

ABSTRACT

The Complexity of Disadvantage: Examining the Effects of Moral Ecology on Adolescent Educational Outcomes

Emily A. Hunt Hinojosa, Ph.D.

Mentor: Jeremy E. Uecker, Ph.D.

Popular methods of addressing educational inequality emphasize structural barriers to educational attainment such as access and affordability, or individual barriers that highlight a lack of character traits such as grit and resilience among traditionally disadvantaged students. I argue that these approaches are insufficient in that they ignore the interactive relationship between a student's moral culture and their structural circumstances and the effect of this total ecology on student achievement. While cultural approaches to addressing the problem of educational inequality are often avoided due to perceived victim blaming, one's moral ecology—defined here as both moral worldviews and the social support systems that sustain them—shapes opportunities for success beyond demographic characteristics.

This dissertation examines how adolescent moral ecology can moderate factors known to affect academic success by describing how four distinct groups—the Connected, Carefree, Committed, and Constrained—emerge from vastly different moral ecologies made up of families, peers, communities, and the values they disseminate; and

by investigating how each group can influence educational outcomes. I find that while most teens are more likely to succeed when embedded in traditional moral frameworks and dense supportive communities, for disadvantaged teens, an achievement ideology and accompanying habitus emerging from an individualistic, relativistic moral worldview may help to mitigate the effect of their social position based on race and socioeconomic status. This study adds to our understanding of the social, moral, and cultural conditions affecting whether students succeed or fail in school using data from the National Study of Youth and Religion, which offers a nationally representative sample of 3,290 dyads of parents and teenagers. This analysis illuminates the complexity of disadvantage and explicates the ways in which a teen's moral ecology interacts with individual-level factors to influence student success.

The Complexity of Disadvantage: Examining the Effects of Moral Ecology on Adolescent
Academic Success

by

Emily A. Hunt Hinojosa, B.S., M.A., M.A.

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F. Carson Mencken, Ph.D., Chairperson

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Approved by the Dissertation Committee

Jeremy E. Uecker, Ph.D., Chairperson

Paul Froese, Ph.D.

Jerry Park, Ph.D.

F. Carson Mencken, Ph.D.

Elesha Coffman, Ph.D.

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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Education is one of the most important determinants of an individual's life chances (Collins, 1979). Academic achievement, in terms of both grades and how far one gets in school, is an important measure of human capital and predictor of socioeconomic outcomes (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Jencks 1972; Stevens, 2008). Affecting more than just financial wellbeing, academic achievement also influences things like employment opportunities and family formation patterns (Keister and Sherkat, 2014). Education can improve health outcomes (Hahn and Truman, 2015) and higher education is associated with lower mortality rates (Hummer and Hernandez, 2013).

Access to these benefits of education in the United States remains unequal, with socioeconomic status and race-ethnic minority status being among the strongest predictors of educational success or failure (Reardon, 2011; Dubow, Boxer, Huesmann, 2009; Sirin, 2005). Though there have been significant advances in educational success for blacks since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) (Diamond, 2006), in 2015, blacks and Hispanics were less likely to have attained a bachelor's degree than Asians or whites (Ryan and Bauman, 2016). During the same year, 82% of teens from high income families immediately enrolled in college upon high school graduation, compared to 58% from low income families (Ma, Pender, and Welch, 2016). Compared to students whose parents graduated from college, first generation college students were 18% less likely to graduate from or stay enrolled in college six years after they began (Cataldi, Bennett, Chen, 2018).

This inequality in terms of academic achievement and success is structured from a young age (Putnam, 2015) with achievement gaps being significantly influenced by school readiness gaps in early childhood (Loeb and Bassok, 2007). Socialization processes in early childhood perpetuate race- and class-based inequality, making disparities in academic achievement a challenge to overcome (Arum and Roska, 2011; Lareau, 2003). Historically, assumptions about the low cognitive abilities and cultural deficits of minority racial groups (Herrnstein and Murray, 1994) influenced conclusions about the sources of the achievement gap (Noguera, 2008). Contemporary discussions of how resource-disadvantaged students fail academically tend to blame the student or the school for these suboptimal outcomes. According to some, disadvantaged students must work hard and persevere to overcome the obstacles in their educational path (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly, 2007; Tough, 2013). According to others, poor and minority students are more likely to attend poorly resourced schools with less qualified teachers which affects their overall chances of success (Darling-Hammond, 2001).

Over the past decade, the field of character education has become increasingly concerned with addressing these gaps in academic achievement. Some approaches have focused on individual student character traits that can be developed to maximize their odds of success. In addition to moral and civic concerns, scholars, philanthropists, and popular writers in character education have begun to emphasize performance outcomes such as grit, perseverance, and self-control as ways of understanding and addressing student behavior issues and academic underperformance. This perspective highlights character as residing within the minds of individuals and as something that can be developed and summoned to overcome structural obstacles to academic achievement.

Though educational inequality has been a central concern of sociology since the 1960's, with the notable exceptions of *The Death of Character* (Hunter, 2001) and a recently published case study project, *The Content of Their Character* (Hunter and Olson 2018), sociological perspectives have been absent from the conversation on character education. These two studies push back on what is described as the “psychological regime” (Hunter, 2001, p. 81) that undergirds the field of character education by suggesting that character is a product of the community, not simply the individual. According to Hunter and Olson (2018), psychology has dominated the discussion of the moral formation of children with the view that “...the moral and character development of children were potentialities that lay emergent with the minds and emotions of every child; that the key to moral development was to call out these capacities through various techniques of self-understanding and self-improvement” (p. 6). I, following Hunter and Olson (2018), suggest that an individual's character is a function of not only their personality traits but also a product of wider cultural influences, institutions, and practices that together form a moral ecology. Only after we adopt a more holistic view of character that adequately conceptualizes the moral and social landscape of students can we begin to use character to address gaps in educational success that persists across racial groups and social classes in the United States.

Understanding the Achievement Gap: The Problem of Politics and Paradigms

Current debates about educational opportunity date back at least as far as the presidential administration of Lyndon B. Johnson. The 1964 *Civil Rights Act* commissioned a comprehensive national survey "concerning the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or

national origin.” The goal of the survey was to demonstrate that schools that were unequal in their resources were unequal in their outputs. James Coleman, a sociologist from Johns Hopkins University, was commissioned to do the survey, which resulted in the Equality of Educational Opportunity Report, more commonly referred to as the Coleman Report. Coleman’s study analyzed data gathered from approximately 600,000 children and 4,000 schools. Its findings challenged the view that schools and their resources were the most important predictor of achievement, noting that family background and the socioeconomic makeup of schools mattered more in explaining variation in achievement (Kilgore, 2016).

Despite the findings of the Coleman Report, more recent legislation pertaining to educational opportunity has focused on holding schools accountable for the achievement gap. The 1965 *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* signed by Johnson was reauthorized as the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) by George W. Bush in 2002 and was most recently amended by Barack Obama as the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) of 2016. Each iteration has focused on closing the race- and class-based achievement gaps and ensuring that students from all backgrounds can succeed. According to Obama (2015), the ESSA was a reaffirmation of the goal of equality, “that every child, regardless of race, income, background, the zip code where they live, deserves the chance to make of their lives what they will.” Each reauthorization of the ESSA has focused on holding schools accountable for the federal funding they receive to ensure greater equity in educational outcomes. Standardized testing has been one way of measuring student learning and supporting greater accountability. In some cases, this has made success for

disadvantaged populations even more difficult by holding them accountable to the same standards as everyone else, despite fewer resources (Darling-Hammond, 2004)

More than 50 years' worth of reform efforts to close pervasive achievement gaps in educational outcomes have been mostly ineffective (Hanushek, 2016). Poverty status remains the best-known predictor of how prepared children are for school, what kinds of schools they attend, how well they will do, and of their general life chances. Children from lower SES families are still less academically prepared than higher SES families and exhibit lower literacy and reading skills (Buckingham, Wheldall, & Beaman-Wheldall, 2013; Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Bergen, Zuijen, Bishop, & Jong, 2016). Teens drop out of school at higher rates in states with higher levels of income inequality (Kearney and Levine, 2016), and when those of low social class do get to college, they are less likely to graduate (Dynarski, 2017; Alexander, Entwisle & Olson, 2014; Cahalan & Perna, 2015).

As economic disparity has increased, the income-based achievement gap has reached double the size of the race achievement gap (Reardon, 2011), though the achievement gap between blacks and whites is still large (Camera, 2016). The National Assessment of Educational Progress revealed that the white and black achievement gap for 12th graders in math and reading in 2013 was only slightly smaller than what Coleman found in 1965 (Camera, 2016). According to Hanushek (2016), at this rate, the race achievement gap in these scores will close one to two centuries from now.

There are two problems with how researchers, including character education researchers, investigate and address the achievement gap. The first problem is political in nature and is related to the controversial intellectual territory of culture and poverty. The

debate about the sources of the achievement gap is situated within a much larger battle over how poverty is reproduced and the controversial social science that has informed that debate over the years. While some still cite schools as the problem, others tend to blame “more subtle” environmental factors within a child’s life such as access to educational resources at home or nutrition and health care (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011). Still others, like Charles Murray (Hernstein and Murray, 1994), point to genetics and differences in IQ as a source of the achievement gap.

In addition to the Coleman Report, Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* elaborated on the race gap in economic outcomes, citing black family instability as a major source of disparity. The Moynihan Report, as it came to be known, was highly controversial and Moynihan himself was marginalized. As a response to backlash against Moynihan and other culture-of-poverty (Lewis, 1966) explanations, social scientists have shied away from explicitly cultural approaches to the problem of educational inequality in order to remain professionally distant from what many viewed as victim-blaming. The problem with avoiding culture-based arguments for inequality in educational attainment is that significant questions remain unanswered regarding how poverty status matters, when it matters, for whom it matters more, and under what conditions it does not matter as much.

Armed with new definitions of culture, an understanding of the complexity of poverty and race, and distance from the cultural upheaval of the 1960’s, sociologists have begun reviving the discussion of how culture matters for poverty. In 2010, the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* dedicated a special issue to

reconsidering the relationship between culture and poverty through an approach that doesn't diminish the importance of macro-level circumstances but that sees that "human action is both constrained and enabled by the meaning people give to their actions" (Small, Harding, Lamont, 2010, p.23).

In the special issue, Vaisey (2010) explores the extent to which culture affects educational attainment, arguing that for those in poverty, low achievement is often accompanied by low aspirations. He makes the case for considering culture, and aspirations and expectations, as an important dimension of educational inequality. In his study, student aspirations significantly influenced future education enrollment, and the values students held about their future schooling affected if and for how long they continued their education. Vaisey draws on Bourdieu's concept of habitus to explain how aspirations differ across socioeconomic lines, noting that those of similar SES have similar experiences and that those experiences "shape" the values of individuals similarly (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Vaisey, 2010, p. 7). In this line of thinking, culture affects inequality through environments influencing values and values affecting how individuals interact with opportunity structures available to them (Vaisey, 2010). These new developments in the sociology of culture suggest there is a way forward in the study of culture and educational inequality, though our knowledge of that relationship remains behind where it should be.

The second problem is a paradigm that conceives of character as an individual trait and the application of this individualistic conception to the achievement gap. Character education in America has taken various forms, both religious and secular, throughout history. Debates in character education have historically centered on whether

instilling moral values is an explicit function of the educational system and, if so, whose morals are worth teaching (Seider, Novick, and Gomez, 2013). Regardless of whose values were taught, character education has almost always focused on alleviating social ills resulting from lack of youth restraint (Watz, 2011). Character education has re-emerged based on the sense that society is once again in moral crisis, as is evidenced by high levels of poverty and family breakdown, lack of civility, and unrestrained sexual activity among youth (Lickona, 1993). This re-emergence has resulted in billions estimated to be spent each year on character education efforts (Davis, 2006). Character education interventions are promoted at school, state, and national levels (Watz, 2011), though the forms, varieties, definitions, and approaches to character vary across school sectors (Hunter and Olson, 2018).

According to Smith (2013), this reemergence of character education occurred alongside a growing pressure on schools to perform at higher levels. As a result, in addition to focusing on youth morality, character education has increasingly focused on issues of academic success. One effect of the culture of high stakes accountability has been a pressure on character education to measure and quantify its influence (Howard, Berkowitz, and Schaeffer, 2004) which has resulted in an increased focus on performance-based non-cognitive skill as opposed to ethical concerns. Moral dimensions of character are related to ethical behavior and performative dimensions of character tend to focus on achievement (Seider et al., 2013). In theory, this focus on performance-based characteristics solves the problem of how to address character in a pluralistic context. Performance-based character traits lack the explicit normativity of moral character traits, thereby making them more palatable for diverse audiences. Additionally, performance-

based measures are easier to measure thus aligning well with a highly competitive educational environment and culture of accountability. Programs focused on performative aspects of character such as self-control, perseverance, and autonomy have been linked to higher levels of academic achievement (Duckworth and Seligman, 2006; Seider, et al, 2013).

This trend within the larger field of character education to focus on measurable, performative character is observable in the application of positive psychology research to character education interventions, known now as positive education (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, and Linkins, 2009). In a sharp turn away from normative, prescriptive forms of character formation that are inevitably contentious, positive psychologists have advocated for a strengths-based view of character, based on its empirical grounding and universal application (Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson, 2005). One goal of the positive education approach is personal strengths development, (Linkins, Niemiec, Gillham, and Mayerson, 2014; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivic, and Linkins, 2009). Within positive psychology, strengths are defined by the six universal virtues and 24 “ubiquitous” character strengths in the Values in Action Classification of Character Strengths (VIA) (Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Linkins et al, 2014, p.1). According to VIA’s website, the taxonomy reflects widely held positive traits across the globe that are present within every individual to varying degrees. This classification, which serves as the backbone of positive psychology (Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2012 Ivtzan, Niemiec, and Briscoe, 2016) provides a framework to help young people identify, develop, and apply their character strengths (Linkins et al, 2014).

Another related example of this psychological, performance-based view of character formation is grit. Grit and its role in predicting success has received widespread attention through Duckworth's (2016) *New York Times* bestseller, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. A former student of Martin Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania, Duckworth defines grit as "perseverance and passion for long term goals" (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly, 2007, p. 1087). Some schools, such as those in the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) Network, have approached character formation using these tools—emphasizing grit and strengths in their work with disadvantaged students. With a "No Excuses" approach to helping poor minority children succeed, KIPP focuses on each child's character strengths in hopes of helping them overcome the obstacles in their path. Summarizing the importance of grit and strengths and the work of KIPP in *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*, Tough (2013) describes the bridge needed for the achievement gap is based on individual character development: "There is no antipoverty tool we can provide for disadvantaged young people that will be more valuable than the character strengths... [such as] conscientiousness, grit, resilience, perseverance, and optimism" (p. 195).

Positive psychology concepts more generally are described as universally applicable, and empirically valid (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), though void of the difficulties that normativity delivers. More broadly, its claims are moral without being dogmatic; scientific, yet supportive of values. As one *New York Times* writer put it, "...it preaches values without linking them to a particular value system and embraces spirituality without making you go to church" (Max, 2007). In one positive education

setting, “the left leaning parents welcomed it because the values were internationally accepted,” and “all but the most conservative ones were reassured that there were values at all” (Max 2007). Despite the appeal of universality application, Pawelski (2016) admits an inherent normativity to the science where the “positive” refers to “that for which there is a simple preference and for which there are degrees of relative preference and sustainability across time, persons, effects, and structures (Pawelski, 2016, p. 364). In short, “positive” refers to what people want.

The theories and strategies of positive psychology are not without critiques. In highlighting individual traits as the keys to success, the strengths and grit approaches have been interpreted by some as attributing the failure of resource-disadvantaged students to the students themselves (Ris, 2015; Strauss, 2014, 2016). In *Bright Sided: How Positive Thinking Is Undermining America*, Barbara Ehrenreich (2010) challenges the paradigm for blaming the individual for their bad circumstances. Additionally, some have questioned the VIA model’s validity, struggling to replicate the six-virtue model through factor analysis (MacDonald, Bore, and Munro, 2008; McGrath and Walker, 2016; McGrath, 2014). Brown, Sokal, and Friedman (2013) debunked the notion of a “positivity ratio,” where, according to Fredrickson and Losada (2005), three positive emotions for every one negative emotion can lead to flourishing. Despite these kinds of critiques, the field’s influence in character education continues to grow. Peer-reviewed articles, professional associations and substantial philanthropic provide ongoing support of this paradigm.

A Better Way Forward

Understanding the complexity of disadvantage related to educational outcomes requires considering a student's total life-world and the norms, morals, and support systems embedded within them, not simply their social position or their individual capacities. The moral dimensions of adolescents' lives, interacting with disparate resources and opportunity structures, may shape student success. These moral ecologies are another way of conceptualizing character. However, instead of being "a set of psychological characteristics that motivate and enable individuals to function as competent moral agents," as Berkowitz (2011, p.153) suggests, character in its moral and performative dimensions is perhaps better understood as "...the embodiment of a morality within a person (Hunter and Olson, 2018, p.10), and "...formed in a conversation between individual subjectivity, moral ideas and ideals, and the structure of social institutions" (Hunter and Olson, 2018, p.11). According to Hunter and Olson (2018), a more adequate account of character is needed than the one provided by psychology. They argue that there is a social and moral ecology to character formation and understanding this moral and social ecology moves beyond the individual and provides an accounting for environmental influences. Character, in this view, is the product of one's moral ecology and defined by its particularity and history (Hunter and Olson, 2018). In order to understand character, one must first consider "the character and quality of the moral ecology" (Hunter and Olson, 2018, p. 13).

Using a moral ecology framework,¹ I propose that disparities in educational outcomes are influenced by the character of the communities in which children are embedded. Moreover, different moral ecologies may interact with factors such as SES and race to either minimize or exacerbate gaps in educational outcomes. The project will focus on how moral ecologies can create opportunities for flourishing, and how they may provide opportunities for those who are otherwise disadvantaged.

Overview of This Study

The first of two assumptions underlying this investigation is that character is communal in form. Moral ecologies encourage certain types of behaviors and goods over and above others in ways that are consistent with the ideals of the community. The second assumption is that addressing disadvantage requires collective, ecologically-based solutions, not simply giving those who experience the greatest risk factors more tools in their tool belt to deal with the hard knocks. The deck is stacked against the poor in terms of opportunities for success and often no amount of working harder or equipping the individual will help in isolation from the collective.

To better understand how teenagers thrive academically, a study of their total environment is warranted—an environment that includes, but is not limited to, the normative and structural dimensions of moral life. Though it is outside the scope of this dissertation to quantify the entire landscape of teen morality, I aim to consider how teen environments affect academic success, focusing on moral worldviews and social support for those worldviews to operationalize moral ecology.

¹ Hunter and Olson (2018) distinguish moral ecology from social ecology. For analytic purposes, I consider moral ecology to include aspects social ecology.

This multi-paper dissertation will build a case for moral ecology to be considered as both a unique contributor to educational success and as a moderator of the effect of individual advantages and disadvantages on educational success. Four research questions will be addressed that will enhance our understanding of the relationship between culture and educational inequality as an important dimension of stratification: 1) What are the distinct adolescent moral ecologies in the United States? 2) What types of teenagers inhabit the different types of moral ecologies? 3) How does moral ecology affect academic success? and 4) Does moral ecology moderate the effects of disadvantage on academic success? The argument will proceed in two steps. First, I define and describe the makeup of adolescent moral and social ecology in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. Secondly, in Chapter Four I test the effect of moral ecology on adolescent educational outcomes including achievement, aspirations, expectations, and attainment, and then consider how these teen moral ecologies interact with race and social class to moderate educational outcomes. Taken together, these three studies investigate the extent to which moral ecology can be understood as an important dimension of teen thriving, and specifically of educational success, that may inform educational interventions seeking to diminish existing achievement gaps.

Data for this project came from the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR). Beginning with the first wave in 2002-2003, the NSYR includes the topics of religion, education, morality, politics, and civic life in its survey focused on the religious and spiritual lives of 13-17-year-olds in the United States. This longitudinal survey has a dyadic component whereby an adolescent respondent's parent answered a variety of questions that allow for a deeper understanding of a given respondent's background. By

situating the teens in homes with parents, researchers have a better understanding of the effect of various environmental presses on student life outcomes. There are many measures of moral life in the survey that support this investigation into teen ecology, including measures of their values, support systems, structural situation, and habits.

The NSYR is the best survey for this study because in addition to teen moral life, it also provides information regarding various educational outcomes. Most of the data for these analyses are taken from Wave 1 of the NSYR, administered to parents and teens in 2002-2003 using Random Digit Dialing methods. There were 3,290 dyadic responses. I also make use of Wave 4 of the NSYR to consider educational continuation in Chapter Four. This was the third follow up study administered in 2012 and was completed by 67% of the original respondents, who by that time were 23-28 years old.

CHAPTER TWO

A Latent Class Analysis of Teen Moral Ecology

According to David Brooks' (2015) bestselling *Road to Character*, every society invents its own moral ecology, and these moral ecologies shape people in a way that is consistent with the ideals of the surrounding community. The road to character is, at its root, a product of this community. How teens view right and wrong, their sense of moral obligation, their source of meaning and purpose, and the paths they choose to take ultimately hinge on these contexts and the extent to which they provide adequate support for a particular vision.

Contemporary character education focuses more or less on cultivating individual level traits in students (Hunter, 2001; Hunter and Olson, 2018). Some frameworks for character focus on performance character related to achievement compared to moral or civic character related to ethical behavior and community engagement (Seider, 2012). In each case, character is often viewed as influential in achieving educational outcomes (Seider, 2012). Performance character traits in particular, operationalized through things like character strengths or grit, have been found to have significant influence on academic success (Duckworth and Seligman, 2005; Park and Peterson, 2009; Wagner and Ruch, 2015).

While character is certainly most visible at the level of the individual, results from case studies in the *Content of Their Character* (Hunter and Olson 2018) describe character formation in various school sectors through the lens of moral ecology whereby character emerges from the group as a product of this ecology. To summarize these

findings, character is rooted in particular places with particular people at particular times and is dependent on both the values of a given community as well as the extent to which one is embedded in or attached to the group. In the reality of a child's life, these agents of socialization tend to influence in conjunction with one another rather than as disaggregated influences. The moral ecology framework advocated by Hunter and Olson (2018), as an antithesis to the dominant individualistic perspective, approaches character formation based on the collective, aggregate effect of such influences.

Though impossible to quantify the entire moral ecology of teens, the central concern of this chapter is to identify empirically the distinct moral ecologies of teenagers and to consider how distinctive properties of teen moral life might work together to influence character. Using the first wave of the National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR) and latent class analysis (LCA), I investigate how teen moral worldviews and support networks work together to form teen moral ecologies. I conclude with a basic description of four distinct moral ecologies based on ideology and social context that can provide the backdrop for a more holistic understanding of character as it relates to educational achievement.

Theoretical Background

Thick Moral Cultures

Morality by its very nature is institutional, not just individual (Hunter and Olson, 2018). For Durkheim, the nature of social relationships hinges upon the extent to which they bind individuals together or tear them apart. Commitments to morality, a sacred code, and religious groups provide opportunities for solidarity, group commitment, and integration. By regulating behavior and teaching submission to authority, moral education

played an important role in social integration (Durkheim, 1961, Ash, 1971). An evaluation of the quality of such an education occurs based on its thickening and strengthening properties and its capacity to reinforce group commitment. I use the term thickness in two ways.

First, I draw from Hunter and Olson's (2018) use of Walzer's (1994) distinction between thick and thin moralities. In their study of school cultures, moral thickness is indicated by the rootedness of an ethical ideal in particular philosophies and guiding principles. Thick moral contexts are particular and traditional, while thin ones are more generalized and universal. In *The Content of Their Character*, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish schools represented thick moral contexts based on common languages, symbols, and references to religious teachings and narratives that were deeply embedded within the school culture. This thickness was set in contrast to the thinner moral context of urban public schools where the moral ideal of success and self-actualization were not so entrenched (Hunter and Olson, 2018). Another way to think about thickness and thinness is regarding the density of networks around children that support them in their achievement (Hunter and Olson, 2018). Regardless of the source of support, "... the thickness of social ties also bears positively on the formation of a stable self-identity, and by extension, a child's moral character" (Hunter and Olson, 2018, p.287). Moral ecology depends in part on the nature of teen social context and support networks—structural factors known to influence educational outcomes.

James Coleman's finding that close, supportive, functional, or moral, communities can influence academic achievement (Coleman, Hoffer, Kilgore, 1982; Coleman and Hoffer, 1987) is helpful for conceptualizing how philosophical and social

thickness might work together in service of educational outcomes. The thickness of a community not only acts as a binding agent but can also support academic success. In his study on the comparative effects of public and private schooling, Coleman found that a coherent moral order along with a strong connection to a community could serve as a protective environment for struggling youth, thereby diminishing the negative effects of low socioeconomic status and race on educational outcomes (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore, 1982; Hoffer, Greeley, Coleman, 1985).

Regardless of family background indicators, private school students did better than public school students in terms of achievement due to factors such as network closure and the shared commitments of the families involved in private schools. Social density of networks and embeddedness within the private school context led to greater engagement, discipline, attendance, and expectations. Higher levels of social capital, attachment, and closure within families, communities, and schools were present for private, and particularly Catholic, school students. In these tight communities, students' parents knew one another and tended to support the values and strategies of other families in the community. In addition to network density, this research also recognized that Catholic schools have norm reinforcing institutions around them, while public schools have "no clear counterpart" (Morgan and Todd, 2009, p. 281). In observing the "Catholic school effect," the thickness of the norms, the tightness of relationships, and the general strength of the group all positively influence child educational outcomes.

In theorizing about the effects of moral ecology, I use the term "moral" much like Durkheim and Coleman, referring to dimensions of morality that integrate teens to the

collective—both those that foster meaning and commitment and those which provide order and support.

Literature Review

The Ecological Perspective

Ecological studies within the social sciences represent an interdisciplinary attempt at addressing how humans function within their environment. In describing the importance of collective life as made up of interactions and adaptations, the human ecology approach took the language and categories of plant and animal ecology, applying them metaphorically to the study of humans and their environment. Amos Hawley's 1986 *Human Ecology* was influential in describing this theoretical framework, advocating that humans exist in overlapping systems and should be studied within those systems. The Chicago School of sociology embodied this approach in the study of urban life (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016).

Ecological studies on education often draw from Urie Bronfenbrenner's 1979 Ecological Systems Theory of Development, which describes children's lives in the context of overlapping environmental systems. The microsystem is closest to the child and includes the people and places with which the child has the most "immediate" contact—peers, teachers, family, school, and church. The mesosystem includes the relationships among those institutions within the microsystem. The third level is the exosystem, whereby those things that affect their microsystem affect children indirectly such as a parent's loss of job. The macrosystem includes the attitudes and values found within the culture of the child. The chronosystem focuses on major changes in the child's environment over time.

Premised on the importance of overlapping systems in child development, Gross (2011) used seven constructs and 111 variables to test how Bronfenbrenner's various ecological levels interacted to affect academic achievement among low-income African Americans. While contextual factors such as poverty, family structure, and race were known to affect youth success rates, the scholarly literature had failed to hypothesize and analyze moderation effects (Gross, 2011). Using an ecological framework, Gross (2011) found examples of the complexity of disadvantage and the nuances of traditionally positive and negative indicators of achievement. For students at low SES schools compared to those at high SES schools, spending more time with their families was indicative of better math scores. However, the moderation of time with family was itself moderated by parent alcohol use. For those attending low income schools, spending time with family influenced positive outcomes, unless their parents engaged in risky alcohol consumption, which created a negative effect.

Moral Ecology

While the ecological approach is often used empirically within the social sciences and particularly in education, studies of moral ecology are limited. Though social science lacks a unified effort to understand and apply a moral ecology framework to the study of human life, scholars have long engaged questions of the role of moral coherence in public life. Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* addressed the role of institutions, ideals, and practices in shaping America's unique moral public and private landscape that allowed for democracy to flourish and those that would lead to its demise. He was mainly concerned that unchecked individualism would extinguish the democratic freedom that allowed for collective sustenance. Drawing heavily from Tocqueville's concerns, in

Habits of the Heart, Bellah, Swidler, Masden, Tipton, and Sullivan (1985) describe the role of moral ecology, “the web of moral understandings and commitments that tie people together in community” in defining and supporting particular visions of the good (p. 335).

Following Bellah’s (1985) use of the term moral ecology, Hertzke’s (1998) theoretical description applied the human ecology interactive approach to the “cultural milieu” of individuals (Hertzke, 1998, p. 629). Hertzke (1998) posits moral life as threatened—analogue to the effects of environmental pollution on an ecosystem, with moral choices, behaviors, and habits of individuals affecting the whole. Again, the use of the ecological analogy to consider the collective and interactive impact, in this case, of various moral “depredations” (p. 637). Swartz (2010) applies a sociological perspective to moral education and poverty in her descriptive study of poor youth in South Africa. Using Bronfenbrenner’s framework, she describes the components of South African youth moral ecology at the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, also suggesting the addition of a sixth environmental level—the endosystem—located at the center of the ecological system to include the belief system, morals, and ideals of the child (p. 310). She concludes that a moral ecology approach allows researchers to observe the effects of lived morality in a way that includes the collective impact of individual choice, community influence, and wider cultural forces. Moral ecology, according to Swartz (2010) is made up of “...interconnecting relationships between the personal, social, institutional and environmental” (p. 322).

In *The Content of Their Character*, Hunter and Olson (2018) summarize the results of a case study project comparing the moral ecologies of 10 school sectors, which

includes an account of their ideals and beliefs as well as the practices, behaviors, and support systems that reinforce them (Hunter and Olson, 2018). Across Islamic, Jewish, Catholic, evangelical Protestant, home, charter, rural public, urban public, alternative pedagogical, and prestigious independent schools, researchers found that, not surprisingly, there are diverse moral ecologies within and between school sectors. Among diverse settings the “form” of character formation was similar even as its “substance” varied (Hunter and Olson, 2018, p. 246). Each school sought to support their particular ideals through character formation, but those ideals were different from one another. For example, researchers found that in enacting their particular vision of thriving, urban public schools prioritized self-actualization while evangelical Protestant schools emphasized behaving in ways they deemed to be “Christ-like.” The theme of justice was pervasive across the Jewish sector, and the prestigious independent school students were bound by strict codes of honor combined with the pressure to be highly successful.

Instead of comparing sectors based on guiding philosophies and ethical codes, researchers chose instead to investigate the thickness of a sector’s moral sources. Religious schools, for example, exhibited thick moral frameworks in terms of language, boundaries, codes, and history. Thickness, however, was also present in non-religious settings. For example, in contrast to the urban public school’s thinner moral conceptions of grit and hard work, the rural public schools drew authority from local history, legacy, and relationships that provided a thicker moral context, tapping into the *Gemeinschaft* of rural life. Sectors also differed in social cohesion as parent engagement and involvement varied, as did the amount of network closure around the schools within sectors. Rural schools and home schools provided thick ecologies in terms of order and support,

particularly in comparison to the urban public schools. Across all sectors, moral ecologies were characterized by differences in their moral ideals and differences in the network density surrounding the school.

Moral Worldviews as Moral Sources of Authority

One way of conceptualizing variant sources of moral authority is through individual moral worldviews. (Hunter, 2000; Vaisey, 2009; Vaisey and Lizardo, 2010). Though morality is not limited to the individual, worldviews operate under the surface of everyday life emerging out of networks that influence moral decision-making and ideals (Victor, Miles, and Vaisey, 2015).

Comparing moral worldviews was a central task in *Habits of the Heart*, where Bellah et. al (1985) contrasted those worldviews that are self-oriented with those that locate moral authority outside of the self. The *Habits* typology outlines four distinct moral worldviews that appear specifically in the United States: Expressive Individualist, Utilitarian Individualist, Civic Republican, and Biblical. In *Death of Character*, Hunter (2000) expounds upon the significance of these orientations from Bellah et al. (1985) and articulates a fifth frame of reference, yielding a five-category typology of Theists, Expressionists, Utilitarians, Civic Humanists, and Conventionalists. In this typology, Conventionalists defer to norms and common beliefs; Theists make decisions based on religious authority; Civic Humanists focus on the public good and the benefit their actions have for the community; Utilitarians tend to operate from a self-interested framework, making decisions based on what will get them ahead in life; and Expressivists are self-interested but make decisions based on what feels right. Subsequent studies of moral worldviews have included a four-category version of this measure with

Theists and Conventionalists adhering to more collectivist moralities and Expressivists and Utilitarians focusing on the individual (Vaisey and Lizardo 2010; Hitlin 2003; Oishi, Schimmack, Diener and Suh 1998).

Empirically, moral worldviews are a valuable independent predictor of behavioral outcomes, choices, attitudes, and associations. Moral worldviews affect network composition and the extent to which teens have friends who exhibit deviant behaviors such as using drugs, or pro-social behaviors, such as volunteering (Vaisey and Lizardo, 2010). Moral worldviews also influence if people volunteer and the types of volunteer work they undertake (Beyerlein and Vaisey, 2013). Teen moral worldviews are predictive of attitudes on a range of important public and private issues such as sex, drinking, altruism, cheating, lying, and abortion (Hunter, 2000). Individualists compared to Theists or Conventionalist are more likely to steal, cheat, and lie and less likely to act compassionately to those in need (Hunter, 2000). When asked about pre-marital sex, Theists and Conventionalists are more restrictive than Individualists (Hunter, 2000). Though moral worldviews are undoubtedly affected by and interact with factors such as religious tradition, school sector, or region of the country, Hunter (2000) found that whether rich or poor, theistic teens tend to be less permissive in their sexual attitudes. Utilitarian individualists, whether black or white, male or female, are more likely than conventionalists to be motivated by financial gains when considering their future (Hunter, 2000).

Moral relativism, in addition to moral worldviews, is an important component of one's moral ecology. Part of the cultural terrain of young adulthood is a tendency toward relativistic moral orientations. Smith and Denton (2005) observe this pattern in this in

their description of Moral Therapeutic Deism, where a central tenet of the therapeutic is a “nonjudgmental demeanor” in the lives of young adults. (p. 145). Absolutists believe that judgment is outside of the self, while relativists find moral authority in the self (Baker, 2005). Though there is considerable overlap in this measure and a measure of individualism versus collectivism (Baker, 2005), in their study predicting network composition, Vaisey and Lizardo (2010) found that there is sufficient difference in the two with only a moderate association between them.

Supportive Networks

In the Durkheimian understanding of morality, something is moral to the extent that it is cohesive. While meaning and specific moral orientations matter, order and supportive structure can activate and amplify or silence a person’s character. A given teen’s network serves to reinforce and support norms to make good decisions (Wilcox, 2007 as cited in Gerson, 2007). Networks and communities provide the context and social resources for worldviews to take root, though individuals have disparate access to them.

As a primary agent of socialization and building block of teen support networks, parents influence the entire child ecology more than anyone and do so in terms of both family structure and parent-child relationships. Stable families create environments for children to thrive (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Wong, 2005). Human capital is most effective when coupled with social capital, as family SES interacts with parent relationship quality to affect success: Success is more likely when those families with resources also are supportive as the quality of parent-child relationship and parental investment moderates the effect of resources (Coleman, 1988).

Parental involvement, support, and structure influence the extent to which children adhere to their parents' moral values (Grolnick, Deci, and Ryan 1997; Hardy, Padilla Walker, Carlo, 2008) and shape child outcomes in myriad ways. Parental involvement leads to a positive relationship between parents and their children (Hardy et al., 2008). Parental support and involvement also lead to higher academic achievement (DuBois, Eitel, and Felner, 1994; Jeynes, 2003; Hill and Taylor, 2004; Jeynes 2007). Teens who are more monitored by their parents are less likely to get into trouble, and the extent to which parents maintain awareness of their child's behaviors can lead to positive child outcomes (Darling, 2007) including academic success (McNeal, 1999).

The effect of monitoring extends beyond the immediate family and into the community as intergenerational network closure strengthens the oversight of family, allowing parents to more closely monitor their child's behavior by sharing the task of parenting with the surrounding community (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987). Greater network closure also promotes greater education outcomes (Coleman, Hoffer and Kilgore, 1982; Coleman and Hoffer, 1987; Carbonaro, 1998). Having adults present besides parents provides extra resources to navigate life's challenges (Sterrett, Jones, McKee, and Kincaid, 2011). Embeddedness in a strong, tight-knit community more generally provide the backdrop for thriving, with residential mobility being a potential risk factor for children (Rumbold, Giles, Whitrow, Steele, Davies, C., Davies, M., and Moore, 2012). Some degree of residential mobility, however, can signal advantage and can encourage better outcomes, as in the case of moving to a different school district (Lareau and Goyette, 2014).

Peer networks are another dimension of community strength and support. While adolescents are more likely to participate in risky behavior if their friends do (Albert, Chein, and Steinberg, 2013), teens can also take on the pro-social orientations of their friends (Choukas-Bradley, Giletta, Cohen, Prinstein, 2015). Additionally, teens are more likely to attend college if their peers also have college aspirations (Cohen, 1983). Peer networks influence the extent to which teens maintain traditional belief systems when exposed to alternatives (Mayrl and Uecker, 2011). Thus, the structure of a family unit and the characteristics of its relationships, the closeness of a community, and the strength of positive peer culture and negative peer culture are all indicators of the degree of support available to teens.

Teens inhabit complex and diverse moral worlds that are constantly changing. The enduring nature of character, however, may be observable through an empirical model of teen moral ecology in which particular views of moral authority take root in certain structures to influence teen life. Drawing from six environmental levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Swartz, 2010) in the merging of a human and moral ecology framework and using latent class analysis (LCA) techniques, I consider how moral worldviews combine in different ways with more or less supportive structures to create distinctive moral ecologies among teenagers.

Data and Methods

There are many indicators of teen moral life, including individual beliefs and attitudes, behaviors, and support structures. In developing an empirical tool to consider teen moral life, I map what I consider to be key indicators of the moral lives of teens in NSYR Wave 1 onto Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, including items related to

the individual such as moral worldview, but also factors outside of the individual teen related to their network. In deciding on which measures make up teen moral ecology, I draw from Swartz's (2010) process in describing the moral ecology of youth in South Africa based on Bronfenbrenner's framework. After creating this moral ecological model, I test for latent data profiles among teen respondents based on the indicators chosen using latent class analysis (LCA).

LCA is a strategy to recognize more complex patterns in a population compared to those observed through single item measures or scales (Pearce, Foster, and Hardie, 2013). By revealing discrete profiles within a population, this technique has been used in numerous studies to understand otherwise unobservable dimensions of teen values (Pearce and Denton, 2011; Uecker, Pearce, and Andercheck, 2015). For example, through LCA, Pearce and Denton (2011) found five distinct religious profiles of adolescents that offered a more complex view of teen religiosity than was observable through independent or scaled measures. Similarly, Uecker, Pearce, and Andercheck (2015) used LCA to investigate clusters of motivations for hooking up among college students. In both studies, LCA uncovered patterns beyond social demographic characteristics or single-item measures that were predictive of teen outcomes. I use 13 variables measuring eight different constructs relating to teen moral life and social context across five ecological levels to develop the moral ecology model for latent class analysis. I do not include measures for the sixth ecological level, the macrosystem, because all respondents lived in the same macro-level cultural context. Each variable used was recreated as a categorical measure since LCA only accepts categorical variables for analysis. Additionally, where dichotomous measures are used, a 1, 2 coding scheme is used rather than a standard 0, 1.

In considering the best model fit for LCA, the model with the lowest adjusted BIC (ABIC) score has been shown to be the optimal model (Nylund, Asparouhov, Muthen, 2007).

At the endosystem level, which includes individual beliefs (Swartz, 2010), I include a measure of whether a teen has an individualist moral worldview or a collectivist moral worldview. Teens were asked how they would decide what to do if they were unsure of what was right or wrong in a situation. Expressivists responded with “Do what would make you feel happy.” Utilitarians responded with “Do what would help you to get ahead.” Conventionalists said they would “follow the advice of a parent or teacher, or other adult you respect.” Theists reported they would “do what you think God or scripture tells you is right.” From these responses, I created a dummy variable using the four-category version where individualist equals 1 and collectivist equals 2. Expressivists (27%) and Utilitarians (11%) fall into the individualist category while Theists (20%) and Conventionalists (41%) fall into the collectivist category (see Hitlin, 2003; Vaisey and Lizardo, 2010). While there are substantive differences within the individualistic (38%) and collectivist (62%) schemas respectively, I choose the two-category measure rather than the four-category measure to focus on the effects of outward versus inward sources of moral authority.

I include a second measure of moral worldview related to moral relativism. I use the dichotomous measure of moral relativism from Vaisey and Lizardo (2010) based on the question, “Some people say that morals are relative, that there are no definite rights and wrongs for everybody. Do you agree or disagree?” Relativists (46%) are coded 1 and absolutists (54%) are coded 2.

The microsystem is the most proximal context for development and includes many direct individual and institutional relationships. For this study, the microsystem includes measures of parent-teen relationships, peer network behaviors and attitudes, and teen involvement. I use three measures of parent-teen relationship quality including monitoring, engagement, and encouragement. Measures for monitoring and engagement are similar to those used by Petts (2014). Each had to be reverse coded. Monitoring is measured by parent responses to the question of how much they monitor their child's media consumption. Those teens whose parents always or usually monitor their media consumption are coded 1, those teens whose parents rarely or never monitor it are coded 2.

Parental engagement is measured by asking parents if they have (a) visited a museum, art gallery, or historical site, (b) gone to a play, concert, or other show, (c) visited a library, (d) worked on a project, and (e) played a game/sport or exercised with their child over the previous six months. These responses were summed together. Doing four or more of these things together was considered high engagement where high engagement=1 and fewer than four was low engagement where low engagement= 2. This measure is also indicative of cultural capital as high arts participation, such as museum visits and plays, is regularly used as a measure of cultural capital (Gaddis, 2013). Parental encouragement is based on teen responses regarding how often (1=never, 5=very often) either their mother or their father praised and encouraged them. I created a dichotomous version comparing those teens whose parents encourage them very often (coded 1) compared to everyone else (coded 2).

Opportunities for involvement can encourage or deter teen achievement. Teens were asked about their involvement in a variety of organizations including sports, clubs, programs, or extracurricular activities, either at school, in a religious organization, or community group. This measure of activity is a continuous sum of all their activities. My dichotomous version compares teens who are involved in any of these activities (coded 1) to those who are completely uninvolved (coded 2).

I use two measures of peer network behaviors and one measure of peer network attitudes, all located within the microsystem. To measure the teen's type of peer network, teens were asked a series of questions about their five closest friends. I include a series of variables regarding the positive and negative behaviors of their peer networks, including the number of friends teens have who "do drugs or drink a lot of alcohol," "have been in trouble in school for fighting, cheating, or skipping classes," and "regularly do volunteer work or community service." Peer delinquency is a dichotomous variable created as a proportion of teen friends who engage in either drinking, drugs, fighting, cheating, or skipping class, and their total number of friends. Teens with no friends in this category are coded as 2 and those with any friends in this category were coded as 1. Pro-social peers was measured by asking teens if each of the friends they listed regularly did volunteer work or community service, putting this as a proportion to their total number of friends, and creating a dichotomous version where 1 equals having friends who volunteered and 2 equals having friends who did not.

Peer belief homogeneity is measured by asking teens in Wave 1 about their five closest friends and the extent to which they had similar religious beliefs. Religious teens were asked if friends held similar beliefs to them, and non-religious teens were asked if

the friend was religious. Religious teens who had religious friends were assigned a 1, and non-religious teens who had non-religious friends were assigned a 1. The rest were assigned a 0. The number of friends with whom the teen had similar religious beliefs was held in proportion to their total number of friends. Teens who shared religious beliefs with all their friends =1 and the rest =0. This variable is a measure of belief homophily and a proxy for the influence of diverse ideas on teen values.

The exosystem includes situations that affect the child indirectly. Since children have little say in their place of residence, I locate a measure of neighborhood safety at the exosystem level. To create this measure, parents were asked how safe they felt in their neighborhood. Those who felt very safe were coded 1 and those and who did not feel very safe, felt somewhat safe, and felt mostly safe were coded 2.

The chronosystem includes changes over time. While this level includes widespread political and social shifts within the society, it also includes more individual-level changes. I locate residential stability at the chronosystem level. In the case of the South African youth, Swartz (2010) located both the changes from Apartheid to democracy and puberty within this level. In the NSYR, parents were also asked how many times their child had to switch schools because of a move. Initially this was a continuous variable ranging from 0-20. Those teens who had never made a move were coded 2 and compared with those who had switched schools at all because of a move, who were coded as 1.

I locate the influence of network closure and non-parental adult support at the mesosystem level. To measure network closure, teens were asked about their five closest friends. They were then asked how many of these friends “have parents who know your

parent well enough to call him/her/them on the phone.” To create the variable, I put the total number of friends with whom the teen had closure in proportion to their total number of friends. The final variable is a categorical measure where high closure (closure with more than 75% of their friends) equals 1, medium closure (closure with some and up to 75% of their friends) equals 2, and no closure (no closure with friends) equals 3. To measure adult support, teens were asked how many total adults they had in their life to turn to when they needed help, not including their parents. Having five or more adults equals 1, having between two and four adults equals 2, and having fewer than two adults equals 3. Figure 2.1 presents the indicators included in the LCA model. After mapping the moral variables based on their ecological levels, I included them in the LCA model in SAS and investigated fit statistics for 13 different class profile options. After establishing the classes, I assigned each respondent to a class based on the highest probability of membership. I exclude the NSYR Jewish oversample and use a sampling weight in all analyses.

Results

LCA reveals four distinct moral ecologies within the data based on constructs related to moral worldviews and support networks. I ran LCA models that produced 1-13 class solutions based on the 13 included variables for moral ecology. In these analyses, the four-class model indicated the best model fit as indicated by the lowest ABIC score (Table 2.2). This suggests that a four-category classification system for teen moral ecologies best fit the data.

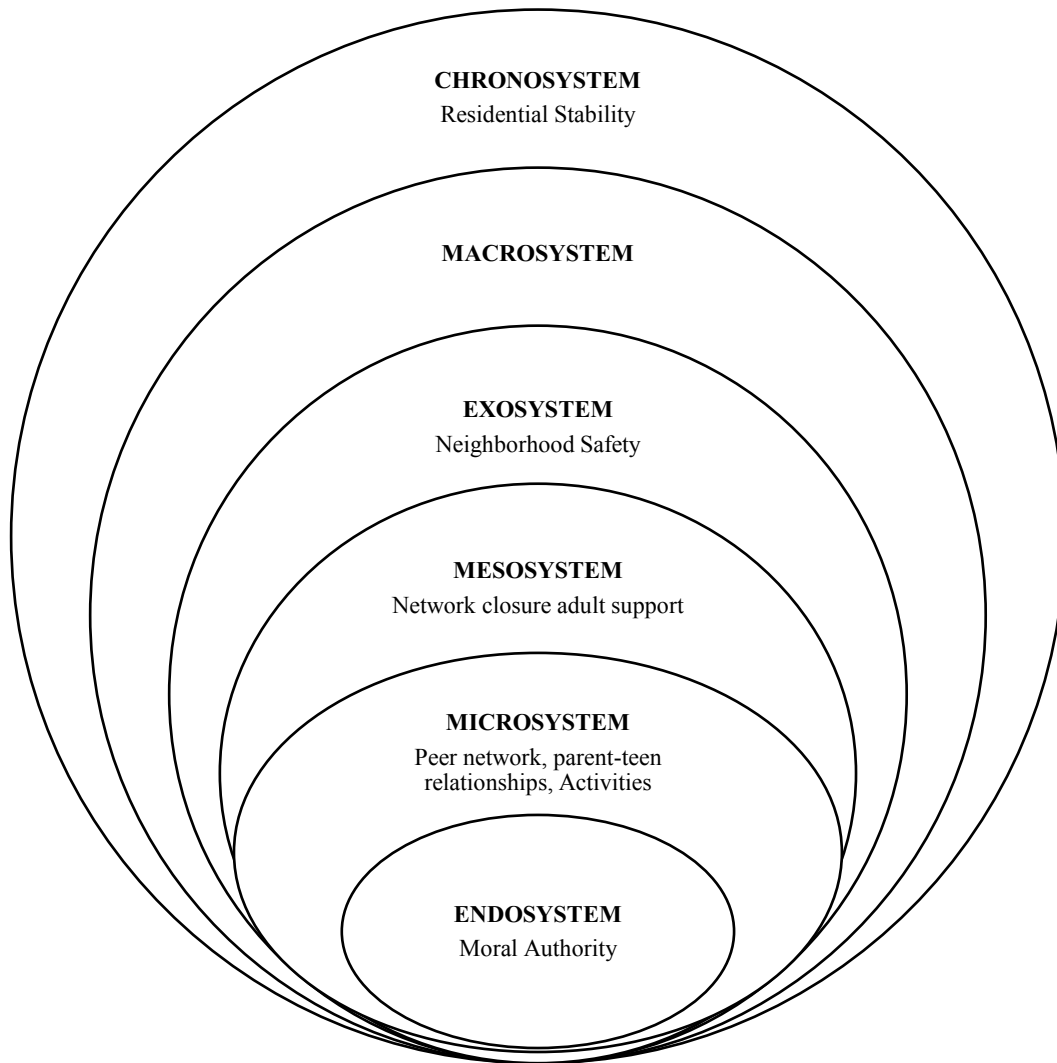


Figure 2.1 Moral Ecology Framework

Table 2.1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean or %	SD	Minimum	Maximum	N
Carefree	21.16	0.43	0	1	3290
Constrained	19.48	0.42	0	1	3290
Committed	19.16	0.42	0	1	3290
Connected	40.2	0.52	0	1	3290
Moral Relativist	46.3	0.53	1	2	3170
Moral Individualist	38.16	0.51	1	2	3231
Expressivist	26.75	0.46	1	2	3231
Utilitarian	11.41	0.33	1	2	3231
Conventionalist	41.45	0.52	1	2	3231
Theist	20.39	0.42	1	2	3231
Peer Delinquency	52.33	0.52	1	2	3249
Pro-Social Peers	14.86	0.37	1	2	3249
Peer belief homogeneity	43.9	0.52	1	2	3249
Network Closure	1.87	0.61	1	3	3249
Parental Monitoring	44.02	0.52	1	2	3284
Parental Engagement	42.53	0.52	1	2	3247
Parental Encouragement	43.13	0.52	1	2	3285
Neighborhood safety	55.98	0.52	1	2	3286
Number of moves	42.33	0.52	1	2	3277
Teen Involvement	74.74	0.45	1	2	3290
Support from other adults	1.83	0.88	1	3	3249
Homeschool	2.39	0.02	0	1	3220
Private non-religious school	1.66	0.01	0	1	3289
Catholic school	3.02	0.03	0	1	3290
Protestant School	2.3	0.02	0	1	3290
Other religious school	0.93	0.009	0	1	3290
Parent Income	5.64	3.01	1	11	3093
Age	15.49	1.51	12.91	18.49	3289
Female	49.63	0.52	0	1	3290
Parent Education	5.41	3.1	1	12	3285
Two parent home	71.17	0.47	0	1	3290
African American Protestant	12.41	0.34	0	1	3290
Catholic	25.17	0.45	0	1	3290
Jewish	1.15	0.11	0	1	3290
Mainline Protestant	9.75	0.31	0	1	3290
Evangelical Protestant	31.87	0.49	0	1	3290
Mormon	2.82	0.17	0	1	3290
Not Religious	11.75	0.34	0	1	3290
Other Religion	2.66	0.17	0	1	3290
Unknown religion	2.42	0.16	0	1	3290
West Region	21.64	0.43	0	1	3290
North East region	14.29	0.36	0	1	3290
Midwest Region	23.01	0.44	0	1	3290
South Region	41.06	0.51	0	1	3290
White	64.12	0.5	0	1	3290
Black	17.71	0.4	0	1	3290
Asian	1.32	0.12	0	1	3290
Hispanic	12.29	0.34	0	1	3290
Other Race	4.06	0.2	0	1	3290
Unknown Race	0.5	0.07	0	1	3290
Immigrant Status	2.76	0.17	0	1	3267

Source: National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 1 (2002-03)

All values weighted.

Table 2.2 Goodness of Fit for Latent Class Analysis Models

Number of Classes	Adjusted BIC
1	9710.00
2	9009.58
3	8924.37
4	8892.69
5	8905.06
6	8928.22
7	8956.63
8	9016.71
9	9044.52
10	9091.35
11	9125.11
12	9166.29
13	9180.36

Source: National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 1 (2002-03)
All values weighted.

Following the tests for goodness of fit, I then proceeded to examine what these four distinct moral ecologies looked like in terms of their relative size and what types of teenagers comprise them. LCA results include the probability of respondents within each class responding to each input variable in a certain way. Table 2.3 compares the probability of respondents in each of the four profile groups (i.e., moral ecologies) giving responses to all the input variables. These four moral ecologies reflect the wide range of teen moral worldviews, but also the disparate levels and types of support they receive. Based on the probabilities of class members being high or low on each of the 13 indicators, teens in the NSYR fall into moral ecologies that I call Carefree, Constrained, Committed, and Connected. Teens fall somewhat evenly across three of the classes the first three of these classes, with the plurality, 40%, falling into the Connected class. I now describe each moral ecology in turn.

The Connected

The overarching theme of the Connected teen moral ecology is thickness. Characterized by absolutism, collectivism, social density, and high levels of engagement and support, they are connected to the collective not only in terms of structures, but also in terms of their moral worldviews. Teens in the Connected moral ecology tend to make decisions based on what God or scriptures would tell them is right, or to defer to conventional norms and beliefs within society. They are very involved in social activities and on the whole, tend to have positive relationships with their parents.

The Connected are also characterized by both a social density and tight community life, where teens not only live within an absolute sense of right and wrong, but most of their peer group has the same religious beliefs that they do. On one hand, this is the most supportive of all the moral ecologies. However, Connected teens also operate in the most closed environment of all. They have the fewest friends who do any volunteering. Their parents more strictly monitor their media consumption than parents of teens from other moral ecologies. Still, their parents are the most encouraging and most engaged of all. Beyond their immediate family context, they have the highest levels of network closure and the most support from other adults. Not surprisingly, Connected teens' friends exhibit the lowest levels of peer delinquency compared to teens in the other three moral ecologies. For the Connected, their biggest source of strength may also be their biggest source of weakness. Closure in terms of social ties provides a highly supportive environment, but closure regarding other views of right and wrong may make navigating difference in a pluralistic setting a challenge.

Table 2.3 Four Moral Ecologies using Latent Class Analysis

	Carefree	Constrained	Committed	Connected
Class Membership	0.21	0.18	0.20	0.41
Moral Relativist	0.57	0.58	0.43	0.35
Individualist	0.58	0.67	0.33	0.14
High Peer Delinquency	0.69	0.79	0.48	0.31
High Pro-Social Peers	0.31	0.09	0.07	0.14
High Peer belief homogeneity	0.37	0.45	0.23	0.58
High Network Closure	0.28	0.21	0.00	0.37
High Parental Monitoring	0.21	0.19	0.45	0.70
High Parental Engagement	0.44	0.20	0.43	0.54
High Parental Encouragement	0.38	0.31	0.29	0.60
High Neighborhood safety	0.71	0.46	0.53	0.55
High Teen Involvement	1.00	0.36	0.75	0.83
High Number of moves	0.34	0.46	0.54	0.38
High Support from other adults	0.54	0.31	0.18	0.61
Moral Absolutist	0.43	0.42	0.57	0.65
Collectivist	0.41	0.33	0.67	0.86
Low Peer Delinquency	0.31	0.21	0.52	0.69
Low Pro-Social Peers	0.69	0.91	0.93	0.86
Low Peer belief homogeneity	0.63	0.55	0.77	0.42
Med. Network Closure	0.64	0.65	0.82	0.55
Low Parental Monitoring	0.78	0.81	0.55	0.30
Low Parental Engagement	0.55	0.80	0.57	0.47
Low Parental Encouragement	0.62	0.69	0.71	0.40
Low Neighborhood safety	0.29	0.54	0.47	0.45
Low Teen Involvement	0.00	0.64	0.25	0.17
Number of moves	0.66	0.54	0.46	0.62
Med. Support from other adults	0.32	0.23	0.38	0.23
Low Network closure	0.08	0.14	0.18	0.09
Low Support from other adults	0.14	0.46	0.44	0.16
Adj. BIC Score	8892.69			

Source: National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 1(2002-03)

All values weighted.

The Committed

Similar to the Connected in terms of moral worldview, Committed teens, who are roughly 19% of teenagers, also experience very thick moral ecologies in that they exhibit an absolutist, collectivist moral orientation. Committed teens adhere to an absolute right and wrong and operate in response to external moral authority. They are more likely to

make moral choices based on religious authority or on social norms which reflects a commitment to the collective, and they also maintain high levels of engagement with the community. However, there is a gap between their commitments to the collective and the support they receive in turn.

Committed teens lag on almost all measures of community support except for parental engagement and monitoring. Low levels of network closure, almost no support from adults other than their parents, high residential instability, and having few friends with similar religious beliefs characterize their moral ecology. Their peers exhibit a modest amount of delinquent behavior. They lack the stability and thick social ties of the Connected and in this way, have much more in common with the thin social support system of the Constrained (described below). Though lacking in social support, the committed remain focused outwardly in terms of their sources of moral authority and rely on God and the community to guide their actions.

The Carefree

About 21% of teens operate within the Carefree moral ecology. They make decisions based on what feels right to them or based on what gets them ahead. For these teens, morality tends to be relative and they locate moral authority within themselves. Like the Connected, they have very strong support networks. Where they differ is in the relative openness of their moral environment. The Carefree not only have a thinner, less particular moral framework than the Connected, but they also have lower levels of network closure, fewer peers that share their religious beliefs, and they receive less monitoring from their parents. Despite more openness to difference, their lives are marked by high stability and thick social support. They live in very safe neighborhoods,

and experience high residential stability. They take advantage of the many opportunities to be highly engaged in their schools and communities. Their peer networks tend to exhibit more pro-social behavior compared to other cultures and their friends also tend to be troublemakers, with higher levels of peer delinquency. While their parents exhibit a more hands-off approach in monitoring, they are both engaged and encouraging.

The Constrained

The Constrained lack almost all the thick moral and social attachments of the Connected, Committed, and Carefree. Almost one fifth (18%) of the entire sample falls into this group, finding themselves constrained by their isolation as well as by their lack of support. These teens tend to be highly relativistic and individualistic, operating as their own moral compass in navigating life choices. These teens have low levels of network closure and have the poorest-quality relationships with their parents marked by low engagement, low monitoring, and little encouragement. Compared to all other moral ecologies, Constrained teens have the most friends who engage in risky behavior and the fewest peers with pro-social orientations. While their peer networks are relatively homogenous in terms of religious beliefs, they have very little network closure and operate in a very open environment. Compared to other teens, their neighborhoods are not safe and they move homes more often. They are highly-isolated from institutions and individuals around them with low levels of involvement in any activities and have low levels of support from other adults. While the strength of these teens is that they are open to difference in terms of alternative views of right and wrong, they lack any meaningful support structures with which to engage with which to connect to those around them.

Discussion

Figure 2.2 summarizes how each of the four classes map on to the moral ecology indicators across the two main axes: moral worldviews and support, which includes peer networks, parent relationships, network closure, involvement, community safety and stability, and other adult support. These support measures operate as indicators of social and cultural capital. With respect to moral worldviews at the endosystem level, teens from Connected and Committed moral ecologies have more in common, as do the Carefree and Constrained. The Connected and Committed are more absolutist and collectivist, while the Carefree and Constrained are more relativist and individualist. However, regarding social support at the other levels of the ecological model, the pairs switch and the Constrained and Carefree become total opposites. On this axis, the Constrained resemble the Committed and the Carefree resemble the Connected. The Connected and Committed represent a greater particularity in their moral worldviews, and in this way, reside in a thick moral ecology, especially when compared to the thinner moral worldviews of individualism and relativism. In terms of social support and attachments, the Connected and the Carefree have substantial social support compared to the Constrained and the Committed who overall experience less stable connections to their community. Teens from different moral ecologies differ substantially in regard to their moral worldviews. This chapter outlines a new way of thinking about teen moral and social life, using an ecological approach to describe these overlapping influences and based on the Durkheimian view of morality as a cohesive force. Though many studies have considered the moral and social lives of children, there has been a gap in studies connecting the two as jointly indicative of a moral ecology. Though theoretically driven,

the moral ecology model I suggest does not include all possible variations of teen moral life and specifically does not include anything about teen individual behavior or personal beliefs. Though the moral life of teens is not limited to the 13 indicators I chose to include, each was chosen based on its location within the human ecology system and because of its ability to independently affect teen outcomes.

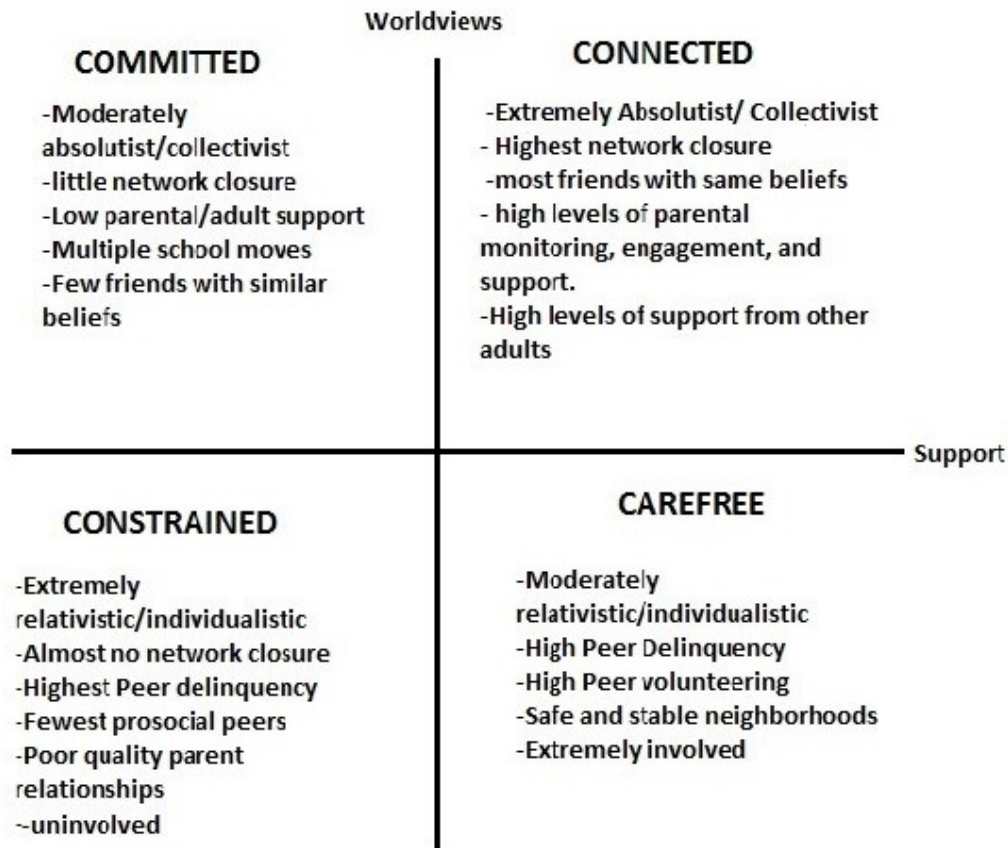


Figure 2.2 Four Moral Ecologies

The four moral ecologies indicate one possibility of many for comparing differences in moral life, and the variables that make up the model represent key, though not exhaustive, indicators of teen morality. There are, of course, others. I include moral

worldviews because they are a less restrictive category than belief in God or service attendance. Similarly, networks come from a variety of sources, not least of which is religious communities. I specifically do not focus on religious or congregational life for similar reasons of not wanting to restrict the story of morality to religious life.

Among teenagers, the Connected, Committed, Carefree, and Constrained moral ecologies each have unique properties that are observable in the data across a wide variety of influences. These classes differ in terms of their relative thickness with respect to both teens' openness and commitment to others, as well as to the relative thickness of their social ties and the support they receive from others. Within these two distinct conceptions of thickness across the two axes in figure 2.2, the Carefree and Connected groups have thick social ties to support their moral ecologies compared to the Constrained and Committed. However, the Committed and Connected maintain thick sources of moral authority compared to the Carefree and Constrained. The Connected represent the thickest moral ecologies in that they have thick moral frameworks and thick social ties. The Committed and Carefree arguably have the same level of thickness with one having thick frameworks and the other thick networks. The Constrained have the thinnest moral ecology, with few social ties and relatively little particularity influencing their moral worldviews.

CHAPTER THREE

Moral Ecology and Disadvantage

Introduction

The moral ecology framework in Chapter Two outlines unique moral ecologies based on teen moral worldviews and the support systems that ground them. Building off previous descriptions of human and moral ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Swartz, 2010; Bellah, 1985; Hertzke, 1998; Hunter and Olson, 2018), these four moral ecologies offer an empirical tool for considering the effects of teen moral and social life on various outcomes. While there are many similarities to be found among these groups, there are fundamental differences in the thickness of the moral worldview and support systems of each. Teens in a Carefree culture approach the world from a highly stable support network and a high level of personal freedom. They are less inhibited than their Connected counterparts by certain codes, approaching the world through a more relativistic framework where they themselves are a source of moral authority. Connected teens are in stable, highly supportive, closed environments. Their moral authority is located outside of themselves, in God, tradition, or their community. Committed teens lack the stabilizing resources of, though have similar thick moral outlooks to, the Connected. The Constrained lack any of the thickening properties found in any other moral ecology. Their moral world, both ideologically and structurally, is thin.

In this chapter, I examine what types of teens fall into each of the moral ecologies based on their religious characteristics, school sector, and demographic makeup. The main goal of this chapter is to further discern the distinctiveness of the Carefree,

Constrained, Committed, and Connected, and to consider their relationship to known indicators of teen outcomes. Investigating how various social groups map on to the four moral ecologies will enrich our understanding of moral ecology as a predictor and can further illuminate the complexity of the tenuous relationship between culture and disadvantage.

Literature Review

School Sector and Moral Ecology

Schools invariably influence moral ecology by serving as a primary agent of socialization into various networks and norms. In Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, schools operate at the microsystem, interacting with other aspects of child ecology such as family life and peer groups. Schools influence teens in terms of the values they transmit and the varying levels of support that they provide. Schools, whether public or private, operate within moral ecologies and as such impart their own moral outlooks and visions of the good to students that attend them (Hunter and Olson, 2018). Views of right and wrong are embedded within schools and reinforced by practices, with schools differing on their sources of moral authority (Hunter and Olson, 2018). Smith (2003) describes universities as "stable configurations of resources (buildings, personnel, budgets, reputations, and so on) grounded in and reproducing moral order (p.22). K-12 institutions have similar moral components and as such reflect sites where values and systems coalesce to shape students. The thickness of a school's moral ecology, based on their sources of moral authority and support networks, may be the impetus for a parent choosing to send their child to a given school. As such, the moral ecologies of schools have a significant bearing on the moral ecologies of teens.

The types of schools children attend have important implications for life outcomes (Putnam, 2015), and even as school choice is intended to create equal opportunity, not all families have equal choice (Phillips, Larsen, and Hausman, 2014). Though most children attend public schools, according to the Council for American Private Education (CAPE), in the 2015-2016 academic year, 25% of all schools in the United States were private schools and 10% of all students in the United States attended private schools (capenet.org/facts). Historically, parent motivations for sending their child to a school other than a public school vary widely. Catholic schools developed as a mid-19th century response to the overwhelming Protestant nature of public schools (Walch, 2003) and evangelical Protestant education expanded in response to prominent cultural conflicts over things such as science curriculums, Bible reading, prayer in schools, and sex education (Hunter, 1991; Sikkink and Hill, 2005; Sikkink, 2018). Homeschooling has emerged in recent decades partially in response to the cultural conflicts which spurred the rise of the evangelical school movement but also due to concerns from the left that public education was “too traditional, structured and authoritarian...” (Dill, 2018, p. 244). Additionally, private education expanded following *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) and the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* with the growth of segregation academies in the south. Whites opted to enroll their children in private schools to avoid school integration (Walder and Cleveland, 1971). In deciding where to send their children, racial composition still influences parents’ school choice (Wyckoff and Lankford, 2006). Though these historic concerns that spawned the rise of alternative schooling strategies are less salient today, concerns about mobility (Goyette, 2014) and morality typically inform school and sector choice.

The decision to send one's child to a non-public school has significant implications beyond academic success. For example, Protestant schools as an alternative schooling strategy has been associated with greater religious commitment (Uecker, 2008) and Sikkink (2004) found that private schools foster greater civic education and engagement than public schools. However, in a comparative study of school sectors and moral formation, researchers found that a hyper-focus on academic achievement was notable throughout the sectors (Hunter and Olson, 2018).

Religion and Moral Ecology

Religious beliefs and activities during adolescence can significantly influence moral ecology in terms of moral worldview and in terms of social support networks. Even though religious participation often declines in teen years, religious identity is an important dimension of adolescence (Lopez, Huynh, and Fuligni, 2011). Since Durkheim (1897) theorized religion's role in promoting social integration, scholars have expounded upon the importance of religious life in providing moral direction and supportive structures. Religion can influence teens across the various contexts of their lives and each of these contexts can affect teen outcomes (Regnerus, 2003).

On one hand, religion can be integrative for adolescence. Not only does religion provide moral direction during a tumultuous developmental period (Smith, 2003), but it can also provide opportunities for extracurricular involvement (Glanville, Sikkink, and Hernandez, 2008). Scholars have also found that participation in religious communities can offer increased social capital and intergenerational closure (Smith, 2003; Glanville, Sikkink, and Hernandez, 2008). Additionally, the effects of religion on parenting have been well-documented (Ellison and Sherkat, 1993; Sherkat and Ellison, 1999; Bartkowski

and Ellison, 1995). Ellison and Sherkat (1993) found that conservative Protestant parents want their children to be obedient, but also think autonomously as to avoid secular influences.

Religious beliefs can affect the quality of parent-child relationships (King, 2003; Pearce and Axinn, 1998; King, Ledwell, and Morris, 2013). Mothers who view religion as important are more likely to have close relationships to their children (Pearce and Axinn, 1998). For children who are disadvantaged, religion can act as protective factor against harmful behaviors and can channel students into more positive outcomes (Mooney, 2010). Religion can mitigate the negative effect of peers on substance abuse (Desmond, Soper, and Kraus, 2011). The effects of religion are also observed beyond the individual as religion can serve as an integrative force at community level. Religion can not only enhance community safety as churches may serve as a protective factor against crime in neighborhoods (Lee, 2006), but Regnerus (2003) found that benefits for teens living within highly religious communities in terms of delinquent behavior. His study documented that teens living in communities with a higher proportion of conservative Protestants were less likely to steal.

Demographics and Moral Ecology

Demographics may interact with aspects of moral ecology in a way that shapes whether a given teen operates from within a Connected, Committed, Carefree, or Constrained moral ecology. The enduring effects of, race, class, and gender remain driving forces behind many belief systems as well as opportunity structures. The effects of these demographic indicators are observed directly and indirectly across the various contexts of teen lives, related to peers, family, schools, and community in innumerable

ways. For example, social class can influence where children live (Lareau and Goyette, 2014), and where children live can influence a variety of other outcomes such as where they go to school. According to Phillips et al. (2015), wealthier families have historically had greater school choice due to more housing options. According to a Pew Research Center survey entitled Parenting in America (2015), lower income parents were less likely to report their neighborhoods as being good places to raise children. Rhodes and Deluca (2014) found that poor families lacked access to better schools because of lower residential mobility whereas middle class families made choices about where to live based on school zones.

Gender can affect peer relationships (Wissink, Dekovic, and Meijer, 2009) and parent child relationships (Starrels, 1994) and may play a significant role in moral ecology. For example, males on average are exposed to greater peer delinquency than females (Mears, Ploeger and Warr, 1998; Haynie, Doogan, and Soller, 2014), and adolescents tend to have closer relationships with their mothers than with their fathers (Collins and Russel, 1991).

Demographics also influence the presence of social capital. According to Robert Putnam (2015), “social airbags” made up of community resources that provide a soft place to land when hardship strikes or when they get in trouble are less available to poor children than wealthy children. In his research, he finds that poor children are increasingly isolated from supportive communities. Parental income and education levels are associated with extracurricular involvement and children from higher income families are more likely to participate in sports, youth groups, social clubs, or enjoy music or dance lessons (Pew Research Center,2015). Some studies indicate that immigrant

families may have greater levels of social capital than non-immigrant families (Coleman, 1988; Hofferth and Moon, 2016).

Another example of how demographics may affect moral ecology is in the form parenting. In *Unequal Childhoods*, Lareau (2003) found that parenting styles had a significant effect on teen outcomes and that these parenting styles differed along lines of social class. Middle class parents took a *concerted cultivation* approach where they intentionally provided and monitored opportunities for activities, engagement, and skill development. In contrast, working class parents took a *natural growth* approach which provided fewer structured activities and overall less oversight of their child's development. Other studies have shown regardless of social class, there are racial differences in parenting. Hill and Sprague (1999) found that black parents were more likely to value school success and obedience and white parents were more likely to value happiness for their children.

Data and Methods

Data for this chapter are also taken from the NSYR Wave 1. To understand the makeup of each moral ecology, I conducted a multinomial logistic regression analysis, comparing the likelihood of class membership based on school sector and religious tradition, along with standard demographic indicators such as income, gender, race, family structure, country region, parent education, and immigrant status (Table 3.1). Multinomial logistic regression coefficients represent the logged relative risk of being in one class versus the reference category. In the models presented I compare the risk of membership in the Carefree, Constrained, and Committed classes to membership in the Connected class. Because logged relative risk (or, when coefficients are exponentiated,

relative risk ratios) is not particularly intuitive to interpret, I also calculate the predicted probabilities that a person would fall into a group based on each indicator of interest. The predicted probabilities were calculated using estimates from the multinomial logistic model while holding all other independent variables in the model at their mean.

The dependent variable for this chapter is the four-category moral ecology variable derived from the previous chapter's latent class analysis: the Carefree, Constrained, Committed, and Connected. Respondents were assigned to the moral ecology in which they had the highest probability of membership.

As a measure of school sector, I include a system of dummy variables for the type of school the teen attended as reported by their parents. There are six dichotomous variables for school sector including public school, homeschool, private non-religious school, Catholic school, Protestant School, and other religious school. Public school serves as the omitted reference category. Charter and magnet schools are included in the public-school sector. Teen religious traditions were measured by the RELTRAD categories from Steensland et al. (2000). I use dummy variables to compare evangelical Protestants to those who identify with various religious traditions including mainline Protestant, African American Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Mormon, not religious, other religion, and unknown religion.

Parent income is a continuous measure of household income across eleven groups ranging from those who made less than 10,000 dollars to those who made more than 100,000 dollars per year. Age in years is a self-reported continuous variable. Parent education is a twelve-category continuous variable ranging from less than high school diploma to doctorate/professional degree. I include a dummy variable for two-parent

homes where the responding parent was either married or living with their partner. Dummy variables are also included for four distinct regions of the country including northeast, midwest, south, and west. South is the reference category. The dummy system for race includes: White (reference category), Black, Asian, Hispanic, other, and unknown. Immigrant status compares teens who were not born in the United States and whose parents were not born in the United States (coded 1) with everyone else (coded 0). For gender, females are coded 1 and males are coded 0. Observations with missing values on any of the study variables were dropped via listwise deletion.

Results

School Sector

Even though most teens within the sample attended public school (87%), results from the multinomial logistic model point to substantial differences in moral ecology based on school sector. To begin, public and homeschool teens have very different moral ecologies. Compared to public school teens, homeschooled teens are more likely to be Connected rather than Carefree or Committed. Holding all other variables at their mean, the probability of a homeschooler operating within a Connected ecology is .54, compared to a .23 probability of being from the Constrained moral ecology. The likelihood of a teen homeschooler being Committed is .13 and of being Carefree is .10. By comparison, public schoolers have just a .41 probability of being Connected, compared to a .19 probability of being Constrained, a .20 probability of being Committed, and a .21 probability of being Carefree.

Similarly, there are differences in moral ecology between public and Catholic school teens. Catholic school teens are more likely to be Connected than Constrained

Table 3.1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean or %	SD	Minimum	Maximum	N
Carefree	21.16	0.43	0	1	3004
Constrained	19.48	0.42	0	1	3004
Committed	19.16	0.42	0	1	3004
Connected	40.2	0.52	0	1	3004
Homeschool	2.39	0.02	0	1	3004
Private non-religious school	1.66	0.01	0	1	3004
Catholic school	3.02	0.03	0	1	3004
Protestant School	2.3	0.02	0	1	3004
Other religious school	0.93	0.009	0	1	3004
Parent Income	5.69	3.01	1	11	3004
Age	15.46	1.51	12.91	18.49	3004
Female	49.63	0.52	0	1	3004
Parent Education	5.47	3.1	1	12	3004
Two parent home	71.17	0.47	0	1	3004
African American Protestant	12.41	0.34	0	1	3004
Catholic	25.17	0.45	0	1	3004
Jewish	1.15	0.11	0	1	3004
Mainline Protestant	9.75	0.31	0	1	3004
Evangelical Protestant	31.87	0.49	0	1	3004
Mormon	2.82	0.17	0	1	3004
Not Religious	11.75	0.34	0	1	3004
Other Religion	2.66	0.17	0	1	3004
Unknown religion	2.42	0.16	0	1	3004
West Region	21.64	0.43	0	1	3004
North East region	14.29	0.36	0	1	3004
Midwest Region	23.01	0.44	0	1	3004
South Region	41.06	0.51	0	1	3004
White	64.12	0.5	0	1	3004
Black	17.71	0.4	0	1	3004
Asian	1.32	0.12	0	1	3004
Hispanic	12.29	0.34	0	1	3004
Other Race	4.06	0.2	0	1	3004
Unknown Race	0.5	0.07	0	1	3004
Immigrant Status	2.76	0.17	0	1	3004

Source: National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 1 (2002-03)

All values weighted.

compared to public school teens, and more likely to be Connected than Committed compared to public school teens. If teens attend a Catholic school, they have a .56 probability of being Connected and a .25 probability of being Committed, compared to just a .06 probability of being in the Constrained moral ecology. Protestant school teens have the highest probability of being Connected among all school sectors. These students have a .71 probability of falling within the Connected moral ecology. There are no statistically significant differences in moral ecology for teens who attend private non-religious schools or other religious schools and teens who attend public schools.

Religious Tradition

While there is representation from all religious traditions in each moral ecology, the results indicate that religious affiliation is indicative of moral ecology membership. Evangelical Protestants only have a .15 probability of being in a Carefree moral ecology, a .19 probability of being either Constrained or Committed, and a .48 probability of being Connected. In other words, they are overrepresented within the Connected and underrepresented among the Carefree, reflecting in large part their more traditional moral worldviews. Evangelical Protestants, along with Mormons, are the most likely to be Connected of all religious groups. Compared to Evangelical Protestants, African American Protestants are more likely to be in the Carefree moral ecology than in the Connected moral ecology. African American Protestants have a .31 probability of being Carefree, a .32 probability of being Connected, a .16 probability of being Constrained, and a .21 probability of being Committed.

There are noticeable differences between Catholics and evangelical Protestants and moral ecology membership. Compared to Evangelical Protestants, Catholics are more

likely to operate from a Carefree moral ecology, with a probability of .25, or a Constrained moral ecology, with a probability of .22, than a Connected moral ecology (with a probability of .34). There are no statistically significant differences between the moral ecologies of teens in the Jewish tradition and the evangelical Protestant tradition, likely owing to a small number of Jewish respondents in the data. Notably however, they—along with the nonreligious—are among the least likely to be in the Connected moral ecology. For Mormon teens, they are less likely to be Committed (.07 probability) than Connected (.50 probability) compared to evangelical Protestants. Mainline Protestants and evangelical Protestants also operate from different moral ecologies. Compared to evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants are more likely to be Carefree or Constrained than Connected. They have a .28 probability of being Carefree, a .21 probability of being Constrained, a .18 probability of being Committed, and a .32 probability of being Connected.

There are statistically significant differences found among teens who are not religious and evangelical Protestant teens in terms of moral ecology. Compared to evangelical Protestants, irreligious teens are far less likely to be in the Connected moral ecology than in any other moral ecology. They have a .18 probability of being Connected compared to a .30 probability of being Carefree, a .28 probability of being Constrained, and a .24 probability of being Committed. I observe a similar pattern when comparing teens who affiliate with other religions compared to evangelical Protestants. Compared to evangelical Protestants, other religious teens are more likely to exist within a Carefree or Committed moral ecology than a Connected moral ecology. The likelihood of a teen from

another religion being Connected is .24 compared to evangelical Protestants' .48 probability of being in a Connected moral ecology.

Demographics

There are notable differences in moral ecologies across demographic groups. Socioeconomic status is associated with moral ecology, with higher income teens being more likely than lower income teens to operate from a Carefree moral ecology than a Connected moral ecology. Teens with low incomes have a .14 probability of being in the Carefree moral ecology compared to a .44 probability of being Connected. High income teens, however, have a .28 probability of being Carefree group compared to a .37 probability of being Connected. Additionally, there is a statistically significant difference between teens whose parents are highly educated and those who are not in terms of their moral ecologies. Teens with higher levels of parent education are less likely to be in the Constrained (.11 probability) or Committed (.17 probability) moral ecology compared to the Connected (.52 probability). There were no statistically significant differences in Carefree versus Connected membership across parent education levels.

In addition to social class, there were also racial differences observed in terms of moral ecology. Blacks (.13 probability) and Hispanics (.17 probability) have the lowest probability of any racial group of being Carefree especially compared to Whites (.24 probability) who have the highest. Blacks also have the highest probability of being Constrained (.22 probability) and Connected (.47 probability). Compared to Whites, Asians and Hispanics are more likely to be Committed than Connected. Asians have the highest probability of any group to be operating from a Committed moral ecology (.44 probability) compared to just a .28 probability of being Connected. The probability of

Asians being Constrained is .08 and of being Carefree is .20. Hispanics have a .29 probability of being Committed, a .38 probability of being Connected, a .17 probability of being Carefree, and a .16 probability of being Constrained. Compared to native born teens, immigrant teens are the least likely of any group to be in a Carefree moral ecology with a lower probability (.05) than Blacks (.13).

Gender is not a predictor of differences in moral ecology, but age does predict moral ecology membership. Younger teens are more likely to be Connected than any other moral ecology. The youngest teens in the sample have a .53 probability of being Connected while the oldest teens have just a .29 probability of being Connected. Where teens resided in terms of region of the country only slightly influenced their moral ecology. The only statistically significant regional variation observed was that Southern teens compared to western teens were more likely to be Carefree than Connected, and less likely to be Constrained than Connected. Teens in the west have the lowest probability of being Carefree (.15) and Southern teens have the highest probability of being Carefree (.26). Teens from two-parent homes were less likely to be Carefree or Constrained than Connected.

Discussion

Defining Characteristics

Connected teens are defined by their youth and their religiosity. On average, teens have a .40 probability of operating from a Connected moral ecology. However, based on religious tradition, school sector, and demographic indicators, the results point to young teens, Catholic school teens, Protestant school teens, and homeschool teens having over a .50 probability of operating from a Connected moral ecology. Evangelical Protestants and

Table 3.2: Multinomial Logistic Regression of Moral Ecologies

Variable	Moral Ecology (ref. Connected)	<i>b</i>	SE	p
Intercept	Carefree	-5.23	0.56	***
	Constrained	-4.09	0.58	***
	Committed	-2.20	0.56	***
Homeschool	Carefree	-0.99	0.41	*
	Constrained	-0.02	0.30	
	Committed	-0.74	0.36	*
Private non-religious school	Carefree	-0.19	0.37	
	Constrained	-0.37	0.43	
	Committed	0.15	0.37	
Catholic school	Carefree	-0.10	0.24	
	Constrained	-1.53	0.46	***
	Committed	-0.83	0.32	**
Protestant School	Carefree	-1.41	0.45	**
	Constrained	-1.04	0.44	*
	Committed	-1.36	0.44	**
Other religious school	Carefree	0.19	0.46	
	Constrained	-1.31	0.91	
	Committed	-0.65	0.62	
Parent Income	Carefree	0.07	0.02	***
	Constrained	-0.03	0.02	
	Committed	0.03	0.02	
Age	Carefree	0.29	0.03	***
	Constrained	0.25	0.04	***
	Committed	0.09	0.04	**
Parent Education	Carefree	-0.04	0.02	
	Constrained	-0.09	0.02	***
	Committed	-0.05	0.02	*
Two parent home	Carefree	-0.38	0.12	**
	Constrained	-0.30	0.13	*
	Committed	-0.19	0.13	
Sex	Carefree	-0.05	0.10	
	Constrained	-0.07	0.10	
	Committed	0.03	0.10	
African American Protestant	Carefree	0.75	0.26	**
	Constrained	0.15	0.24	
	Committed	0.35	0.26	
Catholic	Carefree	0.50	0.14	***
	Constrained	0.51	0.15	***
	Committed	0.22	0.14	
Jewish	Carefree	0.90	0.46	
	Constrained	0.95	0.53	
	Committed	0.63	0.49	
Mainline Protestant	Carefree	0.61	0.17	***
	Constrained	0.41	0.19	*
	Committed	0.15	0.18	
Mormon	Carefree	0.21	0.28	
	Constrained	-0.70	0.38	
	Committed	-1.27	0.41	**
Not Religious	Carefree	1.35	0.18	***
	Constrained	1.44	0.18	***
	Committed	1.11	0.18	***

(continued)

Variable	Moral Ecology (ref. Connected)	<i>b</i>	SE	P
Other Religion	Carefree	0.94	0.32	**
	Constrained	0.42	0.36	
	Committed	0.93	0.30	**
Unknown religion	Carefree	0.71	0.33	*
	Constrained	0.82	0.33	*
	Committed	0.26	0.34	
West Region	Carefree	-0.42	0.15	**
	Constrained	-0.05	0.14	
	Committed	0.26	0.13	*
Northeast region	Carefree	0.22	0.15	
	Constrained	-0.04	0.16	
	Committed	0.02	0.16	
Midwest Region	Carefree	-0.03	0.13	
	Constrained	-0.17	0.14	
	Committed	0.10	0.13	
Black	Carefree	-0.71	0.22	**
	Constrained	0.06	0.20	
	Committed	-0.37	0.22	
Asian	Carefree	0.35	0.48	
	Constrained	-0.41	0.65	
	Committed	1.16	0.41	**
Hispanic	Carefree	-0.14	0.19	
	Constrained	-0.03	0.18	
	Committed	0.50	0.16	**
Other Race	Carefree	0.36	0.24	
	Constrained	0.31	0.25	
	Committed	-0.22	0.28	
Unknown Race	Carefree	-1.23	0.89	
	Constrained	-1.58	1.08	
	Committed	-1.05	0.79	
Immigrant Status	Carefree	-1.34	0.56	*
	Constrained	0.53	0.31	
	Committed	0.50	0.29	
N	3004			

National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 1 (2002-03)

All values weighted, ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Table 3.3: Predicted Probabilities of Moral Ecologies

Variables	<i>Carefree</i>	<i>Constrained</i>	<i>Committed</i>	<i>Connected</i>
Total sample	0.21	0.19	0.19	0.40
Public school	0.21	0.19	0.20	0.41
Homeschool	0.10	0.23	0.13	0.54
Private non-religious school	0.18	0.13	0.25	0.44
Catholic school	0.26	0.06	0.12	0.56
Protestant school	0.09	0.11	0.09	0.71
Other religious school	0.31	0.06	0.13	0.50
Female	0.20	0.18	0.21	0.41
Parent income low	0.14	0.23	0.18	0.44
Parent income middle	0.20	0.19	0.20	0.41
Parent income high	0.28	0.14	0.21	0.37
Age (13)	0.13	0.13	0.21	0.53
Age (18)	0.26	0.22	0.18	0.29
High parent education	0.19	0.11	0.17	0.52
Two parent home	0.19	0.17	0.20	0.43
African American Protestant	0.31	0.16	0.21	0.32
Evangelical Protestant	0.15	0.19	0.19	0.48
Catholic	0.25	0.22	0.20	0.34
Jewish	0.29	0.27	0.21	0.23
Mainline Protestant	0.28	0.21	0.18	0.32
Mormon	0.31	0.11	0.07	0.50
Not religious	0.30	0.28	0.24	0.18
Other religion	0.30	0.16	0.29	0.24
Unknown religion	0.28	0.27	0.18	0.28
South region	0.26	0.18	0.17	0.40
West region	0.15	0.18	0.25	0.42
Northeast region	0.24	0.17	0.20	0.39
Midwest region	0.20	0.16	0.22	0.41
White	0.24	0.16	0.21	0.38
Black	0.13	0.22	0.17	0.47
Asian	0.20	0.08	0.44	0.28
Hispanic	0.17	0.16	0.29	0.38
Other race	0.26	0.22	0.15	0.37
Unknown race	0.10	0.07	0.12	0.71
Immigrant status	0.05	0.28	0.30	0.37

Source: National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 1 (2002-03)

All values weighted.

Mormon teens have the highest probability of falling into this group compared to teens from other religious traditions.

Teens in the sample have approximately a .19 probability of operating from a *Committed* moral ecology. However, after considering the likelihood of teens operating from a moral ecology based on demographic indicators, several driving characteristics of the *Committed* group appear to be race, immigrant status, lack of religious affiliation, and living in the West. Asian and Hispanic teens and immigrant teens (as well as other religious teens) are likely to operate from this framework. Asian teens have a .44 probability of being *Committed* and Hispanic teens a .29 probability. While there is significant overlap between the immigrant teens and these two race categories, based on immigrant status alone (i.e., setting race at its “mean”), the probability of a teen operating from a *Committed* moral ecology is 11 percentage points higher than average (.30 vs. .19). Nonreligious and western teens are disproportionately represented in this group. Given the fact that this group is characterized by lower social support relative to the *Carefree* and *Committed*, religion, region, and immigrant status could play a significant role in binding communities together.

The makeup of the *Constrained* is less clear, however, a theme of marginalization based on poverty and minority status does emerge. The probability of a teen being *Constrained* increases by .09 if they are low income compared to high income (from .14 to .23), by .08 compared to the average if they are Jewish (from .19 to .27), and by .06 if they are Black or from the other/mixed race category compared to Whites (from .16 to .22). Though immigrants have a higher probability of being *Committed* compared to

Constrained, the probability of an immigrant teen being in the Constrained category is .09 higher than the average teen (.28 vs. .19).

Lastly, *Carefree* teens are defined by their age, irreligion, and affluence. Teens from high-income families have a high probability of being Carefree compared to other moral ecologies and compared to low or middle-income teens. Additionally, teens who are not religious have a higher probability of being in the Carefree moral ecology than in any other moral ecology. The likelihood of an older teen being Carefree is twice that of a younger teen, and attending a Catholic (.26) or other religious school (.31) increases the probability of being Carefree.

Key Predictors of Moral Ecologies

I do find that teens from different social classes tend to cluster within certain moral ecologies based on demographic factors. The biggest difference in income levels is between the Carefree and the Constrained. More affluent teens are likely to be Carefree compared to Connected, and on average, the probability of a high-income teen being Carefree is twice that of a low-income teen. Low-income teens have a .23 probability of being Constrained compared to high-income teens who only have a .14 probability. Wealthier teens are thus more concentrated in the Carefree moral ecology while teens in poverty are more likely to operate in a Constrained moral ecology.

However, one interesting finding is that, for the Connected moral ecology, there is less of a gap based on income levels or race-ethnic identity despite the similarity of the Connected moral ecology to the Carefree moral ecology in support structures. Low-income teens have a higher probability (.44) of being Connected than do high-income teens (.37). Similarly, blacks (.47) have a high probability of being Connected compared

to Whites (.38). While the supportive nature in the Carefree category may be based on social class and race, the supportive nature of the Connected category may be due to religious values and networks.

The differences in age across moral ecologies seem to point to the fact that moral ecology is a developmental process rather than a static one. According to this study, younger teens are more likely to be absolutists and collectivists while older ones are relativists and individualists. Teens in this study fit with previous findings regarding the transitional nature of emerging adulthood which is marked by an increasing individualism and liberalism (Smith, Christoffersen, Davison, and Herzog, 2011). This is also in line with Hunter's (2000) finding that as children grow up they are more self-focused and take a more relaxed stance towards moral concerns.

In predicting moral ecology, school sector has a profound effect. Teens attending Catholic schools, homeschools, and Protestant schools are overall more likely to operate from a Connected moral ecology when compared to their public-school peers. By operating within a Connected moral ecology, homeschoolers tend to have strong support systems and to have theistic or conventionalist views on moral authority. While there is a great variety found within each of the sectors considered, the fact that homeschoolers tend to be Connected contrasts with stereotypes that homeschoolers are lacking in social connection (Reich, 2005). These findings support Medlin's (2000) who found that homeschoolers are embedded within, rather than isolated from, their communities.

Despite a great deal of research on the difference between private religious schools and public schools, much of the literature on the effects of religious schooling has failed to consider the differences between Protestant and Catholic forms (Jeynes,

2008). These results show that there are key differences among Protestant, Catholic, and public schools. Compared to public school teens, both Protestant and Catholic school teens have a very high probability of being in the Connected moral ecology, but the effect of Protestant schooling is greater than that of Catholic schooling. Protestant school teens are almost twice as likely as public-school teens (.71 to .41) to be Connected and are also more likely than Catholic school students to be Connected (.71 to .56). This finding is in line with research on the strong collective identity of evangelical Protestant schools. For example, Sikkink (2018) found that an overall “intensity” (p. 117) was indicative of evangelical Protestant school communities. For these schools, faith formation was paramount and supported by thick sources of moral authority like the Bible as well grounded in a close-knit school community. I found no statistically significant differences in moral ecology for teens who attend a private non-religious school or other religious school and public-school teens.

Religious tradition was also a significant predictor of moral ecology, even when controlling for religious schooling. Though religious teens are found in each of the moral ecologies, evangelical Protestants have a high probability of being Connected. This is not surprising as Connected teens are more likely to have absolute views of right and wrong more likely to be operate from a theistic or conventionalist moral worldview. Compared to most other religious traditions, African American Protestants, Catholics, and mainline Protestants all had over a .30 probability of being Connected, while the nonreligious, those from other religions, and those from unknown religions had less than a .30 probability of being Connected. The only religious tradition that had a higher likelihood than evangelical Protestants (.48) of being Connected were Mormon teens (.50).

There was no statistically significant difference in the moral ecologies from which evangelical Protestant teens and Jewish teens operate. This finding is in line with Hunter's (1991) culture war thesis that there is more similarity than difference in groups such as evangelicals and Orthodox Jews on a variety of political and social issues due to a common view in transcendent and traditional moral authority, but could also stem from having only a small number of Jewish teens in the sample as sizable-but-not-statistically-significant differences across moral ecologies appear between these groups.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Effect of Moral Ecology on Educational Success

Introduction

The enduring problems of the achievement gap have sent educators in search of alternative solutions to solving educational inequality. For example, many schools such as those in the KIPP network and other “No Excuses” schools have emphasized performance character such as grit and perseverance to enhance academic achievement (Seider et al. 2013). Many of these programs target disadvantaged children.

A collection of 14 essays on the topic of character education and opportunity from the Center on Children and Families define some of the driving challenges and possibilities for character to address educational inequality. In the collection, Rose (2014) shares concerns over the trajectory of the contemporary character education movement based on the tendency towards a reductive definition of character to traits and the tendency to focus solely on poor children. Rose (2014) points out that despite having “grit by the truckload,” disadvantaged young adults experience insurmountable barriers to their educational success based on finances, housing, healthcare, violence, bureaucracy, and transportation, and in many cases these obstacles make it impossible to succeed. In considering how character might address inequality, Rose (2014) suggests that:

A good education has always had as one of its goals the development of character. But as a matter of public policy, it would be counterproductive, and ultimately cruel, to focus on individual characteristics without also considering the economic and social terrain on which those characteristics play out. (p.47)

The descriptive work undertaken in *The Content of Their Character* (Hunter and Olson 2018) addresses one way forward in considering the role of character in student outcomes—specifically suggesting that the moral ecology outside of the child might shape character in important ways for which the current character models fail to account. The previous chapters in this dissertation have developed an empirical moral ecology model. This model provides a picture of teen moral lives that accounts for differences in schematic frameworks in the form of moral worldviews and opportunity structures in the form of social support, resulting in four distinct ecologies represented by the Connected, Carefree, Committed and Constrained. I now turn to how these moral ecologies might collectively influence educational outcomes including achievement, aspirations, expectations, and college attainment. Like other character education researchers who have considered how the moral lives of teens might influence achievement (Wagner and Ruch, 2015; Davidson, Lickona, and Khmelkov, 2014), I am interested not only in whether moral ecology influences educational success, but also if moral ecologies may moderate the negative effects of disadvantage often associated with race and socioeconomic status.

In addition to Rose (2014), other scholars have suggested that the dominant models for character education are reductive (Hunter, 2000; Hunter and Olson, 2018) and have advocated that an ecological model might be better suited for considering the richness of young adult moral and social life (Hunter and Olson, 2018; Swartz, 2010). I draw from the latent class analysis in Chapter Two and the multinomial logistic model in Chapter Three to describe four comparative moral ecologies and to test the ways these models may influence educational achievement. Moral ecologies are determined by

teens' sources of moral authority and the density of networks that support them, and not by wealth, race, or religion. Despite some degree of clustering based on social position, teens from all social positions can be found in each moral ecology.

Literature Review

Habitus, Schemas, Social Capital, and Education

Despite the contentious history of studies focused on the relationship between culture and poverty, sociologists have reinvigorated the investigation of how the two might interact (Small, Harding, and Lamont, 2010). Part of this debate is centered on the role of culture and values in influencing educational outcomes. Many of these studies considering culture and achievement focus on the role of cultural capital and habitus in reproducing inequality. Cultural capital refers to elite styles, habits, and practices (DiMaggio, 1982; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Habitus refers to “the learned set of preferences or dispositions by which a person orients to the social world (Edgerton and Roberts, 2014, p. 195). Bourdieu’s conception of cultural capital and its embodied form, habitus help to explain the differential effects of culture. Mitchell Stevens (2008) emphasizes the powerful influence that these Bourdieusian concepts have had on studies of culture and education. On one hand, Bourdieu’s concepts have been applied towards social reproduction models. In this line of thinking, inequality is reproduced because of differences in habitus and cultural capital that is acquired both inside of and outside of formal schooling. However, another application of Bourdieu’s theories is represented by models of cultural mobility, such as those advocated by DiMaggio and Mohr (1985). The question central to the debate on how to apply Bourdieu is whether or not differences in cultural capital reproduce inequalities or provide opportunities for mobility for those

from disadvantaged backgrounds (Gaddis, 2013). Many scholars have discussed the role of culture and differential educational outcomes based on race and socioeconomic status through this lens. Describing how some kind of habitus is acquired by social and cultural capital and reinforced by social structures may be a better indicator of success than demographics alone.

As adolescents undoubtedly benefit from the resources provided by their support systems in navigating institutional and organizational life, these concepts have informed a wide variety of studies on culture and poverty, particular as they connect with family life and schooling. For example, in *Ain't No Makin' It*, MacLeod (1987) discusses the nuances of social class, unequal structures, and personal agency in reproducing inequality, concluding that differences in achievement ideology may be a source of disparity. Gaddis (2013) also found that habitus plays an important role in the academic achievement of disadvantaged youth, and that the effects of cultural capital are mediated by habitus. According to his study, when exposed to higher levels of cultural capital, youth took on a habitus that was supportive of greater academic achievement and educational success.

Jacks' (2016) study comparing the "privileged poor" to the "doubly disadvantaged" reveals substantial differences in how well low-income youth perform at elite colleges. The privileged poor arrive at college marked by their experience in private education, while the doubly disadvantaged arrive lacking the resources to navigate elite environments. According to this study, lower income and minority students have diverse experiences that affect their educational success, and operating in more elite environments before college influences their cultural capital in a way that makes them

successful in college despite being disadvantaged. Traditionally disadvantaged social statuses were moderated by private school habitus.

Vaisey (2010) found that for those in poverty, internalized low aspirations negatively influenced future education enrollment and school continuation. Lee and Zhou (2015) found that contrary to the stereotype of Asian American culture simply emphasizing higher success, there are also institutional reasons for higher educational success found among Asian Americans. Asian American students in this study were more likely to succeed based on a “success frame” that is reinforced and supported in their communities as well as by teachers and schools which gives them an advantage academically.

While the studies described above focus on how cultural capital and habitus might moderate the effect of disadvantage on educational outcomes, other studies have focused on the direct role that schemas, or cultural views, play in affecting educational outcomes. Schemas are interpretive frameworks used to organize resources (Sewell, 1992) that can interact with environments and ultimately influence how students take advantage of the opportunities around them. There is a wide literature on schemas influencing educational outcomes. In his study of black student academic success, Ogbu (2003) suggests that black students view high achievement as “acting white” and oppose the achievement ideology of white culture. Religious tradition or affiliation can influence cognitive schemas that affect how people make decisions about their future schooling (Keister and Sherkat, 2014). In particular, conservative Protestant schemas can have negative effects on educational outcomes due to an other-worldly focus, a negative view of nonreligious higher education, and a prioritization of family over career, especially for women

(Sherkat, D., and Darnell, 1999; Darnell and Sherkat, 1997; Glass and Jacobs, 2005; Fitzgerald and Glass, 2008; Greeley and Hout, 2006; Smith and Faris, 2005; Keister and Sherkat, 2014; Uecker and Pearce, 2017). Moral worldviews operate as values that activate these underlying moral schemas (Vaisey, 2009) and offer a window into how individuals think about right and wrong, good and bad, what is worthwhile and what is irrelevant.

Relatedly, in her ethnographic work with South African youth, Swartz (2010) develops the idea of “moral capital” to conceptualize the relationships among poverty, morality, and social reproduction. Moral capital refers to being perceived by others as being good, and that being perceived of as good helped students achieve their goals and become good by finishing school and contributing to their community. Four elements of moral capital include relational connection, reflective practice, personal agency, and an enabling environment. Swartz (2010) found that a variety of factors under these domains influenced the presence of moral capital, including caring adult relationships and good quality schools. Moral capital influenced economic capital thus influencing social mobility. Ultimately, Swartz (2010) found that moral ecology bears directly on the extent to which youth are able to gain moral capital. Her research points to the benefit of a moral ecology model in discussing the inevitable nuances of disadvantage and the way in which being good may influence teen outcomes.

Schemas are made more salient as they are reinforced by actors and institutions in real-world situations (Sewell, 1992). Thus, thicker social support around a child within a community with a particular schema facilitates the transmission of that schema. This social support is often described as social capital (Loury, 1977; Coleman 1990), the

availability of community school, peer, and family resources that can promote greater success (however defined). There are various measures of social density and capital included within the model of moral ecology from Chapter Two which have been shown to have independent effects on educational outcomes. For example, high network closure (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore, 1982; Carbonaro, 1998), quality parent-child relationships (DuBois, Eitel, and Felner, 1994; Jeynes, 2003; Hill 2004; Jeynes 2007; McNeal, 1999) and supportive relationships with other adults such as teachers (Murdock, 1999) can positively influence academic success. Additionally, where teens live can have a significant effect on their education success (Rosenfeld, Richman, Bowen, and Wynns, 2006). Bowen and Van Dorn (2003) showed that living in a high crime neighborhood has a negative impact on educational outcomes. School mobility, often connected to residential mobility, is negatively associated with academic achievement (Voight, Shinn, and Nation, 2012). Teen engagement with and involvement in extra-curricular activities has a positive effect on academic achievement (Broh, 2002; McNeal, 1998). Having more prosocial peers is positively associated with school success (Berndt and Keefe, 1995).

Various factors have been shown to influence the presence of these support structures and in turn to affect achievement. Some teens have greater access to social support than others. Teens who attend private schools have higher levels of network closure than public school teens (Coleman and Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore, 1982). Religious communities are a primary source of social capital (Putnam, 2000). Demographic differences based on factors such as family structure and parenting styles can also influence social capital. Working class families and middle-class families

differ in social capital (Lareau, 2003). Poor neighborhoods can negatively affect social capital (Wilson, 1987), and children from one parent families have lower access to social capital (Coleman, 1988, Bianchi and Robinson, 1997).

In the framework developed in Chapter Two and expounded upon in Chapter Three, moral worldviews and social support both play a large role in shaping teens' moral ecology. Though to my knowledge no studies have considered how moral worldviews independently influence educational outcomes, as indicators of moral schemas, they may indeed affect educational trajectories by supporting divergent schemas of success that are reinforced within their social context. The Carefree tend to be more relativistic and make decisions based on what feels right or what will get them ahead. Teens who have no religious affiliation are more likely to be Carefree than they are to be from another moral ecology, and while private school teens are more highly concentrated in the Connected category, Catholic school and other religious school teens have a higher probability of being Carefree than do public school teens. Carefree teens have a higher probability of being involved and have a higher proportion of friends who volunteer compared to teens in other moral ecologies. Despite being individually oriented, teens are outwardly engaged.

Connected teens tend to be highly absolutist in their worldviews. When making decisions, they seek direction from traditional authority structures. Their parents, their friends' parents, and non-parental adults are highly involved in their lives. Teens who attend private schools are more likely than teens who attend public schools to be Connected. Connected teens operate from a stable, coherent, secure environment represented by thickness both morally and socially. The Constrained operate in a

relativistic moral world, making decisions based on their own sense of what is best rather than looking outside of themselves for direction. They have low network closure and high peer delinquency and tend to receive less support from their parents. Constrained teens generally lack the thick moral worldviews and thick support structures that are most indicative of educational success. Committed teens maintain an absolutist view of right and wrong and generally are more collectivist in ethical decision making. Teens in public school and private non-religious schools are more likely to be Committed than they are to attend a school in another sector.

The Carefree and Constrained may operate differently than the Connected and Committed based on the difference across collectivist and absolutist lines. The Carefree and Constrained represent thin moral frameworks while the Connected and Committed represent thick ones. Each moral ecology has a certain type of support system that reinforces either an individualist/relativist schema or an absolutist/collectivist schema. Regarding this social support system, the Carefree and Connected have thick social networks to reinforce their values while the Committed and Constrained are marked by thinner social support systems.

Hypotheses

H1: Based on the availability of thick support systems, Carefree and Connected teens will have better educational outcomes than the Constrained or Committed.

H2: Based on the work of Durkheim and Coleman, I hypothesize that thick moral ecologies support greater levels of educational success. Teens in the Connected environment will have better educational outcomes than the Carefree based on the presence of thick moral sources of authority reinforced by thick support systems.

H3: Given similar levels of social support, thick moral frameworks are advantageous for educational outcomes. Based on the availability of thick moral frameworks, I hypothesize that teens in the Committed moral ecology will perform better on educational outcomes than Constrained teens.

H4: Being a Carefree teen, operating from an individualistic and relativistic framework that is indicative of high achieving educational environments with high levels of support, will lead to better educational outcomes for disadvantaged teens.

Data and Methods

Following the investigation in Chapter Two regarding the extent to which adolescent character can be conceived of ecologically and the discussion of disadvantage across moral ecologies in Chapter Three, I now consider how moral ecology might influence educational success. Using data from the NSYR Wave 1 and the third follow up study, Wave 4, this study employs Ordinary Least-Squares (OLS) and logistic regression techniques applied to five measures of educational success including academic achievement, aspirations and expectations for higher education, high school diploma attainment, and receiving a bachelor's degree.

Dependent Variables

Academic achievement was measured by asking teens what kind of grades they earned in school. Responses were placed into 10 categories ranging from 1 ("Mostly F's") to 10 (all A's). When teens responded "mixed," I replaced this response with the unweighted sample mean of 7.40. According to Sticca and colleagues (2017), self-reported grades are highly correlated with actual grades, and high school grades are associated with college outcomes (Geisr and Santelices, 2007). This question was not asked of teens who were homeschooled, thus homeschoolers were excluded from all models predicting academic achievement.

Recent interest has been paid to examining the predictive power of educational motivations, aspirations, and expectations—what people want and aspire to regarding their future education and how these aspirations shape, and are shaped by, student

pursuits (e.g., Cheng and Starks, 2002; Goyette, 2008; Goyette and Xie, 1999; Hanson, 1994; Morgan, 1998, 2002; Qian and Blair, 1999; Shneider and Stevenson, 2000; Vaisey, 2010). Higher education aspirations were measured by asking teens how far in school they would like to go. This measure is a continuous measure ranging from 1 to 7 as follows: 1=no farther in school, 2=some high school, 3=high school graduate, 4=vocational technical school, 5=some college or Associates Degree, 6=college graduate, and 7=post-graduate or professional school.

Higher education expectations were measured by asking teens “given realistic limitations, how far in school do you think you will go?” Responses were coded as a continuous measure similar to the aspirations measure described above: 1=no farther in school, 2=some high school, 3=high school graduate, 4=vocational technical school, 5=some college or Associates Degree, 6=college graduate, and 7=post-graduate or professional school.

High school diploma and bachelor’s degree attainment were both measured by asking respondents at Wave 4 which if they had received each degree. These measures are coded dichotomously such that those who received the degree are coded 1 and those who did not are coded 0.

Independent and Control Variables

As my key independent variable of moral ecology, I use the groups resulting from the latent class analysis in Chapter Two with each teen being assigned to the Connected, Committed, Carefree, or Constrained moral ecology. These are a dummy variable system. In the models presented, I rotate the reference category so that statistical tests are performed comparing all moral ecologies to one another. *Connected* teens operate within

a highly structured and supported environment and have traditional, absolutist views of right and wrong. They tend to make moral choices based on what God or scripture tells them is the right thing to do, or to follow the advice of an authority figure. 40% of the sample falls into this group. Like the Connected, *Committed* teens also have traditional moral worldviews marked by absolutism, conventionalist, and theistic tendencies.

Though supported, they have less stability on average than Connected teens. 19% of the sample falls in the Connected group. *Carefree* teens make up 21% of the sample. These teens have stable support systems and are highly engaged with their communities, but tend to have more relativistic and individualistic worldviews, more friends who volunteer on average, and higher peer delinquency. *Constrained* teens represent the least stable moral ecology based on parental oversight, residential instability, and living in unsafe neighborhoods. They have the individualistic and relativistic moral views of the Carefree, without the supportive, stable environments. 20% of the sample falls in the Constrained category.

I include a measure for the type of school teens attended as reported by their parents. There are six dichotomous variables for school sector including public school (which serves as the reference category), homeschool, private non-religious school, Catholic school, Protestant school, and other religious school. Charter and magnet schools are included in the public-school sector. Teen religious traditions were measured by the RELTRAD categories from Steensland et al. (2000). I use dummy variables to compare evangelical Protestants to those who identify with various religious traditions including mainline Protestant, African American Protestant, Catholics, Jewish, Mormon, not religious, other religion, and unknown religion.

Parent income is a continuous measure ranging from those who made less than \$10,000 dollars (coded 1) to those who made more than \$100,000 per year (coded 11). Age in years is a self-reported continuous variable. Parent education is a 12-category continuous variable ranging from less than high school diploma to doctorate/professional degree. I include a dummy variable for two-parent homes where the responding parent was either married or living with their partner. Dummy variables are also included for four distinct regions of the country including northeast, midwest, south, and west. South is the reference category. The dummy system for race includes: White (reference category), Black, Asian, Hispanic, other, and unknown. Immigrant status compares teens who were not born in the United States and whose parents were not born in the United States (coded 1) with everyone else (coded 0). For gender, females are coded 1 and males are coded 0. Observations with missing values on any of the study variables were dropped via listwise deletion.

Descriptive statistics for the five dependent variables are presented in Table 4.1. See Table 3.1 for descriptive statistics for the independent variables.

Table 4.1 Educational Outcomes Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean or %	SD	Minimum	Maximum	N
Grades	7.40	1.64	1	10	2942
Higher Education Aspirations	6.06	1.02	1	7	2950
Higher Education Expectations	5.69	1.21	1	7	2985
High School Diploma Attainment	72.03	0.47	0	1	1920
Bachelor's Degree Attainment	38.38	0.51	0	1	1920

National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 1 (2002-03) and Wave 4 (2012)
All values weighted.

Results

The Effect of Moral Ecology on Educational Outcomes

In conducting statistical analysis, I considered each moral ecology group as a reference category and report the effects of using the Carefree, Constrained, and Committed as reference categories for each of the five educational outcomes (Table 4.2). For academic achievement, Connected teens report the highest grades followed by the Carefree, the Committed, and then the Constrained. The effects are statistically significant for all comparisons and are present despite controlling for religious tradition, school sector, and demographic indicators. In some cases, these effects are rather modest in size. For example, being Connected is associated with .16 higher grades (on a scale from 1 to 10), or about one tenth of a standard deviation higher grades, than being Carefree. Similar differences are seen between the Committed and the Carefree. But larger effects are present between the Connected and the Constrained (.91), the Carefree and the Constrained (.74), the Committed and the Constrained (.57), and the Connected and the Committed (.33).

The effects of school sector are present even when controlling for moral ecology. Regardless of whether a teen is Connected, Constrained, Committed, or Carefree, private nonreligious, Catholic, and Protestant school teens all report higher grades than public school teens. There is no effect on grades for attending another religious school compared to a public school. There are few differences in grades that emerge from differences in religious tradition once accounting for moral ecology. When compared to evangelical Protestant teens, Jewish teens are more likely to report higher grades. Parent income and parent education also remain significant predictors of teen self-reported grades

independent of moral ecology. Teens from higher SES groups were more likely to report higher grades, and compared to White teens, Blacks reported lower grades. Women on average report higher grades than men, and older teens report higher grades than younger ones. Teens from the south are more likely to report higher grades than those from the west.

In Table 4.3, there are no statistically significant differences observed between the Carefree, Committed, and Connected in terms of their aspirations for higher education, but all three groups have higher aspirations than the Constrained. Being Carefree is associated with .31 higher aspirations compared to the Constrained. Similar size effects are observed for Connected (.26) and Committed (.24) teens in relation to the Constrained.

Compared to public school teens, homeschool teens have significantly lower aspirations for higher education when controlling for moral ecology. Compared to public school teens, Catholic school teens have higher aspirations for higher education than public school teens. Socioeconomic status is a significant predictor of higher education aspirations with higher SES groups reporting higher aspirations. Women on average aspire to higher levels of schooling than men.

For expectations (Table 4.4), the Carefree and Connected expect to attain higher levels of schooling than the Committed, with all three expecting better outcomes for themselves than the Constrained. Connected and Carefree teens have similar differences in expectations compared to Constrained teens. The difference between Connected and Constrained teen expectations is .47, and between Carefree and Constrained it is .44. Committed teens expectations are only .31 higher than the Constrained. There is no

significant difference between the Carefree and Connected with regards to expectations of how far they will go in school.

Additionally, homeschoolers also have lower expectations for their educational futures compared to public school teens, while Catholic and Protestant school teens have higher expectations than public school teens. The effects of SES, age, and gender remain strong in predicting expectations with higher SES groups, women, and older teens reporting higher educational expectations. Catholics report higher expectations for higher education, and compared to white teens, Asian teens have higher educational expectations even when accounting for moral ecology.

In Table 4.5, the only notable difference in high school diploma attainment based on moral ecology is that the Committed and Connected have greater odds of receiving a high school diploma than the Constrained. Committed teens have 1.45 greater odds of receiving a high school diploma compared to the Constrained, and Connected teens have 1.39 greater odds of receiving a high school diploma than the Constrained.

Each unit increase in parental income is associated with 5% higher odds of earning a high school diploma, and not surprisingly, older teens had higher odds of achieving a high school diploma by Wave 4. Compared to southern teens, teens from the west had far lower odds of receiving a high school diploma by Wave 4.

In Table 4.6, the Connected are significantly more likely than the Carefree or Constrained to attain a college degree. While they are also more likely than the Committed, the relationship was slightly below the chosen statistical significance levels ($p=.056$). The odds of a Connected teen achievement a college degree are 1.47 times greater than a Carefree teen, and compared to a Constrained teen, the odds are 1.87 times

greater that they will achieve a bachelor's degree. The odds of a Committed teen achieving a bachelor's degree are 1.45 times greater than a Constrained teen.

Homeschool teens have much lower odds of achieving a bachelor's degree compared to public school teens. Catholic school teens, however, have more than twice the odds of public school teens of achieving a bachelor's degree. SES, sex, and age affect college attainment. Higher income teens, women, and older teens have greater odds of having attained a college degree by Wave 4. Mainline Protestants have greater odds of bachelor's degree attainment compared evangelical Protestants. Hispanics have lower odds than Whites of having finished college by Wave 4.

Interacting Moral Ecology with Race and Class

Next, to understand how moral ecology moderates the negative effects of disadvantage, I consider how race and socioeconomic status interact with each moral ecology to affect the educational success of teens. I created multiplicative interaction terms between each race-ethnic category and each moral ecology, parental income and moral ecology, and parental education and moral ecology. I report only models with significant interaction terms.

When comparing Carefree teens to Connected teens based on academic achievement in Table 4.7, there is a significant interaction between being black and being in the Carefree moral ecology. Even though being black has a negative effect on academic success in general, this negative effect was diminished when operating from a Carefree moral ecology compared to a Connected moral ecology. Regardless of moral ecology, black teens still reported lower grades than whites, but blacks in the Carefree culture are not at as great of a disadvantage as blacks in the Connected culture (see Figure

Table 4.2 Moral Ecology and Academic Achievement OLS

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Carefree reference</i>			<i>Constrained reference</i>			<i>Committed Reference</i>		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Intercept</i>	6.24	0.36	***	5.57	0.31	***	6.15	0.31	***
Carefree				0.74	0.09	***	0.17	0.08	*
Constrained	-0.74	0.09	***				-0.58	0.09	***
Committed	-0.16	0.07	*	0.57	0.09	***			
Connected	0.16	0.07	*	0.91	0.08	***	0.33	0.07	***
Homeschool									
Private non-religious school	0.43	0.21	*	0.43	0.21	*	0.43	0.21	*
Catholic school	0.38	0.15	**	0.38	0.15	**	0.38	0.15	**
Protestant school	0.06	0.29	**	0.06	0.29	**	0.06	0.29	**
Other religious school	0.33	0.18		0.33	0.18		0.33	0.18	
Parent income	0.07	0.01	***	0.07	0.01	***	0.07	0.01	***
Age	0.02	0.02	***	0.02	0.02	***	0.02	0.02	***
Parent education	0.06	0.01	***	0.06	0.01	***	0.06	0.01	***
Sex	0.47	0.05	***	0.47	0.05	***	0.47	0.05	***
Two parent home	0.12	0.07		0.12	0.07		0.12	0.07	
African American Protestant	0.14	0.13		0.14	0.13		0.14	0.13	
Catholic	-0.13	0.08		-0.13	0.08		-0.13	0.08	
Jewish	0.52	0.26	*	0.52	0.26	*	0.52	0.26	*
Mainline Protestant	0.06	0.10		0.06	0.10		0.06	0.10	
Mormon	0.08	0.17		0.08	0.17		0.08	0.17	
Not religious	-0.08	0.10		-0.08	0.10		-0.08	0.10	
Other religion	-0.07	0.17		-0.07	0.17		-0.07	0.17	
Unknown religion	-0.47	0.18	*	-0.47	0.18	*	-0.47	0.18	*
West region	-0.13	0.08	*	-0.13	0.08	*	-0.13	0.08	*
Northeast region	-0.13	0.09		-0.13	0.09		-0.13	0.09	
Midwest region	0.07	0.07		0.07	0.07		0.07	0.07	
Black	-0.41	0.11	***	-0.41	0.11	***	-0.41	0.11	***
Asian	0.03	0.24		0.03	0.24		0.03	0.24	
Hispanic	0.01	0.24		0.01	0.24		0.01	0.24	
Other race	-0.12	0.14		-0.12	0.14		-0.12	0.14	
Unknown race	-0.36	0.37		-0.36	0.37		-0.36	0.37	
Immigrant status	0.33	0.17		0.33	0.17		0.33	0.17	
R ²	0.16			0.16			0.16		
N	2942			2942			2942		

Source: National Study of Youth and Religion, wave 1 (2002-03)

All values weighted, ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Table 4.3 Moral Ecology and Higher Education Aspirations OLS

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Carefree Reference</i>			<i>Constrained reference</i>			<i>Committed reference</i>		
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>P</i>	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>P</i>
<i>Intercept</i>	5.4	0.2	***	5.1	0.2	***	5.35	0.2	***
Carefree				0.31	0.05	***	0.05	0.05	
Constrained	-0.31	0.05	***				-0.3	0.05	***
Committed	-0.05	0.05		0.26	0.05	***			
Connected	-0.08	0.05		0.24	0.05	***	-0	0.05	
Homeschool	-0.26	0.11	*	-0.26	0.11	*	-0.3	0.11	*
Private non-religious school	-0.05	0.13		-0.05	0.13		-0.1	0.13	
Catholic school	0.26	0.1	**	0.26	0.1	**	0.26	0.1	**
Protestant school	0.11	0.12		0.11	0.12		0.11	0.12	
Other religious school	0.05	0.18		0.05	0.18		0.05	0.18	
Parent income	0.04	0.01	***	0.04	0.01	***	0.04	0.01	***
Age	-0.001	0.01		-0.001	0.01		-0	0.01	
Parent education	0.07f	0.01	***	0.07	0.01	***	0.07	0.01	***
Sex	0.2	0.03	***	0.2	0.03	***	0.2	0.03	***
Two parent home	-0.07	0.04		-0.07	0.04		-0.1	0.04	
African American Protestant	0.12	0.08		0.12	0.08		0.12	0.08	
Catholic	0.03	0.05		0.03	0.05		0.03	0.05	
Jewish	-0.02	0.17		-0.02	0.17		-0	0.17	
Mainline Protestant	0.07	0.06		0.07	0.06		0.07	0.06	
Mormon	-0.1	0.11		-0.1	0.11		-0.1	0.11	
Not religious	-0.12	0.06		-0.12	0.06		-0.1	0.06	
Other religion	-0.03	0.11		-0.03	0.11		-0	0.11	
Unknown religion	-0.01	0.12		-0.01	0.12		-0	0.12	
West region	-0.002	0.05		-0.002	0.05		-0	0.05	
Northeast region	0.02	0.05		0.02	0.05		0.02	0.05	
Midwest region	0.002	0.04		0.002	0.04		0	0.04	
Black	0.01	0.07		0.01	0.07		0.01	0.07	
Asian	0.17	0.15		0.17	0.15		0.17	0.15	
Hispanic	0.04	0.06		0.04	0.06		0.04	0.06	
Other race	-0.17	0.09		-0.17	0.09		-0.2	0.09	
Unknown race	-0.38	0.25		-0.38	0.25		-0.4	0.25	
Immigrant status	0.12	0.11		0.12	0.11		0.12	0.11	
R ²	0.11			0.11			0.11		
N	2950			2950			2950		

Source: National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 1 (2002-03)

All values weighted, ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Table 4.4 Moral Ecology and Higher Education Expectations OLS

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Carefree Reference</i>			<i>Constrained reference</i>			<i>Committed reference</i>		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Intercept</i>	4.16	0.24	***	3.71	0.24	***	4.03	0.23	***
Carefree				0.44	0.06	***	0.13	0.06	*
Constrained	-0.44	0.06	***				-0.31	0.06	***
Committed	-0.13	0.06	*	0.31	0.06	***			
Connected	0.03	0.05		0.47	0.06	***	0.16	0.06	**
Homeschool	-0.39	0.14	**	-0.39	0.14	**	-0.39	0.14	**
Private non-religious school	-0.15	0.16		-0.15	0.16		-0.15	0.16	
Catholic school	0.25	0.12	*	0.25	0.12	*	0.25	0.12	*
Protestant school	0.30	0.14	*	0.30	0.14	*	0.30	0.14	*
Other religious school	0.16	0.22		0.16	0.22		0.16	0.22	
Parent income	0.07	0.01	***	0.07	0.01	***	0.07	0.01	***
Age	0.05	0.01	***	0.05	0.01	***	0.05	0.01	***
Parent education	0.07	0.01	***	0.07	0.01	***	0.07	0.01	***
Sex	0.22	0.04	***	0.22	0.04	***	0.22	0.04	***
Two parent home	-0.06	0.05		-0.06	0.05		-0.06	0.05	
African American Protestant	0.16	0.10		0.16	0.10		0.16	0.10	
Catholic	0.15	0.06	*	0.15	0.06	*	0.15	0.06	*
Jewish	0.13	0.20		0.13	0.20		0.13	0.20	
Mainline Protestant	0.09	0.07		0.09	0.07		0.09	0.07	
Mormon	-0.13	0.13		-0.13	0.13		-0.13	0.13	
Not religious	-0.04	0.07		-0.04	0.07		-0.04	0.07	
Other religion	0.17	0.13		0.17	0.13		0.17	0.13	
Unknown religion	0.17	0.15		0.17	0.15		0.17	0.15	
West region	-0.06	0.06		-0.06	0.06		-0.06	0.06	
Northeast region	0.01	0.06		0.01	0.06		0.01	0.06	
Midwest region	0.06	0.05		0.06	0.05		0.06	0.05	
Black	-0.02	0.09		-0.02	0.09		-0.02	0.09	
Asian	0.36	0.18	*	0.36	0.18	*	0.36	0.18	*
Hispanic	-0.03	0.07		-0.03	0.07		-0.03	0.07	
Other race	0.02	0.10		0.02	0.10		0.02	0.10	
Unknown race	-0.28	0.30		-0.28	0.30		-0.28	0.30	
Immigrant status	0.03	0.13		0.03	0.13		0.03	0.13	
	0.15			0.15			0.15		
R ²	0.15			0.15			0.15		
N	2895			2895			2895		

Source: National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 1 (2002-03)

All values weighted, ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Table 4.5 Moral Ecology and High School Diploma Logistic Regression

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Carefree reference</i>			<i>Constrained reference</i>			<i>Committed reference</i>		
	<i>b</i> (OR)	SE	P	<i>b</i> (OR)	SE	p	<i>b</i> (OR)	SE	p
<i>Intercept</i>	2.34	0.60	***	2.11	0.60	***	2.44	0.60	***
Carefree				0.28	0.16		-0.09	0.15	
Constrained	-0.28	0.16					-0.37(.68)	0.17	*
Committed	0.10	0.15		0.37(1.45)	0.17	*			
Connected	0.06	0.13		0.33 (1.39)	0.15	*	-0.04	0.14	
Homeschool	-0.73(.48)	0.29	*	-0.73(.48)	0.29	*	-0.73(.48)	0.29	*
Private non-religious school	-0.12	0.37		-0.12	0.37		-0.12	0.37	
Catholic school	-0.18	0.26		-0.18	0.26		-0.18	0.26	
Protestant School	0.47	0.36		0.47	0.36		0.47	0.36	
Other religious school	-0.03	0.46		-0.03	0.46		-0.03	0.46	
Parent income	0.05(1.05)	0.02	*	0.05(1.05)	0.02	*	0.05(1.05)	0.02	*
Age	-.10(.91)	0.04	*	-.10(.91)	0.04	*	-.10(.91)	0.04	*
Parent education	-0.02	0.02		-0.02	0.02		-0.02	0.02	
Sex	-0.11	0.10		-0.11	0.10		-0.11	0.10	
Two parent home	0.22	0.13		0.22	0.13		0.22	0.13	
African American Protestant	0.38	0.27		0.38	0.27		0.38	0.27	
Catholic	-0.02	0.15		-0.02	0.15		-0.02	0.15	
Jewish	-0.10	0.44		-0.10	0.44		-0.10	0.44	
Mainline Protestant	-0.15	0.17		-0.15	0.17		-0.15	0.17	
Mormon	-0.10	0.26		-0.10	0.26		-0.10	0.26	
Not Religious	-0.11	0.17		-0.11	0.17		-0.11	0.17	
Other Religion	0.07	0.30		0.07	0.30		0.07	0.30	
Unknown religion	0.42	0.36		0.42	0.36		0.42	0.36	
West Region	-0.45(.64)	0.14	**	-0.45(.64)	0.14	**	-0.45(.64)	0.14	**
Northeast Region	-0.11	0.16		-0.11	0.16		-0.11	0.16	
Midwest Region	-0.06	0.13		-0.06	0.13		-0.06	0.13	
Black	-0.41	0.22		-0.41	0.22		-0.41	0.22	
Asian	0.16	0.47		0.16	0.47		0.16	0.47	
Hispanic	0.06	0.18		0.06	0.18		0.06	0.18	
Other Race	0.33	0.26		0.33	0.26		0.33	0.26	
Unknown race	13.36	402.9		13.36	402.9		13.36	402.9	
Immigrant Status	-0.41	0.35		-0.41	0.35		-0.41	0.35	
N	1920	0		1920	0		1920	90	

Source: National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 1 (2002-03) and Wave 4 (2012)

All values weighted, ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Table 4.6. Bachelor's Degree Logistic Regression

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Carefree reference</i>			<i>Constrained reference</i>			<i>Committed reference</i>		
	b(OR)	SE	P	b(OR)	SE	p	b(OR)	SE	p
<i>Intercept</i>	-4.77	0.64	***	-0.502	0.63	***	-4.65	0.62	****
Carefree				0.25	0.17		-0.12	0.16	
Constrained	-0.25	0.18					-0.37(.69)	0.18	*
Committed	0.12	0.16		0.37(1.45)	0.18	*			
Connected	0.38 (1.47)	0.13	**	0.63(1.87)	0.16	***	0.26(1.30)	0.14	
Homeschool	-1.26(.29)	0.43	**	-1.26(.29)	0.43	**	-1.26(.29)	0.43	**
Private non-religious school	0.52	0.38		0.52	0.38		0.52	0.38	
Catholic school	0.90(2.47)	0.28	**	0.90(2.47)	0.28	**	0.90(2.47)	0.28	**
Protestant school	0.58	0.30		0.58	0.30		0.58	0.30	
Other religious school	0.82	0.44		0.82	0.44		0.82	0.44	
Parent income	0.18(1.20)	0.02	***	0.18(1.20)	0.02	***	0.18(1.20)	0.02	***
Age	0.12(1.12)	0.04	**	0.12(1.12)	0.04	**	0.12(1.12)	0.04	**
Parent education	0.16(1.18)	0.02	***	0.16(1.18)	0.02	***	0.16(1.18)	0.02	***
Sex	0.38(1.40)	0.10	***	0.38(1.40)	0.10	***	0.38(1.40)	0.10	***
Two parent home	-0.10	0.14		-0.10	0.14		-0.10	0.14	
African American Protestant	-0.20	0.30		-0.20	0.30		-0.20	0.30	
Catholic	0.25	0.15		0.25	0.15		0.25	0.15	
Jewish	0.68	0.44		0.68	0.44		0.68	0.44	
Mainline Protestant	0.39 (1.48)	0.17	*	0.39 (1.48)	0.17	*	0.39 (1.48)	0.17	*
Mormon	-0.20(.81)	0.27		-0.20(.81)	0.27		-0.20(.81)	0.27	
Not religious	0.01	0.18		0.01	0.18		0.01	0.18	
Other religion	-0.49	0.33		-0.49	0.33		-0.49	0.33	
Unknown religion	-0.16	0.35		-0.16	0.35		-0.16	0.35	
West region	-0.14	0.15		-0.14	0.15		-0.14	0.15	
Northeast region	0.37(1.45)	0.16	*	0.37(1.45)	0.16	*	0.37(1.45)	0.16	*
Midwest region	0.12	0.13		0.12	0.13		0.12	0.13	
Black	-0.24	0.24		-0.24	0.24		-0.24	0.24	
Asian	0.86	0.49		0.86	0.49		0.86	0.49	
Hispanic	-0.49(.61)	0.20	*	-0.49(.61)	0.20	*	-0.49(.61)	0.20	*
Other race	-0.37	0.27		-0.37	0.27		-0.37	0.27	
Unknown race	-0.69	0.70		-0.69	0.70		-0.69	0.70	
Immigrant status	0.67	0.38		0.67	0.38		0.67	0.38	
N	1920			1920			1920		

Source: National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 1 (2002-03) and Wave 4 (2012)

All values weighted, ****p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

4.1). In other words, the effect of being black in the carefree culture is less negative than in the Connected.²

For Carefree teens compared to Connected teens, parent education has a diminished effect on academic achievement (Table 4.7). That is, the positive effect of parental education for Connected teens is smaller among Carefree teens. For Carefree and Connected teens compared to Constrained, the positive effect of socioeconomic status is less pronounced regarding higher education aspirations (Table 4.8). The positive effect of parent income for Carefree teens is also less important than it is for Constrained teens. (Table 4.8). For predicting higher education expectations, the positive effect of SES (both parental education and parental income) is smaller for Carefree teens than for Constrained teens (Table 4.9). None of the interaction effects were significant in models predicting high school diploma or bachelor's degree attainment.

Discussion

Based on previous studies regarding the importance of thick, normative communities for educational success as well as the importance of tight, supportive structures, I hypothesized that moral ecology would influence educational outcomes based on levels of thickness and thinness with regards to moral frameworks and thickness and thinness of social density and support. I assumed based on previous studies on culture and achievement that the schemas within each moral ecology would interact with the various supporting structures to influence educational outcomes.

² Cross tabulation of Carefree X Black using an unweighted sample show that there are 98 blacks in the Carefree culture. For white teens in the Connected moral ecology who were a 0 on all other independent variables, the intercept grade was 6.48. Connected blacks had grades that were .75 lower.

Table 4.7 Moral Ecology, Race, SES, and Achievement Interactions

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Parent Education</i>
	Carefree vs. Connected	Carefree vs. Connected
Intercept	6.48***	6.35***
Carefree	-.23**	0.16
Constrained	-0.92***	-.75***
Committed	-0.35***	-.22
Private non-religious school	0.42*	.42*
Catholic school	.38*	.38*
Protestant school	0.31	0.32
Other religious school	0.04	0.04
Parent income	.07***	0.07
Age	0.02	0.02
Parent education	.06***	.08***
Sex	0.47***	.47***
Two parent home	0.12	0.12
African American protestant	0.13	0.13
Catholic	-0.13	-0.13
Jewish	.53*	.52*
Mainline protestant	0.06	0.06
Mormon	0.08	0.07
Not religious	-0.07	-0.08
Other religion	-0.04	-0.05
Unknown religion	-.46*	-.47*
West region	-.13	-0.12
Northeast region	-0.12	-0.12
Midwest region	0.06	0.06
Black	-0.75***	-.42***
Asian	0.03	0.03
Hispanic	0.01	0.01
Other race	-0.12	-0.12
Unknown race	-0.37	-0.36
Immigrant status	0.31	0.33
Parent Education X carefree		-.06*
Black X carefree	.41*	
R ²	0.16	0.16
N	2942	2942

Source: National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 1(2002-03)

All values weighted, ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

All race and SES interaction terms included in models, only significant effects reported

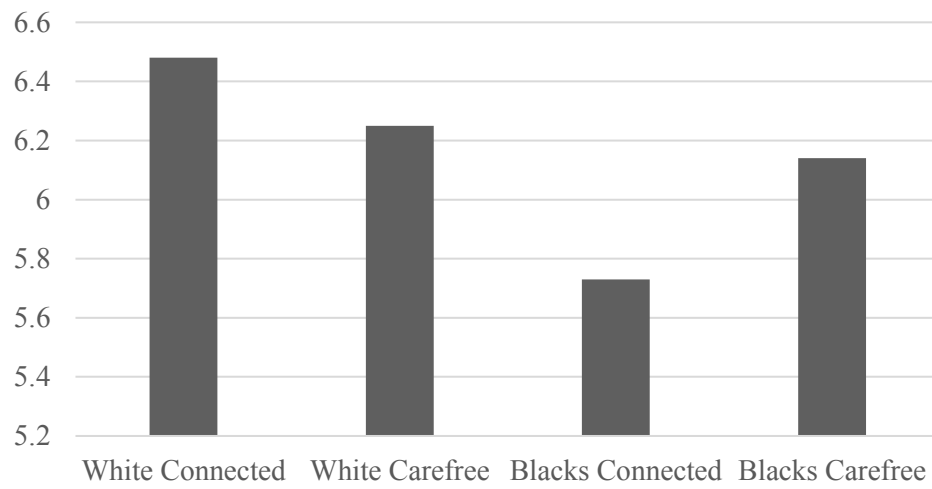


Figure 4.1 Race, Moral Ecology, and Academic Achievement

Table 4.8. Moral Ecology, SES, and Aspirations Interactions

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Income</i>
	Carefree vs. Constrained	Connected vs. Constrained	Carefree vs. Constrained
Intercept	4.92***	4.92***	5.03***
Carefree	0.62***	0.62***	0.49***
Constrained			
Committed	0.35**	0.35**	0.26***
Connected	0.48***	0.48***	0.24***
Homeschool	-0.26*	-0.26*	-0.25*
Private non-religious school	-0.04	-0.04	-0.05
Catholic school	0.27**	0.27**	0.27**
Protestant School	0.11	0.11	0.10
Other religious school	0.06	0.06	0.06
Parent income	0.04***	0.04***	0.05***
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00
Parent education	0.10***	0.10***	0.06***
Sex	0.20***	0.20***	0.20***
Two parent home	-0.07	-0.07	-0.07
African American Protestant	0.11	0.11	0.12
Catholic	0.02	0.02	0.03
Jewish	-0.03	-0.03	0.00
Mainline Protestant	0.07	0.07	0.07
Mormon	-0.09	-0.09	-0.11
Not Religious	-0.11	-0.11	-0.11
Other Religion	-0.03	-0.03	-0.04
unknown religion	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01
West Region	-0.01	-0.01	0.00
Northeast Region	0.02	0.02	0.01
Midwest Region	0.00	0.00	0.00
Black	0.01	0.01	0.01
Asian	0.14	0.14	0.16
Hispanic	0.05	0.05	0.05
Other race	-0.18*	-0.18*	-0.17
Unknown Race	-0.36	-0.36	-0.37
Immigrant Status	0.14	0.14	0.14
Income X Carefree			-0.03*
Parent Education X Carefree	-0.06**		
Parent Education X Connected		-0.05**	
R ²	0.12	0.12	0.12
N	2950.00	2950.00	2950.00

National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 1 (2002-03)

All values weighted, ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

All race and SES interaction terms included in models, only significant effects reported.

Table 4.9. Moral Ecology, SES, and Expectations Interactions

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Income</i>
	Carefree vs. Constrained	Carefree vs. Constrained
Intercept	3.66***	3.65***
Carefree	0.71***	0.66***
Constrained		
Committed	0.30***	0.30***
Connected	0.46***	0.46***
Homeschool	-0.38**	-0.38**
Private non-religious school	-0.15	-0.15
Catholic school	0.25*	0.26*
Protestant school	0.30*	0.30*
Other religious school	0.15	0.17
Parent income	0.07***	0.08***
Age	0.05***	0.05***
Parent education	0.08***	0.07***
Sex	0.22***	0.22***
Two parent home	-0.07	-0.06
African American Protestant	0.16	0.15
Catholic	0.15*	0.15*
Jewish	0.12	0.15
Mainline Protestant	0.10	0.10
Mormon	-0.12	-0.13
Not religious	-0.04	-0.04
Other religion	0.18	0.16
Unknown religion	0.18	0.18
West region	-0.06	-0.06
Northeast region	0.01	0.01
Midwest region	0.06	0.06
Black	-0.02	-0.02
Asian	0.34	0.36*
Hispanic	-0.03	-0.03
Other race	0.02	0.01
Unknown race	-0.28	-0.28
Immigrant status	0.04	0.04
Income X Carefree		-0.04*
Parent Education X Carefree	-0.05**	
R ²	0.15	0.15
N	2895	2895

National Study of Youth and Religion, Wave 1 (2002-03)

All values weighted, ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05

All race and SES interaction terms included in models, only significant effects reported.

I find support for my first hypothesis as the results show that Carefree and Connected teens, who overall have higher levels of stability and support, do indeed have better educational outcomes than the Constrained or Committed. This finding is not surprising considering what previous studies have shown about the importance of social networks and social capital in educational outcomes.

Additionally, I find support for my second hypothesis regarding the importance of thick moral frameworks and thick social support. Results show that Connected teens, who operate from the thickest moral ecology, are more likely to report higher grades and more likely to achieve a bachelor's degree compared to Carefree teens who have the support structures of the Connected, but a thinner moral framework. The third hypothesis was related to the second; when controlling for similar levels of social support, thick moral frameworks are more supportive of educational success than thin ones. I find support for my third hypothesis in that on all five measures of educational success, Committed teens outperform Constrained teens.

Lastly, I had expected that the Carefree would perform better than the Connected in terms of moderating disadvantage. Results show that even though blacks reported lower grades than whites, when operating from a Carefree moral ecology, the negative effects of being black were slightly reduced. At the same time, the positive effect of income was also reduced, meaning that parent education was less of a factor in predicting grades for Carefree teens. This finding was similar in predicting higher education aspirations and expectations in that compared to the Constrained, parent income and education mattered less for the Carefree. Even though parent education was also less important for the Connected compared to the Constrained when predicting higher

education aspirations, the effect of the Carefree in lessening the effect of disadvantage was more pronounced throughout the interactive models and present for multiple indicators of disadvantage.

In Coleman's study of public and private schools, one of the most interesting findings was that Catholic schools served as a protective factor for students disadvantaged by race and income (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore, 1982; Hoffer, Greeley, Coleman, 1985). In private Catholic schools, strong social ties and strengthening properties found in normative communities created supportive environments for success. Though private religious teens are more highly concentrated in the Connected moral ecology, Catholic school teens and other religious school teens have a high probability of being Carefree compared to Constrained or Committed. Additionally, teens from higher income families had a higher probability of being Carefree (.28) relative to the total Carefree class membership (.21). Based on the private school effect in addition to a higher concentration of affluence that might emerge in the form of cultural capital, these results that the Carefree moral ecology might be better positioned to moderate disadvantage are not surprising.

The moral ecology model as a predictor of educational success highlights the role of culture in educational achievement. Specifically, these results emphasize the dialectical relationship between schemas and opportunity structures in influencing educational outcomes. The absolutist and collectivist moral worldviews of the Connected and Committed and the individualist and relativist views of the Constrained and Carefree received disparate levels of social support which affected their capacity to support or deter achievement.

Connected and Carefree teens were more likely to succeed in terms of educational outcomes than Constrained or Committed. The main difference separating the Connected and Carefree from the Constrained and Committed is regarding various indicators of social capital and support, highlighting the importance of peers, neighborhoods, communities, schools, and families. Despite being demographically diverse and even when controlling for school sector and religious tradition, teens from the Connected and Carefree cultures were more likely to achieve better educational outcomes than those from other ecological backgrounds. This points to the fact that resources matter a great deal and that the importance of thick, supportive moral ecologies is unmatched in terms of educational outcomes. However, considering that the Connected and Carefree operate from similarly supported moral ecologies, differences in moral frameworks may be responsible for the variance between these two in educational outcomes. Guided by an absolutist and collectivist framework, Connected teens performed better on multiple indicators of educational success than did Carefree teens who, despite sharing similarities in support, diverge towards an individualistic and relativistic moral worldview.

However, in moderating the effect of disadvantage based on race and income, the thick, more exclusive moral worldviews of the Connected are less helpful than the thinner, individualistic, relativist moral worldviews of the Carefree. While an average teen may be more successful by operating from the thickest moral ecology, for poor black teens, the effects of race and income, though still negative, are more likely to be suppressed when operating from a thinner framework. For disadvantaged teens who are socially supported, focusing too heavily on the collective (collectivism) or being too closed off to diverse ideas (absolutism) can be detrimental to one's own success. The

individualism and relativism of the Carefree, when held by traditionally disadvantaged teens, may operate as an achievement ideology or educational habitus that moderates the negative effects of race and SES.

Future research should consider how the 13 variables used to create the moral ecology model operate as independent predictors of educational outcomes and then compare the results of both models. This comparison would strengthen the conceptual basis for the ecological approach. Additionally, NSYR primarily focuses on aspects of morality and religion rather than education. Using another data set that provided a more detailed account of school-related outcomes such as GPA and test scores might also enhance these findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The reductive tendency of contemporary character education when applied to the achievement gap is theoretically and intuitively inadequate. The problem is every bit as anthropological and philosophical as it is sociological. Young people are not simply combinations of neurons and synapses but rather human beings who exist in relationship to other human beings, institutions, and social contexts. Though the achievement gap is a massive problem, arguably the larger concern is as Rose (2014) indicated: the hyper-attention to the individual and the lack of attention to the wider moral and social landscape. In service to both the problem of the achievement gap and the problem of how character education addresses the gap, I find that an ecological framework is useful for understanding teen moral life as operating collectively and interactively rather than independently. More of this is contextualization is needed—particularly in the field of character education. Interventions that consider children as social beings and that account for character as emerging from overlapping systems of meaning are better equipped to address the achievement gap.

Though many have discussed the importance of moral ecology in shaping public and private life, only recently have scholars begun to offer insight into how to account for it (e.g. Swartz, 2001; Hunter and Olson, 2018). This research offers an empirical model of the moral ecology in which character is formed that accounts for the individual and the social and provides a way of observing how the various cultural and structural dimensions of teen life work together to affect educational outcomes. Taken together,

these three studies provide insight into the conditional nature of social position in determining life outcomes. Moral ecology is not defined by social class, race, or religious tradition, but in fact operates independently of these indicators. There is a vast heterogeneity within social demographic groups in terms of their moral ecology that has helped to illuminate the complexity of disadvantage. Beyond these general contributions, there are three important implications of these findings.

The first finding is that a latent class analysis approach to data gives an elaborative picture of the underlying relationships that bind respondents together for which there is no previous account. In the case of NSYR, four profiles of teens emerged across theoretically-driven dimensions of worldview and support that provide a basis for moral ecology, and act as a lens with which to view the relationship between schema and opportunity structures that may be helpful in cultural analysis beyond character education research. In this particular study, I observed the relationship between schema and structure through the conditional effects of moral worldview and the equally conditional effects of social support networks. To the extent that moral ecology is a way of talking about and analyzing the effect of culture, the LCA technique is a promising direction for pursuing this agenda.

Secondly, I find that the benefits of a given moral ecology are context specific. Hunter and Olson (2018) found that thick moral school cultures were more cohesive and stable in support of character formation. However, in describing the possibility of a moral ecology that supports both particularity and pluralism, Hunter and Olson (2018) indicate that an optimal moral ecology

is one that provides moral resources to children that are both thick and thin; thick in ways that provide coherent articulation rooted in practices that are authoritative

without begin authoritarian, yet balanced by thinner more universal norms that bind people across traditions and communities (p. 291).

In this study, I find similarly that thick moral ecologies like that of the Connected can be beneficial, but that thinness can also be advantageous. Collectivism and absolutism were assets for some teens, but for others, these approaches to moral choices were less helpful. Individualism and relativism operated similarly in that their benefit was conditioned by social support and social position. Individualism and relativism only became an asset for disadvantaged teens when these worldviews were combined with higher levels of social support. Though much research on rising individualism has proposed its negative effects on collective society (e.g. Bellah et al., 1985; Putnam, 2000), this research highlights that in efforts to close the achievement gap, individualism and an accompanying relativism could in some contexts prove advantageous.

In terms of educational policy, this research shows that both a fear of values and particularity on the left and a fear of individualism and relativism on the right may be counter-productive in the quest for better educational results. On one hand, this research shows that thick, normative values can, as Durkheim articulated, provide the context for social solidarity in service of better outcomes. Though aggressive religious messaging may not be appropriate in a pluralistic context, values that are deeply rooted, supported, and embedded within a community can help orient youth to their social obligations and provide a sense of meaning and purpose. However, this pursuit of social integration cannot come at the expense of the disadvantaged, who, according to this research, benefit from a healthy dose of individualism and relativism when operating out of supportive social networks.

Lastly, the finding that the Carefree moral ecology was most helpful in suppressing the effect of disadvantage is in line with previous research on the role of habitus and an achievement ideology in affecting educational outcomes for disadvantaged teens. Studies of cultural mobility have indicated that traditionally disadvantaged teens acquire cultural capital in elite environments that appears in the form of habitus. As the Carefree moral ecology includes more affluence than poverty relative to other moral ecologies, habitus may partially responsible for mitigating the effects of disadvantage. In addition to the role of habitus in educational success for disadvantaged teens, other research has indicated the importance of an achievement ideology in providing a pathway to success (MacLeod, 1987). The individualism and relativism of the Carefree may operate as a proxy for such a mindset. Like Jacks' (2016) privileged poor, disadvantaged teens in the Carefree moral ecology may benefit from the cultural capital that comes from a variety of sources, including private education or affluent parental engagement and network closure. The combination of individualism and relativism with reinforcing support structures and the resulting habitus may increase an individual's expectation that they will succeed.

For disadvantaged teens, the individualistic mindset on its own is limiting, but when combined with the right support systems, the mindset is a protective factor. A critique of grit and its application to disadvantaged children is not so much about the unimportance of individual effort, but rather about the detachment of such effort from a wider ecology of teen moral life. As Hunter argues (2000), character is not simply a set of individual traits but rather that it is a product of social life, "inseparable from the culture within which it is found and formed" (p. 15). Though individual performance traits such

as grit may indeed play a role in addressing the achievement gap, any account of the role of the psychological basis of character must include an account of the wider moral ecology from which such traits emerge. My research does not deny the benefits of an individualist mentality, but highlights that this mentality is only helpful when embedded within and supported by thick social networks.

Future Directions

While interventions to address character and achievement should occur beyond the school level, school-based efforts are also important. There is evidence that some educators are already making use of the ecological approach to character and achievement. In *It's Being Done*, Chenoweth (2007) followed high achieving schools with high disadvantaged populations and found that some schools unexpectedly foster supportive environments where all students succeed, confounding the traditional understanding of race and SES as indicators of inequality. Chenoweth discusses 25 traits held in common by the most successful schools. The National School Climate Center also focuses on the role of the school environment in fostering better educational and character outcomes. The NSCC highlights six categories of school climate and 13 dimensions that are indicative of that climate. School climates are then measured by a comprehensive inventory that accounts for the wider landscape of student engagement. School climate practice and research may be one area of application for the moral ecology framework.

In addressing the achievement gap, the moral ecology model provides a conceptual and empirical framework whereby the child's total life world, including individual dimensions, is considered. In sum, character education may indeed be helpful

in addressing the achievement gap, but would benefit from an ecological model in accounting for the moral landscape. One limitation in this study is that I do not have a measure for the individual indicators that I critique. Future surveys on the moral life of teens should incorporate grit scales or the Values in Action inventory to allow for a more robust comparison of the personal strengths and traits approach to character with the moral ecology approach to character.

This model developed through LCA is merely one way of conceiving of the landscape from which character can emerge, though others should be considered. This particular model is limited to individual level variables available within the NSYR, though there are countless indicators of moral ecology beyond the 13 I included. Future studies could account for school systems, policies, transportation, local geography, and the wider economic landscapes surrounding the child. Additionally, the importance of historical, cultural and political moments could also be empirically addressed using a moral ecology framework. Including indicators such as these would only enhance the ecological account of how children are formed.

Future studies should also consider how moral ecology influences and is influenced by other individual-level factors such as church attendance or volunteering. For example, results from Chapter Three indicate that not only are Connected teens more likely to be absolutist, theistic, and conventionalist, but they are also more likely to identify with a conservative religious tradition. Carefree teens on average are not only relativistic and individualistic, they are also far less religious than the Connected. Though moral ecology is distinct from religion, religion is a significant dimension of ecology and the relationship should be explored in further detail.

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