Paved with good intentions: Moral disengagement and social entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship has a deservedly well-regarded reputation in the literature. Given the constraints and problems of modern society we are looking for social entrepreneurs to solve problems that government will not or cannot solve more now than ever. However, there is also a darker side to social entrepreneurs. In effect, social entrepreneurs become so involved in fixing problems that they justify behaviors that could be viewed as unethical. In essence, they do the "wrong thing for the right reason." Using moral disengagement theory, we develop a typology to discuss issues related to social entrepreneurship.

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Introduction

Our purpose is to examine how social entrepreneurs may cognitively disengage from commonly accepted ethical standards to justify actions designed to address unsolved social problems. Through the lens of moral disengagement (MD), we investigate the actions and subsequent behaviors of social entrepreneurs. As a lens, the moral disengagement literature allows us to illustrate how an individual may circumvent the self-regulatory processes associated with feeling guilt or engaging in self-sanctioning (Bandura, 1991a). In turn, when an individual circumvents his or her own self-regulatory processes, the individual may morally disengage therefore eliminating the feeling of guilt. This in turn will limit self-sanctioning and this moral disengagement allows oneself to engage in questionable behavior through a "cognitive misconstrual" of its impact and ensuing consequences (Detert, Trevino & Sweitzer, 2008).

Moral disengagement impacts all aspects of modern life even some of our most honorable professions including law enforcement and the military (Bandura, 2016). It stands to reason that social entrepreneurs could probably have this temptation as well. Take as an example if a social entrepreneur is faced with a conundrum where a donor wants results to justify additional funding, but, as of now, there

are no notable improvements from the intervention. Should they manipulate the data to mitigate the risk of losing the additional funding? Or, should the social entrepreneur engage in practices that may duplicate existing results in hopes of appeasing the donor to secure the additional funding? In both examples, it is possible for the social entrepreneur to justify a "little white lie" because of the good that may come.

For a social entrepreneur, this leads to a cognitive justification of viewing themselves as a good person, engaging in reprehensible actions, to contribute to a greater good. In other words, the means justifies the end. One of the key issues here is that these moral disengaged behaviors may threaten the moral legitimacy of social entrepreneurship (SE), making it difficult to gather and orchestrate resources (Suchman, 1995). Given this, social entrepreneurs frequently work in the "gray areas" where formal institutions have allowed micro-pockets of potential beneficiaries to fall through the proverbial cracks or in some instances, fail to address them altogether. These "gray areas" often lend themselves to being somewhere between social and economic missions, which are difficult to define (Stevens, Moray & Bruneel, 2015). When this happens, we contend that social entrepreneurs may morally disengage to justify helping those neglected or forgotten potential beneficiaries.

This is not to say all social entrepreneurs are morally disengaged or, even most social entrepreneurs. However, there can be social entrepreneurs, who are trying to "do good" but may take shortcuts

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and begin disengaging from common morally accepted behaviors. Bandura (1999) recognizes that even professions who are noble, such as those serving in the military, can lend themselves to immoral behavior. As Merton (1936) once wrote, in collective social action, there are always unintended consequences to behavior in that social entrepreneurs may perceive the benefits of their immoral activity to exceed the prohibition on society. One of the reasons why this may occur is due to agency problems associated with SE (e.g., Bendickson, Muldoon, Liguori & Davis, 2016), especially when our conceptions of agency as a society are in flux. SE is a relatively new concept given that varying conceptualizations and research agendas are only roughly 20 years old (i.e., Haugh, 2005; Sullivan Mort, Weerawardena & Carnegie, 2003). Further, scholars are still trying to understand and explain Kickul and Lyons (2020) and one that requires a complex set of relationships between multitudes of actors in an ecosystem compounds the agency problem (Purkayastha, Tripathy & Das, 2020). Asas problems of the world compound and formal institutions fail to address these complex problems (Christie & Honig, 2006), social entrepreneurs remain on the forefront of leveraging an entrepreneurial mindset, to solve various social problems.

To frame our study, we pose a primary research question: what are the conditions under which a social entrepreneur may engage in questionable behaviors? To address this question, we discuss the foundations of SE and moral disengagement to unearth the mechanisms that may result in social entrepreneurs morally disengaging. First, we unpack the tenets of SE to establish a typology-related view of SE, due to the wide range of scope varying from one type of social entrepreneur to the next. In this vein, we identify the scope and scale of the social entrepreneur's mission to more succinctly operationalize the mechanisms of moral disengagement for each. Second, we leverage the moral disengagement literature to visit the actions associated with the deactivation of self-regulative process associated with personal moral and ethical standards. Deactivating the self-regulatory processes positions the social entrepreneur to engage in moral justification, euphemistic labeling, and advantageous comparison to justify ones questionable actions (Bandura, 1991a). Third, we juxtapose the SE typology and the deactivated self-regulative processes to identify mechanisms of moral disengagement for social entrepreneurs. Finally, we close with implications for SE researchers and for practicing/aspiring social entrepreneurs. The implications section is not exhaustive. Instead, it is intended to provide new avenues of research and to offer insights into potential potholes for social entrepreneurs to avoid on their journey to rid the world of social inequities.

The contributions of the manuscript are numerous. First, we build upon the SE literature by examining the less explored dark side of SE. To this end, our objective is not to disavow the long-standing and uplifting work done by social entrepreneurs. Instead, we endeavor to offer a more in-depth view of the phenomena and shed light on areas to evaluate more closely, in order to maintain legitimacy. Second, we extend the literature of moral disengagement into the entrepreneurship space by establishing the conditions under which social entrepreneurs may morally disengage. Establishing this linkage and examining its effects may result in the prescription of more coherent and cohesive governing mechanisms to establish greater transparency into social entities. Supporters and financiers of social entities endeavor to ensure that the beneficiaries, those who experience social injustice and inequities, are served dutifully. We purport that our manuscript contributes to this pursuit by identifying those triggers of moral disengagement. Finally, our manuscript is rich with insights for practicing/aspiring social entrepreneurs to consider when setting up or navigating the social missions of their causes. In essence, we identify potential pitfalls for social entrepreneurs to avoid. Avoiding these potential pitfalls will allow the social entrepreneur to keep the social mission on track and viable in the eyes of supporters, financiers, and beneficiaries alike.

Literature review: Social entrepreneurship, moral disengagement, and mechanisms

Social entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is "the activities and processes undertaken to discover, define, and exploit opportunities in order to enhance social wealth by creating new ventures or managing existing organizations in an innovative manner" (Zahra, Gedajlovic, Neubaum & Shulman, 2009, pg. 522). Social entrepreneurs seek to achieve social goals and objectives through commercial activities (Moizer & Tracey, 2010). The scope of these problems and activities ranges from a small/local span to large/international reach. Since many issues addressed by social entrepreneurs are somewhat missed by larger governmental or private agency screens, defining the boundaries or establishing the rules of engagement are often poorly defined.

While the literature stream is still relatively young in an academic sense, we now surpass over 20 years of growing interest in the field (e.g., Dees, 1998) as scholars continue to refine and assess its research agenda (Dato-on & Kalakay, 2016; Gupta, Chauhan, Paul & Jaiswal, 2020; Haugh, 2005; Peredo & McLean, 2006), validate (Carraher, Welsh & Svilokos, 2016), conceptualize/operationalize (Dwivedi & Weerawardena, 2018), as well as make strides to better understand social impact (Rawhouser, Cummings & Newbert, 2019) and how SE can be deployed effectively education-wise (Kickul & Lyons, 2020; Kickul, Gundry, Mitra & Berçot, 2018; Wilson, Kickul & Marlino, 2007). Such studies seek to better understand what has been done and what needs doing to further develop theory, as well as to apply ideas to education and practice. For example, the SafePoint Trust seeks to address the medical taboo of needle sharing. The SafePoint Trust believes that each patient is entitled to a safe, medical injection. In developing nations, syringes are used an average of four times before being disposed and nearly 1.3 million people die from needle sharing annually (Safepoint 2022, n.d.). To combat this problem, the SafePoint Trust has created a one-time use disposable needle, which is rendered inoperable once used. Basically, SE is the application of business principles that "socially conscious individuals have introduced and applied innovative business models to address social problems previously overlooked by business, governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Zahra et al., 2009, pg. 520)."

Social entrepreneurs decide to act because there is either resource scarcity, corruption, or a desire to use market mechanisms when public/government mechanisms have failed to do so. For instance, Solar Sister's mission is to empower women in sub−Saharan Africa to develop and sell clean energy and clean energy cook stoves to combat poverty. In sub−Saharan African, more than 70 percent of the population do not have access to power, which severely constrains the family unit to function above the poverty line. Through their social entrepreneurial actions, Solar Sister has help more than 5000 entrepreneurs enter the clean energy sector. These jobs pay well and permit those families to earn a living wage while simultaneously empowering the woman of the family by elevating her to a key decision-maker in the home (Solar Sister 2022, n.d.). Therefore, society has looked at entrepreneurs to solve problems that had once been the domain of either government or large corporations.

Zahra and coauthors identified three types of social entrepreneurs. The first one is a social bricoleur, which is based on the work of Hayek (1945). This type of entrepreneur has a local focus, uses resources that are on hand, and understands the types of issues that people in the community could face. The second entrepreneur type is the social constructionist, based on the work of Krizner (1973). Social constructionists seek to build structures that can provide goods and services that governments are unable or unwilling to provide (Goduscheit, Khanin, Mahto & McDowell, 2021). They can range from local to international in scope. They are needed because laws, regulation, political acceptability, inefficiencies and/or lack of will prevent

governments from the ability to handle problems. The next category is social engineer which comes from the work of Schumpeter (1942). Social engineers embraces the "Creation of newer, more effective social systems designed to replace existing ones when they are ill-suited to address significant social needs (Zahra et al., 2009, pg. 523)." Social engineers are needed because current institutions are prevented from solving social issues because of entrenched interests.

Despite some of the promising aspects of SE, various ethical challenges can still emerge. Individuals may enter into SE because of egoism, in that they may wish to be seen as a heroic figure, much like CEOs pursuing corporate social responsibility (Al-Shammari, Rasheed & Al-Shammari, 2019; Gibson, Harris, Aaron & McDowell, 2016). SE can also be used as a mechanism to justify the awful things that individuals may do. In essence, SE can be used as a moral justification for poor behavior. SE may face issues with resource allocation when there is no price mechanism—meaning that efficiency could be reduced. Given some of the high stakes of various problems, some entrepreneurs may try to "cut corners" or justify unethical behavior by focusing on the ends, rather than the means. Furthermore, the corporate governance mechanisms may be weak, which could limit the monitoring of social entrepreneurs.

Social entrepreneurs need to be careful with issues related to ethics. While the mission of the social entity intends to do good, ethical situations may arise, as the very nature of the social problem at hand may be complex and subject to interpretation (Dey & Steyaert, 2016; Haugh and Talwar, 2010; Hota, Subramanian & Narayanamurthy, 2020). Ethics are the rules of the game that society enforces (Argandoña, 2004). When either individuals or corporations violate ethics, they will suffer a loss of legitimacy so much so that many organizations have ethics and compliance officers (Treviño, den Nieuwenboer, Kreiner & Bishop, 2014). This will be especially true for those actors in fields lacking legitimacy, which may reassemble SE since it has a liability of newness (e.g., Singh, Tucker & House, 1986). In addition, this may suggest that social entrepreneurs are encroaching into areas that should be the domain of the government. Some scholars suggest that the only intent of business is to make a profit and that such social actions are beyond the competence of the organization (Friedman, 1992). Yet others might argue that SE is an action to satisfy the needs of society and is a form of virtue signaling (Gray, Sütterlin, Siegrist & Árvai, 2020; Moss, Neubaum & Meyskens, 2015) therefore a route in which social entrepreneurs may gain access to resources to further their projects.

Given the typology presented by Zahra et al. (2009), it is important to summarize and contextualize the complexities of the SE domain as other scholars have begun to further explore (e.g., Agency theory; Davis, Bendickson, Muldoon & McDowell, 2021). For instance, since social bricoleurs primarily focus on localized societal problems, these social entrepreneurs are often subjected to the rules, moral and ethical standards, as well as the expectations outlined for entities they tend to support or work along-side. In other words, there is very little opportunity to misinterpret or misunderstand the rules of engagement, as the social bricoleurs seek solutions to local problems. However, this is not the case for social constructionists or social engineers.

In the case of social constructionists, new institutions are created to fill in gaps for the shortcomings of incumbent institutions. From this perspective, the social constructionists are operating in a poorly defined area, as it relates to rules, moral and ethical standards, and societal expectations as they often are on the fringes of ground rules, morally and ethically, of incumbent institutions. Since the incumbent institutions fail to meet the needs of those beneficiaries that are the subject of the social constructionist's mission, the social constructionist operates in a largely gray area. Because of this, the possibility of moral disengagement increases as the social constructionist will justify his or her actions to benefit the disadvantaged. The social

constructionist may also contend that the rules and standards in place do not exactly fit what they do.

As far as the social engineer is concerned, a comparable muddied path exists. Since the social engineer is at the forefront of constructing institutions designed to replace inefficient or ineffective incumbent institutions, the pathway through rules, moral and ethical standards, as well as societal expectations is fraught with complexity. Unlike social bricoleurs and social constructionists where rules, morals, ethics, and expectations are present, the social engineer faces the challenge of complying with existing rules or not. If the social engineer perceives that a contributing factor or the primary driver of the incumbent institution's inefficiency and ineffectiveness is due to the compliance environment that governs them, they may be inclined to create their own rules. In essence, writing a new playbook will draw criticisms from incumbent institutions and their governing bodies and may be viewed as risky. The social engineer may perceive this as a step in the right direction because it is disrupting the entities they intend to displace. Given this unique challenge, the social engineer may face a plethora of opportunities to morally disengage, either willfully or unknowingly. In the next section, we will discuss the tenets of moral disengagement and how they work.

Moral disengagement

Moral disengagement[1] is about how individuals convince themselves that ethical statements do not apply to them under certain conditions (Bandura, 1999). Ethics is a complicated concept in the literature as there is little agreement on what constitutes ethical behavior. In other words, ethics is contextual and may vary from one discipline to the next or from one scenario to another. Compounding this issue is that there are various ethical paradigms and, sometimes these paradigms are in conflict (e.g., consequentialism versus deontology). Since social entrepreneurship is about solving problems utilizing resources, we believe that rules of exchange should guide this process (North, 1990). Accordingly, for this paper, we define ethics as receiving resources without deceit or coercion (Brown & Forster, 2013).

Thus, these individuals will experience lowering the perception of guilt. The removal of guilt means that people may perform behaviors that they would not ordinarily do so. In essence, guilt serves as an internal mechanism that tells an individual whether a behavior is good or not. People learn guilt based on moral standards that are enforced and learned through social interaction (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996). Moral standards serve as the guideline for behavior, allowing people to make moral judgements. These guidelines of ethical behavior come from law, religion, morals, and other bodies that provide a template for what is moral and what is not. These cognitions form the basis of ethical cognition which then leads to ethical behavior.

If people feel guilt, then ethical cognition indicates a reason not to perform a particular behavior. For example, someone might not cheat on an exam, not just because they have a fear of getting caught, but also because they believe that such a behavior is unethical. Likewise, organizations often provide templates of what is acceptable behavior, which is needed because the organization has limits in its capacity to monitor employees (Williamson, 1975). In essence, moral standards help to promote good behavior in the potential absence or limitation of monitoring, regulations, or contractual protocols because people will self-condemn themselves. When this self-condemnation is

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[1] We note that some may find umbrage in that some of the examples involve life and death circumstances. However, moral disengagement is a very common problem in nearly every facet of life. In terms of business, Bandura (2016) proposes that justifications of the market (especially the writings of Milton Friedman) can create justifications (such as competition) that people can do what they wish under the guise of making money.

deactivated, so is self-sanction and people may act poorly—from wide-scale devastation to everyday acts conducted by regular people (Bandura, 2016).

Moral disengagement involves the process of changing the cognition of event to make the behavior ethical without changing the behavior or ethical standards. Basically, it emerges when ethical control is moved from external sources to internal mechanisms that justify bad behavior. For example, someone could justify cheating during a game or breaking a rule because it will provide them victory. In terms of business, people often justify unethical behaviors such as lying to make a sale (Bandura, 2016). As Bandura et al. (1996), pg. 364): "Development of self-regulatory functions does not create an invariant control system within a person, as implied by theories of internalization that incorporate entities such as consciences, superegos, or moral principles as perpetual internal overseers of conduct. Self-reactive influences do not operate unless they are activated, and there are many psychosocial processes by which self-sanctions can be disengaged from inhumane conduct."

One of the issues with moral disengagement is that people may find self-satisfaction and justification for their behaviors (Bandura, 1999). As the above example suggests, people can justify cheating during a game because "everyone does it." This attitude is very common in bigtime college football where the attitude is "if you are not cheating, you're not trying." When individuals remove external mechanisms and use their own moral guidelines, they will act in such a way to promote and maintain satisfaction, which endorses poor behavior. People will also disable their self-sanction, making them much more likely to engage in bad behavior (Bandura, 2016).

People could commit two actions of moral agency. In the first, some people employ a proactive approach to correct practices that are both unjust and inhumane. In this regard, SE is an example of proactive moral agency, because people are correcting problems that are unjust and inhumane. However, in the second, when people try to correct injustices, they can suffer from a lack of the inhibitive form of moral agency—which occurs when people lack the "ability to refrain from behaving inhumanely (Bandura, 2016 pg. 1)." In essence, they act in this manner, because they become so consumed with correcting an issue. This can happen because people can commit inhumane and humane actions at the same time (Bandura, 2016). Or individuals can justify behaviors by focusing on consequentialism and the ends justify the means.

People morally disengage through a series of mechanisms. There are three types of mechanisms through which people disengage from moral outcomes. Agency-focused people will morally disengage by placing blame on others to the point where the blame is so wide that no one bears responsibility. Individuals who are outcome-focused disregard, minimize, and dispute the effects of their behaviors. Victim-focused offenders justify their maltreatment by denying their victims of human qualities. Given this, the following mechanisms are produced: moral justification, euphemistic labeling, advantageous comparison, displacing or diffusing responsibility, disregarding or misrepresenting injurious consequences, and dehumanizing the victim. Each of these mechanisms are already interrelated but when combined, can lead people to commit immoral actions.

SE may suffer from moral disengagement for several reasons. First, traditionally the literature has found that empathy limits moral disengagement (Detert et al., 2008). However, the empathy of social entrepreneurs can potentially trip them up because being dishonest to gain additional resources could easily be justified. Entrepreneurs have a higher internal locus of control (e.g. Bonnett & Furnham, 1991), which would indicate that they would be less likely to morally disengage. However, they may note the people they are trying to help are victims of fate, doomed to misery based on random chance. This may encourage the social entrepreneur to act in a way to help them even out the cost of violating ethical norms.

Ethical norms are learned through socialization (Bandura, 2002). Much like we witnessed with the Milgram experiment, people justify behaviors because a higher authority justifies it (Milgram, 1963). Accordingly, people learn from society what behaviors are acceptable or not. People have limited personal ability to overcome their institutional setting. We take cues from society and unless we develop resources, skills and abilities to move past, we proxy society's values (Bandura, 2001). Society places a high regard on outcomes (Bandura, 2016), embracing a consequentialist framework. An examination of some of the most highly regarded societal actors suggests we value people who get results. We also rig the rules of the game to encourage people to separate their social life from work life. Therefore, social entrepreneurs may be encouraged to morally disengage since they could help people. This is a Robin Hood argument: theft is ok, as long as it helps the poor.

Social entrepreneurship and moral disengagement mechanisms

Moral justification

Moral justification occurs when "… detrimental conduct is made personally and socially acceptable by portraying it as serving socially worthy or moral purposes. People then can act on a moral imperative and preserve their view of themselves as moral agents while inflicting harm on others" (Bandura et al., 1996, pg. 365). In fact, people will find moral justification to endorse and support poor behavior. For example, in the U.S. sport of stock car racing, a crew chief (the leader of the pit crew, driver, and operations teams for the car) may engage in altering specifications outside of the "stock" standards to win races. These stock standards are determined by the sanctioning body known as the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR). The crew chief may justify the alterations because he or she believes the standards are too strict or the alteration does not lend itself to a competitive advantage on the race track. The justification for the behavior will occur before the behavior will be performed. One of the reasons why people perform moral justification is that people are often presented with ethical dilemmas, where an ethical choice is next to impossible. The examples provided in the literature are examples from the military, law enforcement, and care providers. People may find justification in religious or national beliefs. One of the primary examples that Bandura provides is how the military is able to turn people into killers by justifying killing in terms of the national interest.

One of the key drivers of moral justification is that the immoral behavior is in support of something that appears to be acceptable or desirable. As Bandura (2002 pg. 103) writes, rather "it is accomplished by cognitively redefining the morality of killing so that it can be done free from self-censure. Through moral justify cation of violent means, people see themselves as fighting ruthless oppressors, protecting their cherished values, preserving world peace, saving humanity from subjugation or honoring their country's commitments." Given that SE is attempting to promote a favorable social outcome, social entrepreneurs may justify poor behavior since it is in support of something that is socially acceptable. For example, community organizations focused on assisting those who deal with various addictions, may prefer one client over the other, based on the clients behavior. If a client uses foul language or engages in offensive behaviors, that client may not receive the needed services. Yet, a client with a calm demeanor and a comparable addiction, may receive services to address the addiction. The social entrepreneur may justify the denial of services to one client by citing safety concerns or by enforcing qualifying rules for treatment. By rendering judgement of one's behavior, the social entrepreneur morally justifies the denial of services for one client and in the same breath, justifies the services for a less confrontational client. In seeking the favorable outcome, the social entrepreneur can justify the denial of services for someone who needs them, perhaps even more so.

Social bricoleurs would be susceptible to this because they are based on local issues and have close ties to people they are trying to help. Although social bricoleurs are uniquely positioned to discover local needs and resources, they are also susceptible to social pressures and the need to help those whom they are close to. For example, someone who runs a local charitable organization, may tend to overstate issues to gain further funding. A justification could be that the extra funds could aid more people—even though what they are doing constitutes fraud. Another example is that an organization may justify committing bribery to a local official in order to advance an issue that could benefit their community (Bandura, 2016).

Social constructionists seek transformation because "they build, launch and operate, ventures which tackle those social needs that are inadequately addressed by existing institutions, businesses, NGOs and government agencies" (Zahra et al., 2009, pg. 525). Given that social constructionists will need multiple resources from many different groups, this means that there is a potential issue for moral justification. Since they have to spend time raising funds, the social constructionist may overclaim what can they do; may exaggerate problems to gain additional funds; or may tolerate the expansion of the staff to allow the organization access to certain important individuals (Müller & Moshagen, 2019). To appear more successful, the social entrepreneur may engage in impression management. In doing so, they provide a false impression to maintain and increase confidence in their social enterprise.

Social engineers need multiple resources "because they identify systemic problems within the social systems and structures and address them by bringing about revolutionary change" (Zahra et al., 2009, pg. 526). Since they are bringing about revolutionary change, they may understate what they intend to do because they do not wish to take steps such as bribery or engaging in other actions that could be politically unacceptable. One of the most common approaches to illicit change is to manipulate images or present only part of a picture. Therefore, we should expect the social engineer to engage in some of these activities and to justify them based on the changes they could expect to make to society.

Euphemistic labeling

Euphemistic labeling is the process through which people use euphemisms which is innocuous words or expressions in place of a more honest, but sometimes offensive terms. Language forms the basis of cognitions which will inform behavior. If people are told that they are being laid off, their reaction will be different than if they are being downsized. People are more likely to engage in aggressive conflict when that conflict is provided in euphemisms. Part of the reason why this type of labeling is so successful is that by downplaying the negative consequences by couching them in hidden language, the masked language provides a lack of agency.

This is not necessarily a direct connection between euphemistic labeling and the types of SE. The reason being that the ends of SE are considered, for most people in a society, a perfectly socially acceptable outcome. The fact of using business methods to improve certain negative aspects of modern life is acceptable to most individuals. Part of the reason why SE has emerged has been a recognition that the government is unable to meet certain social needs (Wolk, 2007) and why a majority of municipalities support SE (Korosec & Berman, 2006). Some of the criticisms that have been directed at entrepreneurship have been that it is not different enough and that the use of business techniques may further exploit the poor. This could be a major issue.

However, euphemistic labeling is an issue in the various types of entrepreneurship because it can be used to hide the questionable behavior that may support SE. A common example comes from the literature on Teach for America (TFA), a well-known and distinguished program that addresses issues related to education. For example, Hartman (2013) notes that TFA founder, Wendy Kopp,

deploys the term "flexibility" when she basically describes getting rid of unions. Social bricoleurs may feel the need to commit bribery or other types of politically unacceptable behavior in order to gain support from local politicians. Social constructionists and engineers may use euphemisms to hide their ideology which may justify these behaviors as "paying dues" or "gaining political support." The second issue is that SE could be seen in itself as a euphemistic activity for corporations and high wealth individuals. They may not be concerned with doing good but may be simply receiving insincere support by fixing issues. They may engage in the activity to provide justification for unethical behaviors, obtain favor with powerful stakeholders, gain a tax advantage, or use this as a form of a bribery to important politicians.

Advantageous comparison

Advantageous comparison is when people compare their behavior to other more unethical behavior, believing that it justifies their illegal behavior. For example, thieves may justify their behavior because they are not murderers. Bandura (1999 pg. 196) noted that Americans justified "the massive destruction in Vietnam was minimized by portraying the American military intervention as saving the populace from Communist enslavement." Terrorists may justify their behaviors because they view their behavior as appropriate given their poor treatment. People often justify the illegal behavior of politicians by noting that the other side does worse or the same. Advantageous comparison is basically justifying bad behavior as claiming that "it is the lesser of two evils." An example of this would be environmentalists placing nails in trees and destroying equipment to prevent deforestation.

Part of the reasoning for advantageous comparison is that it is based on a utilitarian calculus. People justify their injurious actions by stating that it will prevent further suffering. For example, people could justify that lack of moral behavior because they believe that a person is just in their pursuits. The issue with utilitarian cost benefit can lead to a "slippery application" under certain applications, because long-term costs and benefits are calculated in a highly uncertain environment. An example of this, according to Bandura et al. (1996), would be the "domino effect." The assumption that violence is justified, and that escalation of commitment and violence is based on the subjective probability that other dominoes may collapse, when it remains unknown that this would be the case. Hence, this is why every aggressor is compared with Hitler. People make cost-benefit analysis by treating uncertain events as certain, because the gathering of information can have serious flaws in gathering and interpreting.

Each of the types of SE may suffer from this. Namely, people would justify their behavior because the outcome would be worse. Someone who is engaged as a social bricoleur may justify lying or committing bribery because, even though that behavior is bad, failure to do so may lead to even worse outcomes. Someone who is a social constructionist may lie about conditions in order to receive extra funding for their SE project. For example, someone seeking a grant to aid and build a school may distort test scores, making it seem like there is a greater need for funding than what actually exists. A social constructionist may lie about their intentions or hide the major changes in their proposals to prevent powerful societal agents from blocking their proposal.

Displacement of responsibility

Displacement of responsibility occurs through distorting the actions and effects that such actions cause. People will act in such a way that they will partake in actions that they would normally oppose when some legitimate authority accepts the consequences of that behavior. One of the most vivid examples of this is the famous

Milgram experiments on obedience. Milgram (1963) conducted an experiment where people were willing to give a fatal shock (or at least appeared to), because they were told to do so by a scientist in a lab coat, taking responsibility for their actions. Compounding this issue is that much of modern bureaucracy attempts to limit the personal bias in decisions. It has the unintended impact of creating circumstances where people may do an unethical action because of the dictates of the bureaucracy.

This is not a direct issue for social entrepreneurs since they are the undertakers of the organization. However, they can create circumstances in which people may have displacement of responsibility. All types of social entrepreneurs will have a vision as well as higher degrees of charisma, and will be convinced to aid others. They could create an environment in which people may act unethically because they lack responsibility. For example, the statistician may fudge numbers under the assumption that they are not the ones who are authorizing the report.

Diffusion of responsibility

Diffusion of responsibility is often a threat in organizations because the number of people in the group will lead to less responsibility per individual, resulting in an increasing level of diffusion of responsibility. People on the lower levels of the organization do not feel responsible for their actions because they have little responsibility in decision making. This is especially true since organizations feature a division of labor. Again, a similar phenomenon like diffusion of responsibility can occur in a SE organization. An example would be someone in a SE organization feeling like they are not responsible since they did not start the organization.

Disregarding or misrepresenting injurious

Disregarding or misrepresenting injurious consequences occurs when people pursue harmful activities that will benefit them but that come at the expense of others. Therefore, when people minimize, distort, or disbelieve negative outcomes, there will be little activation of self-censure. One of the aspects that makes this worse is the fact that warfare is now disconnected through the use of drones—literal push-button killing. Even personal responsibility cannot restrain this when people are unaware of the harm that they cause.

In terms of SE, this is a complicated issue because social entrepreneurs are not out to make a dollar, but rather promote social betterment. Therefore, we should expect that individuals should feel a higher degree of understanding of the negative outcomes of their actions. However, each of the three categories can fall guilty to this if they do immoral behaviors to support their form of SE. Social bricoleurs, for example, may commit unethical behaviors, such as tolerating corruption, if they believe that the corruption benefits their community. However, they will remain uncaring about the costs of corruption, since it does not directly impact their social mission. Likewise, a social constructionist or engineer may commit fraud, through underplaying or overplaying their endeavor, in order to gain funding.

Dehumanization

The last category is dehumanization, which occurs when individuals believe that or group of people are denied 'humaneness' or human attributes. One of the aspects is that there is a common humanity that elicits emotional reactions through a perceived similarity and social obligation. This common strain of humanity allows individuals to feel a connection to other people and prevents mistreating without also feeling guilt and self-condemnation. One issue is whether a person identifies with the people who they mistreat. If they identify with them then they (Bandura, 1991b) pg. 148) "are more vicariously arousing than are those of strangers or of individuals who have been divested of human qualities." In experiments, people were more brutal, and more willing to punish than people when they do not identify with them.

Certain types of SE require a relationship and identify with other people. The social bricoleur should not suffer from this outcome. One of the issues that could occur is that in the problems that people attempt to solve, the human aspect is lost at some point. A commonly used phrase summarizing this phenomenon is that "people become another statistic." Social entrepreneurs can do this perhaps because they have conceptualized the problem as being too big. Another explanation is that as people become frustrated, they could suffer from burnout. This can also occur in caring professions such as nursing or social work, in which taking care of the issues of others could lead to frustration.

As Zahra et al. (2009) note, "they identify a local concern and bring innovative measures to bear on a recognizable social problem." Given that they have an ongoing relationship in their community, they lack utilitarian calculation, and recognize and seek to meet the concerns their community. In addition, the small-scale nature of their entrepreneurial actions should prevent them from attempting to gain outside resources and will reduce the tendency to treat their stakeholders as a statistic. Likewise, governance, oversight, and legitimacy will remain in the hands of local communities, which serve as a hedge against dehumanization. People and their problems remain well. Given the local connection, the issue that could occur may be dehumanization caused by burnout.

Social constructionists, given their complex ambitions and their willingness to create a new equilibrium, will serve their client group and also seek to introduce social change and reform. Social constructionists may seek to manipulate, coerce, or lie to gain support to obtain the resources needed to make a change to the new social equilibrium. This may prompt them to cut corners on ethical issues although there could be potential oversight, such as maintaining their "vision for change." To bring about broad-based changes in how social wealth is created and distributed, the social constructionist must be focused on the big picture, meaning that they could lose sight of their focus group. In addition, oversight will come from entities that are not local in nature, given the need for outside funds. In addition, the social constructionist may be egoistical, meaning that they will lack identification with others, especially those individuals that they believe are lesser.

Social engineers are highly driven, subversive, revolutionary, and aggressive in nature. They view social structures, institutions, and norms as being ossified and will support rule-breaking to introduce reform. They will require so many resources that they could lose sight of the people they are trying to help. A potential reason is that this approach has a high degree of working "for the greater good." Such a utilitarian calculus may reduce people to statistics. In addition, social engineers may place their own needs above those they seek to serve. The missionary zeal to overcome ossified structures may turn the people that they serve into mere numbers and statistics.

Discussion

SE is a well-regarded entrepreneurship type as it is used in broad situations to address societal problems and inequities. To this end, social enterprises are generally founded with a mission to bring change in a socially oriented way (Strothatte & Wüstenhagen, 2005). This is a noble undertaking, and the attention SE has received has clear justification and is well-earned. Examples of the downfalls and positive aspects of SE are vast in the literature, yet we still have little understanding as to why the moral compass of social entrepreneurs loses its bearing. Understanding why social entrepreneurs are willing to disengage morally to advance their social missions is relevant due to the rise in socially structured organizations and the lack of regulations available to govern them. Hence, it behooves us as researchers

to illuminate a brighter pathway to understand the conditions under which moral disengagement occurs. This exploration is beneficial for researchers, as well as practicing social entrepreneurs who wish to avoid the pitfalls of doing wrong for the sake of doing good.

To accomplish this feat, we have narrowed our approach by centering on three types of SE as identified by Zahra et al. (2009), which each come with their own unique situations, challenges, and also positive implications for the betterment of society. The concept of moral disengagement presents a unique challenge for social entrepreneurs and for these three types of SE as the desire and drive to solve wicked societal problems can present a situation that widens the disconnect with behaviors and ethics, that is moral disengagement. By realizing and accounting for biases and potential ethical oversights, social entrepreneurs can better achieve their goals.

Other scholars have noted that social entrepreneurs could find themselves working with authoritarian governments (Nega & Schneider, 2014). Part of the example is that aspects of entrepreneurship are goal driven endeavors that may lead to betrayal of trust. SE does have similar aspects, especially when entrepreneurs are performing large projects. However, such behaviors may not be considered as acceptable or legitimate for a social enterprise, especially since people believe that different morals cover social versus enterprise. Social entrepreneurs seek legitimacy which, according to Suchman (1995 pg.574) is a "generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definition." Legitimacy is important because it allows for organizations to gain additional resources. This will be true for social entrepreneurs who will need resources to address problems. Failure to adhere to accepted morally legitimate behaviors may cause them to lack the resources needed to grow and really address issues, especially since there is a great deal of skepticism regarding the actions of entrepreneurs (Elkington & Hartigan, 2008).

Theoretical implications

By developing a typology from moral disengagement theory to discuss SE issues, we have enhanced the degree of understanding the many facets of SE and the challenges faced by different social entrepreneur types. In the case of moral justification, the present manuscript offers theoretical insights into why social entrepreneurs may engage in inhumane behaviors. Qualifying the inhumane behavior by minimizing its negative impacts to see rosier, more altruistic outcomes explains the cognitive dissonance present when questionable actions are used to do the right thing. By dehumanizing anyone who stands in the way of the right thing, the social entrepreneur justifies his or her actions by painting a picture absent of any wrongdoing.

When the social entrepreneur engages in practices that would ordinarily be self-deplored, he or she justifies those practices as righteous by comparing those actions with ones that are perceived to be much worse. When doing so, the social entrepreneur employs advantageous comparison. While this may be present in all three of the SE typologies, we contend that the practice is more likely to occur at the social constructionist or social engineer level of SE. At these levels of SE, the social entity itself is likely sizable or rapidly expanding to include more groups and hence broader relationships in general. Due to entity's size and scale, the social entrepreneur may feel that others are equally responsible for actions taken. As with such, the social entrepreneur diffuses his or her responsibility and compares what the group is doing to more heinous acts committed by other groups. By diffusing his responsibilities, the social entrepreneur shifts the ownership of any potential backlash to the group while simultaneously minimizing the possible repercussions through a direct comparison of the actions taken to a more reprehensible offense. Furthermore, by diffusing responsibility and comparing the

questionable actions taken to more serious offenses, the social entrepreneur remains "just" in the eyes of the public.

Finally, in some instances, the social entrepreneur may regard his or her conduct as benign and attempts to label such conduct as respectable acts. In this vein, the social entrepreneur is downplaying possible consequences through the use of language and masking. The social entrepreneur attempts to conceal the repercussions of her conduct by bestowing a respectable status upon them. By engaging in the practice of euphemistic labeling, the social entrepreneur displaces her responsibilities through the deliberate use of flowery language that masks the severity of the inappropriate actions. Hence, the consequences of the actions are not easily known and are unfortunately misrepresented.

From a theoretical standpoint, our manuscript extends upon the various ethical challenges that can emerge from SE. By narrowing the focus to three SE types and establishing concrete linkages with acts of moral disengagement, we have enhanced the understanding of the specific challenges faced in each situation and the potential for unethical behavior in these different forms. This allowed for a deeper analysis of deep-rooted issues within this type of entrepreneurship and sets the framework for further research into best practices in SE that reap the most societal gains.

Practical implications

Social entrepreneurs can use the knowledge of moral disengagement and associated phenomena to avoid practicing unethical behaviors. This knowledge can also be used to identify both intentional and unintentional forms of related unethical behaviors. Governing bodies can use this information to identify underlying issues that may have been overshadowed by the title and status of "social entrepreneurship" or "the social entrepreneur." Realizing potential underlying ethical infractions may inhibit any potential corruption relating to SE and may allow for the most positive impacts in society.

We believe that this approach is necessary because of the importance of SE in fixing societal problems. The problems facing society are, with the presence of systematic racism and the COVID virus, more acute than they had been in previous generations. New forms of SE and social entrepreneurs will need to emerge to fix these ongoing issues. However, if the quality of response of SE is compromised, then it would be difficult for social entrepreneurs to gain added resources (Alvord, Brown & Letts, 2004).

We also contend that the governing bodies (i.e. boards of directors, resource grantors, etc.) can benefit from the findings disclosed in this manuscript. Through the carefully constructed linkages between SE types and moral disengagement acts, we offer a unique perspective for such governing bodies to consider in the guidance of social entities. The theoretical linkages offered in the manuscript provide a pathway to establish more effective governing mechanisms. The construction of these mechanisms could result in a governance system capable of detecting the signs of moral disengagement at its onset. From a practical standpoint, a reduction in SE moral disengagement will benefit all social entities because the emphasis will be placed on the social cause itself and not on the social entrepreneur engaged in questionable behavior.

Limitations and future research

This manuscript is not without limitations as the scope is somewhat narrow in nature with the focus on three types of SE. All SE types were not addressed, thus broad generalizations should be avoided as there are other facets of SE that we have not fully addressed. All aspects of moral disengagement also may not have been accounted for in terms of the different types of SE and the situational implications. Outlets for future research could include the collection of primary data in SE firms and from social entrepreneurs of

Table 1
Types of Moral Disengagement Defined and Social Entrepreneurship.

Type of Moral Disengagement	Definition	Types of Social Entrepreneurship
Moral justification	One method of disengagement is portraying inhumane behavior as though it has a moral purpose in order to make it socially acceptable.	Especially in the social bricoleur—close knowledge of the people impacted, low stakes. Social constructionist and social engineer impacted as well.
Euphemistic labeling	Using euphemistic language to describe reprehensible conduct is another way that individuals can morally disengage from their moral standards. Language shapes individual thought forms which constitute the basis for courses of action.	Social engineer and social constructionist
Advantageous comparison	This process exploits the contrast principle, which follows the assumption that the perception of human conduct is influenced by what it is compared against. That is, individuals contrast their conduct with other examples of more immoral behavior and in doing this comparison their own behavior is trivialized.	Present in all three
Displacement of responsibility	Another dissociative practice, known as displacement of responsibility, operates by distorting the relationship between actions and the effects they cause. People behave in ways they would normally oppose if a legitimate authority accepts responsibility for the consequences of that behavior. Displacement of responsibility distorts facts. Under these conditions people view their actions as dictates of authorities rather than their own actions.	Social constructionist, social engineer
Diffusion of responsibility	Additionally, there is the practice of diffusion of responsibility. It occurs in a group of people, where with the increasing number of people, the level of diffusion increases. In this phenomenon, a person has lower inclination towards responsibility as they feel that others are also equally responsible in the group.	Less the social entrepreneur, but the individuals under the social entrepreneur. Impacts each of the three elements.
Disregarding or misrepresenting injurious consequences	When someone decides to pursue an activity harmful to others for personal advantage, or as a result of impact by social stimulus, they generally either minimize the harm they have caused or attempt to avoid facing it.	Each of the three—social entrepreneurship that is pursued by individuals who are seeking to making it about them.
Dehumanization	Dehumanization is the process through which a person or group of people are denied 'humanness' or human attributes. The victim is no longer viewed as a person with feelings, hopes and concerns, but objectified as a lesser sub-human.	Less of a concern—however, in each of the categories, the social entrepreneur may regard more emphasis on the cause rather than the people.

all types, as well as a deeper comparison with real world examples of these types of SE. Future research could also explore individual perceptions of moral disengagement from social entrepreneurs. We recommend more exploration in the realm of governance mechanisms and the monitoring of social entrepreneurs in terms of moral disengagement. Further expansion upon additional exhibits of moral disengagement is also recommended along with a more detailed history of the SE literature with connections to moral disengagement.

A further line of research could be instead of researching when social entrepreneurs act poorly to help people, it warrants research to examine when entrepreneurs try to use SE to improve their standing. In essence, like corporate social responsibility, social entrepreneurs may use other people's money to enhance their reputation. Some of the individuals who have formed organizations and aid charities may be doing so to improve a negative business reputation or like convicted criminal Bernie Madoff, use their charitable actions as a cover for their psychopathic behaviors.

Another issue that should be addressed is the extent to which social entrepreneurs believe that they have a "moral license." This issue is related to moral disengagement, but slightly different. Whereas with moral disengagement people do unethical things in support of a greater good, with moral license, people start out acting moral and ethical, but decide based on their previous virtuous behavior that they have "the right" to act in an unethical fashion. As Blanken, van de Ven and Zeelenberg (2015), pg. 540, ". . . someone who has just spent some time volunteering for the local community center might later find it more acceptable to "forget" to report some additional income when filling out the tax return." People can justify their bad behaviors because they are socially responsible (e.g., Muldoon, Skorodziyevskiy, Keough & Phillips, 2021). This could have implications for corporate social responsibility as well.

Lastly, we need to consider the extent to which SE may become unproductive. Regular corporate entrepreneurship can become unproductive when entrepreneurs shift wealth rather than create it (e.g. rent-seeking). It is possible that either reputation buying, or moral disengagement may result in SE becoming unproductive and perhaps damaging. SE should take a note from the CSR literature. While CSR scholars have demonstrated that CSR is generally positive,

there are places (such as agency problems), where CSR has issues. Therefore, SE, while being a positive, needs to consider these issues as well.

Conclusion

Social entrepreneurship is not without faults, however, it is a revered and commonly used method for addressing complex societal problems. With the ever-increasing number of social entrepreneurs, there is a paired increase in unethical practices and behaviors, both intentional and unintentional. Approaching SE through the lens of moral disengagement theory can expose deep rooted issues that social entrepreneurs and members of society may not realize. Further discussion of the positives and potential downfalls of SE is needed. (Table 1)

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