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What does your research focus on?

I study 1) how people perceive the minds of others 2) how people make moral judgments and 3) the link between these two processes. My research suggests that mind is perceived along the two dimensions of agency (intentional action) and experience (pain/pleasure), and that these two dimensions form the essence of moral judgment. All moral acts — no matter how they appear — are understood through a prototype of harm, consisting of a dyad of an intentional agent and a suffering patient. This dyadic prototype can help explain why people punish heroes, why victims escape blame, and why good deeds make people physically stronger. I also research the creepiness of humanoid robots, perceptions of vegetative patients, and the nature of objectification.

What drew you to this line of research and why is it exciting to you?

I research mind perception and morality because they are both ultimately subjective. There is no objective truth about whether someone deserves moral rights or responsibility, and no way of knowing whether someone really has mind. Both mind and morality are about perception — they are things that we perceive into existence.

Who were/are your mentors or scientific influences?

I'm lucky to have had many wonderful mentors, including the faculty at the University of Waterloo, Wendy Mendes and Josh Greene at Harvard, Arie Kruglanski and Michele Gelfand at the University of Maryland, and Barb Fredrickson and Keith Payne at the University of North Carolina. Lisa Barrett and Kristen Lindquist have both also shaped my scientific thinking, as have my amazing co-authors and friends from the field. Most of all, I'm grateful to my advisor, Dan Wegner. He gave me his love of big theory, fun studies, and odd topics. If I am even half as creative and productive as Dan, I'll consider my career wildly successful.

What's your future research agenda?

My lab is currently investigating the psychological power of distant evil, the aversion to human evolution, the allure of conspiracy theories, the structure of God, the psychology of paradox, and the immortality of morality.

What publication are you most proud of?

Gray, K., Young, L., Waytz, A. (2012). Mind perception is the essence of morality. *Psychological Inquiry*, 23, 101–124.

Arguing against the fragmentation of morality into distinct domains, my co-authors and I suggest that morality is unified by mind perception. What makes this paper especially memorable for me is the wide range of insightful commentaries that accompany it.