

Dialogue as a Way of Life:
Moral Turning Points in Emerging Adulthood

by

Joshua Danaher

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by

Joshua Danaher

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Graduate Supervisory Committee

Vincent Waldron, Chair

Douglas Kelley

Ramsey Eric Ramsey

ACCEPTED BY THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

ABSTRACT

This study explored the functions of dialogue in emerging adults' moral turning points. Through purposive sampling, the researcher interviewed 10 emerging adults between 25 and 30 years old about experiences of turning point conversations during the years of 18 and 25. This study employed constant comparative and grounded theory methodologies to analyze messages reported in memorable conversations during this period. Results indicated that dialogue functioned to educate, disturb, and maintain emerging adults' moral perception during this period of moral reorientation. Subcategories under each included dialogue that functioned to explain, invite, warn, direct or instruct, challenge, persuade, agitate, expose, inquire, legitimize, co-reflect, redefine, and affirm or reinforce. This report cites passages from interview data to highlight how dialogic themes informed or shaped changes in moral perception. In each participant's self-reported turning point conversations there was an admixture of dialogic functions at work. Notably, participants' experience of moral turning (degree and trajectory) varied despite there being similarity in intended functions of dialogue.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Interest in moral stages has declined in recent years, as the view on morality as a whole has broadened. The entire context of moral judgment and action are now being examined, including moral sensitivity, motivation, and commitment. (Minnameier, 2009, p. 131)

In this passage, Gerhard Minnameier, a professor of vocational and business education and philosophy in Germany, summarizes the state of affairs in research surrounding moral development. Globalization and the ensuing exposure to myriad worldviews has created a complex communication climate in which persons struggle to find mechanisms by which we may foster understanding among differing conceptions of morality. Also expressed in Minnameier's words is the desire to seek out such processes, creating space for moral ideas or practices, and the basic beliefs therein, to be illuminated. The following study finds this landscape as the backdrop for an exploration of moral turning points in emerging adulthood. Guiding this exploration, turning point theory provides a unique opportunity to make sense of the ways in which communication functions to shape persons' actions (Arnett, 1997; Baxter, Braithwaite, & Nicholson, 1999; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). On this account, it is believed that turning points—periods of significant change or transition—are likely to expose critical communicative processes at work in daily interaction. Not only are turning points important experiences to examine in terms of how communicators experience change, but literature suggests that this characteristic is implicit in the very nature of turning points: “turning point events are perceived to *lead* to relational change

and to other types of change” (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009, p. 182, italics added). Building on past turning point scholarship, this study expands theorizing of turning points with the context of negotiating morality. Morality, though defined by sundry scholars in differing manners, can broadly be described as the area of study that addresses questions regarding “right” or “wrong” actions and beliefs.

As the subsequent review of literature will outline, *how* persons define “right” or “wrong” actions and beliefs is the question that makes the negotiation of morality a communicative phenomena. Studying morality in the context of emerging adulthood is vital because this stage in life is filled with much transition and choice. Thus, turning points at this age can have a lasting impact on persons’ moral development (Arnett, 1997; Arnett, Ramos, & Jensen, 2001). This exploration of moral turning points can foster greater understanding of the process by which emerging adults come to answer the question, “what ought I do?” More specifically, this is an exploration of how communication functions to influence, direct, or shape transitions in moral understanding through emerging adults’ participation in dialogue. Consequently, the subjects or moral domains of dialogue, which are salient in the realm of emerging adulthood, are not the current focus. Instead, this study clarifies the manner in which communication either supports, challenges, clarifies, questions, or encourages changes in the valuation of moralities adopted by emerging adults during these formative years.

This project is divided into four sections. The first section (Chapter 2) will outline relevant philosophical work to the topic of morality and dialogue: it will

be argued that the relevancy of such work is perceived in their conceptualization of human-being as inseparable from language and dialogue. The second section (Chapter 3), with this philosophical foundation presupposed, will more specifically focus on the social scientific scholarship conducted in recent years regarding the concept of moral reasoning and moral negotiation. Also, this section will be devoted to providing relevant insights on the nature of turning points and providing literature that argues for the relevancy of emerging adulthood as a rich context in which to study communication phenomena. Following the review of literature, section three (Chapter 4) will be dedicated to considering the methodological approach taken in this project. Examples of studies employing these qualitative methods in recent communication scholarship will serve as support for taking such an approach in analyzing the phenomenon at hand. Finally, in the fourth section (Chapter 5), results will be provided, analyzed, and discussed.

Chapter Two: Philosophical Perspectives on Morality

History reveals the cumulative insight and outworking of ideas that constitute societies' and persons' expressions of shared belief and shared ways of living. More specifically, this relationship of ideas finds expression in a socio-historical, circumstantial manner, affecting the way people live together in community. Foundational to these circumstances is the idea that persons:

Live in a community by virtue of the things, which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge— a common understanding— like-mindedness as the sociologists say.

(Dewey, 1944, p. 4)

We find ourselves, then, with the responsibility of growing in our understanding of the differing conceptions of morality and the ways in which these differing conceptions inform and confront each other in our present society. In the above passage, Dewey understands that communication is always-already showing the possibilities for human relating. This mode of being through, in, and by communication is active in giving meaning to our shared experience. The task is to discover *what* meaning is given and *how* it is constructed. In the conception of morality with which this study is concerned, these discourses are at the forefront of our present societal concerns: explicitly present in dialogue, or implicitly present in disposition and action.

Creating a Taxonomy for Understanding Ethical Communication

In their recent edited volume, *Ethical Communication: Moral Stances in Human Dialogue*, Christians and Merrill (2009) attempt to construct a taxonomy that describes the various understandings of morality as they relate to the subject of communication (see Table 1). Christians and Merrill organize these different conceptions of morality from various traditions. For example, when speaking about morality, some choose to emphasize the importance of acting in a way that focuses on the welfare of others. In this context a moral belief or action would be one predicated on caring for others, whether it be the greatest number as with the utilitarianism of John Stewart Mill, or caring for one's neighbor as in the teachings of Jesus. Other theorists, according to Christians and Merrill, situate morality in the realm of actions that reflect a loyalty to one's self. In this framework, as seen in Aristotle's writings, we have a moral obligation to develop ourselves as individuals. Similarly, Ayn Rand concludes that citizens cannot act ethically in a society if there is not present a self-interest or reverence for one's own possibilities. Much more could be said about the uniqueness and complexity of these moral frameworks that cannot be said here. Instead, for this present project it is interesting to note how Christians and Merrill make an attempt to answer the question: How do philosophers, religious thinkers, and other intellectuals compare in terms of their explications about what it means to be ethical? The more important question would be: How are these understandings of morality expounded upon if not through, by, and about communicative practice? In fact, in the following sections, the case will be made that morality does not

happen outside of communication but, instead, moral understanding is made possible by communication (i.e. in language).

Table 1

Ethical Stances Described in Terms of Loyalty

Ethical Stance	Defining Characteristic	Exemplars
Loyalty to Others	Ethical action benefits others rather than focusing on the self or general virtues or following the law.	- Dalai Lama - Jesus - Mother Teresa - Martin Luther King, Jr. - Carol Gilligan
Loyalty to Self	Ethical concern is primarily for the self. This may not exclude a social sense, but the development of the virtuous self.	- Machiavelli - Nietzsche - Aristotle - Ayn Rand - Kautilya of India
Loyalty to Freedom	These ethicists are lovers of freedom and especially resist rule-bound ethics of historical figures in the legalist ethical stance.	- John Locke - Henry David Thoreau - Dietrich Bonhoeffer - Paulo Freire - Hannah Arendt
Loyalty to Authority	This approach emphasizes following rules. This stance is normative and honors an authority or a revered code of principles.	- Moses - Muhammed - Plato - Kant - Hobbes
Loyalty to Community	This stance is known as social ethics. Communitarian ethics places emphasis on the idea of democracy.	- Confucius - Dewey - Marx - Gandhi - Levinas

Note. Adapted from *Ethical Communication: Moral Stances in Human Dialogue* by Christian and Merrill, 2009.

The thinkers mentioned previously are outlined and grouped together by Christians and Merrill (2009) because they share certain characteristic perspectives about morality. First, they group together thinkers such as Henry David Thoreau, John Locke, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paulo Freire, and Hannah Arendt, all of which share a belief that freedom is a pivotal ingredient in morality. For Christians and Merrill's second group, juxtaposed with this loyalty to the freedom or rights of the individual, common notions regarding morality hinge on people's disposition toward authority: a functional outworking of this conception is seen in a deontological, duty-driven ethic. The final category proposed by Christians and Merrill (2009), as exemplified by Emmanuel Levinas, Confucius, and others, reflects the goal of community-driven ethics. This perspective situates ethics and morality as a means by which a healthy, thriving community life is realized. In this way, the broader group (community) is held as the marker for moral belief or action. As a result, if any action is aimed at supporting the welfare of the community by deconstructing alienating power structures or supporting democratic dialogue or consensus, it is deemed ethical. Christians and Merrill connect the moral explications of historical thinkers and, in so doing, communicate the influence of such perspectives on what we understand to be ethical communication. By classifying different moral frameworks in terms of human being-together (in some thinkers, this was not the focus of human-being), Christians and Merrill bring out each philosopher's way of talking about what is most basic or central to dwelling ethically in the world. Authors focusing on loyalty to authority as the rubric for understanding morality may perceive humans

essentially as beings that need and desire structure. In other words, following a code of conduct given by some religious authority constitutes a meaningful human experience. For the following thinkers, defining what it means to be an *ethical* human being has the task of first defining what it most fundamentally means to partake in human-being. In the following section, beginning with Leo Tolstoy, passages from their work will be explicated to bring out this emphasis on what it means to be human. First in Tolstoy, we will see that, from one vantage point, we cannot think about morality without coming to terms with his conception of religion. Secondly, Immanuel Kant takes this further. A particular reading of Kant would contend that religion has made its mark on people's conceptions of morality, but an enlightened individual is one who is engaged in public discourse and free debate. Thirdly Plato's Socrates, in the form of a question, takes up this public converging of ideas on morality: How is one to understand wisdom or to know if one is wise? And finally in Heidegger we perceive the conditions for the possibility of our engaging in dialogue. We come to see that we are always-already together meaningfully in the world through language and our continued communication about what we ought to do characterizes the negotiated nature of moral understanding. That is to say, our moral conceptions are not mere abstractions; they are shared ways of interpreting that world and how we ought to act in it.

Dialogic Conceptions of Man

Leo Tolstoy. Arguably one of the most influential Russian novelists of the 19th century, Leo Tolstoy published many works of literature that took up the

most profound questions surrounding what it means to be human, for better and for worse. However, it was much later in his life that Tolstoy wrote a series of essays relating his deeply held convictions about religion and morality. In one particular essay, he sorts out two questions posed to him: “(1) What does [he] understand by the word ‘religion,’ and (2) Does [he] consider it possible for morality to exist independently of religion, as [he] understands it” (1987, p. 131)? In answering these two questions, Tolstoy inexorably links his definition of religion and his conception of a moral human being. Denying that the “essence of religion lies in the fear evoked before the unknown forces of nature, and in the recognition and worship of imaginary beings” (p. 133), he instead believes that religion is “the relationship man establishes between himself and the infinite, never-ending universe, or its origin and first cause” (p. 142). By implication, religion is a continuous process whereby humans orient their beliefs and actions based on how they understand their relation to the external world. Morality, then, is understood as the “indication and explanation of those activities which automatically result when a person maintains one or other relationship to the universe” (p. 142).

Following this insight as to the connection between religion and morality, one can discern how different interpretations lead to different actions. For example, one who perceives his relationship to the universe to be the realization of his personal well-being may be hard-pressed to understand morality in terms of caring for others. Such a person’s goals of success will invariably overshadow the concerns of the group.

The next orientation about which Tolstoy speaks, “where the purpose of life is held to lie in the well-being of a particular group of individuals, gives rise to a moral doctrine that requires a person to serve that group whose well-being is recognized as the purpose of life” (p. 142). Here, Tolstoy points to the doctrine of self-renunciation whereby persons are able to sacrifice some part of their personal success or well-being in order to serve the greater purpose of the group.

Further, Tolstoy recognizes another level of moral, religious insight. In the following passage, he outlines the circumstances that give rise to this third conception of man’s relation to the universe. He writes:

None of the philosophical arguments stemming from a religious view of life that is pagan can prove to a person that it is more advantageous and reasonable not to live for his own well-being, which he desires, understands, finds possible, or for the well-being of his family, or society, but for the well-being that is unknown, undesired, incomprehensible and unattainable by human means. A philosophy founded on an understanding of human life and confined to the welfare of man will never be in a position to prove to a rational person, who knows that he might die at any moment, that it is good for him and that he must deny himself his own desired, appreciated, and undoubted well-being, and do so not for the good of others (because he will never know the results of his sacrifices) but simply because it is necessary and worthy, and a categorical imperative.
(p. 146)

Appealing to greater level of rhetorical persuasion, Tolstoy sets this conception of morality over the others. In the third orientation of man's relation to the universe, persons are cognizant of the providence and will of a transcendent being: a first cause or originator desiring a particular end for humans. In this framework, motivation for moral action is not found in the realization of personal well-being or the perceived well-being of a group. Instead, energy is spent discerning the will of this "higher" being. In the end, Tolstoy claims that "there can be no genuine, non-hypocritical morality that is without a religious foundation, just as there can be no plant without roots" (p. 150).

In this moral schema, in order to ask what one ought to do, persons would be urged to look at their relation to the origin of the universe— not as a fearful response to unknown forces, but instead as a response to the search for that which brings purpose to the lives of humans. By way of these explanations of man's relation to the universe, Tolstoy exemplifies the necessity of giving an account of what it means to be human in the discussion of what it means to be a moral individual or society. His insights echo the keen judgment by Dewey about the elemental necessity of communication in understanding human relationships.

Along with the connecting theme of what it means to be human, all of the categories set forth by Christians and Merrill (2009) pertained to a particular expression of morality: the quality of being loyal to some idea, person, or group of persons. For the following thinkers, and the guiding theoretical thread of this thesis, loyalty to dialogue or conversation is central to what it means to be a moral individual. Furthermore, dialogue is vital because if one (with concepts

understood through language) who lives *with* others in the world (a world of language) wants to find out how they “ought to” live and best relate with one another, this ultimately needs to be done through dialogue. In this conception of morality, countless philosophers are implicated. However, in the following section, only a handful will be enumerated in order to show how philosophers whose ideas are not compatible in many ways actually find harmony because they all find language and the exchange of ideas through dialogue to be crucial to a rich understanding of morality.

Immanuel Kant. Impassioned by the possibility that change in the way human-being was conceptualized would “bring about a falling off of personal despotism and of avaricious or tyrannical oppression,” Kant (1798) was invested in describing the conditions by which he thought change might become a reality in his *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment* (p. 2)? This transformation in the way persons relate to each other would not be through revolution because revolution was sure to replace one tyrant with yet another and another. Instead, Kant promulgates that, “for this enlightenment, however, nothing is required but freedom, and indeed the least harmful of anything that could even be called freedom: namely, freedom to make *public use* of one’s reason in all matters” (1798, p. 2). In order for humans to be enlightened, they need not be merely told what is right and what is wrong: their actions directed solely by an authority figure. Instead, persons need to have the opportunity to partake in the education, or sharpening, of their intellect. This sharpening would make a more sophisticated public dialogue about morality possible without the

necessity of control. Wisdom would direct change in a society, not the will of a select, powerful few. In postulating this kind of free discourse, Kant (1798) anticipates feelings of trepidation on the part of those in power, disallowing them from understanding the gravity and benefit of the change that enlightenment would bring. In the following passage, Kant addresses these potential fears:

But I hear from all sides the cry: do *not argue!* The officer says: Do not argue but drill! The tax official: Do not argue but pay! The clergyman: Do not argue but believe! (Only one ruler in the world says: *Argue* as much as you will and about whatever you *will, but obey!*) Everywhere there are restrictions on freedom. But what sort of restriction hinders enlightenment, and what sort does not hinder but instead promotes it? I reply: The *public* use of one's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among human beings. (p. 2, italics in original)

This revolutionary claim says that the enlightenment and, in turn, the advancement or progress of society would only be realized if citizens were able to freely disseminate their ideas about any number of life's issues whether they be political, religious, etc. Dialogue and argumentation are, here, set apart as indispensable to what it means to be human. For Kant, it is not the case that enlightenment should bring an end to authority and duty. Instead, persons are given a particular forum—public sphere—in which to voice their individual understanding, rightly called the public use of one's reason. In the private use of one's reason, persons are called to uphold the duty of their position. Systemically, giving persons the freedom to exchange ideas about an array of subjects,

including morality, cultivates an environment in which human dignity is upheld. As a result, humans “who are now more than machines” rise above their “self-incurred minority” and are able to construct a more complex, well-rounded moral understanding (p. 6).

Socrates. In Plato’s “Apology,” Socrates exemplifies a philosopher, a lover of wisdom, who is dedicated to the search for deeper understanding. Possessing understanding takes considerable humility as many are willing to contradict the wisdom of a person who presumes to possess it. Only through a process of much discussion or deliberation will they come to find out with which wisdom resides. Socrates understands the definitive quality of meaningful dialogue to be this kind of examination. We see upon a closer reading of Socrates’ apology that this examination is realized through extensive dialogue with others. In fact, in order to test the validity of what the Oracle says about him, Plato says of Socrates:

I thought of a way to try to find out, something like this: I approached one of those who had the reputation of being wise, for there, I thought, if anywhere, I should test the revelation and prove that the oracle was wrong: “Here is one wiser than I, but you said I was wiser.” (1984, p. 507)

Socrates does not merely accept the words of the Oracle. Rather, he tests this revelation through dialogue with others that may prove to be wiser than he. What Socrates finds astonishes even him. Through questioning a politician, a poet, and an artisan, Socrates finds that he is truly wiser than his fellow man by virtue of

one trait: Socrates, unlike the others, understands that he does not know all there is to know.

In the end, Socrates is put on trial for the very characteristic that sets him above the rest of his citizenry—the desire to gain wisdom even if it means questioning his own assumptions or pride. Meletos, one of those who sought Socrates' demise, accuses Socrates of aspiring to corrupt the youth of Athens. In his integrity, Socrates denounces this through the very same process of dialogue. He questions the reasoning behind Meletos' accusation. Socrates points out that most men, if not all, aim to influence their associates toward the good precisely because those same associates whom one influences will be the persons with whom one shares his life. He asks Meletos, “Have I indeed come to such a depth of ignorance that I do not know even this—that if I make one of my associates bad I shall risk getting some evil from him—to such a depth as to do so great an evil intentionally, as you say” (p. 512)? In these words, Socrates supports the idea that, if we do evil to those around us, it is at minimum unintentional. Conversely, we seek to do good by those around us and, for Socrates, doing good by those around him is engaging in meaningful dialogue or argumentation that sharpens and brings wisdom. A final instance in which Socrates defends his dialogic aim and foundation is seen when he is asked to lead a quiet life and not bother their political process with his questioning. He responds with the following:

For if I say that this is to disobey the god, and therefore I cannot keep quiet, you will not believe me but think I am a humbug. If again I say

it is the greatest good for a man every day to discuss virtue and the other things, about which you hear me talking and examining myself and everybody else, and that life without enquiry is not worth living for a man, you will believe me still less if I say that. (p. 526)

Throughout his life and trial, Socrates embodied his undying commitment to the process of examining his life through conversation with others. As a result, he braved the grave consequences of the death penalty in order to be an example to a society which did not value the same. Though he was executed, Socrates' manner of living persisted, guiding others in a method of self-examination through inviting intellectual debate and dialogue.

Martin Heidegger. Desiring to give a phenomenological account of being (i.e. how being shows itself in its everyday dealings with and in the world), Heidegger (1966) explicates the nature of thinking and the conditions for the possibility of living together in the world. Accordingly, Heidegger spoke, and, we can say, still speaks to a public that is far too thoughtless. Heidegger conceptualizes the issue in the following way: “Thoughtlessness is an uncanny visitor who comes and goes everywhere in today’s world. For nowadays we take in everything in the quickest and cheapest way, only to forget it just as quickly, instantly” (1966, p. 45). Although persons may be engaged in many activities, all of which include the presence and participation of others, it is important to understand the quality or essence of such participation in more detail. In this regard, Heidegger points out that “man today is in a *flight from thinking*...but part of this flight is that man will neither see nor admit it” (p. 45, italics in original).

The reason that man neither sees nor admits his flight from thinking is because his understanding of thinking has evolved altogether; failing to recognize that thinking is inextricably connected to, even rooted in, communicating and always-already being understandingly or meaningfully in the world.

Accordingly, Heidegger situates thinking as the “place” where the world can show itself *as* meaningful through communication (i.e. humans interacting with other humans and entities in the world). In order to garner a deeper understanding of how humans relate in and by communication, Heidegger purports that “we speak because speaking is natural to us... language belongs to the closest neighborhood of man’s being” (1971, p. 187). Dialogue is a central part of our humanity because we are always-already interpreting our experience, using language and reason to do so. This is not to say that we do not have automatic, emotional, or intuitive responses to sensuous experience. However, we make such experience *meaningful* by communicating our understanding of our experience through language. In this concept of being, Dasein (i.e. human-being) is differentiated from entities that are present-at-hand. Entities that are present-at-hand are beings for which their being is not an issue (e.g. a car, a hammer, a computer). He explains this distinction by arguing that:

That Being which is an *issue* for this entity in its very Being, is in each case mine. Thus Dasein is never to be taken ontologically as an instance or special case of some genus of entities as things that are present-at-hand.

To entities such as these, their Being is ‘a matter of indifference’, or more

precisely, they 'are' such that their Being can be neither a matter of indifference to them, nor the opposite. (1962, p. 68)

In other words, human-being cannot be conceptualized as the adding together of entities in the world. We are not merely defined by the number of bones in our bodies, the kinds of cells in our blood, or even the unique pattern of our particular DNA strand. What makes Dasein, Dasein is that it is the "site" in, or towards, which the world discloses itself. This means that the activities about which Dasein is concerned are communicative activities that interpret, create, or respond to the world. Entities present-at-hand in the world do not have this concern and they show this by way of an absence of understanding or an indifference of sorts.

Entities in the world, present-at-hand, always-already show themselves as ready-to-hand. To put it differently, the disclosure of entities' meaningfulness to Dasein is ineluctably defined in terms of their "toward which" or "for that which" character: entities are interpreted as being *for* our human endeavors that are always-already "underway." Consequently, Dasein is always-already understandingly responding to entities in the world by way of responding to or interpreting their "involvement" in the world. For example, the computer on which one writes one's thesis is not just an aluminum and plastic piece of technology. It is the tool by which one continues in his or her studies and continue going on his or her path. The computer is ready-to-hand, meaningful, in a totality of significance (i.e. the conditions for the possibility of its showing itself in a particular manner). When Heidegger explicates this concept of "totality of significance" he writes:

Dasein, in its familiarity with significance, is the ontical condition for the possibility of discovering entities which are encountered in a world with involvement (readiness-to-hand) as their kind of Being, and which can thus make themselves known as they are in themselves. (1962, p. 120)

In other words, Dasein needs to be understood as distinct from entities in the world because it is *to* Dasein that the things in the world show themselves; Dasein makes the showing possible. For the scope this study, this is an import foundation from which to start because dialogue can be conceptualized as participation in the activities of Dasein (i.e. responding to the world as disclosed through language). With this in mind, dialogue can be seen as something “ready-to-hand” though, not quite. Entities are ready-to-hand and dialogue is not an entity as such. Therefore, dialogue can be “caught up” in the totality of a project and when one is circumspect one can see the significance of dialogue’s function in a sense. However, this can only be analogous to Heidegger’s conception of the ready-to-hand because language is discovered, “used”, in the way a pen (object present-at-hand) could never be.

Interestingly though, persons’ moral understandings can “break down” almost as things that are ready-to-hand can. In this way, Heidegger’s discussion of the (un)readiness-to-hand becomes especially helpful in starting to theorize the nature of moral turning points. He describes that “*when an assignment has been disturbed*—when something is unusable for some purpose— then the assignment becomes explicit” (p. 105, italics in original). If moral frameworks are our habitual responses, or understandings, of the world and these systems fail to

continue giving an adequate picture of what our experiences “uncover,” then we can be motivated to comport ourselves toward entities or toward other humans differently. Heidegger’s intellectual work on the nature of human-being (Dasein) informs the current project by way of the importance of interpretation and the communication of interpretation through dialogue as necessary conditions for the possibility of understanding morality.

Philosophy as a Foundation for Understanding Communication Ethics

Following the insight of these thinkers, we perceive a fundamental quality of human experience: we have basic beliefs about the nature of what it means to be human and our values are informed by these basic beliefs. In turn, our differing values guide the ways in which we understand what constitutes a meaningful, shared social world. These interpretations mark the driving force of influence in how morality is defined in this study: morality is an ongoing communicative negotiation of basic beliefs and values. One thing that is clear, implicitly or explicitly, is that moral turning will not be done apart from communication and dialogue. Being familiar with the ideas of these scholars, any theory of moral turning needs to be grounded in communication because it is the site where morality is expressly negotiated. If persons are going to experience a change in their moral framework, it will not likely happen apart from the influence of others. Furthermore, it is to be expected that when persons’ “ready-to-hand” moral framework is disturbed, the only way persons will be able to “re-settle” their understanding will be through learning how others make sense of their world. Although this influence could come through nonverbal means (i.e.

watching a particular representation of morality on a T.V. show), Tolstoy, Socrates, Kant, and Heidegger suggest that the participation in language is requisite for morality.

It is also important to understand the “type” of person who is suggested to be a common influencer. For Socrates, a mentor or public educator was influential in educating or corrupting (in his accusers’ language) the youth of Athens. New moral conceptions came through an older person whose insights presented information about differing worldviews. This is not to exclude other influences such as parents, girlfriends, boyfriends, siblings, and others who are likely to influence the ways in which these emerging adults form their worldview. With Kant’s idea of the “cosmopolitan” it can be argued that this process of exposure, and the change that often follows, grows as the ability for the free exchange of ideas in public discourse grows. It would also be somewhat surprising, if Tolstoy is accurate in his estimation, to find religion absent in informing public and private discourse concerning morality. Instead, it will be expected that participants find some vocabulary for speaking about morality in any admixture of world religions. These examples elucidate the philosophical foundation upon which this study can start to contextualize moral turning points in emerging adulthood.

Douglas Birkhead (1989) conducting research for the journal, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, wrote the following passage that provides an important insight necessary for studying morality and communication:

Moral reasoning as deliberative action to be consummated in behavior is preceded by contemplation, the cultivation of a way of seeing the world that is not concerned with specific acts. Morality is thus more than a mode of behavior. It is a form of reality construction, a technique for observing and expressing interpretations about aspects of the world which are humanly unobservable and ineffable without an ethical sensitivity.

(p. 289)

In other words, morality is a communicative creation of a particular kind of worldview enactment. Cultivation, contemplation, observing, and expressing are social behaviors: communication is done in community as Dewey helps us see. Taking this into account, along with the insights of the previously outlined philosophies, it can be hypothesized that moral turning points are a process by which persons cultivate a new way of the seeing the world based on exposure to new techniques of observing or interpreting the world. Moreover, morality is not merely contemplation about right and wrong; behavior or action follows. The following section will outline the research that addresses morality, turning points, and emerging adulthood in various contexts. Scholars provide various ways by which we can understand these three topics and their importance in constructing a complex framework for human communication. By outlining recent research projects, a case will be built for connecting them in the study of moral turning points in emerging adulthood.

Chapter Three: Review of Social Science Literature

Morality and Communication

Moral development. As was outlined in the previous section, many scholars throughout history have tried to give an exposition of the means by which persons form moral concepts. These concepts, in turn, produce a framework for how one “ought to” live in society. In the midst of this diversity, many scholars in the social scientific traditions have adopted the view that morality arises in a socially constructed fashion. In taking up the work on moral stages theory originating in the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, Minnameier (2009) communicates what he, along with most scholars at present, believes to be the pivotal quality that spawns moral negotiation among human beings:

The recognition that there are no such absolute—or divine—moral standards (in the sense of concrete laws such as, i.e., the Ten Commandments), but that morality consists in the rules for social conduct that human beings create by themselves as a consequence of and as a regulation for public life in a society. (p. 134)

To put it another way, it is not quite accurate to say that morality consists of the content of set standards (i.e. Ten Commandments) but that morality is exemplified in the process of dialogue focused on *understanding* such “content.” In this light, research has overwhelmingly focused on creating a descriptive taxonomy of *how* persons enact their moral understandings in different traditions and cultures, in one’s own mind, and among persons involved in interpersonal relationships. Although the mental processes involved in moral reasoning are not

the focus of this research, it is important to provide a brief review of Kohlberg's work on moral development because he plays an influential role in the methodology that researchers employ to study morality.

Kohlberg situates moral reasoning as a phenomenon that is not merely culturally relative, but a process of transitioning through sequential stages (Kurtines & Greif, 1974). Kohlberg further differentiates the developmental stages of Piaget and describes three levels and six stages of moral development, rather than two general stages. After conducting a study in which he presents participants with a variety of moral dilemmas (72 middle and lower-class boys), he outlined six developmental types of value orientations that were salient in his interpretation of their responses to these moral dilemmas. The first level in Kohlberg's theory, the *Premoral Level*, includes Stage 1 and Stage 2, *punishment and obedience orientation* and *naïve instrumental hedonism*, respectively. The second level of moral development is the *Morality of Conventional Role Conformity*, which includes Stage 3, *the good-boy morality of maintaining good relations or approval of others*, and Stage 4, *authority-maintaining morality*. The final level, *Morality of Self-Accepted Moral Principles*, includes Stage 5, *morality of contract and democratically accepted law*, and Stage 6, *morality of individual principles of conscience* (Kohlberg, 1963a). Many scholars have postulated that this last stage is reached during the beginning stages of emerging adulthood. However, Kohlberg has stated that moral maturity that is defined by the capacity for principled reasoning is actually embodied by very few people (as cited in Kurtines & Greif, 1974).

Distinct from the previous developmental framework, Marsha Aileen Hewitt (2008), drawing on the work of Sigmund Freud, describes the religious (or “moral”) impulse to be just that, an impulse or a drive that has been impressed upon humans by way of a historical truth communicated in and through one’s subconscious. For Hewitt, this impulse is rightly understood as a historical truth, grounded in past human experiences (memories) that shape persons’ culturally-situated moral responses. The following passage elucidates this conception in greater detail:

If we reformulate and reconceptualize these memory traces and impressions that are embedded in the deepest recesses of the mind in terms of attachment theory, then the experience being described *may* well refer to that profound yearning and wishing for the love and protection of a strong caretaker that is encoded in the human being’s drive for survival, which is a feature of evolutionary development. (p. 67)

So, one can derive from this example that moral thinking in some cases has been studied and understood as an “encoded” drive, purported to be a subconscious inheritance necessary for survival. This explanation coincides with the sentiments of other social scientific research. Though, there is invariably a cognitive component to morality, humans find emotion or intuition as the originating, emergent impulse of this process. As a reiteration, Hewitt (2008) enumerates the following: “This does not mean that infants experience this longing (for a supernatural protective deity) consciously but rather that it is an unformulated, deeply felt and inherent need for attachment” (p. 67). In fact, this longing is

similar in many ways to our moral impulses, communicated and “felt” in and by an inherent need; apparently conceived as the need to understand our survival in terms of participation in a moral society. In Hewitt’s explication of moral impulses, moral reflexivity can only be explained as a result of secure attachment in early childhood development. Reflexive “individuals [are those] whose emotional organization, self or “other” representations and capacity for embracing and holding a multiplicity of perspectives are rooted in infantile experiences of secure attachment” (Hewitt, 2008, p. 74). This alternate view of moral development, juxtaposed against Kohlberg’s more cognitive taxonomy, emphasizes the nature of early childhood attachment as having the greatest formative effect on the way individuals form moral understandings.

Differing from these psychological approaches found in the work of Hewitt, Kohlberg and Minnameier, explicated in terms of stage development (Minnameier critiques and adapts Kohlberg’s moral stages), this study aims to understand the ways in which *communication* expresses, supports, or challenges individuals’ moral notions. Presently, however, more has to be explicated about how social scientists have studied and, consequently, described the fundamental characteristics of communication about moral issues.

Intuitive or automatic moral response vs. principled reasoning. Not surprisingly, there are longstanding disagreements about the nature of negotiating morality. With the concept of negotiation comes the idea that “morality is concerned not just with the quality of a decision when the need arises but with states of attention, perception, and consciousness” (Birkhead, 1989, p. 289).

Discussions and applied studies such as the work done by Murphy, Wilde, Ogden, Barnard, and Calder (2009) distinguish between intuitive, emotional responses to morality as opposed to a process of “principled reasoning”: an automatic process juxtaposed with one that takes more cognitive effort (p. 41). In this study, Murphy et al. adapted a methodology used in previous sociological and psychological studies that aimed to measure the extent to which readers create rich mental representations of characters’ emotions in stories. For example, in accordance with findings from pilot tests about what was considered “moral” and “immoral,” they created 24 stories (12 stories with a “moral” ending and 12 stories with an “immoral” ending). Each of the stories was followed by a target sentence, which asked the participant to agree or disagree. Participants were randomly assigned to a pair of stories with the same target sentence. This was named a moral-immoral pair. A target sentence that summarized a given story and its moral theme appeared in this manner: “Jessica (or Valerie) thought about the situation and decided it would be wrong for her to do it” (Murphy et al., 2009, p. 44). By using this methodology, Murphy et al. maintain that they measured the level of cognition used in moral reasoning and found out something interesting about the automaticity of moral judgments. Their findings suggest that persons may have running inner commentaries that express moral perceptions. These perceptions indicate beliefs or behaviors as right or wrong and this expression can be measured in terms of reading time (the time it takes to process a “moral” statement or story). What is still unclear is exactly how persons come to understand particular beliefs or behaviors as moral and others as immoral, for, “it

is often the case that an individual who practices dubious morals may still possess adequate knowledge of what others consider to be right or wrong” (p. 48).

An interesting question arises as a result of this discussion: what is the connection between what one knows others to perceive as right and wrong and what knowledge one actually acts upon? An answer to this question will hopefully become apparent as data is collected regarding how emerging adults gauge “right” and “wrong” and how they come to such positions. In other words, this present study may uncover data that closely resembles the conclusions from Murphy et al. in that emerging adults may not explicitly be persuaded or discuss reasons for adopting a new moral position. It may be that that transition is largely implicit. This leads to the two significant research questions of this study: Does dialogue function to influence or inform moral turning points in emerging adults? If so, how does dialogue function to influence or inform moral turning points in emerging adults? Murphy et al. (2009) contribute to the literature on moral communication by revealing that persons have moral responses ingrained in them and interesting questions surface when one starts to investigate the nature of these moral responses: how they came about and how they are expressed. Their contribution shows that persons take much longer to process and respond to narrative questions when stories go against the reader’s deeply held moral assumptions. This anecdote implies that there are differentiated methods for processing moral information or experience depending on whether moral outcomes parallel existing expectations or not. This helps the current study’s

focus by asking the above-mentioned questions as to the nature of dialogue in turning points.

Moral reasoning and information processing. Answering the question of how moral positions are learned or processed, Bargh and Chartrand (2000) discuss distinct qualities of information processing, which Murphy et al. (2009) draw on, to form greater understanding of how persons process moral information. The four qualities outlined by Bargh and Chartrand include: “(a) whether an individual has some awareness of the operations of the process under consideration (i.e. moral processing); (b) whether the process is efficient; (c) whether the process is unintentional; and (d) whether the process is under conscious control” (p. 43). Murphy et al. particularly drew on the second quality—efficiency of information processing—in order to capture the relative efficiency of moral automaticity. They found that at least some qualities of intuitive or automatic responsiveness apply to moral reasoning; namely, “it is an efficient process that persists despite a significant cognitive load” (p. 47). In other words, these findings indicate that moral reasoning is a deeply rooted process of human being that, at present, seems to occur mostly unintentionally without principled reasoning. These conclusions suggest that beliefs about morality find their expression in a socially complex and implicit manner. In order to better understand their uniqueness, scholars need to explore the relationship between these automatic, unintentional responses to immoral or moral experiences or ideas and the deeply rooted beliefs that supply them. In other words, it may be found in the current interview process that turning points are descriptive of a process in

which the automatic moral responses in participants are brought to light and questioned for their legitimacy or consistency.

Another explanation of moral negotiation emphasizes the role of peers and other social group members in moral ideological formation through the concept “moral testimony” (Hills, 2009). For Allison Hills, moral testimony is “a testimony with explicitly moral content” (p. 94). Through this lens, Hills’ reader is called to question the legitimacy of moral testimony from perceived “moral experts.” In fact, the very idea of expertise in negotiating what ought to be conceived as moral belief or action is called into question. As a result, moral understanding is defined as grasping the reasons behind any moral proposition and having the ability to enumerate and explain such reasons for a given moral position in a specific context. Hills explains this reasoning process in the following passage:

The grasp of the reasons why p that is essential to understanding involves a number of abilities: to understand why p, you need to be able to treat q as the reason why p, not merely believe or know that q is the reason why p. If you understand why p (and q is why p), then in the right sort of circumstances, you can successfully: (i) follow an explanation of why p given by someone else; (ii) explain why p in your own words; (iii) draw the conclusion that p (or that probably p) from the information that q; (iv) draw the conclusion that p’ (or that probably p’) from the information that q’ (where p’ and q’ are similar to but not identical to p and q); (v) given the information that p, give the right explanation, q. (p. 102)

In other words, this process of drawing out moral conclusions is intimately connected with logically working out the connective or causal reasons for holding a given position, supporting one's positions with circumstantial intricacies that make every situation complexly different. Hills acknowledges that her epistemic assumptions about how to come to affirmative (factive as she terms them) moral reasons may be called into question:

While according to some accounts, knowing how and propositional knowledge are distinct, there are well-known arguments that knowing how is a species of propositional knowledge. If these arguments apply to understanding why *p* as well as to knowledge how, one might conclude that moral understanding must be a species of propositional knowledge too. (2009, p. 105)

Thus, Hills believes what separates mere adherence to a particular moral testimony from the ability to make mature moral judgments is the ability to start from "true beliefs" and learn to make "how" judgments that apply in unique circumstances (p. 105). In this she expresses the complexity of making situation-specific judgments. Hills gives the following example of one who does not exhibit such complexity:

Eleanor has always enjoyed eating meat but has recently realized that it raises some moral issues. Rather than thinking further about these, however, she talks to a friend, who tells her that eating meat is wrong, Eleanor knows that her friend is normally trustworthy and reliable, so she believes her and accepts that eating meat is wrong. (p. 94)

This passage features the idea that moral testimony, when *not tested* for value, is situated as a controversial method by which persons gather moral knowledge. Instead, Hills' essay is dedicated to showing methods by which Eleanor can show greater complexity in the way that she comes to make moral judgments such as in the case of Mary: "Mary believes that she has a moral reason not to lie because lying to others fails to respect them and in the long run tends to make them unhappy" (p. 98). In this example, Mary does not rely on the testimony of trusted others. She thinks through the implications of lying and forms her positions based on these implications. Similarly, it would be beneficial to learn whether or not moral testimony, influence of others in a given context, proves to be prominent in emerging adults' moral turning points. It will be interesting to explore the ways in which emerging adults make judgments. Hills' concept of moral testimony reiterates the importance of understanding the topic of morality in terms of communicative negotiation. It is a process by which persons listen to and test others' positions, making complex judgments or merely trusting and acting upon the conclusions in moral testimonies.

Thus far, there has been a review of social scientific literature regarding the nature of morality and communication as well as a review of philosophical writings on morality and what it means to be human. With these perspectives in mind, the following section will further express the dialogic nature of human communication, situating moral communication as a *conversational negotiation* of beliefs or ideas. This will be understood as a kind of societal, social, or communal sense making and will integrate various patterns of dialogue as integral

to negotiation. By addressing several caveats or applications of a dialogical theory of communication, the focus on dialogue in moral turning will find further support. Also, it will be noticed that a certain kind of dialogue, proposed by the following thinkers, is able to incite persons to be more mindful of their moral positions or behavior. It may be found that this greater awareness is characteristic in emerging adults' moral turning points. First, an introduction will be provided that makes a case for emphasizing "the conversation" in understanding human communication. Secondly, some structural aspects of dialogue will be outlined that differentiate genuine or mindful dialogue from daily discursive practices. In this introduction to the structure of dialogue, the real possibility for change in understanding made possible by dialogue with others will be elucidated. Thirdly, Baxter and Braithwaite's (2008) dialectic perspective on Bakhtin's dialogical theory will be visited. Lastly, this section will provide an account of how dialogue facilitates a shift in orientation from, what Martin Buber terms, I-It orientation to I-Thou orientation. These insights together will provide a third body of literature from which this study will theorize emerging adults' moral turning points.

Moral Consciousness: A Dialogical Frame

Communication and conversation. Dialogic thinking reflects a fundamental emphasis on the value of learning through conversation with others and reflection on the content of dialogue between persons, within groups, and between groups according to a certain dialogic perspective, we engage with others by focusing on content questions, such as: to what do I want to belong, and why? These kind of questions help facilitate a particular quality of being together, one

characterized by learning about the Other through engagement in dialogue as opposed to unreflective belonging. This quality of relating is important in our society because, often, we take reflection for granted. Regularly, we unconsciously partake in normative discursive practices that maintain a minimal level of disclosure or understanding of the persons involved in dialogue. Though values provide the underlying framework for any relationship, they are not regularly brought to the fore.

Although daily communicative acts may be conceived as implicit or unconscious, this is not to say that is simplistic. Though relational or conversational partners may not be dissecting the values that support the content of any given conversation, these values and presuppositions are at work. Values, being culturally situated and socially learned, provide the content or knowledge for a range of activities in conversation including non verbal cues, attitudes, tones, topics, etc. Jesse Delia (1977) refers to this common ground between communicators as a shared knowledge (a set of beliefs or presuppositions) about the world that create the space for conversational partners to even be *in* communication. John Dewey (1944) suggests “we live in a community precisely by a shared embodiment of aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge—a common understanding” (p. 4) and this understanding is presented to our minds and senses through language. In fact, according to communication scholar Stanley Deetz (2003), “language is not simply a tool used to share experience but is intrinsic to and involved in developing the possibilities for experience” (p. 41).

One important implication of this perspective of language and social relation is that we need to be aware of language's impact on the way we make judgments or decisions about what we value. We are always in a social environment in which we test our judgments or moral knowledge. We are indebted to scholars who have espoused this important insight because it heightens our awareness of the many facets of dialogue. It is not simply transactional; it is a dynamic and systemic phenomenon. It is dynamic because it is always shifting and evolving with the progression of time and lived experience and it is systemic because it is only possible—only rich and beautiful—through our mutual investment in a shared social world. Being together means doing the work of interpreting shared experiences and trying to describe or unpack those experiences that are not as closely shared.

Thus, Buber (1955) calls monologue, technical dialogue, and dialogue *all* relational, but only genuine dialogue is “where insight emerges between persons, insight that belongs to neither one nor the other” (as cited in Arnett, Fritz, & Bell, 2009, p. 83). For Buber, genuine dialogue involves the creation or discovery of insight that does not belong to either conversational partner precisely because it is a product of the emergent responsiveness of both: “a human gift that brings insight and meaning beyond expectation” (2009, p. 84). This inception hints at the notion of turning by expressing that dialogue brings about an unexpected co-mingling of past understandings with the insight of others, yielding an experience that reorients someone's self concept. The various ways in which our values or moral conceptions shape the way we conceptualize our “self” and how we relate

with others are characterized by this constant sense of turning. Unlike technological dialogue, however, genuine dialogue slows the force with which practical, transactional language drives action. In genuine dialogue, one is invited to challenge his definition of “practical” or “valuable” and turn toward another morality embodiment.

Structure of dialogue. Arnett (2009) and his colleagues propose some dialogic coordinates to serve as a road map to a healthy dialogical disposition. As such, dialogic coordinates can help us think about healthy manners of turning.

The following are the coordinates outlined in Arnett et al (2009):

- Be a learner and a listener; attend to content or ground that shapes your own discourse and that of another.
- Demand for dialogue moves us from dialogue into monologue and concern for our own image of how communication ‘should’ be.
- Acknowledge bias; it is inevitable. To admit where one stands actually permits the possibility of change from new insight.
- Acknowledge that not all communicative arrangements offer the possibility for dialogue.
- Keep dialogue connected to content and learning, remaining ever attentive to new possibilities that emerge ‘between’ persons.
- Find ways to nourish the natural dialectic of public and private communicative life, foregoing the temptation to blur them by trying to create ‘nice’ or friendly space from places that require some professional distance. (p. 92)

This kind of structure provides space for the exploration of differing presuppositions and valued ways of being or doing—embodiment of beliefs. Not many situations in life afford this opportunity. Our lives are filled with a kind of language that is adapted for specific communicative outcomes with expected ends. However, having a place (especially in emerging adulthood) to meet difference through genuine dialogue can have a positive influence on the growth or maturation of moral thinking. “Dialogic civility” is a term describing this kind of moral growth:

[Dialogic civility] engages a form of communication architecture that attempts to design a place of communicative safety, not for all time, but for a moment, a temporal moment in which difference can meet with the project of learning, temporarily bracketing a triad of domination that seeks to defame, discount, dissect the Other. (Arnett & Arneson, 2001, p. 92)

In this space, individuals’ communicative moral disposition is allowed to take shape. As Arnett et al. (2009) suggest, dialogic civility makes possible the idea of “places of sanctuary, places to think and places to work with ideas and to exchange them with others” (p. 92). Those who are somehow searching for or desiring an opportunity to meet “difference,” so to speak, need these places.

Understanding moral turning points through dialogical theory uncovers their ability to create a quality of “suspended” time, even if the suspension is more of a mood than a metaphysical reality. Arnett et al (2009) turn to the literature of music theory to describe this phenomenon. A dialogical understanding of communication is expressed in the term “‘rubato,’ in which one

takes the notes out of their normal rhythmical flow. Rubato gives one a sense of pause or elongated time” (p. 93). Through this slowing process, dialogue eases the forward inertia of existing moral conceptions in order to leave room for others to show forth. Emerging adulthood, as a result of the qualities that resonate in a similar fashion, presents itself as a period of life in which this mood is most salient or available. This presupposes the following dialogical attitudes:

Dialogic ethics *listens* to what is before one, *attends* to the historical moment, and seeks to *negotiate* new possibilities. Dialogic ethics is a conceptual form of marketplace engagement, ever attentive to conversational partners and their ground, the historical moment, and the emerging ‘possible’ that takes place in the between of human meeting.

(Arnett et al., 2009, p. 95)

Finally, the phenomenon of communication from a dialogical perspective requires that genuine dialogue hinge on the ability to learn from the perspective of the Other. This task calls for an attentiveness and a willingness to let go of the demand to tell and, even, the demand for dialogue itself.

A dialectical perspective on Bakhtin’s dialogical theory. Three key factors serve an important function in a truly dialogical understanding of communication and, thus, of human relating (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). The following are three propositions supporting the relevance of dialect tension in dialogue:

Proposition 1: Meaning emerges from the struggle of different, often opposing, discourses.

Proposition 2: The interpenetration of discourses is both synchronic and diachronic.

Proposition 3: The interpenetration of competing discourses constitutes social reality. (p. 351)

These insights are invaluable in the discussion of turning points because they conceive of turning points as both “momentous” and “gradual” (taking place over time). The explication of these three propositions will assist in making important connections between existing scholarly work and the value of understanding a dialogical theory of communication for exploring the communicative qualities of moral turning points in emerging adults.

As humans we are always-already engaged in systems of meaning-making through the interplay of different cultural discourses. Baxter and Braithwaite (2008) are interested in describing the intricate nature of this interplay and how communication and dialogue function to negotiate these variances in interpretation in order to have some semblance of coherence in one’s relationships. Drawing on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Baxter and Braithwaite conceptualize relational dialectics in a characteristically Bakhtinian way when they express, “all meaning-making can be understood metaphorically and literally as a dialogue, that is, the simultaneous fusion and differentiation of different systems of meaning, or discourses” (p. 351). As a result, Baxter and Braithwaite do not see change as a fixed, neat system.

According to a dialogical understanding of communication and change, there are always already competing versions or interpretations of experience that

are informed by sometimes contradictory basic beliefs. Communication, understood in this way, implies these competing discourses are actively and simultaneously affecting our everyday conversations and actions. With this in mind, the first task of theorists in relational dialectics theory is to “[seek] to understand this dialectical process by (a) identifying the various discourses that are directly or indirectly invoked in talk to render utterances understandable and legitimate, and (b) asking how those discourses interpenetrate one another in the production of meaning” (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 352).

Explained in Baxter and Braithwaite’s (2008) second proposition, synchronic interpenetration of discourses describes meaning as being expressed, articulated, or understood at a particular moment in time. This is opposed to a more dialogical perspective of the ways in which meanings ebb and flow, different sense-making frameworks become more or less salient over an indefinite period of time. This conception of meaning-making, understood as closer to a dialogical perspective of communication, is diachronic. If conceptualized as diachronic, communication is understood to bring some interpretations to the fore in some dialogue and other interpretations to the fore in other dialogue. In these terms, meanings that are created in dialogue between persons are “ultimately unfinalizable and ‘up for grabs’ in the next interactional moment” (2008, p. 353).

In many instances, the dialogical nature of communication also functions to emphasize certain meanings and not others (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). In fact, “some constructed meanings function to elude, or skirt, the struggle of discourses” (p. 353). Skirting happens when one discourse becomes the go-to and

other discourses are not found to be a part of the conversational mix; one discourse becomes dominant over others. According to Baxter and Braithwaite, “authoritative discourses are taken-for-granted or default, accepted as “true” or “reasonable” on their face” (p. 353). Interpreting this phenomenon in a dialogical scheme means understanding repeated emphasis of one discourse over another is not an ostensible, “objective” choice, but rather the latent or discursive character of communication in many circumstances.

Even though this kind of conceptual, dialogical favoring happens, it is not always such a clean distinction. When competing discourses come together in less neat ways, communicators experience an amalgamation, which Bakhtin (1981) terms a “hybrid” (p. 358). A hybrid is the bringing together of competing discourses to form an interpretive expression with aspects recognized in many diverging discourses. As a result, dialogical hybrids can be thought of as conceptual compromises on the part of communicators—though “the discourses are distinct, yet they combine to form a new meaning” (Baxter & Braithwaite, p. 354). One cannot, with consistency, clearly distinguish between the participating belief structures that inform our dialogue or the dialogical outcomes of our everyday communicative encounters. This diluted combination is another way in which discourses meet. To reiterate, the “aesthetic moment” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 67), in which meanings are created and discourses informing conversation are not clearly distinguishable, creates a space for dialogue to bring about turning points. Transitioning from the dual nature of dialectic communication—diachronic and

synchronic—Baxter and Braithwaite outline the ways in which “the interpenetration of competing discourses constitutes social reality” (p. 355).

Social reality is fluid, ever-evolving, sculpting, and constitutive. The joint communicative activities that shape relationships are responsible for shaping everything from the ways in which language is employed in differing circumstances to the identities that we form in response to the process of “othering”—this process being one in which one’s formation of identity is directly related to what one conceives of as Other. This process of embodiment and interpenetration happens on the level of conceptualizing morality as well. We, at any given time (always-already), have a formed concept of what it means to be bad or immoral. Our response is to speak and act in ways that do not resemble the Other, in fact, in direct opposition. In an ongoing and diachronic way, we experience “fluid and dynamic relations between different perspectives,” (Baxter & Braithwaite, p. 356) which constitute our social, moral reality. In summarizing the constitutive nature of the interpenetration of differing discourses, Baxter and Braithwaite write:

The constitutive proposition in [relational dialectics theory] (RDT) moves us away from questions about individual subjectivity and the strategic deployment of communication to accomplish desired goals. Instead, it moves us to a focus on discourse and the joint activities of parties. (p. 357)

In relation to conceptualizing the character of emerging adults’ moral turning points, this would imply that moral understanding is realized in the embodiment of the shared activity of daily communication and dialogue. This means that

“rather than presupposing the [social] world exists ‘out there’ prior to communication... RDT joins other social constructionist theories in positioning communication as the constitutive mechanism through which we make the social world meaningful” (p. 356). One of the concepts used to define a meaningful world is what comes to be considered a moral social world. In order to clarify, one could pose the following questions: What is the best way to talk to others? What ought the content of our dialogue to be? These questions constitute what a communicator might mean when they say “a meaningful social world” in terms of morality.

Relational Dialectics Theory helps us to ask the question: What are the competing moral discourses that interpenetrate and constitute dialogue between emerging adults? Asking this important question implies a focus on the function of opposing discourses or moral messages on dialogue and action. It also hints at an interest in the ensuing outcome or character of “hybrid,” or “aesthetic” embodiment of certain moral positions. Through the lens of this scholarly work, it may be found that moral turning points consist of a sharp contrast in moral reasoning, communication thus functioning in a synchronic manner which brings one discourse to the forefront of everyday action above and beyond an existing moral conception. Or, it may be discovered that the character of moral turning is diachronic, the shift expressing a melding of diverging moral discourses (existing and newly adopted). Based on these theoretical analyses, this present study anticipates a dialogical character of moral turning whereby moral beliefs or ideas will be negotiated through the active engagement in dialogue with others.

Furthermore, it is expected that this dialogue will be indicative of emerging adults' attempt to understand morality in deeper, more intricate ways. That they may come to perceive the influence of competing discourses as well as how others create frameworks that take these discourses into account. The following conversation regarding the work of Martin Buber will shed light on how this awareness of the Other comes about.

Toward an I-Thou, Other-centered dialogical orientation. Neher and Sandin (2007) outline a communication ethic that highlights the work of Martin Buber. In their work, Neher and Sandin direct attention to an I-Thou orientation to the social world instead of an I-It orientation. The concept of one's orientation to others in the social world is one of great importance in a dialogical understanding of communication phenomena. Etymologically, "orientation" brings out an appreciation for the bearing or position one has when relating with others. One's bearing is affected by a number of different variables, all of which describe an attitude or disposition of either openness to the possibilities of social interaction or a deceptively confident sense of fore-guidance in conversational interaction. In the latter, which Buber describes as an I-It orientation, communicators treat dialogue as a tool instead of a "deeper, more intimate, way in which subject converses with subject" (Neher & Sandin, 2007, p. 91). Greater intimacy is a central quality of communication because it emphasizes the closeness one can have with another through communication. This closeness only comes when communicators are invested in dialogue in such a way as to construct an authentic image of the other person (through shared knowledge that is built and reinforced

in relationship or conversation) “rather than as an objectified person for whom we notice the features, peculiarities, or small details” (p. 91). Sharing and learning from others, through dialogue, constitutes a unique quality of social life.

Accordingly, the intersection of learning and education that is influenced by dialogue with the Other is pivotal in gaining wisdom in moral judgment. In fact, Neher and Sandin have “posited that ethics begins first and foremost in person-to-person contact” (p. 94). It is in the meeting, or dialogue, between persons that ethics or morality becomes salient precisely because morality seeks to answer the question of how persons ought to live together. As a result, morality becomes something that is negotiated in a way as to happen in and by the experience of communication and shared action, not objectively or apart from shared experience. However, often persons think of morality as an abstract or strictly theoretical topic that is not applicable in any particularly practical instance. Neher and Sandin (2007) express a similar inference from students’ perspectives in their communication ethics courses:

As we teach the course every semester, *tweaking* the material based on what we ourselves are learning, we realize that ethics for many of our students is strictly theoretical, almost without shape or form in their understanding. We believe that dialogical ethics gives our students (and ourselves) a clearer, more understandable platform on which we can judge ethical behavior. (p. 95)

Scholars theorizing the dialogical character of everyday communicative negotiation inform the current work in very important ways. Their theorizing

supports the understanding that the behavior of interpretation and the role of communication, relationships, and ideas are integral in the conceptual negotiation of morality (right or wrong, good or bad actions and/or beliefs). Baxter and Braithwaite (2008) urge researchers to:

Engage the issue of how meanings are constituted from the interpenetration of opposing discourses. In so doing, RDT research will be more responsive to the criticism of, “so what?” It means little for researchers to simply list discursive tensions unless they also take the next step of rendering intelligible how the struggle of competing discourses constitutes meaning. (p. 359)

This study aims to do just that. By creating a rich description of the ways in which communication functions to manage opposing conceptions of “the good,” more understanding can be gathered about the tensions that face communicators in the constitution of what it means to be a moral person— as it relates to actions as well as beliefs. By analyzing the character of moral turning points through a dialogical lens—akin to that of Bakhtin, Baxter, and others—this study aims to elucidate the multifarious ways by which dialogue affects change in persons’ ideas about morality, as well as the affective change in one’s actions. Baxter and Braithwaite (2008) posit a few methods by which future research may be communicated: “Shifting from isolated utterances, or even single conversations, to the more complete utterance ‘chain’ will involve taking into analytic account three different kinds of data” (2008, p. 360). Their suggestions about data come in the following forms and may provide an organizing scheme for the thematic content that will be

collected in qualitative interviews about persons' emerging adulthood experience, as it relates to moral turning points.

1. Discursive history of past utterances in the relationship.
2. The broader cultural discourse that relationship parties jointly draw on as resources in making intelligible utterances in the present.
3. The anticipated responses from others (including relationship parties themselves) in the future. (p. 360)

The anticipated responses can be conceptualized as the new relationship of ideas resulting from the dialogical, moral turning. This could be a hybrid of old and new beliefs that express themselves in a corroborative manner or a distinctly different moral disposition. Regardless of the specifics of the change, the dialogical affect of moral turning during emerging adulthood is expected to reinforce and reproduce a quality of communication that is extended into the future. This interpretation will only have validity if the case can be made that emerging adulthood is a truly significant time of moral development and that a dialogical approach to understanding turning points accurately captures the character of communication about morality during this period. The following section will address current research in turning point theory and hypothesize the manner in which this topic will be expressed in the specific context of this study.

Communication and Turning Points

Turning point theory provides a way of understanding transitions in persons' communicative experience. Given as an alternative to theorizing from a stage perspective, turning points are seen as extraordinary periods of development

or reconceptualization related to how a person's understanding of the world, and relationships therein, shift. A turning point refers to "a transformative event that alters a relationship in some important way, either positively or negatively" (Baxter, Braithwaite & Nicholson, 1999, p. 294). This particular theoretical lens emphasizes the developmental changes through which relationships "traverse in light of factors such as normative ideological shifts, introspection, dyadic examination, and circumstantial change" (Surra & Huston, 1987). The communicative content with which researchers working in the turning point paradigm are interested can be seen in the following questions from a study on blended families by Baxter et al. (1999):

What are the primary types of events that are perceived as turning points in the first 48 months of blended family development? What are the primary trajectories of development for blended families? Does the current level of reported family bonding correlate with the trajectory of blended family development? (p.295)

These questions aim at discovering how turning points theory serves as a foundation for understanding the unique characteristics of communication during periods of transformation or change. Furthermore, the distinct nature of turning points has implications for the types of communication behaviors or responses that would be expected to be present. In order to understand how communication during periods of transition is different from other types of communication, it is necessary to create a taxonomy of the ways in which communication functions to assist transition or change. For example, the function of communication in turning

points has been categorized by Baxter and Pittman (2001) as, first “intrapersonal or normative in nature; that is, events in which the individuals cognitively evaluate the relationship according to normative expectations of relating” (p. 4). They give the example of one turning point in which “one person concludes privately that she has met the ‘perfect mate’” (p. 5). However, this is not always the case. Sometimes persons experience turning in the form of dyadic events, in which the focus is on the interaction between communicators. This is exemplified in experiences where couples make a prominent decision together (i.e. to break up, get engaged, etc.). The third category of turning point events, which Baxter and Pittman put forward, “consists of those situated in interactions with social network members; for example, the presence of former romantic partners, competing demands for time from friends, meeting the partner’s family for the first time, or experiencing objection to the relationship from family or friends” (p. 5). The fourth category describes a situation in which the factors influencing a change in character extend to a broader network. However, turning point events have not solely resulted from the direct influence of relational partners or broader social networks. It has also been discovered that circumstances beyond persons’ control play a role in turning points: for example, “physical separations related to work or school in different geographic locations” (Baxter & Pittman, 2001, p.5).

These four categories are important points of reference in conceptualizing how communication facilitates turning. They indicate that the anatomy of turning points is complex and can be described in a number ways. Likewise, turning points can be composed of a “mix of events, experiences, sudden illuminations,

and gradual realizations” (King et al, 2003, p. 192). Consequently, some turning points are related to major life events while others result from common developmental transitions. Regardless of their outworking, turning points indicate an important communicative theme. Namely, understanding communication involves perceiving an intricate system of influence in which persons are always in a position of responding to fellow members of society. In fact, one’s position in life is defined as such precisely due to one’s relation with others. Experience works in a synonymous fashion. Our experiences are a dynamic web of layered interpretations; moments that blur in a canvas of saturated meaning. This saturation of meaning lends itself to research that is focused on expressing the complexity of life’s interrelatedness. It should be noted that this conception of the experience of turning closely resembles the ideas put forward in Baxter and Braithwaite’s relational dialectics theory. As was stated earlier, persons bring together competing discourses to form a worldview with aspects recognized in many diverging discourses. As a result, dialogical hybrids can be thought of as conceptual compromises on the part of communicators. Though “the discourses are distinct, yet they combine to form a new meaning” (Baxter & Braithwaite, p. 354). It is clear how these two bodies of literature intersect naturally, the constitutive qualities relating in terms of the divergence of ideas affecting change in behavior. Thus, any study of turning points cannot be “complete” without taking into account the effect of dialogue on the way persons respond to their social world and the diverging discourses therein.

As a result, this study focuses on turning points because they are a unique

blend of gradual reflection and growth, while retaining moments of sudden realization or distinct interstice. Recent theorists have alluded to the elusive nature of turning points and maintained, “qualitative research is especially suited for an in-depth exploration of complex issues that are not well understood, which is the case for turning points” (Rutter, 1985; Zimmerman & Arunkumar, 1994). Getting a glimpse into the nature of turning points means capturing something unique about the nature of time, making it hard to define. Time takes on qualities that deceive and mislead. For example, it may surprise some participants that their moral turning happened over such a long period of time while some may feel that the “measured” time of a turning point event does not do justice to importance of the turning on their starkly different conception of morality as an adult. Due to time’s peculiar nature, one is often at a loss to describe the culminating factors that serve as pivotal influences in his/her life (Bruner, 1994; Singer & Powers, 1993). Consequently, this study takes a narrative approach to interviewing participants. As will be discussed in more detail later, it is hoped that by allowing participants to retrospectively reflect on the pivotal years between 18 and 25, more insight will be gained about how transition during this life stage occurs.

Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood (18 to 25 years old) is distinct from adolescence and young adulthood (Arnett, 2000). The existence of emerging adulthood as a unique category is due to a cultural situation in which individuals experience a “prolonged period of independent role exploration during the late teens and twenties” (p. 469). As a result, young people experience development in a

different way than early social scientists have explicated. For many, it is a time of frequent change as various possibilities in love, work, and worldviews are explored (Erikson, 1968; Rindfuss, 1991). Of particular importance to communication scholars is the increasing longevity of this time in life where transitions multiply and exploration of possible future direction deepens. Due to changes in societal expectations surrounding an age appropriate for marriage and career solidification, the nature of development has been dramatically altered:

Emerging adulthood is distinguished by relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations. Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews.

(Arnett, 2000, p. 469)

Emerging adults go through fundamental changes as a result of this limbo. In a state where norms and responsibilities are in suspension, persons have the opportunity to experience the development of individual morality in an interesting way. This limbo gives rise to an environment that is more conducive to turning because lasting commitments to particular ways of embodying morality are not in place. For example, since emerging adulthood extends the period of time in which a person can date, it also affords emerging adults more time to shape their views about the nature of marriage. The difference in emerging adults' experience of communication about morality might be analogous to buying a pair of shoes online as opposed to buying a pair of shoes in a department store. With an online

experience, much like young adulthood before the current cultural milieu, one “knows” his size and stylistic bent and orders accordingly. In a department store, on the other hand, one comes with a similar normative “knowledge” but also relies on the experience of trying the shoe on. In various ways communication can be understood as the phenomena through which morality is “tried on.”

Interestingly, turning points seem to come about when the contradictory experiences or forces of social relation intersect in the development of a young person. Emerging adulthood literature highlights the particular tension between themes of change or instability while simultaneously trying to “move into the adult world and build a stable life structure” (Arnett, 2000, p. 470). One reason that research points to emerging adulthood as an especially interesting site for deeper understanding is the high level of differentiation and unpredictability in terms of demographics. Contrarily, “about 75% of 30-year-olds have married, about 75% have become parents, and fewer than 10% are enrolled in school” (p. 471). In other words, researchers and statisticians have found it difficult to predict demographic connectors, such as marital status or career status, on age alone in persons between the age of 18 and 25 because these persons do not seem to have few particular qualities or behaviors in common.

By way of this insight, emerging adults seem to escape quantification; evidence that rich qualitative explication is needed. This study is aimed at adding to existing literature by potentially finding a shared quality of experience in moral turning. However, any claims of similarity will be qualified because of the difficulty in generalizing from such a small sample, garnered through purposive

sampling. Prior ways of defining what it means to be an adult are no longer salient to the current generation of emerging adults and it is left for future research to try and give a rich description of what persons in this life stage share. Arnett (2000) begins this work by concluding, “on the top of the list of criteria for emerging adults’ conception of actual adulthood are things that reflect autonomy in decision making and other aspects of life” (p. 472). This may be due to the fact that in emerging adulthood there is more experimentation that happens with various roles because the enduring quality of adult roles is not present. This would mean that emerging adults share the experience of experimentation in processes that lead to building greater levels of autonomy and decision making skill.

On this point, most of the research on changes in worldview during emerging adulthood involving college students and graduate students has shown evidence that higher education (a factor that plays an important role in emerging adulthood) promotes exploration and reconsideration of world views (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). However, it is notable that emerging adults who do not attend college are as likely as college students to indicate that deciding on their own beliefs and values is an essential criterion for attaining adult status (Arnett, 1997). Also, research on emerging adults’ religious beliefs suggests that regardless of educational background, they consider it important during emerging adulthood to reexamine the beliefs they have learned in their families and to form a set of beliefs that is *the product of their own independent reflections* (Arnett, Ramos & Jensen, 2001; Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1993).

As this study aims to show, however, the seemingly independent reflections in emerging adulthood are not independent. Rather, communication in various contexts allows emerging adults to explore different worldviews. Arnett, Ramos, Jensen (2001) describe one way of understanding how emerging adults engage in this kind of negotiation in their study on ideological views in emerging adulthood. In this study they sampled 140 emerging adults to participate in interviews and used Shweder's ethics of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity (as cited in Jensen, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997) to examine ideological thinking from ages 20 to 29. In this study, autonomy situated the individual as a primary moral authority as opposed to defining morality in terms of the commitments and obligation one has to a group (i.e. Community). The third, divinity, was distinguished from autonomy and community by defining the "individual as a spiritual entity, subject to the prescriptions of a spiritual or natural order" (Arnett et al., 2001, p. 70). Their coding process was as follows:

Responses to the two questions were coded separately. Each response was coded for the use of Autonomy, Community, and Divinity. If any part of the response indicated use of a particular ethic, the ethic was coded as used by that participant for that question. The coding of responses was not mutually exclusive; it was possible for a response to be coded for Autonomy as well as for Community, or Community and Divinity, and so on. (p. 72)

The two questions that were asked of participants were aimed at understanding what participants felt was important to pass on to the next generation and what participants would think about their lives once they were older, looking back. Quantitatively, the results showed a mixture of ethics at work in the participants' responses. However, the frequency of autonomy and community far outweighed references to the divinity ethic. An example of this finding was illustrated when Arnett et al. (2001) reported the following passage from a 27-year-old participant: "I think I would pass on other values and beliefs other than religious beliefs... I would pass on values of self-esteem rather than religious values" (p. 77). As will be outlined in the method section of this study, this passage closely resembles the kind of qualitative data that will be used to report dialogic functions in moral turning points. Emerging adulthood is still a relatively new conceptualization of lifespan development, however it is quickly garnering much evidence as to the validity of its claims. It provides an opportunity to theorize the influence of cultural or economic change on a particular age group. For these reasons, this age range has become the focus for the current exploration on moral turning points.

Rationale for Research Questions

Studying communication with a dialogic focus has been the approach of many researchers. Dialogue is experienced early on in life and continues to grow in complexity as persons grow older. By observing dialogue, theorists have pointed out the multi-layered nature of meaning making in conversation (Delia, 1977; Martsin, 2010). This is one way in which persons understand what it means for them to participate in families, be a good friend, participate in a religious

community (or not), participate in the political process of society, etc. Owing to dialogue's influential role in the formation of such ideas, it is essential to understand the manner in which persons engage in dialogue. The following research questions communicate this study's goal of exploring and understanding dialogue's role in the context of emerging adults' moral turning points.

R.Q. 1. Does dialogue play an important role in shaping moral turning points during emerging adulthood?

R.Q. 2. In what ways does dialogue influence the character of moral turning points during emerging adulthood?

Chapter Four: Method

Participants

Demographics. The population in focus was 25 to 30 year-olds who had experienced a turning point(s) in their understanding of morality. A total of 10 interviews were completed over a period of a month, from August to September. Four of the participants were female (n=4) and six were male (n=6). Although this study included a low number of participants, the variation in participants' experience, beliefs, and cultural background was significant. Three participants were married and seven were unmarried. One participant had not completed any college-level course work. Two were in the midst of undergraduate coursework and seven participants were currently in graduate school. Nationalities represented in the sample include: Germany, the United Arab Emirates, Mexico, Romania and the United States. Three of the participants reported having been brought up without any religious affiliation while one reported having been raised Mormon and six reported having been raised with Christian. In their adult lives (i.e. after 25), three reported no religious affiliation (no belief in God or inclusion in a faith community of any kind); three reported belief in God without any particular institutional or doctrinal affiliation; four reported belief in God with a particular religious affiliation (e.g. Reformed Presbyterianism, Mormonism, Catholicism).

Sampling. The first five participants were invited to participate in the study because the researcher had prior knowledge indicating that they fit the scope of inquiry. It is widely noted by scholars in the social sciences that this kind of convenience or purposive sampling is not particularly reliable and makes it

extremely difficult (if not impossible) to generalize findings. However, it is important that:

Although the convenience sample can be perceived as a study limitation, it can still turn up rich data. Paradoxically, the same close relationship between researcher and research site that makes a sample convenient often grants the researcher a level of access to and familiarity with the sample that guarantees a richness of data that could not be attained if the sample were less familiar, and therefore less convenient, to the researcher.

(Koerber & McMichael, 2008, p. 463)

In other words, knowledge of the first five participants' experience of morality allowed the researcher to make a judgment about the relevance of their journey. This knowledge was important because this study brings together diverse bodies of inquiry—moral negotiation and turning points in the context of emerging adulthood—narrowing the field of eligible participants. An attempt was made to diversify the sample by asking initial participants to invite members of their social network to participate. Trying to account for the narrow criteria field, two participants were informed about the study through snowball sampling. Primary participants were “able to provide information needed to locate other members of that population” (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 135). The final three participants were contacted through networking with a student at an international business school. A sifting survey was created on SurveyMonkey.com that asked questions ensuring criteria for the study was met. Questions included: Are you between the age of 25 and 30? Have you experienced a turning point(s) in the way you

understood morality between the age of 18 and 25? Would you be willing to participate in one, hour-long interview? There were 22 responses to the survey but only three met all of the criteria for the study. All participants were given \$10 Starbucks gift cards for their participation in the interview.

Rationale for sampling methods. As noted by Baxter and Babbie (2004), some “research is often characterized by an emergent sampling strategy in which multiple sampling techniques are used over the course of data gathering” (p. 314). Again, the specificity of subject matter and the limited time frame allotted for data collection in this study made it necessary to rely on this mixture of convenience, judgmental, or snowball sampling. It may be the case that an overwhelming number of persons discuss issues of right or wrong actions or beliefs. However, it was necessary for this study to rely on the non-probabilistic sampling methods because “the enumeration of them all would be nearly impossible” (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 135).

Procedures

Setting. Each participant was involved in one interview that lasted 60 minutes to 90 minutes. Most interviews (n=7) were conducted on campus in study rooms at a local state university campus. Two interviews were conducted in participants’ homes and one interview was conducted in a study room on campus at the international business school.

Preparing for interviews. Participants were given an information letter that defined “morality” and “turning points” two weeks prior to the interview date. In this letter, participants were given several questions that prompted them

to think about specific conversations or turning point events. The following prompts were compiled and included in an email to each participant preceding interviews:

- Think about how you define morality and some key moral issues that you are passionate about or that have been important in your life. (e.g. for some, abortion or same-sex marriage are important issues while others may be concerned about religious affiliation or participation, etc.).
- Has dialogue or conversation played a role in the forming of your beliefs regarding these moral issues? Think about specific instances... (e.g. This one time at the gym, my roommate and I talked about same-sex marriage... She/He said this... I responded like that, etc...)
- What was the tone of conversations? What was said? How it was said? How did you respond? These are the kinds of details that will be important to recount in the interview.
- What conversations have had the greatest impact on you in changing the way you make choices or understand morality?

These questions were formulated in response to the design considerations discussed in the King et al (2003) study. They found it important, in order to elicit as much contextual description as possible, to provide participants with a cover letter which explained some possible ambiguities in the study content:

In the letter, we defined turning points as events, experiences, or realizations that could be positive or negative in nature and cumulative or

sudden in occurrence. We asked participants to prepare for the interviews by thinking about how their turning points came about, what made those events or experiences important in their lives, and what helped or hindered their adaptation to the turning points. (p. 189)

Interview process. Interviews began with the obtaining of verbal consent from participants. Participants were then asked to describe the communication of moral issues during childhood— recalling specific conversations, giving details about setting of conversations, messages that were communicated in conversations, and the ways in which these messages were communicated. These questions were mostly open-ended questions. Thus, the interview can be characterized as semi-structured, allowing participants to have ample opportunity for a detailed reflection of moral development in childhood and emerging adulthood. Examples of preliminary questions include: When you were a child, did your family discuss moral issues? How did your parents talk to you about issues of right and wrong? What issues were considered “moral” to your family? What did those conversations look like? What did you take away from “X” conversation (about a given moral issue) growing up? In discussing each turning point or important transitional conversations, secondary questions were asked in order to clarify or obtain more detailed information such as: What exactly did “X” person say? What did you say in response? Where did that conversation take place? How, exactly, was that message communicated? Participants were also asked to describe what effect, if any, these conversations or messages had on their beliefs or behavior. Obtaining a detailed description was important in this study

because, as current literature on turning points supports, “past events may become perceived as transformative turning points only through the retrospective hindsight that comes when the parties communicate subsequently about those events” (Baxter & Pittman, 2001, p. 6). This effect is also true of narrative-telling in general, functioning to bind together disparate events into a more understandable, interpretable whole (Goldberg, 1982). Also, “turning point interviews afford participants the opportunity to consider and interpret the moments at which their relationships were significantly altered (either positively or negatively), and to describe the context of these transformations. Analyses reveal patterns in relationship trajectories which are useful in understanding relational change” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Conversational approach. Collecting and analyzing personal narratives through qualitative interviews, while focusing on case-specific examples of turning points, fit the exploratory or dialogical nature of this study most aptly. Understanding that personal narrative interviews are somewhat of a co-creation (interviewer— interviewee), interview questions were open-ended so as to allow interviews to be “more linguistically sophisticated and ethically engaged” (Anneke A.J. van Enk, 2009, p. 1269) and were informed by several studies’ methodologies. For example, from the turning point literature, King et al. (2003) asked open-ended questions and follow-up prompts of their participants. They describe some key questions asked: “Have there been key turning points (events, experiences, or realizations) in your life? What were they? And: When and how did they occur?” (p. 189).

Researchers have found this kind of narrative expression of life experience, especially in ascertaining greater understanding of turning points, to be advantageous in many ways. An important concept in narrative expression, internal continuity, is “associated with psychological identity that is developed through the process of connecting past and present life events, and by which the present is reinforced by change and ongoing interaction with others” (Coupland & Nussbaum, 1993, p. 176). This type of reflection is important to work that seeks to understand communicative qualities surrounding turning points because it asks participants to reflect upon the details of past conversations that have influenced their beliefs and actions. Consequently, narrative expression gives participants the opportunity to reflect upon *change* (in this case, moral or ethical) in the course of their experience. Furthermore, going through the thoughtful labor of narrating one’s past experience and reflecting upon the role communication and, specifically, dialogue had in shaping one’s concept of moral or ethical behavior will influence future experience that will call forth similar processes of growth and change. As a result, it is claimed that participation in narrative expression may provide a better foundation for future ethical communication considerations (Coupland & Nussbaum, 1993, p. 177).

Obtaining dialogue details. One issue that arose, due to the loose structure of interviews, was the tendency for participants to describe general impressions of experience, internal feelings or thoughts without thoroughly describing details of experiences (i.e. what was said, where it was said, who said it). In order to address this concern, a method of questioning was adopted similar

to that used in Docan-Morgan and Manusov's (2009) study on turning point events in college teacher and student relationships. In their study, Docan-Morgan and Manusov interviewed students regarding turning points and their outcomes in student-teacher relationships. They utilized the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) in order to understand students' perceptions of change as a result of specific turning points. By using this method of questioning, Docan-Morgan and Manusov avoided common problems in qualitative interviewing, namely, "by focusing on a specific event, the contextual and case-specific nature of the phenomena under investigation [was] captured" (2009, p. 161). These kinds of case-specific questions led participants to describe, in detail, what verbal messages were present in turning points. In addition, participants were asked to describe why and how these messages elicited change in their understanding of morality.

Method for Analyzing Data

Function of dialogue as the unit of measure. The interest of this study lay in the function of dialogue in moral negotiation; what communication about moral issues practically looked like in participants' conversations (as self-reported by participants). Retrospective self-reports have been valued as a productive and reliable means of obtaining information about behaviors that, for the most part, are not accessible through direct observation (i.e. instances of dialogue that inform moral turning) (Metts, Sprecher, & Cupach, 1991). Therefore, the content of moral issues was not the focus of analysis, but the themes are noteworthy. The moral issues that arose in interviews included subjects such as belief in God,

stealing, premarital sex, the nature or definition of marriage, same sex relationships, work ethic, etc. The focus of data collection was on describing how messages were constructed and communicated: the intended goal of dialogue as well as the ways in which the messages inspired a change in understanding on the part of participants during emerging adulthood. Much of the existing literature on turning points explores and describes the types of turning point events (i.e. King et al., 2003). Others, like in the Baxter, Braithwaite, and Nicholson (1999) study on turning points in blended families, analyze this phenomenon in terms of the amplitude and sequencing of turning points. For example, Baxter et al. (1999) posed several research questions that expected the following trajectory: “Some blended families may be reported to accelerate quickly toward family bonding, whereas others may report progressing more slowly and gradually” (Baxter et al., 1999, p. 296). They found that, in fact, the acceleration of blended family bonding correlated positively with the acceleration of blended family development. The focus of their findings was on the way in which different turning point events correlate with family bonding trajectories. In analyzing their data, Baxter et al. drew upon quantitative methods. This allowed them to analyze the frequency of turning point events and compare the percentage of turning points perceived as bringing positive change versus those that were perceived to bring negative change.

In contrast, the present study employed a textual or content analysis approach, which involved transcribing statements that influenced or prompted moral turning points. The unit of measure in each case was the function of various

moral messages. In this study, “function” was conceptualized as that which emerging adults and/or their relational counterparts accomplished, or tried to accomplish, through different styles of message delivery in moral turning point conversations. In each case, themes were introduced in terms of how they answered the following questions: How is this emerging adult participating in or “using” dialogue in this turning point event? How is the conversational partner influencing this participant’s moral turning by their style of message delivery in dialogue? In explicating the various functions of dialogue in the discussion of results it will be clearer how these components of dialogue functions to shape participants’ beliefs and actions during emerging adulthood. In the process of analyzing, the messages would be judged as either similar (incorporated in the same category) or dissimilar in which case a new theme of dialogic function was created. These themes were revisited several times to delineate and refine them (Crabtree & Miller, 1991; Fiese & Bickman, 1998). Other scholars have conducted qualitative studies which aim to discern abstract functions of communication. For example, in Kelley’s (1998) inductive study of forgive processes, three judges employed the following method in ascertaining themes: “(1) recurrence in semantic meaning wherein different language expresses the same concept, (2) repetition of words, phrases or concepts, and (3) intensity, which typically is indicated by paralanguage or gesturing” (Owen, 1984, as cited in Kelley, 1998).

Grounded theory. This refining resulted in a taxonomy that explains and describes the types of dialogue that played a role in turning points. This kind of

constant-comparative analysis work comes from a grounded theory approach in analyzing participants' dialogue. Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss (1990) note, when taking a grounded theory approach, "since phenomena are not conceived of as static but as continually changing in response to evolving conditions, an important component of the method is to build change, through process, into the method" (p. 5). In their work, Corbin and Strauss describe several features of grounded theory. In terms of canons and procedures, they give a more formal, systematic method by which to conduct a qualitative analysis.

The first procedure explains that analysis begins as soon as the first bit of data is collected. For example, the analysis of data in this study was commenced as soon as the first interview was completed. This is important because the insights from the preliminary analysis are used to "direct the next interview and observations" (p. 6). In other words, the themes that came out of the transcription of the first interview informed a new kind of vocabulary for the ensuing examples. For example, upon analyzing the first interview, it was observed that some dialogue was filled with messages that challenged existing moral frameworks. Therefore, when similar examples of dialogue arose in the second interview, the interviewee was asked: "Do you think that conversation served to challenge your prior beliefs? Explain." The resulting explanation served to reinforce and clarify the characteristics of different dialogic themes. In this way, "each concept earns its way into the theory by *repeatedly* being present in interviews, documents, and observations in some form or another—or by being significantly absent" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 7).

The second procedure describes the process by which concepts become “more numerous and more abstract” (p. 7). As this happens, a concept like “challenging” dialogue is enumerated in such a way that it is more clearly differentiated from other dialogic functions such as “inviting” dialogue or “exemplifying” dialogue. Through this process of abstraction, concepts serve as units of analysis for communication phenomena (e.g. the function of dialogue in moral turning points).

The next procedural step is to develop categories integrating the various conceptual themes. This higher level integration is accomplished by revisiting concepts and deciphering whether they can be put into more abstract categories or not. “All of [these] observations would be qualified by noting the conditions under which the phenomena occur, the action/interactional form they take, the consequence that result, and so forth” (p. 9). For example, this means analytic work has to be done to explicate the ways in which disturbing, educative, and maintaining forms of dialogue work together in moral turning points.

Grounded theorists go further in this work, continuing to make greater conceptual comparisons, noticing and accounting for patterns in phenomena, and creating hypotheses that verify the link between categories. Moreover, grounded theory hypotheses are “constantly revised during the research until they hold true for all of the evidence concerning the phenomena under study” (p. 11). This study does not delve into the later procedural stages which result in a hypothesis about the interrelated conditions that create the conditions for the possibility of a given phenomena. However, it does closely follow the rigorous constant-comparative

method involved in explicating various functions of dialogue and grouping these into broader, more abstract theoretical categories. In the analysis, the reliability with which these categories (disturbing, educative, and maintaining) are put forward and the manner in which they influence the character and content of turning will be clarified.

Identifying themes. Drawing on these methodological principles for data analysis, the following paragraphs describe the process by which themes were constructed in the present study. The first interview was transcribed and 10 functions of dialogue emerged. These initial themes included: challenging, deflecting, intensifying or agitating, inviting, warning, inquiring, explaining, redefining relationships, and defending or legitimizing. After transcribing the first interview and constructing a list of provisional concepts, the second, third and fourth interviews were transcribed. During each transcription, concepts and their defining qualities (i.e. defending or legitimizing— dialogue that gave a justification for holding to an existing or new moral position) were on hand. Each time conversations about moral issues were described, provisional concepts were revisited to discern whether or not they sufficiently described the dialogue phenomena in each subsequent interview. Many of these provisional concepts were solidified in their validity due to the overwhelming presence of instances that were explained by them. For example, there were more than 20 experiences of dialogue communicated by participants that included the “challenging” function of dialogue regarding morality. However, some concepts were added to the existing list after finding that it was not sufficient in exhaustively illustrating

the occurrence of different forms of dialogue in moral turning points. A case in point is the addition of “affirming” dialogue and “co-reflective or processing” dialogue. These both indicated a type of dialogue that played a role in facilitating or maintaining relationships during turning points but added more specificity to the already-existing functions such as: redefining, reinforcing, or defending or legitimizing. In other words, these two added functions informed the creation of a more abstract category, “maintaining” communication, because they gave a clearer picture of how all of these functions of dialogue were serving moral turning.

The process of thematizing was continued by reducing and integrating dialogic functions similar to Luttenberg and Bergen’s process of integrating domains of teachers’ reflections on teaching practice (2008, p. 549). In transcribing and reflecting on interviews “the categories [began] to emerge from this analysis, and names for these categories [began] to emerge” (Fraas & Calvert, 2009, p. 318). This being the case, dialogic themes were grouped in the following taxonomy: disturbing, educative, and maintaining. The subcategory of “inquiring” dialogue was originally apart of the “educative” category. However, after the enumeration of many examples of dialogue that “inquired,” it was decided that it more accurately embodied the “maintaining” function of dialogue. Also, the subcategories of “exemplifying” and “deflecting” dialogue were removed because they proved to be too ambiguous to support any concrete dialogic feature of the three main categories that was not already sufficiently captured by other subcategories. The categories of “educative,” “disturbing,” and “maintaining”

dialogue, with their various subcategories more firmly in place, seemed to sufficiently describe the phenomenological character of dialogue in the remaining interviews (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 319).

Solidifying themes. Through the process of listening to interviews already conducted and conducting new interviews, attention was given to probing, in order to see if there were any major dialogic functions not captured by these categories. For example, in the last five interviews that were conducted, toward the end of the interview participants were often asked: “It seems like you have described your conversations as *challenging* your existing moral framework or *explaining* another concept of moral action... Are there any other characteristics of communication in these conversations that you haven’t described?” It was found that these categories sufficiently described the types of messages present in conversations surrounding moral turning. Another method by which these results were corroborated was by member checking. This method served to give participants the opportunity to fill in interpretational gaps that may exist in the analysis by, “[presenting] them with several sample units of data and [asking] them to perform a categorization, determining the extent to which it matches your own category” (Baxter & Babbie, 2004, p. 369). Therefore, each participant was given the opportunity to review several messages (which they reported in the interview) and give feedback as to the accuracy of categorization. This indicated that the categories given accurately portrayed the dialogic functions in the self-reports of turning point events.

Chapter Five: Analysis

As discussed above, moral reasoning is a process that happens through communication, made possible by the conceptual structure of language through the relation of ideas. There are various ways in which morality as a concept, and the enacting of various concepts, is taught and put into practice in daily life. The emphasis of much current research expresses the implicit, deeply rooted nature of moral understanding and communication. This may be true in many cases; however, the results of this study indicate that engaging in dialogue is a catalyst for a more explicit form of moral reasoning. Based on interview data, several key functions of dialogue emerged (see table 2). In the following section, each dialogic function will be briefly introduced and passages from the interviews will be explicated to support the categorization of functions. In this manner, the reader will be able to gain a rich understanding of the multi-faceted ways in which the dialogic character of communication functions to influence change in beliefs or enactments of morality. However, at present this analysis will aim to outline the many thematic functions that came into focus during the interview process.

Interview data were categorized in the following emergent themes: educative, disturbing, and maintaining. Included in dialogue's "educating" function was communication that: inquired, invited, warned, informed, instructed, or directed. Conversely, the "disturbing" function of dialogue displayed factors that persuaded, challenged, or defended or legitimized. These two dialogic functions seemed to be the catalysts for moral turning. In fact, they actually appeared to operate as measures of impending moral turning. While some

conversations disturbed previous moral conceptions or educated persons about a new way to understand morality, the “maintaining” function of dialogue affirmed, redefined relationships, inquired about, deflected, or reinforced moral attitudes or beliefs that affected the daily requirements for relationship maintenance. The “maintaining” function of dialogue created the conceptual space in relationships that enabled persons to reflect upon or react to external influences.

Although these categories presented distinct communicative features, some more apparent than others at times, all of these were connected in producing transformation in the participants’ moral perspective. For instance participant B, when asked how he would comport himself with his younger “self” regarding the topic of morality, said: “Well, I’d be careful what I said to me. Because... I wouldn’t wanna just pull the culture rug from under my feet, I don’t believe in that.” In his own dialogical approach, he would temper disturbing, unsettling communication with communication that would maintain a slow shift and provide an educative platform from which to approach morality. In a similar vein, the following analysis highlights and explicates various dialogic scenarios, bringing out the way in which communication functions in the moral turning of each individual. Each function of dialogue is identified and defined. Prominent examples explain how dialogue assisted the process of moral turning.

Table 2

Functions of Dialogue

Function	Definition	Examples
Educative (Bring Out/Forth)	Dialogue that led out, or brought forth a new way of understanding, not conceived before.	- Explaining/ Informing - Inviting - Warning - Instructing/Directing
Disturbing (Unsettling)	Dialogue that threw into disorder. A process of turmoil or confusion; lacking clarity.	- Challenging - Persuading - Intensifying/ Agitating - Exposing
Maintaining (Hold Together)	Dialogue that holds together, keeping or supporting something through repeated action. (Ideological or relational)	- Inquiring - Defending/ Legitimizing - Co-reflecting/ Processing - Redefining relationships - Reinforcing/ Affirming

Dialogue as Educator

One of the three categories that emerged from analysis of interviews was dialogue that functioned to educate participants about different moral beliefs. This theme came to light through messages that had these qualities: participants were “led out” of existing modes of thinking in some manner or some new moral concept was “brought forth,” creating a new understanding. In other words, dialogue that was coded as “educative” prompted a way of understanding morality that was not conceived before. A prominent catalyst in these emerging adults’ moral turning points, “educative” dialogue functioned in many ways: to explain or inform persons of a given moral conception, invite persons to take part in an embodiment of a given moral framework, warn persons of the consequences of believing or acting according to a particular moral understanding, and also to instruct or direct someone to act according to a specific conceptualization of morality. There were no strong associations between dialogic function and trajectory of moral turning (i.e. if a participant was challenged in conversation, it did not necessarily prompt a one hundred eighty degree behavioral transformation). For example, if participants experienced “instructing” communication in dialogue, they did not necessarily carry out those understandings in behavior following turning points. However, it is clear that turning point events were full of dialogue that functioned to educate participants about conceptions of morality to which they had not been exposed in childhood or adolescence. In this section, examples of “explaining,” “inviting,” “warning,” and “instructing” dialogue will be explicated as well as their perceived effect on

emerging adults' moral turning points.

Explaining or informing. Conversational messages carry meaning or information about one's world that persons want to be able to convey to a relational partner. There are many different methods by which meaning can be communicated in dialogue from communicating a specific mood through a choice in tone to defining terms in the conversation at hand. However differentiated the manner in which meaning is translated from one person to another, it is translated by way of information that is given. Participants repeatedly gave examples where conversations served to explain something about a different moral position that the participant had not been familiar with or that served as an opportunity for participants to explain their new moral position to existing network members. For example, participant D went through several months, following her engagement to her romantic partner, explaining to family members that they were not going to have a traditional Christian marriage, in the sense that they wanted to make the commitment of marriage without making it legal in the traditional sense. In the following instance, she related the experience of telling a friend about her situation:

We talked to one friend who I was a little afraid of telling him because his dad's a pastor at a church and he's going to take over [for him], and he's in my opinion like, you know, traditional Christian... So I was: "I wonder how he's going to interpret this." So, once we explained it, he said: "You know what I think... that's really great!"

In this example, participant D clarified her moral perspective to a close friend. This was an important aspect of her turning because the reactions of persons with whom she was close became evident instead of remaining a mystery. In terms of its explanatory nature, dialogue also offered participants the opportunity to learn more about the moral positions of others. In the following scenario, which took place at the latter stages of participant D's adolescence, she described the impact of a mentor's explanation of what it means to love another person:

My definition of morality as “loving others and yourself” happened through a lot of conversations with my partner. And, a lot of it came with understanding my Young Life leader in high school... she said: “You know, love’s not a feeling. It’s a choice even when you don’t feel it, you choose to love another person.” I remember it being just like... My mind was blown... that love wasn’t everything I had seen in the movies and it was choosing to love other people even when it was hard. It wasn’t even like a persuasion. It was more like: “I’ve never even looked at it that way.” And the more I experienced the more I thought, “That’s what love is... it’s choosing to love someone even when you don’t feel like it.”

Conversations like these set participant D on a trajectory that inspired deeper thought regarding the nature of love. She emphasized that these kinds of explanations opened her up to see morality in ways that she did not expect. For the most part, examples given by various participants of explanatory dialogue revealed that dialogue functioning in this way served to deepen or broaden their perspective on a given moral topic. However, explaining did not always have this

positive effect in moral turning points. Participant E gave the example of explanatory dialogue functioning to excuse his immoral behavior at the beginning of his emerging adult experience. He said:

When I was asked how I made those decisions, I would say: “Well, if it fits with my present desires [e.g. drinking, hanging out late, sleeping with girls] and it’s not blatantly contradictory to what I believe then...” That’s how I managed myself, that’s kind of how I dealt with [morality].

In this case, participant E described his attitude whenever confronted with thinking about his behavior. Instead of dialogue primarily functioning to elucidate and deepen moral understanding, it served to obscure morality and alleviate his moral responsibility. Later in the interview, participant E told the interviewer about a particular turning point experience that caused him to think differently about the explanatory function of dialogue. In this example, he described his reaction to a philosophy class that caused him to stop and think more deeply:

I thought the class was crazy because [the professor] would ask direct questions like: “What do you think about the afterlife? What do you think the meaning of life is?” I was never accustomed to sharing about those things, so I had a negative reaction to it.

Eventually, however, participant E was impacted by this professor’s commitment to drawing out explanations for holding moral positions. Though it did not come naturally, participant E’s turning point experiences were characterized by a growth in his ability to explain his reasons for understanding morality in the way he did.

In these examples, dialogue functioned to explain a moral position or a moral position was embodied in an explanation. These explanations served to influence participants' moral turning in both positive and negative ways. Some, like participant D, appreciated explanations of others' moral understanding because it supported her growth and change. These conversations were significant tuning points for her because they allowed her to expand her moral perspective. On the contrary, for persons like participant E, explanatory dialogue was sometimes negative because it caused discomfort (causing participant E to give explanations that he did not want to give).

Inviting. Sometimes an invitation can be relatively subtle, but persons experience invitations regularly in conversation. Dialogue that functions to “invite” requested or elicited particular moral or immoral behaviors. This subcategory is conceptualized as a form of “educative” dialogue because it serves to introduce a moral position, even if implicitly. There were several prominent examples of dialogue that invited participants to think or act in a way that had moral implications or content. In the following example, participant B described repeated instances in which dialogue functioned to invite youth group members to accept Jesus as their savior and repent:

There was also the culture of youth groups and so you're hearing messages all the time in youth groups. And camps... that was a huge thing. There is a progression [in the messages], and what's harped upon is the suffering of Christ and the evilness of sin, and then the message of redemption. So, first you are convinced that you're fallen, that all your life

you are lost, a prisoner to sin, a slave to sin. That opens the door for the message of redemption where you're invited to accept Jesus as your savior. But, if you're not "lost," if you're not miserable, if you're not a horrible sinner, it's less inviting to be set free... I heard that message multiple times a week for my whole life.

These opportunities, created by invitational rhetoric, were interesting expressions of moral negotiation. The invitation was educative in the sense that it was accompanied by messages that communicated explicitly moral content. However, the invitational component of "camp dialogue" was subtler. This kind of invitation had an adverse effect on participant B because he thought it was a manipulative way to introduce morality. These experiences were catalysts for his moral turning because they pushed him further away from ideologies that expressed themselves in a like manner.

Dialogue functioning to invite was not always received negatively. For participant H, it was "inviting" dialogue that was the focus of one memorable turning point event. During her first years in college, she was exposed to religion in a way that she hadn't been in Germany, where she grew up. She learned a lot about Christianity through the lives of persons with whom she lived, in Georgia. However, she told the interviewer that she never was able to formulate a thoughtful opinion about belief in God because she didn't "know a lot." That changed when she was invited to read a book by her college professor:

I ended up talking to him in his office and I saw this book on the shelf. I was like: "Ah, that's the book that you wrote!" And he was like: "Ya! Do

you want to read it?” And I was like: “Sure, I’m going to Germany next week... I’m going to read it on the plane.

This invitational rhetoric allowed participant H to discover more about a unique moral position without directly engaging in dialogue about the moral position in person.

Another case that communicates this particular function of dialogue was seen in an experience recounted by participant C. When he went to college, he had his first experience drinking alcohol. He was raised in a Christian family and drinking alcohol was prohibited. However, when he got to college he had a roommate who drank. In the interview, participant C was asked if he had any conversations with his roommate about whether or not he thought drinking was wrong. He said that no such conversations took place; he was merely invited to take part. This was described as a memorable turning point for participant C and he relayed the important thusly:

I wasn’t told... there wasn’t a construct where that was bad, because no one was there to... I mean, I guess there were the RAs who told us not to drink in the room, but we didn’t. We drank other places.

These instances exemplify dialogue that functions to invite emerging adults to experience morality from a different perspective without being forced or explicitly persuaded. In this way, invitational rhetoric for participants in this study was educative because, through dialogue, they were brought into an expression of morality that differed from their previous conceptions.

Warning. In some cases, conversations are an opportunity for one person

to warn another to not perform or take part in a behavior that is perceived to be immoral. According to the data, it was apparent that warning someone did not always have the desired effect but, nevertheless, it was often an impetus for moral turning point events. For example, Participant B recalled from an early age, examples of his mother warning him about being transparent, loving, and close as a family. Moreover, he recounted a specific domain that continually came up in dialogue with his mom when he was still very young. He remembered:

[My mother] would never lie to me and she would expect me to never to lie to her... She would constantly say it. You know, for instance she told me about Santa Claus. She said she didn't want me to ever hear a lie from her and she didn't want me to ever lie to her.

These conversations in which he was warned about the consequences of lying stayed with him throughout his emerging adult experience. Further in his reflections on this matter, participant B clarifies his interpretation of such events:

From as young as I can remember the rhetoric was surrounding love and closeness and openness and um, and it's very, um... and again, not in a negative sense, but very clinging and controlling.

In both of these utterances, participant B is giving examples of dialogue used as a type of warning. Warnings in the conversations recalled by participants functioned to explicitly communicate expectations of given moral positions. The mother of participant B used early conversations to warn him about the negativity of lying by reinforcing the gravity of doing so. He reiterated, moral messages were always framed as a warning or communication that was expressed "because

[his mother] loved him and [wanted him] to be righteous and live a good life.”

Ironically, for most of the participants who experienced dialogue in which others warned them of a particular embodiment of morality, it had the effect of driving them closer to the acts about which they were being warned. For example, in her early twenties participant F stopped attending her parents’ church. She had already experienced several moral turning points that led her away from Christianity as a significant moral compass for her life. Though she had stopped regularly attending worship services, she still went on some occasions. On these occasions, she engaged in conversations that consisted of others warning her of the danger inherent in her not going to church. She said in the interview: “Some of the older people that I respected would come and ask me, like: ‘Are you not afraid for your salvation?’ It just... It pushed me so far from them.” In this instance the intended, explicit function of dialogue was to warn. Instead of “correcting” perceived immoral behavior, these communications caused participants to react in opposition.

For participant G, “warning” dialogue had a similar effect at first, but influenced his eventual turning in a positive way. He explained that, in the conversations he had with his parents during many turning point events in emerging adulthood (these conversations were fewer for this participant than others), warning him about immoral behavior spurred him on like participants B and F. He gave the following conversation with his dad as an example:

There were lots of times that they talked to me about drinking. They talked to me about smoking and stuff. Um, Dad would have said: “I’ve seen the

results of this kind of living. It's not good, smoking will kill you, you know, I've seen alcoholics from church..." Told me that's not where I want to be.

Though he did not heed his father's warning at the time, he eventually came to see the wisdom in his father's insight. This example of "warning" dialogue is especially interesting in participant G's journey of moral turning because he described his turning as a reorientation in the way he saw his relationship with God. His parents had raised him according to their conception of Christian morality but, from that conception of morality, he rebelled. He characterized his moral turning "point" as a slow process of coming to see Christianity in his own, new way. Dialogue that functioned to warn these emerging adults was categorized as "educative" dialogue because it was representative of communication that aimed to shed light on the consequences of perceived immoral behavior.

Instructing or directing. Especially found in the early experiences of many participants, dialogue was used in an instructive or directive manner. Conversations that exemplified these qualities included messages that were informational, yet with the express purpose of directing the hearer to adopt a certain line of action in accordance with the communicated moral belief. Participant B discerned this kind of directive communication in conversations early in his life and he even followed the same pattern of dialogue when speaking with his siblings. He explained:

One of my siblings, I was really close to and I would just... sort of... I don't know, I would admonish him, try to tell him how to be... why, you

know, why what he was doing was wrong and what the right path would be and that sort of thing. So, I was extension of that, um, the machinery... the disciplinary machinery.

In this passage, participant B was using dialogue as a means of transmitting a particular moral position by making use of a directive form of communication in which information was coupled with an implicit desire to see his brother follow suite. Another example of “instructing” dialogue in early childhood was seen in participant I’s experience. He communicated this dialogic function in the following memory:

We were at a department store and I picked up a candy... I ripped open the bar and started eating. She [my mom] was like: “You cannot do that!” And I was like: “Why?” “Well, it’s not right because we have to pay for it first... Then, it becomes yours and you can eat it.”

Interestingly, in many of participant I’s emerging adult turning points dialogue functioned very differently. During childhood, moral discussion came in the form of instruction or direction. In emerging adulthood, when he came across persons who did not behave in a way that followed the principles to which he was committed, he adapted his definition of morality to include those behaviors instead of directing them to act differently. In other words, he *experienced* dialogue that functioned to instruct (when he was a child) but never enacted this form of moral rhetoric. On the other hand, participant F did enact the instructive or directive form of dialogue when engaging her nieces and nephews in conversations about morality:

[My nieces and nephews] will ask me, like what do I think about this and that. I was excited and I could tell them and they were open. And they're not scared to really disagree with me cause I'm not gonna... I'm not gonna yell at them or anything like that. So I actually kind of have fun when they disagree with me cause I can kinda deconstruct what they think and show them... and not that I'm... I always tell them that I could be wrong. But I tell them: "This is why I think that." And the main thing that I tell em to always, whatever they believe, that they have to actually think about it and not just believe it.

This example of participant F instructing her nieces and nephews to always think about why they believe what they believe was directly related to her process of moral turning during that time. She found that she could use dialogue to instruct her nieces and nephews in order to help them avoid what she understood to be the negative elements of the moral framework in which she was raised. In all of the cases, regardless of the influence of dialogue on participants' trajectories in moral turning, messages in dialogue functioned to instruct or direct behavior in the hope of aligned behavior with a particular understanding of morality.

Dialogue as Disturber

The second category that emerged was dialogue as "disturber." The theme of disturbance, as included in Table 2, connotes something that is thrown into disorder, a process of turmoil, lack of clarity, or confusion. In this way dialogue pointedly incited participants to re-examine their existing moral framework. Dialogue functioned to disturb moral understanding and, therefore, induce moral

turning in several ways, including: directly challenging an existing way of thinking about morality, persuading persons to consider an alternative moral conception, intensifying or agitating existing negative feelings about a particular moral ideology, or exposing a perceived flaw in a moral position. Although it functioned to bring about change differently than the “educative” function, the “disturbing” function of dialogue was also a significant catalyst for moral turning point events. In this section, examples of “challenging,” “persuading,” “intensifying or agitating,” and “exposing” dialogue will be explicated as well as their perceived affect on emerging adults’ moral turning points.

Challenging. Sometimes the mood accompanying the process of moral turning points is marked by conflict, disillusionment, or disagreement with one’s existing conception of morality. Several examples from the data highlight the experience of challenging or confronting existing ways of understanding morality. For person A this meant asking, why? “Why do I have to believe in God in order to be a moral person?” Although, in this example, person A directly challenged his parents, friends, and teachers in conversation on a regular basis, confrontation or challenging was not always so explicit. Case and point, Person E regarded with some amount of detached calm, his process of moral turning in its early stages:

I just stopped drinking because I got bored of it and it was meaningless. Growing up, my parents didn’t have an opinion about how I spent my time. For them, it was always about happiness. As long as I was happy... I started to question this, because I was told “that, in order for something to be moral, it needed an end or a purpose.”

In this way Person E shows how his parents' conception of life is left wanting. There are many ways that participants described challenging or confronting existing beliefs but the central theme of "disturbing" dialogue, regardless of how content of moral beliefs changed, was to delve deeper and find some sort of foundation on which to build a moral system. For example, participant B had several encounters in the early years of emerging adulthood with girls who claimed that God wanted them to be with him romantically. In the following passage, participant B talked about how he confronted this idea as a part of his moral turning that consisted of turning away from defining morality in Christian terms:

And I remember saying, you know: "That's just what you want. You're rationalizing what you want and, um, putting God in the picture, but you know how I know that that's not what God told you? Because there's no way in hell that I would ever date you."

Accordingly, participant B took advantage of the opportunity afforded by this conversation to explicitly challenge a conceptual pillar of the Christianity from which he was turning. In a similar manner, participant C experienced several impacting turning point events in his emerging adult experience that assisted or informed his transition from an "institutionalized view of morality to a de-institutionalized view of morality." This turning was instigated by his relationship with a pastor that was fired from the church he attended. Participant C described how his pastor or mentor was different in his conception of morality than his parents or the church in which he grew up:

I think what was even more eye opening... was the fact that he indicated that that the institution was never a part of his moral code. That, this moral code first and then he chose to be a part of this institution second. And, frankly that was a new idea for me. You know... I was raised in a place where the institution was primary and what you learned was secondary. So, I've kind of taken that to heart and that's why I see that the institution [of religion] is not really necessary.

In this example, the challenge came in a subtler way. Participant C described this particular experience as a pivotal turning point because it turned his existing "order" of morality around. In this new conception, he decided that it was morality that informed the action of the church and not the other way around. This challenge was the beginning of participant C's turning. This eventually brought him to drastically downplay the role of any institution in the genesis or enforcement of a specific or rigid set of rules by which to live. This example also neatly characterized the central quality of "challenging" dialogue. Dialogue in these emerging adults' moral turning often served to contest the validity, complexity, authenticity, or agreeability of their existing moral frameworks. However, this was not always a clean transition. Often, the system of morality with which others challenged the participants' moral positions were, themselves, challenged by participants. More distinctly than the educative function of dialogue, this "challenging" kind of disturbing rhetoric was the momentum for change in these emerging adults' lives.

Persuading. Another form of "disturbing" dialogue, persuasion was a

prominent them in reorienting the way these emerging adults understood morality. Persuasion is under the category as dialogue that disturbed because it had a similar unsettling effect; persons were explicitly called to stop and examine what they believed about morality. However, persuasive rhetoric was different in its tone than challenging rhetoric. According to the data, persuasion was more of a sustained effort to convince another, as opposed to the more aggressive or abrupt nature of a challenge. In the following example, participant F described the tactics by which her mom tried to get her to follow the rules of the house and the rules of Christianity. She had stayed out with some of her college friends late one night and when she came home her mom tried to persuade her to stop doing those “immoral” things:

My mom would wait in my room, crying. When I would get home, she would yell at me. She would hit me. Sometimes, cry... sometimes beg me to come to church. She kind of used different approaches but all of them were really irrational, you know, always just yelling, crying, screaming... whatever it was, you know?

Although it may not be conceived as “good” dialogue, it was a way in which participant F’s mother tried to communicate a moral position through conversation. In the next example, participant G described the kind of dialogue that he would have with friends while he was in his rebellious young emerging years. He still had a group of Christian friends, but started to build more friendships that were centered on “seeking pleasure.” When asked about the types of conversations he had with his friends at that time in his life, he described

conversations that were void of much depth (self reported); conversations that were spent persuading his existing friends to just have fun:

Um, well... He, he was kinda like... We kinda talked him into to doing what we wanted to do. So, like: “Hey! Come on, let’s go drink or something.” And there were times like, uh... We’d do stuff like that or we’d do stuff we weren’t supposed to do and we could kinda get him to do that. All our parents found out at different times and his parents didn’t like us because of that.

In this example, the intended function of dialogue was to persuade his friends to not challenge his enactment of a new moral understanding. In other words, at this point in his life he was tired of “trying to live up to the high moral standards of Christianity” and he, instead thought it right to seek pleasure and have fun.

Dialogue did not function to challenge his beliefs. It instead functioned to persuade others to join him in his turning and not examine the decisions being made. This case of dialogue functioning to persuade others in participant G’s network was an unusual example of the presence of persuasive rhetoric. Usually, the persuasive rhetoric functioned to motivate change in the participants themselves. For example, in the following instance, participant I described a time when he and a friend were riding motorcycles in India. When they stopped to get gas at a station, the attendant came out to fill the tank and when he went back inside to get the ticket with the amount to be paid the friend sped off. Participant I described why this was an influential turning point for him:

When we drove away I yelled at him, like: “What the hell? We can’t do

this!” And he was like: “What’s wrong? Haven’t you done this before?”

And that was like the instigating aspect for me... I was like: “You guys have done this before?” And he said, “Ya! It’s fine. It happens all the time.” So, I again... I felt like I was not part of a set of people who found this to be cool. Similarly, with the girl he was like: “Come on, we’ve always done this. It happens all the time.” I was like, “Well, I’ve never done this.” And he said, “There’s a first time for everything.”

In this experience, his friend used this dialogic opportunity to persuade him that, sometimes, stealing was okay. In fact (he continued), it happened all the time and he tried to reassure participant I that this understanding of morality was enacted all of the time. Along this vein, persuasive rhetoric was a mixture of invitation and challenge. It was educative in a sense, but directly and verbally invited persons to understand morality in a different manner. Thematically, persuasive rhetoric was distinguishable because it was characterized by the effort on the part of others to try and get these emerging adults to understand morality differently by giving reasons; not merely an invitation to enact morality in a particular way and also not directly challenging their existing moral perception. In most cases, it was successful and brought about change in the way that these emerging adults conceptualized morality. This seemed to be because most of the participants did not feel like they were given reasons in childhood for the adopting of their “familial” morality. So, for these emerging adults, the very act of giving reasons to support a moral argument was unique and transformational. This function of dialogue, as seen in previous functions, also did not have the power to predict the

content of moral turning. It merely ignited the desire for change from existing understandings or perceptions (“norms”) of morality.

Intensifying or agitating. Unlike dialogue that operated to challenge or persuade, rhetoric that intensified or agitated participants caused them some amount of confusion regarding moral understanding without the same intentionality that came with these other functions of dialogue. Motivations or intentions were expressly present in the challenging and persuading rhetoric of communicators. The following example uncovers a situation in which the communicator was not necessarily trying to disturb participant A’s moral position but, nevertheless, dialogue with this person agitated participant A’s understanding of morality. He remembered:

My stepdad influenced how I thought about morality in the sense that I liked to argue with him. He was very traditional, he agreed... He never made any absolute claims about anything... He just said: “You don’t do that... you just shouldn’t do that.” That’s as far as he would go... That perpetuated my frustration with tradition and seeking out morality because that didn’t seem sufficient.

Often, like in this example, the intensifying or agitating nature of turning point conversations was not an intended outcome of dialogue on the part of the communicator. Participant A’s stepdad did not likely expressly try to agitate him by embodying in dialogue what participant A had grown to dislike so much. However, by engaging in such dialogue, his reasons for wanting to change his concept of morality were intensified.

The example above of participant F's mom crying and yelling at her is a case where 1) dialogue is understood as having many functions working together simultaneously, and 2) dialogue is creating a situation in which the experience of turning is intensified. In this example, we can see how her mom's communication style in this dialogue caused an increased adverse reaction to her parents' morality during emerging adulthood. In the subsequent example, participant F described a situation in which dialogue that functioned to intensify her frustrations with Christians. In this situation, her plans to go to California with friends were foiled by their dad at the last moment. Regarding her frustration, she said:

I found out from the dad, he said... He got on the phone and told me that he had never really planned on letting us go anyway, in his mind, and yet he told us that... and I was like "Why did you lead us on?" And he was like, "Well, I never really intended for you guys to go... I just didn't want to let you down."

His explanation was frustrating to her, because she perceived this to be another example of the lack of integrity or morality in the Christian community in which she grew up. In this dialogue, the dad's explanation did not have explicit moral content but was an embodiment of the morality from which participant F was turning away during emerging adulthood that agitated her and moved her further away from identifying with Christian morality. All of these examples reveal how dialogue can function to intensify an existing experience of moral turning. This kind of intensification was a salient theme for many participants because it perpetuated their feelings of being unsettled or in a state of confusion regarding

what they thought about morality during emerging adulthood.

Exposing. In several cases, that data revealed experiences of dialogue that functioned to expose an opinion, concern, or value related to an existing or new moral understanding. For example, when participant F was 21, she was at a family party when the issue of drinking alcohol came up. She took the opportunity to expose her feelings or moral position at the party:

I was at my parents' house and somebody said: "Where's the booze?" My nephew said it. He's really young and he said it as a joke. And then his mom kind of like, smacked his mouth. And then I was like, "Well, what *would* be so bad about celebrating with alcohol?" And she was like, "Are you crazy?" And then I said what I thought and she said to not say that stuff around her kids.

In this instance, dialogue functioned to expose a moral understanding that was not previously held by others in the conversation: this was met by admonishment by her aunt. This dialogic occurrence was categorized as different from "explaining" because of the way in which the explanation uncovered what lay hidden and the disturbance it caused. In a similar manner, though the tone was not as challenging or negative, participant H engaged in dialogue with a group of Americans at the beginning of her emerging adult experience. This took place at a sports camp in Germany and functioned to expose participant H to Christianity (a conception of morality with which she was not familiar):

There was a group from America who, they were in Germany and they were musicians. And, they were just interested in sports so they came to

that event as well. But, they *were* Americans. And, you know, they started to talk about why they were in Germany, they were on a mission...and they played music for God so that was the first time that I had met a group of people that all believed. And, so I started, like I'm very open minded, it's not like I had shut this out but before I was just never around [Christian] people so it just never came up.

In this experience, participant H was exposed to belief in God in a way that she had never been before. Dialogue functioning in this way was an important aspect of participants' turning points because it uncovered an aspect of morality that was previously covered over. Participant H, during her childhood, had had extensive training from her parents and in school to "[do] the right thing in [her] daily decisions," to not "harm people with them... don't cheat, don't steal, don't lie." However she had not been exposed to people who define moral actions as a part of their religious participation. Because she had not grown up around religion, the experience of talking to someone from another country and uncovering moral understanding from a religious framework was a pivotal event for her.

Dialogue as Maintainer

This third emergent theme carries the notion of holding something together, a kind of keeping or supporting something through a habitual practicing. Upon analysis, this theme pertained to relationship maintaining as well as ideological maintaining in that participants used dialogue to facilitate or manage their relationships as their moral understanding changed, or visa versa. This was significant in emerging adults' experience of moral turning: while the "educating"

and “disturbing” functions of dialogue acted as the catalyst for change or turning, “maintaining” dialogue functioned as a practical means by which participants continually reassessed, redefined, and held together a meaningful interpretation of their experience. This category of dialogic function most closely resembled communication as negotiation. In other words, it was through the process of negotiation taking place in “maintaining” dialogue that participants were able to manage the opposing discourses or tensions in different conceptions of morality. Salient themes of “maintaining” dialogue that emerged from the data were messages in conversation that: inquired about the unique aspects of a different moral framework, provided a defense for or legitimized a particular line of moral thinking, gave participants the opportunity to reflect on moral change with relational counterparts, affirmed the process of growth or change in participants’ emerging adult experience, defined morality a new way or redefined one’s existing conception of morality, or reinforced particular messages or implications of a new or existing moral understanding.

Inquiring. For many of the participants, early emerging adult conversations that served to challenge their existing understanding or educate them about other moral conceptions caused them to raise questions in an attempt to bring the new conception of morality *to* their existing understanding. Inquiry, in dialogue, was marked by an attitude of seeking knowledge through asking questions of persons who were perceived to have a level of wisdom beyond that of the inquirer (e.g. teachers, older siblings, parents, etc.). Consequently, the “inquiring” function of dialogue was categorized as “maintaining” because

questioning functioned to *facilitate* growth in understanding by *bringing together* new and existing conceptions of morality through increased understanding of the ways in which they intersected or differed. Following her exposure to Christianity by the Americans who visited the sports camp in Germany, participant H expresses this function of dialogue, aiming to make sense of the world by inquiring further into the nature of the missionaries' motivations for coming to Germany:

I asked them why they were doing this, like: "Why do you go to Germany on a mission?" Like, it didn't make sense to me. And they just said that they wanted to promote happiness and they find a real peacefulness in music and they played for me too, and it was no hard rock or nothing. I don't remember exact quotes but they used words like "happiness" and "peace"... calming words to go out on the mission. They didn't convert me but it was the first time that I was like, "hmm... that sounds interesting, like something I might want to know more about."

Following her exposure to a Christian conception of morality, participant H seemed to be trying to hold together her worldview in some capacity by asking questions that helped her "make sense." She wanted to clarify what this meant for her life in practical terms. This was common in moral turning points. Participants needed to be able to bring new interpretations of morality "up against" existing ones through questioning and clarifying in order to grow or move forward.

Participant J also experienced this kind of dialogue in her conversation with an Indian woman while in Egypt. This took place at the end of her emerging

adult experience and her formation of a moral framework was stronger at this point. However, she still engaged in dialogue and inquired as to how others made sense of morality. She explained how she asked her acquaintance about the caste system in India because she was trying to make sense of how morality and obeying authority were compatible (or if they were compatible):

I spoke later with an Indian woman, and I asked her... cause you know they have a caste system there, and you know: "How do you... what's your life like? Do you have a husband? Do you only do what he says?" You know? Like: "Can you move across the caste system?" sort of thing... and, I have a lot of Indian friends at school so... we talk about this a lot. And, it has to do with that whole freedom of thought, freedom of movement, freedom of practice, freedom of ability to do whatever you want. So, that was the mentality... which, to me is right. And so then when I see situations where that's not happening, I want to say: "Oh, that's wrong." But, I want to know why it's happening.

For participant J, this inquiring served to solidify her ideas about freedom of religion and thought by conceptually "holding up" these new understandings against her existing framework. She had grown up with a particular worldview and a set of morals that accompanied her religious worldview, but she also thought that it was imperative that people be able to choose for themselves. By asking questions of the Indian woman, participant J was able to see how morality in other parts of the world compared to the morality that had been shaping her throughout emerging adulthood. This last sentence of the passage, "But, I want to

know why it's happening," is a key characteristic in understanding the role of inquiring dialogue during emerging adults' experience of moral turning. It was important for participants to not only change their actions in accordance with their new moral understanding, but also understand why it was "better" for them to act or think differently by constantly readdressing old and new moral positions through inquiry.

Providing a defense or legitimizing. In the communication of morality, often participants were forced to give reasons for why they held a particular moral position or they called others to do more work in explaining their reasons for conceiving of right and wrong in a particular manner. When this happened, dialogue served as a way for persons to provide an apologetic of sorts for why they believed what they believed. Persons were called upon to provide a defense. In many ways, legitimizing rhetoric looked similar to explanatory rhetoric. However, there was one important difference that made examples of legitimizing rhetoric distinctly different: dialogic messages that functioned to legitimize did more than explain a moral position. The explaining was loaded with the desire for conversational partners to recognize participants' understanding as a possible way of applying their existing morality. For participants, legitimizing was distinct from explaining because there was a desire for their moral turning or transition to be acceptable to their relational network. Sometimes, situations seemed to inherently elicit an explanation of the reasons behind actions. Participant B remembered his mother giving the following defense or legitimization for why she implemented corporeal punishment:

I would sometimes receive spankings and my mom would always sit me down... and she would be teary-eyed and upset... and she would say: 'I just want you to know that this is because I really love you so much, and I would never hurt you but I have to do this to make yo--, to train you' - or whatever, but she would give me this long speech every single time.

In this manner, the participant's mother used dialogue as a means of explaining the reasons for her actions, an apology for the moral rightness of the behavior.

Often, in situations where the legitimacy of moral positions is called into question, dialogue is used to defend or legitimize a moral stance. Conversations created a space whereby persons were able to give reasons for why they behaved a particular way. The space created by dialogue, however, did not always have the same structure or setting. In the previous example, a mother defended or gave a legitimizing apology for her style of punishment or instruction. In the following passage, participant F described a defense of a very different kind. Far from a one-to-one interpersonal exchange, she was engaged in providing intellectual support for her religious background in a college classroom:

I took philosophy and it was kind of anti-religious and I was so angry in that class. I had to, kind of, grow out of my shell to think of ways to respond to the professors or the other students in that class. And then later I was on the other side of the spectrum really.

This manner of dialogue showed itself as an experience of defending her childhood morality. Also, this was an example of a turning point in moral thinking that began by inciting the participant to adopt a more complex dialogical

approach to defending her parents' religious framework. This, as the participant communicated, led to a more meticulous building of thinking skills and the ability to construct deeper understanding. Respectively, through this kind of dialogue she managed to form more persuasive arguments that eventually supported her actual turning to a non-religious moral position.

Another example in which legitimizing was seen as distinct from explaining was when participant D and her fiancé tried to legitimize their view of marriage to family members. For her these experiences of moral turning were very difficult because it seemed nearly impossible to hold together their new understanding of marriage and their existing Christian values (at least as they were interpreted by network members):

When we went home to tell our parents, you know I told my mom, "My boyfriend gave me this ring and it means this... and he's committing to me forever--" And she's like: "Well, what does that mean? Are you engaged?!" And I'm like, "Well, not really?... I guess-- No, not really, because he's committing to me now, not promising to commit to me later." And so she couldn't deal with that kind of "wishy-washy" sense of what we were... we knew what we were, but we couldn't express that to other people because we hadn't negotiated what commitment looks like [with them].

The main component of dialogic legitimization about which participants seems to be cognizant was the investment in trying to bring together similar parts of differing moral frameworks to form a basis for moral action in emerging

adulthood. This proved to be exceedingly difficult because the manner in which moral frameworks were often interpreted did not leave room for altered applications; thus the effort in legitimizing.

Co-reflective or processing. Another noteworthy form of “maintaining” dialogue was one that allowed emerging adults to discuss and examine the changes, occurring during this time in life, together with others also going through pivotal turning points. This theme of dialogue was expressed in many of the participants’ self-reported conversations and was distinct from other forms of “maintaining” dialogue because it was a negotiation enacted with others perceived to be going through similar transition. For example, participant F needed to be able to make sense of her experience with her mom. She processed through the situation with one of her friends after some of the difficult conversations that took place between her and her mom. She related one time in particular when she went to a friend’s house after listening to one of her mom’s tirades:

It was to help me process, you know. If I was to come home and my mom was in my room yelling at me, sometimes I would even just leave. I would storm out and I would go to my friend’s house and cry and tell her what happened... and sleep there, you know?

Often, as is expressed in this situation, turning point events were overwhelming for the participants in this study. They needed to have times of relief in which they could “slow down” the process of sense making because they experienced a kind of transitional overload.

This same participant recalled another instance in which she and her

boyfriend took time to process through the change in their relationship. The behaviors that were present in their relationship went against the morality of her youth and her boyfriend, being aware of this difference, asked her how she felt about it: “When we first actually, um... became intimate I was asked: ‘Do you feel guilty?’ And I said ‘No...’ but I actually did. The person that I was intimate with, my boyfriend [asked me].” This is another case in which dialogue functions to maintain or hold together some semblance of moral meaning. The meanings were new to participant F, so their validity was negotiated in dialogue with her boyfriend. Contrarily, sometimes the co-reflective rhetoric arises between persons who are not in the same turning point process; not on the same trajectory of turning. For example, participant H remembered a time when she was at a funeral and the preacher said something that she did not expect, with which she did not agree. As part of her moral turning throughout emerging adulthood, she struggled to try to understand what it meant to believe in God. This process was continued in a conversation with her co-worker after the funeral:

I talked to a co-worker about it and she’s a total atheist, so she was like: “See?! It makes no sense!” You know? I said: “I just can’t believe that he would say that you could be a bad person and still go to heaven.” And, still to this point it doesn’t make sense to me. And she just, like, supported the fact, she was like: “Ya, that’s why I don’t believe, cause it doesn’t make any sense”... So, it was kind of like restating the fact of why she doesn’t believe.

In this way, participant H was able to engage in a conversation with someone who

helped her process through change she was experiencing without having to necessarily be a part of the same turning point. In all of these cases where dialogue functioned to create a space for reflection and the processing of moral information, participants were able to bring together or connect seemingly disparate moralities, helping them to make sense of their own turning points. The central theme of co-reflective rhetoric was the quality of examining the content and implications or applications of a given moral position or framework with another person in conversation.

Redefining relationships as a consequence of new moral

understanding. Redefining different aspects of participants' experience, what held relationships together, what counted as moral behavior, were all important considerations to these emerging adults working through turning point events and the implications of such events on their daily lives. Participant A shared one example of an idea that went through a constant redefining process. For him, defining marriage was a difficult task because he had experienced such inconsistency in this area during childhood. However, he participated in dialogue when he was in the navy that raised the question of how he was going to think about marriage. After being able to talk to his sea mates about marriage and observe their infidelity he came to the following conclusion:

My mom's on her third husband and my dad's on his sixth wife. So, going through that and then tying it in with these guys on the boat not keeping their vows when we tie into port somewhere and they are cheating on their wives... things like that and just witnessing that... my ethical view of

marriage was, it's a joke anyway. It doesn't matter. It doesn't mean anything.

Through conversations of this nature, participant A was able to process what he thought about marriage over a long period of time; at that point constantly adding cynicism to his definition of marriage. Later, through conversations with Christians, he defined marriage in relation to his conception of God and not based on the experience of his sea mates and his parents.

Likewise, for participant J, being in an international business school and meeting people from around the world constantly brought her to a place of redefining what moral actions look like for persons with different belief systems. According to participant J, redefining is inevitable because one element of moral turning points in emerging adulthood is trying to make sense of how relationships shift as a result. She told the interviewer about seeing her friend who, in high school, had “turned from straight to gay”:

Two years later, I saw him... he was working in a paper store or something. I saw him and I was like: “Hey how are you?” And he had said: “Oh, I just got an apartment with my boyfriend...” And all this kind of stuff. So, inadvertently, I learned more information about him but he was happy and open, but not necessarily as open as he had been way back before. And, that was one thing... I felt like I lost a friend at that point.

And, I don't know if it was me or if it was him.

This passage highlights how relationships were redefined as a result of participant J's moral turning. She solidified in her own religious foundation while realizing

how her new understanding changed the manner in which she related with others. Participant J differentiated this awareness with the implicit, immediate tolerance that she embodied when she was younger.

Sometimes, there was a note of humor in the process of redefining morality. Upon running into a high school peer, participant D shared how she had to clarify what she thought was immoral about a particular incident that took place in high school. In this experience, participant D went to her mentor and complained about her peer's underage drinking, as it was affecting their perceived integrity as leaders of a club on campus. This person apparently had the impression that participant D thought drinking was issue. However, participant D had to redefine or clarify what she actually thought was immoral:

I recently saw one of those guys... and he came in when I was eating or drinking, whatever, the Jell-o shot, and he goes: "What? What are you doing?!... You're Young Life girl! Blah, blah, blah..." And I was like: "I am 24 years old. Are you for real, stuck in high school and you think..." And it was just this... "[You] don't get it" type of thing.... it was the hypocrisy that bothered me, not the drinking.

This experience exemplifies the necessity and regularity of defining and redefining in moral turning points. The ways in which these participants made sense of the world were changing in distinct ways that affected their daily behavior. Often, this led to the unmet or shattered expectations of relational counterparts. Thus, participants were called on to communicate the difference in belief or behavior. This can be conceptualized as an ongoing work that is being

done by emerging adults and points to the negotiated nature of morality in relationships.

Reinforcing or affirming. Another function of dialogue was the reinforcement of feelings (negative and positive) that participants experienced when confronted with a new or existing conception of morality. Conversation was experienced as a means by which participants negotiated their way through the process of moral turning. Dialogue functioning to “reinforce” or “affirm” supported the idea that moral turning points are not experienced alone. They are transitions that are experienced with other persons in a community. In some cases, this meant that phrases, reflecting the “newly conceived morality,” were repeated in a manner that continually re-framed and re-interpreted relations of moral ideas. For example, when participant I was trying to work through what it meant to be a moral businessperson at age 21, he remembered his boss reinforcing his thought process. Participant I was in management and, in his employee reviews, he could not help but take into account the personal information he knew when he was assessing co-workers’ performance. In other words, he felt like it was okay to show compassion and not give someone a negative evaluation if he knew they had a family to support or other extenuating circumstances. He recounted his boss’s response:

There was one time that my boss questioned me about this and he said: “It’s perfectly alright for you to do that.” In the beginning when I was guilty, saying I was doing the right thing, my boss reaffirmed, saying, “Ya, it is the right thing.” You know? “You have to look at people. People

are not just statistics on a piece of paper. You have to know them through and through, inside and out.” So, that gave me a confirmation that what I did was right.

This is a prime example of dialogue that functioned to “maintain.” To put it differently, this dialogue helped participant I to be able to “keep together” the connection between what he thought to be moral and what he actually did, which was not ostensibly in accordance with the rules of the professional world. In the following example, the affirmation or reinforcement was similar in character, but came from participant F’s close network of friends:

[Friends] would kind of affirm what I felt. They would say: “Oh my God, your mom’s crazy!” You know, like, they would basically be on my side in a way. They would say, “If she only knew that we’re normal people.” Cause my mom would always say: “Well, whom are you partying with?!... Who are you?!... Who are you drinking with?!”

These friends, in a way, assisted or supported participant F through many key turning points in her emerging adult experience. Dialogic experiences such as these served to facilitate turning in a manageable way and uphold participants in their meaning making endeavors. This was an important communicative moment for each of the participants because of the gravity of changes they were going through in terms of moral understanding. More than the other categories, the “maintaining” function of dialogue points to an orientation, mood, or goal in communication that is sensitive to the communicators. The following passage from the interview with participant C highlights this difference in disposition

(holding together instead of unsettling or inviting newness):

Maybe that's part of, you know... the inherent nature of morals, is... you can feel if you are butting up against someone else's morals, so you steer conversation in a different direction. Maybe because that's a value of mine, the people I talk to about morality... it isn't the first conversation we have. And in fact, there's a lot of rapport that's been built before we broach that discussion. And if anybody knows about my moral code, it's because they've explicitly asked me... I don't necessarily share that.

This reflection came at the very end of the interview and was a prominent theme that arose from the culminating influence of participant C's entire moral turning during the whole of emerging adulthood. In this insight, he communicated the theme that most fully captured the character of dialogue as maintainer: namely, that during the difficult process of moral turning, it is necessary for discussion to be as caring and encouraging as possible. This care was found in the affirmation and reinforcement that came from close network members.

Discussion of Results

This study brings together insight from several bodies of existing research to explore the process of moral turning in a particularly unpredictable period of life. Emerging adulthood is a unique stage of development because emerging adults face ambiguity or uncertainty in the presence of much transition and environmental or social change. The negotiation of morality is a particularly interesting and pertinent topic of study in emerging adulthood because many individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 years old are still open to various

possibilities of moral embodiment. In other words, because moral understanding is still being formed and applied in various contexts during emerging adulthood, persons have the ability to form moral concepts and put them into practice in distinct situations. This study reveals that one of the contexts in which this conceptual formation and growth happens is in dialogue about moral issues with others. By focusing on turning points in morality, this study was able to give an account of how conversations about morality affected change in the moral beliefs and behaviors of 10 emerging adults. Through the self-report of memorable conversations during the years of 18 to 25, participants gave information that helped answer this study's two research questions: Does dialogue play an important role in shaping moral turning points during emerging adulthood? In what ways does dialogue influence the character moral turning points during emerging adulthood?

To summarize, in answer to the first research question, the results indicate that dialogue plays a prominent role in moral turning points. Though most of the participants in the seven years of emerging adulthood were only able to recount a handful of memorable conversations, these conversations lastingly changed their concepts of morality. Every participant reported that these dialogic experiences still influence the manner in which they relate to others in their adult life. And, in answer to the second research question, results indicate that dialogue functions to 1) offer different interpretations of moral belief or action through "educating" dialogue, 2) motivate participants to question existing moral positions through "disturbing" dialogue, and 3) prompt emerging adults to participate in an ongoing

negotiation and application process through “maintaining” dialogue. In the following section, discussion of contributions will address the implications of these findings in relation to the various bodies of literature that informed this study: literature on moral reasoning and communication, literature on dialogical theories of communication, turning points literature, and work explicating emerging adulthood.

Contributions to moral communication literature

Instances of moral dialogue reported in this study can be generally described as experiences in which emerging adults made sense of the world. According to Mariann Martisin (2010), “sense-making is an essential and fundamental quality of human being” (p. 109). When participants engaged in dialogue with parents, teachers, friends, co-workers, siblings, or romantic partners, they were actively engaging in a process of interpreting their experience and thereby, “[rendering] their relation to the world and their experience within and of the world meaningful” (2010, p. 110). This study’s results complemented what others have found to be true about the nature of moral reasoning, namely: moral reasoning is a deliberative action, a co-creation, a shared observing of the world, a negotiation of competing discourses (Arnett, 2009; Birkhead, 1989; Delia, 1977). For all ten participants, conversations had the effect of motivating them to be more mindful and aware of their reasons for behaving or believing a particular way. Several participants reported that this time was important because it provided the opportunity to engage other conceptions of morality firsthand, listen to the ways in which others made sense of the world, and reflect on the

outcomes of these conceptions.

These results indicate that the statement, “moral maturity, defined by the capacity for principled reasoning, is actually embodied by very few people” (Kohlberg, 1963, as cited in Kurtines & Greif, 1974), fails to perceive the impact of dialogue in emerging adults’ capacity to reason morally. Ninety percent of the participants communicated a growth in the capacity to explain reasons for others’ moral understandings, as well as their own, by engaging in conversation. The data point to one explanation for this: the capacity for growth in principled reasoning is intimately connected to an increased opportunity for critical dialogue such as at college. This particular factor was crucial, as seen in the reported difference of dialogue between nine participants who had some level of college education and one participant who did not have any college experience. For that participant (G), there were fewer instances in which dialogue played a positive role. Instead, dialogue about morality was mostly avoided. In fact, participant G related that he knew his friends, for instance, “knew they weren’t going to convince [him] of anything. One friend... [He] remembered him mentioning, you know: “This is wrong.” But, [participant G], [he] didn’t care. His parents often inquired about how he was doing or what he was thinking, but he remembered mostly cutting off conversation: “I talked less about, like, significant things. It was all just surface.” These results reveal that in order for more persons to embody moral maturity in their ability to reason, it would be beneficial for them to have opportunities for moral dialogue that are abstracted from situations in which their behavior is being judged or evaluated.

The Murphy et al. (2009) study, assessing the automaticity of moral processing, raised important questions by having participants read stories that portrayed behavior that was perceived to be moral or immoral. They found that participants had deeply ingrained ideas about “right” and “wrong” and that when characters in the stories acted against readers’ moral framework, readers took longer to process a target statement at the end, which defined that behavior as “good.” The current findings regarding moral turning points suggest a similar experiential quality; participants spent a considerable amount of time between 18 and 25 years old renegotiating what they considered to be moral behavior when they were confronted by other conceptions of morality. For example, participant D communicated that it took her a long time to really understand love in a deeper way when given a definition that had previously eluded her. She had to continually revisit the topic in conversations with her partner, friends, family, and teachers. Engaging in dialogue seemed to give participants the opportunity to test the validity of their automatic moral responses and create a method by which they could construct more complex reasons for holding any given moral position.

Finally it was learned in the review of literature that Hills (2009) believes what separates mere adherence to a particular moral testimony from the ability to make mature moral judgments is the ability to start from “true beliefs” and learn to make “how” judgments that apply in unique circumstances (p. 105). Insights from interviewing these 10 emerging adults corroborate and extend her concerns with moral testimony. Accordingly, this process of gaining more knowledge in support of more accomplished moral judgments as opposed to relying on the

moral testimony of another was exemplified in the experience of most of the participants in this study. For example, participants A, E, F, and J in particular communicated the positive influence of a college class in helping them to either find support for an existing moral understanding or give reasons to show their existing moral framework to be found wanting. Often, the “educative” and “disturbing” functions of dialogue had the effect of motivating participants to find reasonable or propositional supports for their conceptualization of morality.

Contributions to a dialogical theory of communication

On numerous occasions, dialogue served to connect participants with people who thought differently, implicitly or explicitly challenging them to make sense of moral differences. Furthermore, as a result of turning point conversation events, participants were more readily willing to embody important dialogic attitudes of communication in their adult relationships. One example of this was seen in a common shift from an “I-It” orientation to an “I-Thou” orientation among participants (Buber, 1955, as cited in Arnett et al., 2009). This meant that, prior to the experiences of emerging adulthood, many participants never interacted with persons who thought differently about morality. Participant A’s reaction to his philosophy professor is a case in point. He, out of all the participants, seemed to have engaged in the highest volume of conversations expressly about morality prior to and during emerging adulthood. Yet, his focus was largely on arguing or asserting of his existing views. However, when he engaged in dialogue with his professor, he was brought out of that manner of interaction:

This was totally different than anything I'd ever heard. No one had ever given me an objective argument before for things... Everything was kind of foggy. And, so the moment I was given an objective argument, that followed through logically and soundly was when it hit me.

His professor was the first to provide an articulate challenge to participant A's moral position that causing him to turn from conceptualizing morality from an atheistic perspective. At first, his pre-emerging adult fervor persisted, echoing another important dialogic theme in the work of Arnett et al. (2009): Demand for dialogue moves us from dialogue into monologue and concern for our own image of how communication 'should' be." Participant A reported that, by the example of his professor and others, he slowly learned to move away from monologue and be more attuned: to listen to others and construct a more complete understanding of their moral framework before challenging them with his. He came to desire this because he realized that "[people] were not so much interested in the argument as they [were] in knowing... or, having a relationship with me first."

For parents, educators, or any other teachers of morality, this is an important insight. It corroborates ideas put forward by Delia (1977) and other communication scholars about the necessity of understanding good communication begins with the reality that we *share* experience. Discovering what we share, and how, is an important foundation from which to start: "Not for all time, but for a moment, a temporal moment in which difference can meet with the project of learning, temporarily bracketing a triad of domination that seeks to defame, discount, dissect the Other (Arnett & Arneson, 2001, p. 92). Dialogic

theorists' threefold definition of dialogue, including listening, attending, and negotiating new possibilities, aptly marks most of what these emerging adults were striving for or moving toward. The experiences that most impacted participants created the feeling of "rubato" (as explicated in the review of literature). To summarize, moral turning point conversations had the effect of slowing the momentum of moral action informed by participants' existing frameworks. This afforded participants "space" to reinterpret, reconceptualize, or imagine new possibilities for relating with others, informed by a "larger" perspective to which they had been introduced.

In addition to validating much of the insight regarding the nature and importance of dialogue, this study's findings support Baxter and Braithwaite's (2008) notion of communication as a dialectic process in which our understandings are informed by an admixture of competing discourses. Furthermore, participants' reports of turning point conversations suggest that this negotiation is, indeed, diachronic in nature (i.e. meaning making is fluid and dynamic as opposed to mechanistic or merely strategic) (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008, p. 356). This character of communication and understanding was evident in participants' reports, moving "us away from questions about... the strategic deployment of communication to accomplish desired goals. Instead, it moves us to a focus on discourse and the joint activities of parties" (p. 357). To be sure, turning point conversations were perceived as distinct, definitive shifts in moral understanding; however, the exact character or implications of shifts in participants' lives continued to be readjusted through the "maintaining" function

of dialogue. For example, participant J communicated: “So, yes. It was more of a veering, but I would look at it as... it was a significant change in my life and that’s why I considered it a moral turning point.” What she termed “veering” was an attempt to explain the effect of experiencing highly influential conversations and constantly bringing lessons from such dialogue “alongside” her as she experienced college, relationships, or traveling during emerging adulthood. The explication of this function of dialogue adds to existing dialectic literature by giving a description of one possible way in which persons strive to manage the tensions of competing discourses.

Contributions to turning points literature

Participants often described turning points as beginning with a challenge, warning, or an invitation. This “disturbance” caused participants to go through a period of inquiring, co-reflecting or processing, and redefining their concept of morality to take into account the change in circumstance, which brought about the questioning. However, dialogue did not always function to directly challenge participants’ existing moral framework. In some instances, outlined above, participants were merely exposed to or educated about a new framework through the sharing of another. Learning about the other’s moral position or framework allowed participants to take a new point of view into consideration. Different from “disturbing” and “educative” dialogue, “maintaining” dialogue created a space for participants to understand connections between new moral conceptions and their own moral framework. Thus, moral turning was marked by an increased awareness of how beliefs informed participants’ actions and a more explicit form

of moral reasoning took shape. As the following passage highlights, the process of moral turning for these emerging adults was unique because it forced them to *reinterpret* their experience from alternative points of view:

I hit that rock bottom, you know. I was like: “My mom taught me this. I don’t think it’s true... My dad taught me that. I don’t think it’s true... My teacher taught me that. I don’t think it’s true...” You know? “My... my priest or the church I went to... I, I don’t think it’s true.

In this passage, participant I explained to the interviewer that he had to go through many turning points that consisted of examining different conceptions of morality. It was only through this process of “trying on” these frameworks in his emerging adult experience that he was able to come to a place where he felt like he knew of what *his* moral framework consisted.

Interestingly, there were many instances of “cross-over” in the functions of dialogue. Dialogue worked in such a complex way that at no point was it solely “educative,” solely “disturbing,” or solely “maintaining”. Instead, these functions informed each other and gave rise to different existential outcomes. For example, for some participants, the way in which dialogue functioned to challenge existing beliefs was met with negative emotions or reactions. On the other hand, for some these challenges were welcomed as invitations to see the world anew. In this way, the “disturbing” and “educative” functions of dialogue, in particular, overlapped.

Surra & Huston (1987), in their research, defined turning points as developmental changes through which relationships “traverse in light of factors such as normative ideological shifts, introspection, dyadic examination, and

circumstantial change” (p. 90). Dialogic themes of turning substantiate this definition with examples from interview data to illustrate each. Without question, most participants experienced moral turning points by dyadic examination. Participant A engaged in this with girls that he dated, with fellow soldiers in the Navy, and with his professor. Participant B engaged in dyadic examination with his siblings, girlfriends, parents, and friends. Participant D engaged in this practice with her Young Life mentor, her friends, professors, and her romantic partner. These few examples reflect the overwhelming presence of opportunities to engage others in conversations that collaboratively interpret their relationship or experience.

Baxter and Pittman’s (2001) functions of communication in turning points are applicable in participants’ reported experience of turning as well. For them, turning points found their genesis in an intrapersonal manner first, then in dyads, followed by processing in a social network, and finally sometimes in a broader network. In particular, participants B and E seemed to follow this trajectory. Both were involved in conversations that affected their moral framework, though not as directly as other participants. Participants B and F described conversations with others as secondary to a more introspective process of interpretation and reinterpretation of their emerging experience. In fact, the most influential component for each of these gentlemen was engaging in dialogue through reading influential philosophers or intellectuals. However, it was not always the case that communication functioned to motivate change primarily in an intrapersonal or cognitive way. The example Baxter and Pittman (2001) give to elucidate

intrapersonal turning is a person individually coming to the decision that she has found the “perfect mate.” As a result of dialogic function being the focus of analysis, these kinds of turning points were often communicated as an outworking, or co-creation of conversational experiences. Thus, the intrapersonal component was either not present or covered over by the communication of other influential processes. The third category, interaction in a social network, was the most salient circumstance in which turning points in moral understanding became apparent to participants. This was primarily due to the fact that the moral issues were social in nature (e.g. church participation, defining and participating in marriage, how to spend time with friends).

Most fundamentally, this study was organized as an exploration. As a result, specific trajectories of turning and characteristics that have garnered attention in previous research on turning points (e.g. amplitude or frequency of events) were not explicated. However, turning did take on different characteristics for each participant for several perceived reasons. To be specific, turning points were “sharper” for some participants and, for others; turning was more gradual (i.e. a process that happened over the entire course of emerging adulthood). For example, participant B reported that his turn away from Christianity was as a result of a long process of contemplation and increasing frustration with the way in which Christians around talked about morality. Likewise, participant J described her turning as a “veering.” Over a process of many years, in many conversations, she increasingly became more conservative and resolute in her religious views. Her turning points functioned more to distinctly change the way

she related with others as she grew in her religious moral framework.

This gradual character of turning did not only pertain to the duration of turning points. There were also significant differences in the difference in degree of turning. In the case of participant J, both the duration and the degree of turning were relatively small: she described emerging adulthood as a combination of many turning point events that functioned to intensify the conservative nature of her moral framework. However, participant B, though the duration of turning was extensive, his shift was distinct. He communicated that his life as an adult looks starkly different from his childhood because he does not participate in a faith community. Another factor that was prominent in the data was the clear difference in “maintaining” dialogue as opposed to “disturbing” or “educative” dialogue in the way they affected turning. Turning points in previous literature have been characterized as a mix of events that bring about and describe change and this study’s findings corroborate this notion. When participants described particular turning point *events* (i.e. conversations that had a strong impact on their moral understanding) they often described the “disturbing” and “educative” functions of dialogue with much greater frequency than “maintaining” dialogue. On the contrary, when participants described longer periods of gradual turning, the “maintaining” function of dialogue seemed to be more relevant or applicable.

Themes that emerged in these participants’ conversations add important insight to existing lines of communicative inquiry on turning points. They support much of the current knowledge about turning points, but may contribute to a deeper understanding of the temporal qualities of turning points. Importantly,

turning points showed themselves to be both gradual and sharp, and were accompanied by unique forms of dialogue depending on whether experiences reflected the former or the later. It is also notable that most turning points research focused on an interpersonal communication context, such as family communication or relational communication. This study serves as an appeal for turning points researchers to think about how turning points theories can function assist our understanding of a variety of communicative contexts.

Contributions to emerging adulthood literature

Scholars explicating this period of development keenly communicate the characteristics that situate emerging adulthood as conceptually distinct from adolescence and adulthood. One of the unique qualities brought out in research surrounding emerging adulthood is the increasing longevity of this period. Arnett (2000) proposes that this period is “distinguished by relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations.” He also adds: “Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews” (Arnett, 2000, p. 469).

By interviewing 10 persons about their emerging adult experience it was found that these insights are perspicacious in their assessment of this period in the life. According to participants, emerging adulthood was filled with opportunities to reflect on their childhood, interact with others from different backgrounds, and as a result, redefine what they wanted their future to include (i.e. marriage, work,

participation in a religious community, opportunities for travel). In particular, participants were affected by the concentration of learning and growing that happened during this period as opposed to other times in their lives. They were “forced” to think more deeply about their moral positions and beliefs, especially participants who attended a college or university. This became apparent to participant C when he had a conversation with his parents about a particular moral issue:

That’s what struck me about the age range [18-25]... because, when we had that conversation, I’m not sure how much my *parents* had thought about that... being or not being apart of their own moral code. Because, when I asked them about the statement, they didn’t have a black and white answer for that.

For participant C, engaging in dialogue with others who were in a similar stage of life was positive because these conversations introduced him to ways of thinking about issues that were not formerly in his purview. This seemed to be the crucial aspect of emerging adulthood for the participants in this study. Due to the fact that they had not yet “entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood,” they were able to explore other possibilities through communication with others (Arnett, 2000, p. 469).

This study contributes to existing literature by way of one particular theme that emerged from the data. Existing literature has described this period as a period of questioning, experimentation, and growth, ending when persons adopt “enduring responsibilities” or when persons “decide” what values they hold.

However, the problem is that all of the “value options” put forward in existing literature already exist. So, in essence emerging adults are perceived to experience a time of relief during which they choose from a number of existential, cultural definitions of what it means to be an adults. However, for the participants in this study, the process of engaging in dialogue functioned to give them a circumstance from which to question these already-existing values, responsibilities or roles. This insight stems from results indicating that emerging adults do not just take time in their early twenties to choose between already-existing ways of living. Through interactions with other conceptions, they make conceptual compromises and form new possibilities for being-in-the-world that are new by virtue of their being conceived through engaging in dialogue with others. In this way, though “the discourses [from which emerging adults’ existing conceptions are informed] are distinct, yet they combine to form a new meaning” (Baxter & Braithwaite, p. 354).

This study also contributes to this line of inquiry by discovering one way in which cultural differences impact emerging adults’ negotiation of morality. The results reveal that, though the content of moral issues discussed by emerging adults often varied due to cultural difference (e.g. participant F faced challenges from her parents due to a religious understanding rooted in their culture), dialogue functioned across cultural contexts in a similar manner. Participant I provided the following assessment of the connection between culture and emerging adulthood:

Once you come out of the closely controlled environment of the family system and enter into [emerging adulthood]... it is a very critical time in

anyone's life. It's probably the only common thing that crosses cultures. You know? Like, "18 to 25" is *different*. Friends grew up, we grew up, we came out of the "ecosystem." Uh, things started looking different to us. We started testing our morals that we learned while we were inside, outside and probably failed in many instances as I just told you. So, we were challenging what we believed in... You know? [Asking:] "Was it right?" And just as my friend used to say in Dubai, "the times have changed," we changed with the times.

Interestingly, participant I understands the experiences in emerging adulthood to be cross-cultural. This may be this case because the circumstances characteristic in emerging adulthood foster a process so basic to what it means to be human, namely: the process of negotiating meaning in a social context to form judgments about belief and action.

Philosophical implications

Although the main focus of this study was to explore the function of dialogue in very practical way, conducting interviews and analyzing responses, the philosophers outlined in the literature review bring something important to bear on the results of this study. To put it rather pointedly, moral discourse at present seems to lack the quality of critical examination propounded in Plato's work or the public use of one's reason in Kant's "enlightened individual." Heidegger (1962) provides a phrase capturing this mindless dialogical milieu: idle talk. In the following passage, Heidegger describes the nature of idle talk and its effect on our being-in-the-world:

Idle talk is something which anyone can rake up; it not only releases one from the task of genuinely understanding, but develops an undifferentiated kind of intelligibility, for which nothing is closed off any longer... To do this, one need not aim to deceive. Idle talk does not have the kind of Being which belongs to *consciously passing off* something as something else.

The fact that something has been said groundlessly, and then gets passed along in further retelling, amounts to perverting the act of disclosing [Erschliessen] into an act of closing off [Verschliessen]. (1962, p. 213)

From this passage, we perceive that meaningful dialogue (i.e. as opposed to idle talk) is grounded, conscious, authentic, and differentiated. The first of these qualities, “grounded,” implies a structural foundation at work when we engage in dialogue. Though there are competing discourses informing the way in which we interpret our experience, the method by which we organize and examine these beliefs provides a stable platform from which we can gauge our conceptual or discursive orientations.

Every human being uses reason to form concepts, judgments, and arguments however unconsciously that formation may seem to be at times. In order to form concepts, persons are always-already making use of the laws of thought, understanding or calling upon a certain way of gaining knowledge. In the discussion of moral turning points, this comes as a pivotal insight for educators, parents, and emerging adults alike. Understanding the structure of understanding will provide individuals with the knowledge to test various arguments: inferences about the nature of experience in general or valuations of particular experiences.

In other words, emerging adults will be able to evaluate “disturbing” or “educating” dialogue for meaning or validity. Accordingly, it is important to note that meaning-making, dialogue, and persuasion are ongoing, everyday processes which call for discernment and discipline in critically analyzing the manner in which discourses come together to inform a persons’ belief or action. In his trial and death, Plato’s Socrates exemplifies this process of critical examination by defending his conduct in teaching the youth of Athens through a lengthy dialogue with his accusers. We ought to learn from how Socrates presses his accusers, understanding the goal of his pressing, which he deems the perfection and care of the soul:

And if any of you argues to the point and says he does take care, I will not at once let him go and depart myself; but I will question and cross-examine and test him, and if I think he does not possess virtue but only says so, I will show that he sets very little value on things most precious, and sets more value on meaner things, and I will put him to shame.

(p. 517)

Socrates’ cross-examination ought not to be thought of as brazen argumentation. Instead, his questions are aimed at discerning whether someone has wisdom or merely says they have wisdom and, in fact, does not. This kind of philosophical telos is much needed in emerging adults’ dialogue. This would necessarily begin with a questioning and awareness of the communicative processes at work in one’s family, understanding how one’s family comes to understand.

Philosophically, this study holds different insights for educators and

parents than it does for emerging adults. This explication of dialogue provides a disposition parents and educators may embody with emerging adults experiencing moral turning. With a richer understanding of dialogue, parents and educators can challenge or invite students to see different moral positions by *leaping ahead* instead of *leaping in*. Explaining the impact of these different orientations, Heidegger (1962) writes:

[Solicitude] has two extreme possibilities. It can, as it were, take away 'care' from the Other and put itself in his position in concern: it can *leap in* for him. This kind of solicitude takes over for the Other that with which he is to concern himself. The Other is thrown out of his position... In contrast to this, there is also the possibility of a kind of solicitude which does not so much leap in for the Other as *leap ahead* of him [ihm vorausspringt] in his existentiell potentiality-for-being, not in order to take away his 'care' but rather to give it back to him authentically as such for the first time. (p. 158)

This means coming alongside emerging adults and helping them to be better interpreters of their experience, not interpreting experience for them. By coming alongside and giving emerging adults the depth of understanding by which they can realize their potentiality-for-being, persons can make use of the functions of dialogue reported in this study in a more sophisticated manner. Instead of teaching or trying to persuade persons of a particular behavioral conformity, solicitude as *leaping ahead* can show emerging adults the possibilities of moral embodiment in dialogue and not its limits.

Practical implications

This study offers many practical reasons for gaining a deeper understanding of how dialogue functions in turning points during emerging adulthood: for emerging adults, adolescents getting ready to enter emerging adulthood, parents, teachers, and religious leaders. In general, three dialectic principles outlined by Baxter and Braithwaite (2008) may give emerging adults concrete methods by which to reflect on dialogic practices in their relationships. They suggest that persons should pay attention to:

1. Discursive history of past utterances in the relationship.
2. The broader cultural discourse that relationship parties jointly draw on as resources in making intelligible utterances in the present.
3. The anticipated responses from others (including relationship parties themselves) in the future. (p. 360)

If parents or teachers are able to imbue this communicative knowledge into adolescents who are entering emerging adulthood, persons will be able to participate in dialogue in a more critical or complex manner. In the following paragraphs, a few situations where these principles might be applied will be put forward.

For example, if an emerging adult were overwhelmed by the multiplicity of perspectives with which they come into contact, it would be beneficial to understand that there are strategies for engaging persons in conversation in order to learn more about morality in a more interpersonal, dialogic context such as: inquiring of a professor, teacher or mentor for insight, sharing and processing

with close friends, or relating experience to parents who are open to listening and instructing. Similarly, understanding these functions of dialogue could help persons support their friends in moral turning points by giving them examples of what it means to use dialogue to affirm the process of deliberation or discussion in coming to a deeper understanding of morality. It may even be the case that, if one holds a particular view of morality without wrestling with others' ideas, that a deeper understanding of the functions of dialogue may direct this person to engage in "educative" or "challenging" dialogue in order to increase their awareness of the reasons why they hold to a particular moral framework. To give another example, an emerging adult could be at a loss for how to communicate with their parents about their moral turning points. Consequently, it might do them well to understand how to apply some of the "educative" functions of dialogue, particularly the "explaining" or "inviting" functions of dialogue in order to engage their parents in dialogue. This need for a deeper understanding of dialogue was apparent in interview data as some participants communicated that their relationships with their parents were strained as a result of their moral turning because their parents didn't understand their emerging child's reasons for changing their views.

In a like manner, this study provides parents with important knowledge about how dialogic functions inform the process of moral turning in their adult children's lives. With this perspective, parents may be able engage their adult children in conversation by asking them how they are processing through challenges to their moral understanding. Also, parents could continue to grow in

their educative approach with their children by understanding those moral perspectives about which their children are inquiring.

Finally, with this understanding, parents may be able to better engage their *young* children in conversations about morality by exposing their children to other views, challenging their child's existing modes of thinking, co-reflecting with their children, and inviting their children to ask questions about morality earlier in life. In this way, children may be taught more critical, dialogical habits of communication and interpretation that may better prepare them for other turning points or transitions that come in emerging adulthood.

Limitations of the Study

Over the course of this study it was found that there are limitations to the methodological approaches used. Some of the limitations of the study were taken into account before research had begun and other weaknesses surfaces as the study progressed. First, because convenience sampling was used, as opposed to random sampling, the results of this study are necessarily conceptualized as qualities represented by the experiences of the 10 participants. However, as Koerber and McMichael (2008) pointed to, the components that make "a sample convenient often grants the researcher a level of access to and familiarity with the sample that guarantees a richness of data that could not be attained if the sample were less familiar and therefore less convenient" (p. 463). In other words, the results cannot be confidently generalized to a broader population with much confidence, but provide a rich description of a unique communicative experience. It may be that the dialogic functions elucidated in this research are applicable to a

much broader population. However, finding that out would necessitate collection of data through alternative sampling methods.

Another factor that made data collection difficult was the choice to keep the definition of morality broad. It may have been the case that more information regarding the specific character of turning points could have been provided had a particular moral issue been the focus. However, as this was an exploratory study regarding the function of dialogue, it was decided that it would be best if the dialogic domain options remained open. Similarly, the next possible weakness was mitigated after thought regarding the benefits of a contested sampling method. It was decided that the best way to ascertain a fruitful data set would be to sample from a network of individuals known to the researcher. This is a weakness because it is understood that such knowledge biases results. However, as this bias was admitted from the commencement of the interviews, it was decided that this form of sampling would none-the-less enable the researcher to garner a sample that would be able to provide a wealth of rich experience because of the familiarity with the sample set.

The final weakness of the study was learned while analyzing the data from the interviews. It was realized that when participants were asked questions regarding the function of dialogue there was a level of ambiguity. In other words, upon analyzing the data, it was found that there were two types of dialogic function present: the function that the messenger intended for the dialogue (intended function) and the function that dialogue had on the participants' actual turning points in terms of change in belief or behavior (actual function). It would

have been beneficial to ask questions of participants that clarified these differences. However, this ambiguity transitions into the following section which addresses some of the implications for future research based on the present findings.

Implications for Future Research

There are numerous questions that arise from these results that can and ought to be taken up by future research projects. For example, it was found that the engagement in dialogue during moral turning points functioned to raise participants' awareness of why they held particular moral positions and how they came to those positions or why they wanted to depart from their existing conceptions. However, it could be the aim of future research to see how well communicators engage in dialogue surrounding moral issues during emerging adulthood. It could be asked: Are emerging adults cognitively complex in the way they use dialogue to challenge other moral frameworks? Do emerging adults grow in their ability to effectively and appropriately inquire about other moral positions?

Another interesting aspect for possible research would be to discover if a correlation could be made between the intended function of dialogue surrounding moral turning and the actual function in terms of turning point trajectory. In other words, future research could potentially find that "challenging" dialogue is positively correlated with a distinct turn *away* from one's existing morality to an diametrically opposing system of morality. Or it could be found that with greater level of reinforcement, redefining, and affirming dialogue on the part of family

members or existing friend networks leads emerging adults to hold on to more aspects of their existing moral beliefs or behaviors than if these dialogic behaviors are not present.

There are many opportunities to explore communication practices surrounding the topic of morality and many salient contexts in which to study morality. This line of inquiry is important because, if it is thoroughly addressed, we can learn to live well together in the communities in which we find ourselves.

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APPENDIX A

DATA COLLECTED AUGUST–SEPTEMBER 2010

[Consult Attached File]