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Are Creative Individuals Bad Apples? A Dual Pathway Model of Unethical Behavior

Sejin Keem
Portland State University

Christina E. Shalley and Eugene Kim
Georgia Institute of Technology

Inseong Jeong
Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Research has been inconsistent in its quest to discover whether dispositional creativity is associated with more or less unethical behavior. Drawing on social cognitive theory, we propose that moral disengagement and moral imagination are 2 parallel mechanisms that encourage or inhibit unethical behavior, and that which of these mediation processes occur depends on moral identity. Study 1, a 3-wave study of a food service organization, shows that employees high on both dispositional creativity and moral identity are less likely to be morally disengaged and behave less unethically. The results of Study 2 replicate Study 1's findings in a scenario-based study of college students, and further show that individuals who are high on both dispositional creativity and moral identity are more likely to be morally imaginative and to behave less unethically. Theoretical and practical implications of our model are discussed.

Keywords: dispositional creativity, moral disengagement, moral imagination, moral identity, unethical behavior

> Just as creativity enables us to envision novel solutions to tough problems, it can also enable us to develop original paths around rules, all the while allowing us to reinterpret information in a self-serving way. . . . Creativity can help us tell better stories—stories that allow us to be even more dishonest but still think of ourselves as wonderfully honest people.
>
> (Ariely, 2012, p. 89)

> A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of many others . . . the great instrument of moral goods is the imagination.
>
> (Shelley, 1821/1995, p. 13)

Unethical behavior is widespread in the workplace. Although 81% of United States organizations offer ethics training, 41% of employees report witnessing unethical behavior at work (Ethics Resource Center, 2013). This means that organizations can benefit from understanding which employees are more likely to be "bad apples" (Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010) in the interest of stemming the incidence of unethical behavior. One individual difference characteristic that is a likely antecedent of unethical behavior is dispositional creativity, which represents an individual having the internal resources to engage in flexible and divergent thinking processes and the motivation to engage in such activities (Guilford, 1967; Helson, Roberts, & Agronick, 1995; McCrae, 1987). Employee creativity is essential for devising solutions that positively impact organizational performance (Amabile, 1983; Anderson, Potočnik, & Zhou, 2014; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993). Thus, many organizations selectively hire individuals who they believe could be creative, and try to provide the type of work environment that will foster their creativity (Shalley, Gilson, & Blum, 2000). However, this could cause issues for organizations if employees high on dispositional creativity also tend to behave in more unethical ways.

The literature offers conflicting views on the relationship between dispositional creativity and the incidence of unethical behavior. For example, research highlighting the dark side of creativity has argued that dispositional creativity is a significant predictor of unethical behavior because those high on this personal characteristic are able to come up with multiple ways to justify their moral transgressions (Gino & Ariely, 2012). Specifically, it has been found that creative individuals are more likely to behave unethically (e.g., Gino & Ariely, 2012; Gino & Wiltermuth, 2014). Yet, other research suggests the opposite possibility. In particular, Mumford and colleagues (2010) found that doctoral students who were higher on dispositional creativity were less likely to conduct unethical research because they had the in-depth knowledge and skills needed to resolve complex ethical dilemmas without resorting to dishonesty. Moreover, a study conducted by Bierly, Kolodinsky, and Charette (2009) suggested that dispositional creativity can help enhance ethical decision making especially within ambiguous situations, because individuals high on dispositional creativity have higher flexible thinking that can help them generate ethical resolutions when faced with uncertain situations.

Our objective is to integrate these two opposing perspectives on the relationship between dispositional creativity and unethical be-

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Sejin Keem, School of Business, Portland State University; Christina E. Shalley and Eugene Kim, Scheller College of Business, Georgia Institute of Technology; Inseong Jeong, HKUST Business School, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sejin Keem, School of Business, Portland State University, 615 SW Harrison Street, Portland, OR 97201. E-mail: sejin.keem@pdx.edu

havior. In doing so, we draw on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1991), a unifying framework that describes reasons for moral transgressions or moral actions. The core premise of social cognitive theory is that individuals experience two distinct moral self-regulation processes when facing opportunities to engage in unethical behaviors: moral disengagement and moral imagination (cf., Bandura, 1991). Here we propose that these distinct mechanisms elucidate the process through which dispositional creativity relates to more or less unethical behavior. First, given their higher cognitive flexibility and divergent thinking skills, creative individuals may come up with efficient ways to *morally disengage* by diffusing responsibility, blaming the victim, or claiming that their actions are justified if they serve a higher purpose (Moore, Detert, Treviño, Baker, & Mayer, 2012; Treviño, den Nieuwenboer, & Kish-Gephart, 2014). Because moral disengagement alleviates punitive emotions such as guilt and shame, it is associated with a higher incidence of unethical behavior (Bandura, 1999; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996). While the moral disengagement pathway describes how dispositional creativity may increase the likelihood of engaging in more unethical behavior, the moral imagination pathway suggests the opposite possibility. That is, individuals high on dispositional creativity may use the same cognitive flexibility and divergent thinking ability to *morally imagine* by envisioning the consequences of their potential decisions and devising alternative courses of action that may be less unethical (Johnson, 1993; Narvaez & Mrkva, 2014; Werhane, 1999; Whitaker & Godwin, 2013).

We propose that *moral identity* (Aquino & Reed, 2002), a self-view regarding moral traits, is a key lever in determining *when* dispositional creativity is associated with each of the above pathways. Because moral self-regulation operates when individuals are able to attend to morally relevant information (Bandura, 1986, 1991, 1999), moral identity is an important factor in determining which of the two pathways could be activated through their dispositional creativity. That is, we argue that moral identity plays a powerful role in linking dispositional creativity, moral disengagement, and moral imagination. In particular, we suggest that whether individuals morally disengage or morally imagine will depend on the strength of their moral identity. This is because having a strong moral identity enables individuals to see moral traits as inseparable from their self-view, and they will be motivated to act in ways that are consistent with their positive moral self-concept (see Aquino & Reed, 2002 for review). Therefore, individuals high on dispositional creativity who are also high on moral identity, will devise solutions for alleviating the potential consequences of dealing with ethical dilemmas rather than generating excuses to avoid self-punishment. On the other hand, those high on dispositional creativity who are low on moral identity will be more likely to morally disengage and this will be associated with more incidents of unethical behavior. Figure 1 depicts our theoretical model where these two cognitive pathways combine with moral identity to determine *when* and *why* dispositional creativity may be associated with more or less unethical behavior.

Overview of Studies

We conducted two studies to test our theory. Study 1 examined whether moral identity moderates the degree of moral disengagement and unethical behavior for those high on dispositional creativity. Following the most dominant approach in conceptualizing moral agency (e.g., Bandura, 2001; Chen, Chen, & Sheldon, 2016; Knoll, Lord, Petersen, & Weigelt, 2016) and a basic assumption in psychology that the valence (negative or positive) of predictors and outcomes should be congruent (see Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003), we solely focused on examining moral disengagement as a process through which dispositional creativity can translate into more or less unethical behavior in Study 1. Partially supporting our initial predictions, results of Study 1 revealed that when moral identity is low, dispositional creativity is not associated with moral disengagement or unethical behavior whereas when moral identity is high, dispositional creativity is negatively associated with moral disengagement and unethical behavior. Based on the results of Study 1, the question of "What other mechanisms can better explain the link between dispositional creativity and unethical behavior when paired with high (or low) levels of moral identity?" arises. In Study 2, we answered the question by integrating the flip side form of moral agency, such as moral imagination, that parallels moral disengagement. As such, the purpose of Study 2 was not only to replicate the results of Study 1, but also to enrich our understanding of social–

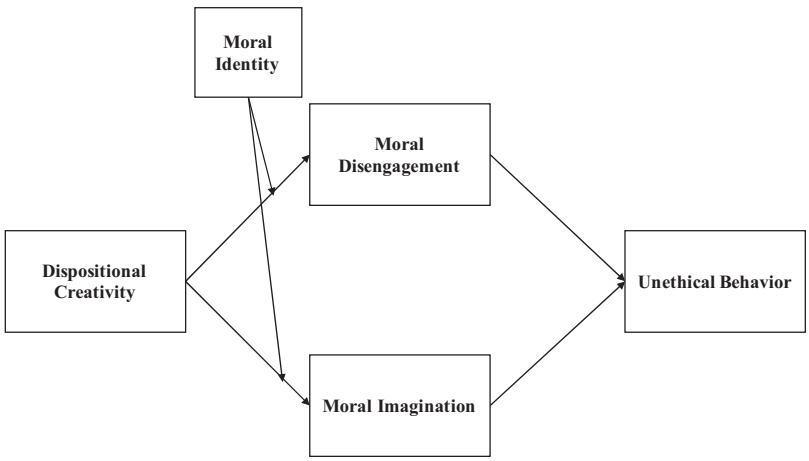

Figure 1. Theoretical model.

cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991, 2001) in terms of two types of moral self-regulation processes explaining the relationship between dispositional creativity and unethical behavior.

Both studies are designed to overcome the limitations from previous studies on creativity and unethical behavior. First, experimental work, where participants have little fear of the potential ramifications of their behavior, has primarily been conducted and the majority of this research has linked dispositional creativity and unethical behavior (e.g., Gino & Ariely, 2012; Gino & Wiltermuth, 2014; Vincent & Kouchaki, 2016). Furthermore, although unethical behaviors can range from minor (e.g., misreporting work hours) to more severe types (e.g., misreporting funds spent, forging documents, and theft) of ethical violations, the experimental work conducted has mostly dealt with minor unethical behavior, such as simple lying (Gino & Ariely, 2012; Gino & Pierce, 2009; Shu, Gino, & Bazerman, 2011). Therefore, we aimed to test our theory with both employees in a field study (Study 1) and in a scenario-based study (Study 2) of college students where we were able to capture a wider range of unethical behaviors for the employees and students (e.g., padding an expense account and stealing from a retail store).

In both studies, we relied on self-reports of unethical behavior. We believe that self-reports of unethical behavior were appropriate for two reasons. First, supervisors or coworkers may have insufficient information to rate unethical behaviors. Many of these behaviors are not performed in front of others, which can preclude them having any knowledge that these actions have occurred (Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010). Second, a recent meta-analysis on counterproductive work behavior suggested that other-reports of counterproductive work behavior captured a narrower set of such behaviors compared with self-reports of this behavior (Berry, Carpenter, & Barratt, 2012). However, we admit that our self-reported measures are prone to bias. To prevent single-source bias, we engaged in three preventive actions. First, we used three different time points to collect data for Study 1 and Study 2. Also, we controlled for social desirability, which can account for some of the effects related to common method biases (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Third, in both studies we emphasized to participants that their responses would remain completely anonymous and confidential.

Study 1: Dispositional Creativity and Moral Disengagement

A number of studies have clearly demonstrated that there is evidence for the consistency and generality of dispositional creativity by looking at descriptors of creative individuals and exploring what specific personal characteristics they share in common (e.g., Barron & Harrington, 1981; Gough, 1979; Guilford, 1967; Helson et al., 1995; McCrae, 1987). Although these personal characteristics were captured somewhat differently by each study, similar cognitive and motivational attributes were represented for creative individuals across the research. For example, Guilford (1967) defined dispositional creativity as possessing the internal resources to engage in flexible and divergent thinking processes. In addition, McCrae (1987) explained that creative individuals are motivated to experience new things, which means that they have a high level of intellectual curiosity, aesthetic sensitivity, and liberal values. Furthermore, Helson and colleagues (1995) provided a broader definition, in that dispositional creativity was said to encompass having the resources and motivation to be creative. Therefore, we adopted the broader definition of dispositional creativity and define it as having the internal resources and motivation to engage in flexible and divergent thinking processes.

Social cognitive theory provides a parsimonious framework that explains how dispositional creativity may relate to unethical behavior (Bandura, 1986, 1991). According to social cognitive theory, individuals have an internal guiding process regarding moral transgressions (Bandura, 2001); they can be *inhibitive* in avoiding inhumane behaviors or be *proactive* in seeking ways to do the right thing. Specifically, the inhibitive mechanisms are manifested in refraining from engaging in unethical behavior, while the proactive mechanisms are expressed in actively engaging in righteous behavior despite the fact that the consequences of such actions may bring severe personal costs and sacrifices (Bandura, 1996, 2001). These moral self-regulatory processes are suggested to be critical in linking moral knowledge and reasoning to moral actions and these factors are highly associated with personal characteristics (Bandura, 1986, 1991, 2001). Stated differently, self-regulatory processes serve to translate certain personal characteristics into the expression of (un)ethical behavior.

Guided by social cognitive theory, we focus on the process by which dispositional creativity is related to moral self-regulation mechanisms. Social cognitive theory suggests that moral disengagement is related to inhibitive mechanisms (Bandura, 1986, 2001). Specifically, individuals behave according to their moral standards to avoid self-sanctions (Bandura, 1986, 1996), but not when moral disengagement interrupts the link between unethical behavior and self-retributions (Bandura, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001; Moore et al., 2012). Consequently, moral disengagement would be positively related to unethical behavior (Bandura, 1986, 1991). Morally disengaged individuals selectively deactivate their moral self-regulation and dismiss their guilt by (a) cognitively reconstructing the behavior through moral justification, using euphemistic language, and making advantageous comparisons; (b) minimizing and obscuring their roles in the harmful behavior; and (c) focusing on the targets' culpability (Bandura, 1999; Bandura et al., 1996). These self-serving deliberate reconstructions of their harmful conduct (Bandura, 1996, 2001; Duffy, Scott, Shaw, Tepper, & Aquino, 2012), block moral self-regulatory processes (Treviño, Weaver, & Reynolds, 2006), triggering unethical behavior (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Bandura, 1999), and serve to alleviate guilt or self-regulation. Therefore, as individuals morally disengage, they reduce the self-regulation that would otherwise have blocked moral transgressions (Bandura, 1991, 1999; Bandura et al., 1996; Moore et al., 2012). The core element of moral disengagement is individuals' cognitive reconstruction of their deleterious conduct by ignoring, minimizing, or challenging the harmful effects (Bandura, 2001). Consequently, morally disengaged individuals will feel less guilt.

Moral disengagement has been found to be positively associated with unethical behavior. For example, moral disengagement was found to significantly increase college students' work-related unethical choices (Barsky, 2011). Moreover, the propensity to morally disengage has been shown to predict self-reported and other-reported unethical behaviors (Moore et al., 2012). Finally, a field study found that moral justification, a component of moral disen-

gagement, was positively associated with coworker undermining (Duffy et al., 2012).

> *Hypothesis 1:* Moral disengagement is positively associated with unethical behavior.

Why does dispositional creativity relate to moral disengagement? A compelling series of experimental studies by Gino and Ariely (2012) has suggested that dispositional creativity may trigger self-serving justifications, which is one critical component of moral disengagement. That is, when faced with ethical dilemmas, people tend to weigh two opposing forces: the desire to maximize self-interest and the desire to maintain a moral view of oneself (Mead, Baumeister, Gino, Schweitzer, & Ariely, 2009). Research has supported that individuals are able to meet these two opposing desires through self-serving justifications of unethical behavior (Gino, Ayal, & Ariely, 2013). Self-serving justifications help individuals to believe that their behavior is not against the moral norm of society, and as a result, they do not need to view themselves as an unethical person. As such, having the disposition to be creative may help individuals come up with various ways to justify their harmful behaviors before engaging in moral transgressions (Gino & Ariely, 2012). Because creativity is associated with greater divergent thinking ability and cognitive flexibility (McCrae, 1987; Runco, 1991), dispositional creativity may help people to generate various methods to justify their self-serving behavior and come up with a new interpretation of the available information in self-serving ways.

Moral Identity as a Moderator

We do not suggest that there is a direct effect of dispositional creativity on moral disengagement because it alone does not involve morality (Narvaez & Mrkva, 2014; Noonan & Gardner, 2014). That is, the creative process itself does not imply ethical components, and creativity does not necessarily lead to ethical or unethical outcomes (Moron, 2014). Furthermore, social cognitive theory suggests that moral self-regulations are likely to be activated under the presence of salient moral standards (Bandura, 1991, 1996). As such, we examined moral identity as a key moderator determining whether dispositional creativity is associated with moral disengagement. Moral identity is a self-view regarding moral traits (Aquino & Reed, 2002). It predicts moral behavior (Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, & Felps, 2009; Aquino & Reed, 2002), and remains relatively stable over time (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Aquino, Reed, Thau, & Freeman, 2007). Individuals who are high on moral identity have easier and faster access to their moral schemas, are more sensitive to moral issues (Aquino & Reed, 2002), and have stronger moral self-regulation (Aquino et al., 2009; Detert, Treviño, & Sweitzer, 2008). When moral schemas are strongly connected to social identities, cognitive resources are directed toward morally relevant information and there is an increase in individuals' sensitivity to any behavior that deviates from society's moral norms (Reynolds, 2008).

Our prediction is consistent with the view that personal characteristics increase information accessibility and interpretation (Fiske & Taylor, 2013). For example, individuals who have high moral identity will have more readily accessible morally relevant concepts in their schemas (Reynolds, 2008; Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007; Treviño et al., 2006). Individuals high on dispositional creativity who are also high on moral identity will be more sensitive to ethical dilemmas, be more motivated to find resolutions, be more likely to generate a wider range of solutions, and they will be less likely to morally disengage.

In contrast to the above, we propose that individuals who are high on dispositional creativity but low on moral identity would be more likely to morally disengage. This is because creative individuals have been shown to be better storytellers (Ariely, 2012; Hennessey & Amabile, 1988), who are able to flexibly reinterpret reality. As writer Douglas Coupland said, "Storytelling is ultimately a creative act of pattern recognition. Through characters, plot and setting, a writer creates places where previously invisible truths becomes visible. Or the storyteller posits a series of dots that the reader can connect" (Munier, 2014, p. 175). Moral disengagement resembles storytelling in that individuals minimize self-sanctions by reconstructing or distorting their perceived reality. For example, highly creative individuals who have low moral identity might actively reframe their unethical conduct so that it seems inevitable. That is, they may use moral justifications and euphemistic labeling to reframe or justify interpersonal harming, such as they may believe they were being a "loyal team member" when they harmed a coworker on a competing team (Umphress & Bingham, 2011). Moreover, they may proactively dehumanize or displace responsibility to fault their victims, or to minimize or distort the effects of their own behavior. Having limited access to their moral schemas, the more creative they are, the more they would actively find ways to morally disengage. Being able to recognize moral issues and to think about potential solutions to ethical dilemmas significantly increases self-regulation, while a lack of such an ability decreases it (Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008; Treviño & Weaver, 2001). Therefore, we argue that moral identity moderates the relationship between dispositional creativity and moral disengagement. Because moral identity influences individuals to attend to morally relevant information, moral identity and dispositional creativity would interact to trigger stronger inhibition, decreasing the likelihood of morally disengaged reasoning, and strongly activating assessments of the potential detrimental consequences of different behaviors. In contrast, individuals who are high on dispositional creativity but are low on moral identity might utilize their propensity to be creative to devise a wide array of morally disengaged reasons for their behavior.

> *Hypothesis 2:* Moral identity will moderate the relationship between dispositional creativity and moral disengagement such that higher (lower) levels of dispositional creativity will be associated with less (more) moral disengagement when moral identity is high (low).

To complete our theoretical model, we further predict that moral disengagement mediates the relationship between the interactive effect of dispositional creativity and moral identity. In accordance with social cognitive theory, dispositional creativity will be more (or less) associated with the moral disengagement process when paired with low (or high) levels of moral identity. In turn, the subsequent cognitive self-serving reconstruction of moral transgressions is expected to inhibit (or activate) moral self-regulation, leading to higher (or lower) levels of unethical behavior. This hypothesis is consistent with the basic tenets of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991) in that the relationship between personal

characteristics and moral actions needs to be mediated through the exercise or disengagement of moral agency, in this case moral disengagement. That is, we expect that the indirect effect of dispositional creativity on unethical behavior via moral disengagement will be negative when moral identity is high and the indirect effect will be positive when moral identity is low.

Hypothesis 3: Moral identity moderates the indirect effect of dispositional creativity on unethical behavior through moral disengagement.

Study 1: Method

Sample and procedures. As part of a larger data collection, we collected survey data in three waves from white collar employees of a large food service organization in Korea.[1] The employees worked in marketing, sales, logistics, R&D, and new business development. Data were collected every 3-weeks to avoid potential problems associated with common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). All employees who participated were ensured that their responses would be anonymous and confidential. When we initially contacted all 499 white collar employees of this organization to request participation, we received a 49% response rate. Given our model, we included only the responses of employees who answered all three waves of data collection, for a final sample of 171 employees, with a 34% response rate. At Time 1, participants provided their demographics and rated their dispositional creativity, moral identity, and social desirability. At Time 2, they rated their moral disengagement. At Time 3, they rated their unethical behavior. Most participants in the final sample were men (81.8%). Participants were on average 36.1 years old, with an average of 6.82 years of tenure in the organization.

Measures.

Dispositional creativity. To rate their dispositional creativity we measured their creative personality using Gough's (1979) scale that is often used to measure dispositional creativity (e.g., Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004). This scale provides 30 adjectives related to having a creative personality. Participants were asked to select the descriptors that best describe their personalities. They received 1 for each selection positively related to creative personality (e.g., original, unconventional) and −1 for each selection negatively related to creative personality (e.g., submissive, conservative). Final scores could range from −12 to 18. The reliability of this measure was calculated using Kuder–Richardson 20 (KR 20) coefficients specifically for binary variables (Lord, Novick, & Birnbaum, 1968; Traub, 1994). The reliability for this scale was .74.

Moral identity. We measured moral identity using Aquino and Reed's (2002) 10-item scale. Participants assessed their identification with characteristics that may describe a moral person, such as "caring, compassionate, fair, friendly, and generous" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). For example, they indicated whether: "It would make me feel good to have these characteristics." Cronbach's α for this scale was .74.

Moral disengagement. We measured moral disengagement using the 8-item scale developed by Moore and colleagues (2012). Participants indicated whether they agreed or disagreed with items such as, "It is okay to spread rumors to defend those you care about" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The Cronbach's α for this scale was .87.

Unethical behavior. We measured unethical behavior using Treviño and Weaver's (2001) 10-item scale. The employees indicated how often they performed certain unethical behaviors at work over the past year, such as "unauthorized personal use of company materials or services," "padding an expense account," and "taking longer than necessary to do a job" (1 = *never*, 7 = *very frequently*). The Cronbach's α for this scale was .94.

Control variables. We controlled for several key variables in the analyses. First, since past research has shown that ethical decision making is related to individuals' demographics (e.g., Detert et al., 2008), we controlled for age and sex. Second, we controlled for job tenure following past research that has hypothesized a link between tenure and work behaviors (Wright & Bonett, 2002). Third, employee performance is an important variable that can influence ethical behavior in organizations and can provide the basis of individual resources such as social capital and heightened self-efficacy (Bothner, Kim, & Smith, 2012). The self-regulation research indicates that individuals who have sufficient resources are less likely to cheat (Gino & Pierce, 2009). Also, organizations tend to be more tolerant toward unethical behavior in high-performing employees and less tolerant toward underperformers (Quade, Greenbaum, & Petrenko, 2016). As such, we used a single-item rating of overall performance (on a 7-point scale with 1 = D, 2 = C, 3 = C + 4 = B, 5 = B+, 6 = A, and 7 = A+) from organizational records provided to us by the Human Resource manager to control for the potentially significant effect of performance for unethical behavior. Finally, based on past research that has suggested a relationship between social desirability and self-reported unethical behavior (Randall & Fernandes, 1991), we controlled for social desirability by using a 10-item social desirability scale (α = .67) that was developed by Crowne and Marlowe (1960).

Study 1: Results

We conducted confirmatory factor analysis to ensure that the morality-related focal constructs (moral identity, moral disengagement, and unethical behavior) had satisfactory discriminant validity. To prevent nonconvergence issues and improve the reliability of indicators, we used item parcelling to reduce the number of observed indicators (Nasser & Wisenbaker, 2003).[2] Previous studies have used item parcelling to overcome such issues (Hirst, van Knippenberg, Chen, & Sacramento, 2011; Takeuchi, Bolino, & Lin, 2015). Results indicated that the three-factor structure fit the data well, $\chi^2 = 98.49$, $df = 51$, $p < .01$; comparative fit index (CFI) = .96, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .08, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .05, and was superior to a model in which all three factors were set to load on a single factor $\chi^2 = .451.47$, $df = 54$, $p < .01$; CFI = .67, RMSEA = .23, SRMR = .16. Table 1 shows means, *SD*s, Cronbach's αs, and

[1] Study 1 data collection was approved by the IRB of Georgia Institute of Technology (Protocol #H13220 Team creative personality study). Study 1 is the first publication from a larger data collection.

[2] Item parcelling yielded a total of 12 parcels from 28 observed items (i.e., 3 for moral identity, 4 for moral disengagement, and 5 for unethical behavior). Item parcelling provide more reliable factor solutions compared with item-level data, especially with the factor structure of lengthy scales that we had (Floyd & Widaman, 1995; Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002).

Table 1
Study 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	36.10	7.33									
2. Sex	.19	.39	−.24**								
3. Job tenure	6.82	4.89	.55**	−.04							
4. Performance	4.47	1.28	.13	−.21**	.20**						
5. Social desirability	4.63	.53	.07	−.26**	−.18*	.05	(.67)				
6. Dispositional creativity	2.63	3.53	.12	−.13	.01	.14	.18*	(.74)			
7. Moral identity	4.03	.80	.11	−.16*	.12	.05	.30**	.28**	(.74)		
8. Moral disengagement	2.42	.78	−.26**	.13	−.06	−.21**	−.50**	−.28**	−.37**	(.87)	
9. Unethical behavior	1.59	.63	−.09	.03	.01	−.07	−.40**	−.05	−.26**	.51**	(.94)

Note. $N = 171$. For sex, 0 = man 1 = woman. Job tenure unit in years. Reliability on the diagonal.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

intercorrelations among the variables included in the analysis. Dispositional creativity was not significantly correlated with unethical behavior ($r = -.05$, *ns*), while moral disengagement significantly correlated with unethical behavior, $r = .51$, $p < .01$. Furthermore, moral identity was negatively correlated with unethical behavior, $r = -.26$, $p < .01$ and also negatively correlated with moral disengagement, $r = -.37$, $p < .01$.

Test of hypotheses. We used hierarchical multiple regression to test Hypothesis 1 and 2. In addition, PROCESS, a SPSS macro (Hayes, 2012; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007) was utilized to examine our moderated mediation model (Hypothesis 3). All terms were mean centered to reduce multicollinearity. Table 2 presents the ordinary least square regression tests for the hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 suggesting a positive association between moral disengagement and unethical behavior was supported ($B = .36$, $SE = .07$, $p < .01$; Table 2, Model 5). Then, we tested Hypothesis 2 involving the interaction between dispositional creativity and moral identity on moral disengagement. To test the moderated relationship, the control variables (i.e., age, sex, tenure, performance, and social desirability) were entered in the first step, regressed on both moral disengagement and unethical behavior. In the second step, dispositional creativity and moral identity were entered, and the interaction term of these two variables was entered in the final step. As Model 3 in Table 2 indicates, the interaction between dispositional creativity and moral identity was significantly associated with moral disengagement ($B = -.03$, $SE = .01$, $p < .01$). To further test the direction of Hypothesis 2, we conducted a simple slope analysis (Aiken & West, 1991; Dawson & Richter, 2006) on high levels (1 *SD* above the mean) and low levels (1 *SD* below the mean) of moral identity. The simple slope test suggested that dispositional creativity was associated with decreased moral disengagement for high moral identity (slope = −.06, $t = -2.86$, $p < .01$), but dispositional creativity did not predict moral disengagement for low moral identity (slope = .00, $t = -.27$, $p = .79$). Figure 2 also shows that high moral identity was associated with low moral disengagement for those high on dispositional creativity, but high dispositional creativity combined with low moral identity did not increase moral disengagement. As such, Hypothesis 2 was partially supported. Furthermore, to test Hypothesis 3, we analyzed the conditional indirect relationship of dispositional creativity with unethical behavior through moral disengagement at two different values of moral identity (1 *SD* below and above the mean). A PROCESS analysis with 1,000 bootstrap samples indicated that the conditional indirect relationship of dispositional creativity was significant for 1 *SD* above the mean level (indirect effect = −.0221,

Table 2
Study 1: Hierarchical Regression Analysis

	DV = Moral disengagement						DV = Unethical behavior			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variables	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
(Constant)	1.39**	.40	1.33**	.08	1.34**	.32	.58	.37	.13	.35
Age	−.02**	.01	−.02**	.01	−.02**	.01	−.01	.01	−.02	.01
Sex	−.15	.14	−.19	.13	−.19	.13	−.18	.13	−.15	.12
Tenure	−.01	.01	.01	.01	−.01	.01	−.01	.01	−.01	.01
Performance	−.10*	.04	−.10*	.04	−.10*	.04	−.03	.04	.01	.03
Social desirability	−.73**	.10	−.61**	.10	−.58**	.10	−.51**	.09	−.25*	.10
Dispositional creativity			−.02	.01	−.03*	.01				
Moral identity			−.21**	.07	−.19**	.07				
Dispositional Creativity × Moral Identity					−.03**	.01				
Moral disengagement									.36**	.07
R^2	.33		.40		.42		.18		.31	
ΔR^2			.04**		.02*				.13**	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

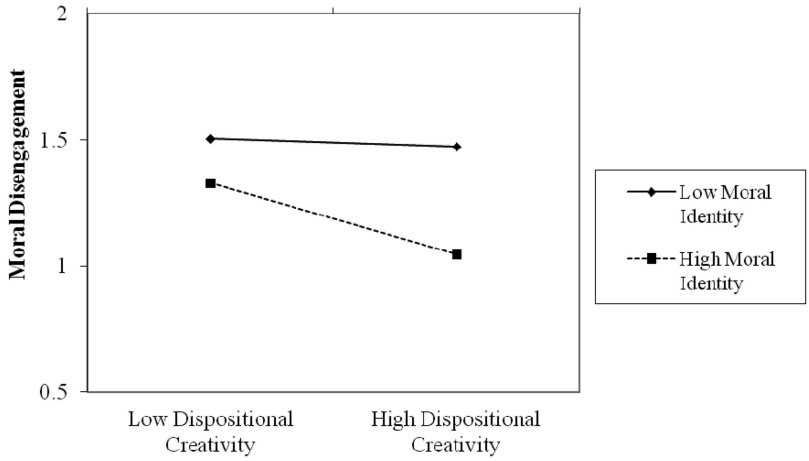

Figure 2. Study 1: Interaction effect of dispositional creativity and moral identity on moral disengagement. High and low levels of dispositional creativity represent 1 *SD* above and below the mean, respectively.

SE = .0084, $p < .05$), and was not significant for 1 *SD* below the mean level. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported with the mediation of moral disengagement (see Table 3).

Study 1: Discussion

Study 1 supported our prediction that dispositional creativity is negatively associated with unethical behavior through lower moral disengagement when moral identity is high. Our results may provide clues as to why dispositional creativity is sometimes positively related to unethical behavior (e.g., Gino & Ariely, 2012; Vincent & Goncalo, 2014; Vincent & Kouchaki, 2016) and sometimes related to less unethical behavior (e.g., Mumford et al., 2010). The results of Study 1 highlight that moral disengagement can serve as an inhibitive mechanism through which the interaction between dispositional creativity and moral identity relates to less unethical behavior. However, our results are somewhat different from our initial expectations. Specifically, we expected dispositional creativity to be positively associated with moral disengagement when moral identity was low, but this relationship was not significant. Thus, when interacting with dispositional creativity, moral identity appears to be an important factor that attenuates unethical behavior, while the lack of it does not facilitate unethical behavior.

Table 3
Study 1: Conditional Indirect Effect of Dispositional Creativity on Unethical Behavior

	Indirect effect of Dispositional Creativity × Moral Identity on unethical behavior via *moral disengagement*			
Moral identity	Effect	*SE*	Boot LCI	Boot UCI
−1 *SD*	−.0014	.0076	−.0170	.0133
1 *SD*	−.0221	.0084	−.0409	−.0083

Note. Boot LCI = bootstrapped lower confidence interval; Boot UCI = bootstrapped upper confidence interval.

There are two possible reasons why dispositional creativity was not positively associated with unethical behavior in Study 1. First, there could be a different moderator that interacts with dispositional creativity to trigger the moral disengagement process and, therefore, facilitate unethical behavior. Second, an alternative mediator could more directly explain why dispositional creativity, when paired with high moral identity, is associated with less unethical behavior. In Study 2, we address this second possibility by keeping our theoretically driven moderator–moral identity. We argued that individuals higher on dispositional creativity are less likely to morally disengage when moral identity is high because they are more likely to proactively deal with ethical dilemmas and, therefore, think of a wider range of solutions. This line of thinking directed us to explore an alternative proactive moral self-regulation process, which is related to actively seeking to do the right thing (Bandura, 1986, 2001). Because we only have focused on the inhibitive moral disengagement process in Study 1, in Study 2 we investigate whether the proactive self-regulation process (i.e., moral imagination) also might explain the relationship between dispositional creativity, moral identity, and unethical behavior.

Study 2: Moral Imagination as an Alternative Mechanism

In Study 2, we test our theory by suggesting that individuals high on dispositional creativity may be motivated to proactively engage in moral ways of interpreting ethical dilemmas by introducing moral imagination as an alternative mechanism. In contrast to moral disengagement related to inhibitive moral agency, we suggest that moral imagination represents a proactive type of moral agency in which individuals seek to behave ethically and to avoid unethical behavior. Moral imagination is defined as "a form of specialized moral reasoning that reflects one's ability to understand a context from a number of different stakeholder perspectives, actualize new context-independent possibilities, and instigate the process of evaluating possibilities from a moral point of view" (Whitaker & Godwin, 2013, p. 61). Previous research on ethics has stressed the need to actively understand, integrate, and

resolve multiple factors when facing ethical dilemmas to reach ethical decisions (Johnson, 1993; Narvaez & Mrkva, 2014; Werhane, 1999).

Moral imagination motivates individuals to (a) distance themselves from their own roles, situations, and contexts; (b) be aware of their adopted schemas and contexts; (c) creatively reframe experiences and generate new solutions to ethical dilemmas; and (d) evaluate old contexts, scopes, or ranges of conceptual schemas whether at work or elsewhere (Werhane, 1999). That is, moral imagination brings awareness of the ethical implications of potential decisions, the ability to freshly reframe situations, and the capacity to create moral alternatives (Johnson, 1993; Moberg & Caldwell, 2007; Whitaker & Godwin, 2013; Yurtsever, 2006). Moral imagination should enable employees to disengage from rigid mental models, garner context-independent possibilities, and evaluate the current status and other potential alternatives from an ethical viewpoint, especially for dealing with complex and multifaceted ethical issues (Werhane, 1998; Whitaker & Godwin, 2013). Furthermore, moral imagination may support the four stages of ethical decision-making: (a) moral awareness, (b) moral judgment, (c) moral intent, and (d) ethical behavior (Moberg & Seabright, 2000; Rest, 1986, 1994). Specifically, moral imagination facilitates moral sensitivity and ethical conduct by expanding the range of possible perspectives and actions (Hargrave, 2009; Moberg & Seabright, 2000). For example, a qualitative study suggested that entrepreneurs who engage in moral imagination have less-rigid mindsets so that they can make better ethical decisions under high uncertainty in morally ambiguous situations (McVea, 2009).

Hypothesis 4: Moral imagination is negatively associated with unethical behavior.

Moral identity as a moderator. Consistent with what we predicted about the relationship between dispositional creativity and moral disengagement, we do not suggest a direct effect of dispositional creativity on moral imagination because dispositional creativity alone does not hold moral components (Moron, 2014; Narvaez & Mrkva, 2014; Noonan & Gardner, 2014). We expect that moral identity will moderate the relationship between dispositional creativity and moral imagination. Moral imagination leads individuals to attend to moral issues, generate multiple solutions, and recognize the impact of potential solutions on others (Vidaver-Cohen, 1997; Werhane, 1998, 1999, 2008). Being high on moral identity is particularly important because it sensitizes individuals to moral issues (Reynolds, 2008). Also, identity theory suggests that individuals desire to maintain any identity that they highly value (Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000), so they will be motivated to make ethical decisions if their moral schemas are accessible for processing (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Therefore, we argue that when individuals have high moral identity, creative individuals are more likely to morally imagine. Specifically, when they are faced with ethical dilemmas, they will have the cognitive capacity to fully use their moral imagination to generate alternative solutions and evaluate the impact of these potential solutions on others. They may be more likely to take others' perspectives, forecast a larger range of potential outcomes, and identify ethical nuances to help them resolve ethical dilemmas (cf., Bierly et al., 2009; Mumford et al., 2010; Sonenshein, 2007). When creative individuals have low moral identity, however, they will be less motivated to use their moral imagination. Although they may be able to generate alternatives to ethical dilemmas and to imagine possible outcomes, they will lack the strong sense of moral self to activate proactive moral agency.

Hypothesis 5: Moral identity will moderate the relationship between dispositional creativity and moral imagination, such that higher (lower) levels of dispositional creativity will be associated with more (less) moral imagination when moral identity is high (low).

To complete our theoretical model, we further predict that moral imagination mediates the relationship between the interactive effect of dispositional creativity and moral identity. We have suggested that dispositional creativity will be positively (or negatively) associated with the moral imagination process when paired with high (or low) levels of moral identity. In turn, moral imagination is expected to activate (or inhibit) moral self-regulation, leading to lower (or higher) levels of unethical behavior. Similar to Hypothesis 3, this current hypothesis is in line with the foundation of social cognitive theory in that unethical behavior is an outcome of personal characteristics and internal moral standards translated into self-regulatory processes, in this case moral imagination (Bandura, 1991). That is, we expect that the indirect effect of dispositional creativity on unethical behavior via moral imagination will be more negative when moral identity is high versus low.

Hypothesis 6: Moral identity moderates the indirect effect of dispositional creativity on unethical behavior through moral imagination.

Study 2: Method

Sample and procedures. Participating in this study in exchange for course credit were 260 undergraduate students in a southeastern university in the United States.[3] We recruited students through email transmitting a link to the presurvey asking participants to rate their dispositional creativity, moral identity, and several control variables. We received 260 initial responses, for a response rate of 87%. Two weeks after the initial email, we asked them to participate in an organizational decision making study in our behavioral laboratory. To minimize the potential of having socially desirable responses, we avoided using the terms *ethics* or *morality*. Participants were asked to carefully read a business scenario describing an ethical dilemma (see Appendix) from Whitaker and Godwin (2013) and to think of possible responses. They then responded to survey items measuring moral imagination and moral disengagement. To control for the ordering effect, we counterbalanced moral imagination and moral disengagement. As such, participants responded to moral disengagement items followed by moral imagination in half of the sessions, while the other half of the participants responded to moral imagination items followed by moral disengagement. A total of 250 participants completed this part of the study. Two weeks later, we emailed participants a link to a postsurvey asking them to rate their

[3] Study 2 data collection was approved by the IRB of Georgia Institute of Technology (Protocol #H15347 Creative personality experiment).

unethical behavior during the past 6 months. A total of 238 students responded to the postsurvey. For the final data set, we focused on the matched sample of 211 participants, 56% were male, with an average age of 21 years old.

Measures.

Dispositional creativity. In the presurvey, dispositional creativity was operationalized with the 10-item openness to experience scale developed by Goldberg (1992).[4] Sample items included: "I believe in the importance of art," and "I have a vivid imagination." Given that Gough's (1979) adjective check list includes a potentially distracting term (i.e., "sexy") for an undergraduate student population, we used this different measure of dispositional creativity to better accommodate the student participants. Prior work on dispositional creativity and unethical behavior has measured various indicators of dispositional creativity (e.g., Gough's check list, openness to experience) and has found that they consistently yield quite similar results (Gino & Ariely, 2012). Items were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), with a Cronbach's α of .77.

Moral identity. As in Study 1, moral identity was measured using Aquino and Reed's (2002) 10-item scale in the presurvey, with a Cronbach's α of .87.

Moral disengagement. Moral disengagement was measured by an 8-item scale modified from Bandura et al.'s (1996) moral disengagement scale to increase relevance to the vignette. Similar to the original scale, our modified scale included all eight moral disengagement mechanisms: (a) moral justification, (b) euphemistic language, (c) advantageous comparison, (d) displacement of responsibility, (e) diffusion of responsibility, (f) distorting consequences, (g) attribution of blame, and (h) dehumanization. After participants read the vignette, they answered "To what extent do you agree with the following statements?" on a 7 point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Items included: "Compared to the extreme workload that you would be asked to do because of her maternity leave, her unemployment is less important," "Using someone's private information is just a way of protecting yourself," "It is alright to tell your boss that she is pregnant," "It is her fault that she let you overhear that she is pregnant," "If a lot of people use someone's private information for hiring, your decision to disclose information that she is pregnant should not be blamed at all," "It is okay to tell your boss that she is pregnant because it would not harm anyone," "Even though you tell your boss that she is pregnant, you are not at fault since you have been working long overtime hours," and "Some people should not be treated fairly during the interview, especially when they are hiding something." The Cronbach's α was .85.

Moral imagination. Moral imagination was measured by modifying a 29-item scale originally developed by Yurtsever (2006). We adapted eight items to fit the situation described in the vignette. After participants read the vignette, they answered "To what extent do the following statements describe your thought processes when reading the vignette (1= *not at all*, 7= *very much*)?" Selected items included: "I anticipated any moral problems that may threaten my career," "I imagined similarities and differences between the situation at hand and other situations where a certain rule proved to be applicable," "Since the current situation is morally ambiguous, I reconceptualized my basic understanding," "I tried to recognize which ideas were morally worth pursuing and which were not," "I felt that I had a moral responsibility for what I answered in terms of affecting others," "I felt the range and diversity of my social knowledge was sufficient to answer this question." "My imagination enabled me to look at myself from the point of view of another person," and "I was able to conceive of the moral relationship that should be in place within this system." The Cronbach's α was .84.

Unethical behavior. In the postsurvey, we measured unethical behavior using a 13-item cheat–lie scale specifically developed to measure the unethical behavior of college students (Detert et al., 2008). Participants assessed how often in the past 6 months (1 = *least often*, 7 = *extremely often*) they had engaged in behaviors such as "Lying to my parents about my school performance," "Lying about my age," and "Claiming to have turned in an assignment when I have not." The Cronbach's α was .91.

Control variables. We controlled for several key variables in our analyses. First, based on the past research suggesting that demographics and cognitive ability affect unethical behavior (e.g., Detert et al., 2008; Kohlberg, 1981), we included sex and grade point average (GPA) as controls. Second, we controlled for social desirability (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Cronbach's α = .61), to be consistent with Study 1.

Study 2: Results

We conducted confirmatory factor analysis to ensure that our morality-relevant focal constructs (moral identity, moral disengagement, moral imagination, and unethical behavior) had satisfactory discriminant validity. Similar to Study 1, we used item parcelling (Nasser & Wisenbaker, 2003).[5] Results indicated that the four-factor model fit the data well: $\chi^2 = 244.58$, $df = 129$, $p < .01$; CFI = .95, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .05 and the model fit was superior to a model in which the moral disengagement and moral imagination were set to load on a single factor: $\chi^2 = 472.54$, $df = 132$, $p < .01$; CFI = .86, RMSEA = .11, SRMR = .08 or a model in which all constructs were set to load on a single factor: $\chi^2 = 1273.62$, $df = 135$, $p < .01$; CFI = .54, RMSEA = .19, SRMR = .16. Table 4 shows means, *SD*s, Cronbach's αs, and intercorrelations among the variables included in the analysis. Dispositional creativity was negatively correlated to moral disengagement, $r = -.30$, $p < .01$ and positively correlated to moral imagination, $r = .19$, $p < .01$. Moral disengagement was negatively correlated to moral imagination, $r = -.48$, $p < .01$ and moral identity, $r = -.23$, $p < .01$, while positively correlated to unethical behavior, $r = .37$, $p < .01$.

Test of hypotheses. We used hierarchical multiple regression to test Hypothesis 1, 2, 4, and 5. In addition, Process, a SPSS macro (Hayes, 2012; Preacher et al., 2007) was utilized to examine the moderated mediation model (Hypothesis 3 and 6). All terms were mean centered to reduce multicollinearity. Table 5 and 6 present the ordinary least square regression results for the hypoth-

[4] We used the openness to experience scale because it is a well-accepted measure of individuals' disposition to be creative and it also is correlated with Gough's creative personality scale (i.e., McCrae, 1987: $r = .44$, $p < .01$) that was used in Study 1. Openness to experience is suggested to be a stable personal characteristic that is a key driver of creative thought (Feist, 1998).

[5] Item parcelling yielded a total of 18 parcels from 39 observed items (i.e., 3 for moral identity, 4 for moral disengagement, 4 for moral imagination, and 7 for unethical behavior).

Table 4
Study 2: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Sex	.44	.50								
2. GPA	3.38	.48	−.12							
3. Social desirability	4.18	.69	.03	−.03	(.61)					
4. Dispositional creativity	5.01	.86	−.13	.03	.13	(.77)				
5. Moral identity	4.52	1.01	−.20**	.06	.15*	.06	(.87)			
6. Moral disengagement	3.12	1.13	.28**	−.14*	−.24**	−.30**	−.23**	(.85)		
7. Moral imagination	5.55	.89	−.18*	.07	.31**	.19**	.17*	−.48**	(.84)	
8. Unethical behavior	2.03	1.02	.08	−.13	−.36**	−.20**	−.06	.37**	−.48**	(.91)

Note. GPA = grade point average. $N = 211$. For sex, 0 = man 1 = woman. Reliability on the diagonal.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

eses. Consistent with the results of Study 1, Hypothesis 1 suggesting a positive association between moral disengagement and unethical behavior was supported ($B = .26$, $SE = .06$, $p < .01$; Table 5, Model 5). Then we tested Hypothesis 2 predicting the interaction between dispositional creativity and moral identity on moral disengagement. As Model 3 in Table 5 indicates, the interaction between dispositional creativity and moral identity was significantly associated with moral disengagement ($B = -.21$, $SE = .07$, $p < .01$). We first entered the control variables (i.e., gender, GPA, and social desirability). In the second step, dispositional creativity and moral identity were entered, and the interaction term of these two variables was entered in the final step. To further test the direction of Hypothesis 2, we conducted a simple slope analysis on high levels (1 *SD* above the mean) and low levels (1 *SD* below the mean) of moral identity. The simple slope test suggested that dispositional creativity was associated with decreased moral disengagement for high moral identity (slope = −.50, $t = -4.99$, $p < .01$), but dispositional creativity did not predict moral disengagement for low moral identity (slope = −.10, $t = -1.04$, *ns*), partially supporting Hypothesis 2. Consistent with Study 1, high moral identity was associated with low moral disengagement for those high on dispositional creativity, but the combination of high dispositional creativity and low moral identity was not associated with moral disengagement. Also, the shape of the interaction between dispositional creativity and moral identity is highly similar to what was observed in Study 1, in that high moral identity was associated with low moral disengagement for those high on dispositional creativity, but high dispositional creativity combined with low moral identity did not increase moral disengagement. Furthermore, to Test Hypothesis 3, we analyzed the conditional indirect relationship between dispositional creativity and unethical behavior through moral disengagement at two different values of moral identity (1 *SD* below and above the mean). A PROCESS analysis with 1,000 bootstrap samples indicated that the conditional indirect relationship of dispositional creativity with unethical behavior was significant for 1 *SD* above the mean level (indirect effect = −.1024, $SE = .0503$, $p < .05$), but was not significant for 1 *SD* below the mean level. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported with the mediation of moral disengagement (see Table 7), and all three hypotheses tests replicated the results for Study 1.

As for our extension hypotheses, first, Hypothesis 4 suggesting a negative association between moral imagination and unethical behavior was supported ($B = -.45$, $SE = .07$, $p < .01$; Table 6, Model 5). Then we tested Hypothesis 5 suggesting an interaction between dispositional creativity and moral imagination, using the same hierarchical regression procedures in testing Hypothesis 2. As Model 3 in Table 6 indicates, dispositional creativity and moral identity significantly interacted with moral imagination ($B = .14$, $SE = .06$, $p < .05$). To further test the direction of Hypothesis 5,

Table 5
Study 2: Hierarchical Regression Analysis With Moral Disengagement as a Mediator

	DV = Moral disengagement						DV = Unethical behavior			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variables	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
(Constant)	.62	.52	.62	.50	.80	.50	.85	.47	.69	.45
Sex	.62**	.15	.48**	.15	.47**	.14	.16	.13	.00	.13
GPA	−.27	.15	−.25	.14	−.30*	.14	−.27*	.14	−.20	.13
Social desirability	−.42**	.11	−.33**	.10	−.32**	.10	−.54**	.09	−.43**	.09
Dispositional creativity			−.31**	.08	−.31**	.08				
Moral identity			−.15*	.07	−.13	.07				
Dispositional Creativity × Moral Identity					−.21**	.07				
Moral disengagement									.26**	.06
R^2	.15		.22		.26		.16		.23	
ΔR^2			.02*		.03**				.07**	

Note. GPA = grade point average.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 6
Study 2: Hierarchical Regression Analysis With Moral Imagination as a Mediator

	DV = Moral imagination						DV = Unethical behavior			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Variable	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*	*B*	*SE*
(Constant)	−.17	.42	−.17	.41	−.29	.41	.85	.47	.77	.43
Sex	−.32**	.12	−.26*	.12	−.25*	.12	.16	.13	.02	.12
GPA	.09	.12	.08	.12	.12	.12	−.27*	.14	−.23	.12
Social desirability	.41**	.08	.37**	.09	.36**	.08	−.54**	.09	−.35**	.09
Dispositional creativity			.13	.06	.13*	.07				
Moral identity			.08	.06	.06	.06				
Dispositional Creativity × Moral Identity					.14*	.06				
Moral imagination									−.45**	.07
R^2	.13		.15		.18		.16		.29	
ΔR^2			.00		.03*				.13**	

Note. GPA = grade point average.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

we conducted a simple slope analysis on high levels (1 *SD* above the mean) and low levels (1 *SD* below the mean) of moral identity. The simple slope test suggested that dispositional creativity was associated with increased moral imagination for high moral identity (slope = .23 $t = 2.24$, $p < .05$), but dispositional creativity was not associated with moral imagination for low moral identity, (slope = .02, $t = .60$, *ns*), partially supporting Hypothesis 5. Figure 3 shows that high moral identity was associated with high moral imagination for those high on dispositional creativity, but the combination of high dispositional creativity and low moral identity was not associated with moral imagination. Furthermore, to Test Hypothesis 6, we analyzed the conditional indirect relationship of dispositional creativity with unethical behavior through moral imagination at two different values of moral identity (1 *SD* below and above the mean). A PROCESS analysis with 1,000 bootstrap samples indicated that the conditional indirect relationship of dispositional creativity was significant for 1 *SD* above the mean level (indirect effect = −.1099, *SE* = .0584, $p < .05$), but was not significant for 1 *SD* below the mean level. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 was supported with the mediation of moral imagination (see Table 7).[6]

Table 7
Study 2: Conditional Indirect Effect of Dispositional Creativity on Unethical Behavior

Moral identity	Effect	*SE*	Boot LCI	Boot UCI
	Indirect effect of Dispositional Creativity × Moral Identity on unethical behavior via *moral disengagement*			
−1 *SD*	−.0148	.0247	−.0838	.0226
1 *SD*	−.1024	.0503	−.2333	−.0269
	Indirect effect of Dispositional Creativity × Moral Identity on unethical behavior via *moral imagination*			
−1 *SD*	−.0086	.0462	−.0702	.1138
1 *SD*	−.1099	.0584	−.2549	−.0175

Note. Boot LCI = bootstrapped lower confidence interval; Boot UCI = bootstrapped upper confidence interval.

General Discussion

In two studies, we sought to investigate under what conditions individuals high on dispositional creativity are propelled to act more or less unethically. We argued and found that moral identity plays an important moderating role in determining the relationship between dispositional creativity and less unethical behavior. Specifically, we provided converging evidence revealing that being high on dispositional creativity combined with high moral identity facilitates moral imagination and inhibits moral disengagement, and is associated with less unethical behavior. We believe that our use of three waves of field survey data in Study 1 and a scenario-based study in Study 2 strengthens the validity of our findings.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

By providing a more nuanced explanation of when and why dispositional creativity can be associated with less unethical behavior, our research provides critical implications for theory and practice. First, we used social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1991) to reveal that inhibitive and proactive moral agencies are both related to unethical behavior. The dominant models of individual antecedents of unethical behavior have mainly focused on moral disengagement as an inhibitive form of moral agency that predicts social undermining, aggression, bullying, or cheating (Detert et al., 2008; Duffy et al., 2012; Hymel, Rocke-Henderson, & Bonanno, 2005; Lee, Kim, Bhave, & Duffy, 2016; Shu et al., 2011). Our research model extends this literature by aligning with social cognitive theory to show that it is not only inhibitive moral agency, but also that a proactive form of moral agency can be associated with less unethical behavior (Bandura, 1991, 1996, 2001). Researchers have found that proactive moral agency, such as moral imagination, may prevent individuals from engaging in unethical behavior (Mumford et al., 2010; Werhane, 1999, 2008; Whitaker & Godwin, 2013). To answer calls to identify proactive

[6] We have conducted the moderated mediation analyses separately with moral disengagement and moral imagination. The results remain significant when moral disengagement and moral imagination are simultaneously included in the moderated mediation analysis.

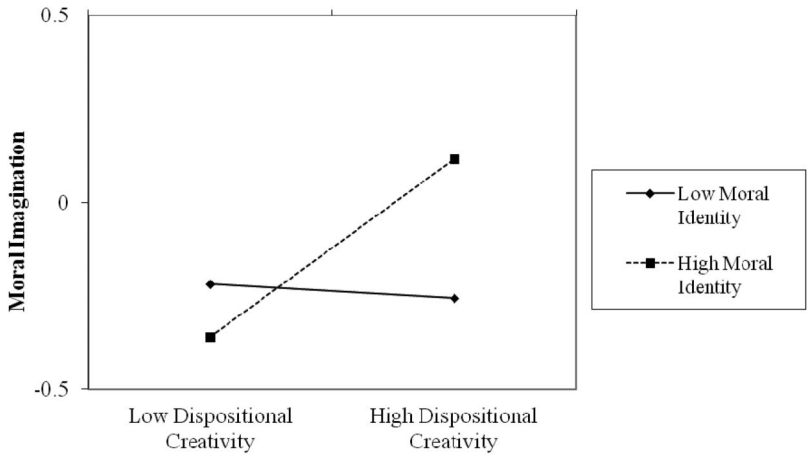

Figure 3. Study 2: Interaction effect of dispositional creativity and moral identity on moral imagination. High and low levels represent 1 *SD* above and below the mean, respectively.

moral agency mechanisms (Bandura, 2001; Reynolds, 2008), we considered both cognitive perspectives simultaneously by looking at inhibitive moral disengagement and proactive moral imagination as underlying mechanisms that theoretically link both dispositional creativity and less unethical behavior. By suggesting these dual mechanisms, we provided a deeper understanding of the cognitive processes that are related to unethical behavior.

Second, also drawing from a social–cognitive perspective (Bandura, 1986, 1991), we examine an important moderator, moral identity, to explain why some studies indicate that dispositional creativity is positively associated with unethical behavior (Gino & Ariely, 2012; Gino & Wiltermuth, 2014; Vincent & Goncalo, 2014), while others indicate a negative association (Mumford et al., 2010; Whitaker & Godwin, 2013). However, we also suggest that other individual differences may moderate this relationship. We proposed and found that dispositional creativity, coupled with high moral identity, is most likely to be associated with less unethical behavior. Using social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1991), we suggest that personal characteristics are the underlying mechanisms determining ethical choices, and our results for both studies indicated that dispositional creativity coupled with high moral identity is associated with less unethical behavior. Thus, this research represents a first step toward resolving the inconsistent results found in the literature regarding the association between individuals being high on dispositional creativity and the incidence of more or less unethical behavior.

Third, the current study also extends the creativity literature into the domain of predicting unethical behavior in more nuanced ways. Previous research has largely focused on the simple positive (e.g., Gino & Ariely, 2012; Gino & Wiltermuth, 2014; Vincent & Kouchaki, 2016) or negative (e.g., Mumford et al., 2010) association between creativity and unethical behavior. Although our results did not provide evidence of when creativity may translate into more unethical behavior, our results show that in certain situations, creativity can be translated into *less* unethical behavior. Specifically, the results of our studies indicate that when moral identity is high, dispositional creativity is positively associated with moral imagination and negatively associated with moral disengagement, and is associated with less unethical behavior. As such, we contribute to the literature by highlighting the complexity of this relationship.

We have provided a complex analysis of personal characteristics to more precisely identify "good or bad apples" in organizational situations. Consequently, practitioners may use our in-depth insights for the better selection and management of employees. Specifically, a critical point is that individuals who are high on dispositional creativity and have high moral identity are less likely to act unethically. Accordingly, we suggest that practitioners continue recruiting individuals high on dispositional creativity (e.g., openness to new experiences, creative personality) but also check their moral identity to reap the benefits of their creative potential while also avoiding a potential increase in the incidence of unethical behavior. Individuals high on both creativity and moral identity might be especially appropriate for analyzing complex and multifaceted situations in organizations where straightforward resolutions to ethical dilemmas may be more difficult to achieve. Additionally, similar to other social identity effects, the social context can make moral identity more salient (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, organizations should establish procedures and training programs that help to create more ethical environments.

Limitations and Future Directions

This research is not without its limitations. As mentioned earlier, we have relied on self-reports to measure the study variables in both studies. Therefore, our study is not free from potentially having common method biases (Podsakoff et al., 2003). We admit that our single-source measurement of the constructs entails an endogeneity problem (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010), because our study design cannot rule out the possibility that additional factors may explain variance in the variables we measured. For example, individuals high on dispositional creativity might have underestimated their own moral disengagement and unethical behavior and overestimated their moral imagination because of other unmeasured factors (e.g., humility or narcissism). One way to overcome this limitation of self-reported unethical behavior in survey studies is to obtain objective ratings or collect ratings from multiple sources (Treviño et al., 2006). Nevertheless,

it is notable that the measurement accuracy and precision in both laboratory and survey research in ethics research have been a serious concern in the ethics literature (Pierce & Balasubramanian, 2015). To increase the validity of the reporting of unethical behavior, we encourage future research to use a mixed-method approach. For example, future research could conduct laboratory studies to test for causality and field experiments to minimize generalizability issues in measuring unethical behavior (Pierce & Balasubramanian, 2015).

Beyond methodological issues, our research encourages some intriguing future research directions. Although we only examined theoretically driven moral identity as a key moderator, exploring other potential contextual and personal factors that moderate the relationship between dispositional creativity and unethical behavior would contribute to the literature. For example, situations have been found to shape organizational behavior (Tett & Burnett, 2003), such that, ethical climate, culture, leadership, peer influence, leader influence, and unfair supervisory treatment have been associated with unethical behavior (see Treviño et al., 2014, 2006 for review). Furthermore, the interactionist view suggests that ethical contexts and peer influences are especially important for exploring unethical behavior within organizations (Treviño, 1986). Therefore, future research should examine the effects of different contextual factors, personal factors, and their interaction to better understand the relationships between dispositional creativity and more or less unethical behavior.

Future research also could examine other psychological mechanisms related to proactive moral agency. Our research is the first examination of social cognitive theory that simultaneously and comprehensively explored both inhibitive and proactive moral agency. For example, social cognitive theory suggests that individuals can proactively seek ways to do the right thing (Bandura, 1999, 2001). However, research has mainly focused on inhibitive moral agency. We examined moral imagination as a representation of proactive moral agency, but there may be other representations that future research could examine. For example, having the moral courage to use internal guiding principles, regardless of personal threat (Sekerka & Bagozzi, 2007), may be distinct from moral imagination, but it also could reflect deliberate, conscious, and discretionary proactive moral agency. Therefore, understanding various factors that motivate ethical behavior will deepen our knowledge about moral cognition.

Our results indicate that creative individuals who are high on moral identity are less likely to justify and make excuses for unethical behavior (i.e., morally disengage) but are more likely to think about various ways to resolve ethical dilemmas (i.e., morally imagine). The unethical behaviors measured in Study 1 and Study 2 were operationalized as relatively severe moral transgressions (e.g., stealing money from the company, cheating on an exam), involving detrimental consequences for the individuals if they are caught. The study by Gino and Ariely (2012) suggested that creativity lead individuals to justify their behavior to the extent to which they were able to convince themselves that their unethical behavior (e.g., dishonesty) was harmless. It is possible that creative individuals may be effective in justifying minor moral transgressions with less consequences, while they may be less effective in justifying moral transgressions with more severe consequences. A meta-analysis by Kish-Gephart and colleagues (2010) also found that the magnitude of the consequences was negatively related to unethical decision making ($r = -.33$). Our results highlight the need for future researchers to carefully consider the differential effects of dispositional creativity on minor and more severe forms of unethical behavior.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although contemporary organizations need both creative and ethical employees, researchers have devoted relatively little attention to understanding the relationship between dispositional creativity and more or less unethical behavior, and the few studies that do exist have yielded inconclusive findings. Recognizing the need to further explore the nuances in the relationship of dispositional creativity and more or less unethical behavior, we conducted two studies and found that being high on both dispositional creativity and moral identity interact through moral disengagement and moral imagination in their association with less unethical behavior. As such, we depict the complex and multifaceted relationship between dispositional creativity and less unethical behavior.

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Appendix

Business Vignette

The scenario below describes an ethical situation in the workplace. Read the scenario carefully and then think about how you would handle it.

Four months ago, a coworker left and your office has been working long overtime hours without overtime pay to meet work demands. The hiring freeze has been lifted and your boss has been interviewing applicants to fill the position. You accidentally overheard an applicant talking on her cell phone and telling someone that she is pregnant. The boss tells you that he has chosen an applicant but wants your input before he hires her. You discover that the applicant he selected is the woman you overheard talking about her pregnancy. You are fairly confident that your boss does not know she is expecting. You know she is not required to tell a potential employer that she is pregnant. You are concerned that you will spend the next 6 months training her. She will then go on maternity leave, or worse, she will quit. Then you will again be pressed in trying to take up the slack. Your boss asks for your opinion on the candidate.

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