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Moral Identity, Identification and Emotion: A Relational and Interactive Approach

Abstract

This paper extends a relational theory of the interconnection between morality, identity, and emotion. We argue that interactional identification with others is central to the development of the moral self, which begins early in childhood as we become the object of the emotional-evaluative attitude of others—becoming a subject to ourselves—while also identifying with others and with the values they embody. This position is extended in contrast to social philosophical ideas of morality and identity, central to which is the notion of narrative identity, and to sociological social psychology where identity theory is taken to be pivotal to understanding the self as driven by the need for verification. In our view, neither of these approaches sufficiently recognise how moral identities are moulded within social relations, interactions, and the identifications these engender. Nor do they take adequate account of the embodied, emotional and intuitional basis of moral identity. We draw on G. H. Mead's theory of the self and moral socialisation to provide a theory of moral selfhood formed within social relations and interactions, while extending his arguments via insight from C. H. Cooley and M. M. Bakhtin to give greater attention to emotional evaluation.

Keywords

Morality; Emotions; Self; G. H. Mead; Narrative Identity; Identity Theory

In conceptualising the relationship between morality and identity, sociologists have typically drawn on perspectives from either social philosophy or social psychology (Hitlin, 2003; Sayer, 2011; Keane, 2015). Key thinkers in post-Enlightenment social philosophy have sought to utilise identity as a conceptual means to provide a situated explanation of how people arrive at and articulate a moral standpoint that they take to be their own. Prominent examples of this, which have exerted notable influence over contemporary sociologies of morality, include the moral theories of Charles Taylor (1989) and Alasdair MacIntyre (2007[1981]). These theories share a narrative-based conceptualisation of identity, in which a person's identity is understood as being culturally embedded, whilst being experienced as a unitary narrative that allows them to understand and articulate their own moral perspectives. Yet, it has been argued that the narrative conceptualisations of identity used in social philosophy maintain discursive and unitary subjectivity as the hallmark of human agency to the extent that non-discursive and disparate

features of agency are underestimated (McNay, 2003). The prioritisation of discursive narrative struggles to adhere with sociological and psychological accounts of embodied habituation, emotion, and other facets of non-discursive consciousness in the formation and enactment of moral identities (e.g. Emirbayer and Maynard (2010); Haidt (2013)).

Conversely, sociologists drawing on social psychology have recently utilised “identity theory” to explain both self-consistency and social variation in the assumption of moral action and attitudes. Stets and Carter (2012, p.120), for example, recognise that ‘a theory of the self that explains individual variation in moral behavior and emotion is noticeably absent’, and therefore propose an ‘identity verification’ theory to explain ‘why some individuals behave morally and others less so, and why some feel bad for immoral actions while others do not’. However, where social philosophic approaches prioritise narrative at the expense of emotion and embodied cognition, the kind of identity theory based explanations offered by Stets and Carter (2012) centre explanations of moral identity around specific cognitive processes (Hitlin, 2003; Housley and Fitzgerald, 2015). Empirical research in this field has tended to focus on positing specific ‘golden factor’ socio-psychological self-efficacy processes (e.g. self-verification) through which the relationship between morality and identity can be encapsulated (Bazzani, 2022, p.3; Hitlin, 2003; Gillespie, 2006). This is undertaken at the expense of holistic processes involved in moral identity such as habituation and dialogic reflexivity (which we argue are key to how moral identity is formed, enacted, reflected on, and reconstructed), while also neglecting the dynamic and contextual nature of moral identities (Hitlin, 2003). Although these theorists base their thinking on the tradition of symbolic interactionism, it is our view that they have lost the deeply intersubjective understanding of a dialogical self, which was so central to the earlier pragmatist, interactionist thinkers, especially G. H. Mead.

Conceptualisations drawn from social philosophy on the one hand, and from sociological social psychology on the other, each bear heavily on contemporary sociological theories of the relationship between identity and morality. While each has virtues in terms of illuminating something significant about moral identity, we argue that sociologists need to adopt a broader conception of moral identity than these approaches allow. In our view, each centres moral identity on features that do not tell the whole story: neither of these approaches sufficiently recognise how moral identities are moulded within social relations and interactions, nor do they provide a sufficiently complex account of the relationship between embodiment, emotions, interaction, and reflexivity in how moral identities are enacted and (re)constructed in the process of

identification. Indeed, we argue that each position gives insufficient credence to identification, whereby moral identity is formed, enacted, and remoulded through our identifications with people, social groups, ideas, and values, as well as the position of these in social relations. We argue that understanding the process of identification must consider its pre-reflexive foundations, because why and when we identify with the relational position that others hold is not always given to reflexive deliberation. In this view, the pre-reflexive provides the ground out of which the reflexive emerges and is the reason why the latter often has difficulty in penetrating the former.

In the first two sections of this article we critique these two main available perspectives, focusing predominantly on figures who have had a notable bearing on sociological conceptions of moral identity: Taylor (1989) and MacIntyre (2007) as prominent representatives of narrative moral identity accounts, and Stets and Carter (2011; 2012) as prominent proponents of identity theory for an explanation of moral identity. We then develop our own stance on morality, identity and emotion from the position of a pragmatist relational sociology. At the level of individuals, this perspective focuses analysis not on the individual as defined by their unitary narrative or by psychological processes, but rather on the relations between individuals, entities, and social processes that defines what or who they are in relation to processes of identification that are always dynamic, fluid and changeable (Powell and Dépelteau, 2013). This approach is grounded in the interactionism of pragmatism, which has informed—and been somewhat revived by—contemporary relational sociological theory (Dépelteau, 2015). We draw on G. H. Mead's theory of the self and moral socialisation to provide a theory of identification within social relations and interactions, while extending his arguments via insight from C. H. Cooley and M. M. Bakhtin to give greater attention to emotional evaluation. We argue this position affords a role for reflexivity in moral identification without positioning discursiveness as prior to emotions and relations in how moral identities are defined and enacted, instead recognising that emotion and intersubjective interaction provides the ground out of which the reflexive engagement with one's identity emerges. Overall, our view of morality, identification, and emotion is relational, in that all these things are formed within the social relations that are the fabric in which our identities are formed, as well as forming the connections to the social objects that our feelings and evaluations are directed at.

Social Philosophy, Narrative Identity, and Morality

Although the basis and direction of their theories differ significantly, Taylor (1989) and MacIntyre (2007[1981]), and also other post-Enlightenment philosophers such as Benhabib (1992), extend a narrative conceptualisation of identity as a means to connect a socially and culturally embedded self with a subjective, efficacious moral consciousness. For each, the concept of narrative identity is utilised to challenge Enlightenment conceptions of the disembodied rational subject whilst guarding against proclamations from postmodernist thinkers regarding the dissolution of the subject, and thereby maintaining a place for discursive, self-reflexive subjectivity as the arbiter of sound moral judgement.

In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor (1989, p.4) argued that the proceduralist outlook that dominated moral philosophy throughout the 20th century was erroneously unconcerned with ‘moral consciousness and beliefs altogether and has even seemed to dismiss them as confused and irrelevant’. In challenge to this, Taylor sought to demonstrate how identity and morality are in fact ‘inextricably intertwined themes’ (Taylor, 1989, p.3). He maintains that we ‘inescapably understand our lives in narrative form’ (1989, pp.51-52) because humans are ‘self-interpreting animals’ who, as linguistic beings, are necessarily concerned with ‘making sense’ of and articulating their place in the world (Taylor, 1985, p.45). This sense-making occurs through the linguistic resources of the world in which we are situated, meaning we necessarily draw on cultural moral frameworks, and subsequently make strong evaluations, as we make sense of our lives (Smith, 2002). This is because our being in social life situates us within historically-moulded ‘webs of interlocation’ that are thoroughly awash with moral values, expectations, and terms of normative judgement. But Taylor seeks to move beyond what he sees as the weaker hypothesis that it is ‘contingently true’ that humans are socialised into moral understandings, and into the ‘stronger’ hypothesis that one’s identity is *necessarily* constructed via moral sources (Taylor, 1989, p.22). Taylor (1989, p.29) argues that existing within strongly valued questions of the good is fundamental to human agency, and thus takes ‘moral orientation as essential to being a human interlocutor’, and ‘this orientation, once attained, defines where you answer from, hence your identity’. It is in the articulation of one’s identity, understood in narrative terms, that allows a person to make sense of themselves in relation to the moral sources that social existence embeds them within, and which—integrally for Taylor—allows a person to affirm and express their own moral perspectives through identification with moral frameworks that resonate with their narrative identity. Indeed, Taylor (1989, p.30) specifically defines identity both as the ‘answer to the

question “Who am I” *and* as ‘what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not’. Thus for Taylor (1989, p.27):

My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.

Taylor thus argues that the narrative form of our identity is inherently tied to the good: ‘[b]ecause we cannot but orient ourselves to the good, and thus determine our place relative to it and hence the direction of our lives, we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form, as a ‘quest’ (Taylor, 1989, pp.51-52). For Taylor, our moral identity is thus formed through identifying with culturally available frameworks of the good that allow us to articulate our self-narrative.

However, Taylor’s approach has been critiqued for providing a ‘top-down’ picture of identity, which assumes that identity is defined specifically by our articulations of who we are via the valued commitments we hold (Rorty and Wong, 1990, p.36). This has been criticised as being overly intellectualist, in that it conceptualises identity in terms of the ‘higher’ intellectual faculties of the individual to construe, articulate and live by commitments that they take to be definitive of who they are (Flanagan, 1990). Taylor’s (1989, p.27, p.30) argument that identity is ‘defined by the commitments and identifications’ that allow the individual to determine ‘what ought to be done’, and as ‘something that one ought to be true to’ also offers a much more discursively articulated and contextually consistent picture of identity and identification than most other dominant conceptualisations tend to abide (e.g. Butler, 2006; Jenkins, 2014). A notable problem with this—a problem that Taylor alludes to in his practice theory without translating into his moral theory (Shapiro, 1986)—is that many of the features of our identity and our moral understandings remain at the level of the intuitive or the partially articulated, reflecting a taken-for-granted habituation into our social world (Bourdieu, 1992). Indeed, Calhoun (1991, p.261) argues Taylor does little to engage with the ‘inarticulate’ aspects of our moral understandings and identities, for example by expounding how our intuitive moral actions and understandings reflect sedimented features of our upbringings and the positions in social space that we occupy.

Conversely, MacIntyre (1994) is critical of the inability of Taylor’s moral theory to decide, or to show how one might decide, between competing moral claims, which points to significant differences between their conceptions of how morality relates to identity. Mostly, MacIntyre

(2007) utilises narrative identity in a similar way to Taylor. He likewise recognises the profound limitations of Enlightenment conceptions of the moral subject as being disembedded from cultural heritage. MacIntyre also aims to recentre the coherent moral self as being integral to how people understand themselves and their action, an argument that he makes against “situational” and “episodic” depictions of moral action and selfhood. He (2007, p.219) similarly argues that narratives are an integral component of how humans understand themselves, also using the term ‘quest’ to describe how narrative identities are lived in pursuit of the ‘good life’. However, the quest-like form of narrative identity occupies a grander place in MacIntyre’s (2007, p.203) work, which he argues becomes integral to avoiding the ‘arbitrariness’ in how goods are pursued that he sees in Taylor’s work.

For Taylor (1989), the terms that make best sense of our lives are the terms through which judgements about the good are made. This is not dissimilar to MacIntyre’s (2007, p.218) argument that asking “‘What is the good for me?’ is to ask how best I might live out that unity and bring it to completion’. However, the difference lies in MacIntyre’s (2007, p.219) reinsertion of a teleological conception of humankind, which provides ‘criteria for success or failure in a human life as a whole [which] are the criteria of success or failure in a narrated or to-be-narrated quest’. MacIntyre (2007, p.215) argues that because human life is lived as a narrative continually moving towards ‘a variety of ends’, guided by judgements and intentionality, human life has a ‘*telos*’. The teleological character of human life means ‘[t]he unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest’, and this narrative quest provides the criteria for people to judge between competing conceptions of the good: the pursuit of what is good for our *telos* allows us to ‘define the kind of life which is a quest for the good’ and ‘enable us to order other goods’ (MacIntyre, 2007, p.219). Whereas Taylor (1989, p.510) argues that a person identifies with particular moral sources by articulating sources that resonate with their narrative identity, MacIntyre (2007, p.225) claims it is the teleological form of a human life that allows a person to be able to *decide* ‘[w]hat is better or worse for X depend[ing] upon the character of that intelligible narrative which provides X’s life with its unity’. The individual is the director of this quest, and thereby virtue is pursued through identification of and with practices that sustain one’s narrative identity. For MacIntyre (2007, p.216) then, responsibility rests firmly upon the shoulders of the individual to decide how to proceed towards the good amongst the available options of how to act, and narrativity becomes the medium for ‘answer[ing] the question “What am I to do?”’

Although theories of emotivism are fairly critiqued for their limited account of how people understand themselves and their action, MacIntyre does not subject his own theories to consideration of competing and well-evidenced arguments of the intermittent and often post-hoc role discursive consciousness plays in orientating action. As with Taylor, then, MacIntyre's consideration of non-discursive aspects of identity and consciousness is limited (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2004). Both Taylor and MacIntyre rightly argue that our moral stances are arrived at not in isolation but as a result of our social embeddedness within a rich and plural cultural history (Smith, 2002). Both *allude* to the fact that our moral standpoints are born out of particularity, drawn from our situatedness within families and social circumstances. But both make unfortunately little of these points, preferring instead to focus on the broader parameters of modern identities, which means neither give a clearly grounded account of how moral identities develop and are enacted (Author's own). Indeed, while both mention the role of identification with moral frameworks or practices, this identification is conceptualised as occurring via the discursive articulation of moral sources or the choice of practice in the service of upholding one's self-narrative.

McNay (2003, p.7) argues that narrative theories of identity generally result 'in an over-extension of the narrative model of self, where it is used as an exhaustive account of all aspects of subjectivity'. For while 'narrative is certainly a fundamental mode through which experience is rendered meaningful[...] the stress on the unifying effects of narrative selfhood posits a simplistic congruence between bodily existence and consciousness of that existence, between intention and action', whilst 'non-linguistic dimensions of identity—unconscious desires, embodied norms, non-verbal forms of expression and ways of being'—are overlooked (McNay, 2003, p.8). We agree with McNay (2003) that whilst discursive narrativity is an integral component of how people understand their lives, the narrative approaches of Taylor and MacIntyre, prioritise discursivity too firmly, resulting in the role of non-discursive features of identity and action, such as emotion, social habituation, and pre- or partially-reflexive behaviours being under-theorised. Furthermore, the ways in which narrative identity is conceptualised gives insufficient attention to the interactional processes through which moralities and identities develop—meaning they become deeply and intuitively significant to us prior to the discursive pursuit of our narrative identity—and also how our identities and moral views can become transformed through interactions. As we will go on to outline, it is through identification with others in social relations and activities that individuals come to develop their identity, a fundamental element of which is a core of moral values. In developing this position we will use the work of pragmatist thinkers such as G. H. Mead

and C. H. Cooley, but before we do that we will critically evaluate the work of contemporary thinkers in sociological social psychology who have also drawn on the symbolic interactionist tradition to understand moral identity.

Morality, Identity Verification, and Sociological Social Psychology

Social philosophic arguments for using narrative to connect identity and morality have exerted notable influence in the redeveloped sociology of morality (e.g. Smith 2003; Calhoun, 1991). However, more notable is the contemporary influence of social psychology, which has contributed a wealth of empirical research that has proved highly instructive for sociologists of moral, cognition, selfhood, and action (Ignatow, 2009). Recent work from sociologists aligned with social psychology have attempted to conceptualise the relationship between morality and identity more specifically in terms of interactions and the emotions these provoke. Particularly prominent is the use of ‘identity theory’ to provide ‘a theory of the self that explains individual variation in moral behavior’, arguing that ‘[a]n individual’s moral identity—wherever it falls on the moral–immoral continuum—guides behavior’ (Stets and Carter, 2012, p.120; Miles and Upenieks, 2018). While identity theory attempts to study and measure individual differences in moral identity and behaviour, it is unlike the social philosophy just discussed, in that morality is not seen to be fundamental to one’s identity. Instead, identity is based on the roles people occupy, on their membership of social groups, and on the personal meanings that individuals bring to situations as unique entities. The various identities that individuals hold are conceptualized as hierarchically arranged in a central system, with moral identity seen as higher in this system, influencing identities lower down the hierarchy, such as being a parent or friend (Burke and Stets, 2009). Identity theorists also set out to measure the degree to which one acts morally or immorally in various situations in relation to moral identity. However, identity theorists conceptualize all identities in a person’s systemic hierarchy as operating in the same way, in that identity standards act as the reference point that guide behaviour across situations. Thus,

individuals act on the basis of their identity meanings, and they regulate the meanings of their behavior so that those meanings are consistent with their identity meanings. An inconsistency produces negative emotions and motivates individuals to behave differently to produce outcomes that will better match their identity meanings (Stets and Carter, 2011, p.192).

In this view, ‘actors are self-regulating entities whose goal is to verify their identities’ (Stets and Carter, 2012, p.120). Identities are verified in relation to cultural expectations—framing rules and feeling rules that structure and govern interactions—as well as according to their own internal identity standard. Verification occurs when an individual’s perception of who they are in a situation corresponds with their internal identity standard and is verified by the perceived appraisal of one’s behaviour from others. This results in positive emotion for the individual whose behaviour has been verified, as they feel they have upheld their own identity standard. However, if verification fails and people perceive that they have not acted in ways that verify their identity standard, they experience negative emotions such as shame or guilt (Stets and Carter, 2012).

This is then straightforwardly translated into a theory of moral identity. How people understand themselves morally often has a strong salience for their identity, meaning people generally have a discernible identity standard that could be called ‘the moral identity’ (Stets and Carter, 2012, p.124). This standard is simply defined as ‘contain[ing] the meanings an individual associates with being a moral person’, where ‘[m]eanings are individuals’ responses when they reflect upon themselves’ (Stets and Carter, 2012, p.124). The application of identity theory to moral identity makes the claim that an individual will feel positive or negative emotions according to whether their moral identity is verified in morally salient situations. Furthermore, identity theorists maintain that the psychological importance of identity verification means that when a particular ‘identity is activated in a situation, it guides behavior’ (Stets and Carter, 2012, p.124). For example, where a morally salient situation provokes one’s moral identity, a person is likely to act in accordance with their identity standard. This allows Stets and Carter (2012, p.124) to hypothesise (and affirm in their research) that ‘[t]he higher a person’s moral identity score, the more likely the person will behave morally’.

Behaving morally, according to Stets and Carter (2012, p.124) simply involves enacting ‘conduct instilled with the expectation to do what is right or good based on social consensus, such as behaving in a just and caring manner’ (ibid). Social consensus is required, because acting in accordance with one’s moral identity, and being appraised as such, requires a common framing of the moral situation ‘as containing meanings that characterize a particular social occasion or frame of interaction’ (Stets and Carter, 2012, p.125). This alludes to an avowed Durkheimian basis of Stets and Carter’s (2012, p.121) theory, which, while supplemented by a Goffman-inspired focus on interactional appraisals and situational framings, nonetheless assumes that ‘morality binds people together through a common system of rules and expectations during interactions’.

However, Goffman's own theories, as well as associated ethnomethodological research, assume much more indeterminacy and misalignment in interactional situations than Stets and Carter seem to recognise (Emirbayer and Maynard, 2010). Whilst clear-cut situations of moral right and wrong may be interpreted via similar frames, the 'seemingly infinite' (Goffman, 1974, p.21) varieties of action and interpretation mean that '[p]otential conflict and difference are ubiquitous in even fairly unremarkable social circumstances' (Keane, 2010, p.81). Yet Stets and Carter present processes of social interaction where the meanings of situations are largely based in consensus, and also an internal identity standard in which 'the meanings an individual associates with being a moral person' appear fixed and certain, with little hint of social or psychological conflict. Indeed, other dominant psychological approaches (e.g. Haidt, 2013) argue that moral identifications occur less in terms of people verifying their identity, and more in terms of the extent to which we identify with another's values, within which misalignment and conflict is central: what is important is not that our feelings of being a moral person are verified, but whether significant values that we hold are supported or confronted by others.

A key problem is that identity theory (along with the dual-processing model of Haidt) tend to prioritise 'the goal of cognitive science in developing an explanatory mental schema [...] for social identities', whereby the exaltation of the cognitive process is given precedence over people's lived experience and how they make sense of the world (Housley and Fitzgerald, 2015, p.2). Hitlin (2003, p.133) is also critical of 'over-cognitive' approaches to the relationship between morality and identity in this respect. He (2003, p.118) argues that, while such social psychology theories have made significant contributions to explaining the role of specific self-processes (e.g. self-actualization, dual-processing, self-verification) in how morality relates to self and action, such approaches

have drifted away from the more holistic discussions of the concept that we find in the pioneers of work on self, such as Dewey, James, and Mead, to a more fragmented, disjointed picture of self comprising a variety of disconnected and independently studied and theorized self-processes.

Hitlin (2003, p.113) thus calls on sociologists and social psychologists to register the 'deeper' significance of values to a person's identity, which people feel reflects 'who they really are' (see also Miles (2015)). The significance of values to a person's sense of self means that 'values are a cohesive force within personal identity', and are therefore integral to 'the cohesion experienced

among one's various social identities' (Hitlin, 2003, p.113). As such, 'we feel authentic when we behave in keeping with our values' (Hitlin, 2003, p.123). Although Hitlin's work adds a more holistic conception of personal identity and its relationship with values, he goes less far than we intend to in using pragmatist theory to present a conceptualisation of identity as it relates to interactions and emotions. Indeed, Hitlin's definitions of how values relate to identity in terms of 'authenticity' remain quite close to those of Taylor. In our view, discussed below, it is more useful to discuss how emotions, via interaction, provoke feelings and reflexive engagement with ourselves and our values, rather than to extend the argument that the motivational cognitive-emotional force of authenticity leads individuals to 'engage in situations that are consistent with those values perceived to be important' to their "true self" (Hitlin, 2003, p.125).

In setting out our view below, we turn back to the pragmatist theory of identity found in the works of Mead and Cooley. Although identity theory understands itself as growing out of the work of earlier pragmatist thinkers, they have gone beyond them in ways that have side-lined more holistic conceptualizations of the self as a socially embedded, intersubjective, dialogical entities experienced through internal conversation. Influenced by Stryker's (1980) theory of 'structural symbolic interactionism', identity theorists believe there are two weaknesses in traditional pragmatist interactionism. The first is that society is understood by the pragmatist thinkers as based in the perpetual construction and reconstruction of meaning in people's everyday interactions, thus conceptualising of society with a fluidity and dynamism that identity theorists resist. In opposition to this, structural symbolic interactionism stresses the relatively fixed nature of social structure, understood as rooted in mainly stable trans-situational structures of meaning and organized relationships between role positions, which endure over time and enable and constrain individual agency. Secondly, if everything is constantly in flux it becomes impossible to get reliable measures of concepts and ideas (Burke and Stets, 2009).

However, while there is some validity to these critiques—a detailed discussion of which is beyond the scope of this article—they have led identity theorists to abandon the pragmatists' broader understanding of the self for one based on 'discovering a "golden factor" of agency based on a set of stable individual characteristics' (e.g. verification of identity and affect control) (Bazzani, 2022, p.3). The focus on such self-processes tend to prioritise stable characteristics over the complex cultural meanings and situational circumstances in which moral selfhood is enacted (Miles, 2015), while also looking past broader, and some would say definitional, features of human agency whereby an actor is able to 'stand apart from the immediate situation and can be motivated by

concerns beyond the situation, such as a distant goal, an abstract principle, or concern for someone else' (Gillespie, 2012, p.32). The emphasising of causal efficacy of specific self-processes are posited over other processes of human agency that pragmatist thinkers saw as having a collective relevance to the emergence of self and social action, such as habit, intersubjectivity, and internal conversation, all of which were considered relevant to explaining social action. Understanding the self in these terms allows us to develop a more deeply intersubjective view of identity and the processes of identification in social relations and interactions. This also entails a view of the self that goes beyond cognition, to theoretically analyze the embodied and dispositional aspects of moral behaviour, and how they interact with the reflexive aspects of the self.

Identification, Moral Socialisation and Reflexive Selfhood

Despite their differences, discursive narrative accounts and many uses of self-verification theories are constructed around what is purported to be an all-purpose account of what identities are directed towards (either narrative coherence or identity verification). As a result, in our view, both give only partial descriptions of how moral identities are moulded, enacted, and come to be understood through interactions. We feel that a more direct reading of Mead¹ provides a contrasting theory of how identities develop socially, through identification in interaction, allowing both reflexive and non-reflexive modes to be centred in how identities are oriented and enacted. Indeed, drawing on Mead, Gillespie (2006) argues that his fellow social psychologists have often neglected the significance of perspective taking and identification as general features of human agency that are integral to the development and enactment of identities.

Identification and the Development of Moral Identity

For Mead (1934), the reality of the objective world and one's own subjective sense of self is created in early childhood through social activity undertaken in interaction with others. This means that, for Mead, there are no ontological pre-givens separate from social activity: the world of objects and other people are encountered in the social act, and it is through this activity that the child constructs its sense of the ontological reality of things and others. Furthermore, it is only when others take an attitude towards the child through their responses to its actions that it realises it is an object to others (Joas, 1997). Only then is the child able to adopt a subjective attitude by

¹ Blumer's 'appropriation' of Mead has been described by Silva (2013, p.464) as being 'partly responsible for a narrow understanding of the extent of Mead's contributions to contemporary sociology'.

taking itself as the object of its own activity and thought, by considering itself through the attitude that others take towards it. Here, the formation of subjectivity and capacities for agency are inseparable from the social processes in which the child, and later the adult, develops its personality and sense of morality. Thus for Mead,

The individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the general standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs. For he enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals towards himself within a social environment or context of experience and behaviour in which both he and they are involved (Mead, 1934, p.138).

Key to all of this is the identification with other individuals and taking the attitude of the other towards oneself. This is seen in the activities of play in childhood, where children will adopt the activities they have observed in adults, such as playing the role of a parent, shopkeeper, or police officer. In putting themselves in the situations of adults, children are taking on and ‘cultivating’ the attitude of the adult, which does not simply mean imitating their conduct, but acting and feeling what it is like to perform those actions (Gillespie, 2005, p.28). Thus, in playing with other children and with dolls, the child takes on the attitude of the parent in the relationship with its playmates and toys.

Through taking the attitude of the other, children also begin to assimilate the normative structures of the adult world, both through the structures of activity that it develops in interaction with others and through the ways in which adults respond to the child’s actions. A child, then, comes to think of their behaviour as good and bad through the attitudes of their caregivers, but as they mature these actual figures fade away and we assume the position of what Mead has called the ‘generalized other’—that is, the generalized attitudes of the group that figures in our inner conversations, without taking on a specific, personalized form. This is the form that adult thinking takes, which is ‘an inner conversation in which we may be taking roles of specific acquaintances over against ourselves, but usually it is with what I have termed the “generalized other” that we converse, and so attain the levels of abstract thinking’ (Mead, 1925, p.272).

For Mead, the self primarily emerges through the process of taking the attitudes of others towards one's own conduct, and it is precisely because of this that the emergence of selfhood and moral habituation are intertwined. Thus, the individual's 'self expresses or reflects the general behavior pattern of this social group to which he belongs' (Mead, 1934, p.7) and 'is thereby an expression of its customs and the carrier of its values. These customs appear in the individual as habits, and the values appear as goods' (Mead, 1981, p.404). But the concurrent development of reflexive selfhood that emerges alongside social habituation (as will be discussed presently) forms the basis of a dialogical and potentially efficacious moral identity.

More recent arguments, which lend empirical support to this position, can be found in the research of developmental psychologists, such as Tomasello (2019) and the other studies that he cites throughout his work on the development of moral identity. For Tomasello, the key to moral identity lies in what he calls 'role-reversal evaluation', in that by the ages of 4 or 5 years old children are starting to judge themselves by the same standard by which they judge others. This happens when they realize that others are judging them by the objective normative rules that they have been applying to others. According to Tomasello, children as young as 3 years make moral judgements about others. It seems that this may be partly implicit, stemming from the evolutionary need of humans to work with cooperative partners in groups, so that across cultures children look favourably on those who are helpful and supportive, and less favourably on those who are uncooperative or selfish. But moral judgements also come from what children learn from their culture, as they judge others by a shared set of standards that they identify as belonging to the group, or to 'we' as a collective. It is when children realize that others are judging them by those same standards that they come to judge themselves in that light too: a process of role reversal in which we find the foundations of moral identity. By the ages of 6 or 7 years, children have begun to understand that they must make their own moral judgements and be able to justify to others why they have done so, having a social and moral identity. Thus, although Tomasello does not mention Mead in his writings, his work nevertheless endorses the importance of what Mead called 'taking the attitude of the other' in the process of developing a moral identity, and also of the 'generalized other' in the sense that Tomasello sees the power of normative standards as residing in the standards of the group as a whole.

However, although valuable, Tomasello's studies of children's moral behaviour stop around the age of 7 years. This leaves little said about later years where young people begin to form more complex moral identities through identification with peers, perhaps latterly coming to challenge

the moral values they have learned from their parents, and also into adult life where interaction in complex societies provokes reflective engagement with one's identity. Where Mead continues to be informative, therefore, is in the illumination of the ongoing active nature of processes of moral identity that continues to be moulded through interaction, taking the attitude of the other, and identification.

Mead (1934), for example, describes how perspective taking in play in early childhood facilitates increasingly complex forms of identification into adolescence and adulthood. Assuming different perspectives is a general feature of social life, with different positions and perspectives adopted and experienced continually: helper/helped, being hurt/doing the hurting, being respected/disrespected, treated fairly/unfairly, agreeing/disagreeing (Gillespie, 2006). As the child develops, the pervasive adoption of various positions cultivates the child's understanding of a multiplicity of perspectives that comprise social life. Along with an increasingly individuated sense of self, this facilitates more complex forms of identification, e.g. with certain values, groups, people, and the ideas they embody (Gillespie, 2006). This in turn reflects a developing capacity for the child to move from the replication of convention to more complex forms of morality in which generalised perspectives of morality can be both inhabited and differentiated from.

Taylor (1995, p.65) accuses Mead of providing an 'introjected' self of pure social habituation that cannot assume and decide on its own course. Yet Mead (1934, p.140) is clear that the social emergence of the self provides the basis for a self that is able 'to converse with himself as he had communicated with others'. This occurs because individuals are socialised within a plurality of relationships and contexts, meaning that the self is constructed and engaged with from a multiplicity of perspectives. This leads to a plurality of reference points for the self, which come to be integrated and differentiated in the formation of an 'emerging self-image' that becomes an efficacious aspect of the reflected on 'me' (Joas, 1997, p.118). The individual is subsequently able to assume an understanding of herself as having her own standpoints on shared moral issues in relation to those of others, and to recognise her own moral attitudes as her own, which she is able to shape and have shaped by others (Habermas, 1995). This provides the basis for an efficacious moral identity that the individual is able to reflexively engage with, which she is able to enact through the assumption of certain positions and actions that may or may not align with social consensus, but which is also moulded through our interactions with others. This in turn allows a Meadian conceptualisation of moral identity to extend beyond self-feeling in relation to the 'right or good based on social consensus' (Stets and Carter, 2012, p.124), without postulating the ethical

self-understanding as an achievement of the unitary pursuit of one's self-narrative (Habermas, 1995). For while Mead describes the self in moral terms similarly to Taylor and MacIntyre, he bases his theory not around the end point of discursive subjectivity, but rather around the interactional and habituating processes out of which capacities for identification and subjectivity develops (Habermas, 1995).

Indeed, a point that is given little credence by Taylor and MacIntyre (Calhoun, 1991) is that the identities that we develop tend to reflect our specific social position in relation to others, and subsequently orientates the (often dispositional) processes through which we identify with others and their values (Mead, 1925). Similarly to Bourdieu's habitus, Mead (1934, p.241) discusses how the groups into which we are most embedded from our earliest years yield the 'formation of habits which are of primary importance' to us, and form the 'me's' that have the most residual bearing. The direct relationships from which we are socialised are themselves situated within differentiated and stratified social relations more broadly, meaning that the identities that we develop tend to reflect our specific social position in relation to others, and subsequently orientates processes through which we identify with others (Mead, 1925). Yet a key value of Mead's work (which contrasts him with Bourdieu (Aboulafia, 1999)) lies in its capacity to describe how these processes of socialisation, alongside the concurrent development of reflexive capacities in the agent, results in the development of an 'intersubjectively mediated self-understanding', which facilitates the potential for the kind of active identification that can resist social habituation and pressures (Habermas, 1995, p.153; Crossley, 2006). Mead's theory consequently facilitates an explanation of how we identify with others not simply on the basis of who they are, but in putting ourselves into the attitude of the other we identify with them by what they can do in their activity, or by their position in social relations, or how they reflect or challenge sedimented parts of our experience. Thus people often identify with others in terms of their power of agency, and beneath this identification there is also a process of taking on certain values and possibilities (Sève, [2008] in press).

Moral Identity and Interaction

Mead's work then differentiates from both narrative-based and verification-based accounts in his argument of how morality and identity relate to action, and thereby how interaction provokes reflexive engagement with, and potential reconstruction of, moral identities.

Firstly, in contrast to narrative-based approaches, rather than prioritising discursivity or teleological narrative pursuits, Mead's theory of action argues that action is mostly non- or partially-reflexive until interactions provoke consciousness: it is at moments in which habituated action no longer prevails that reflexivity emerges (Aboulafia, 1999). Secondly, where ends are formulated, which is by no means the case for the more habituated side of moral action, this occurs in relation to situational circumstance and in terms of the socially inculcated means through which situations are understood, interpreted, and valued (Joas, 1990). For example, extensive research centred on personal lives illuminates how moral decisions around care for elderly relatives or difficult relationship decisions reflect the social contexts and interactions in which moral perspectives are formed, as well as the immediate relations and emerging circumstances in which decisions are entangled (Finch and Mason, 1990; Smart and Neale, 1999). While people do arrive at and articulate positions and decisions they recognise as being their own, they are arrived at and enacted *within* emergent intersubjective processes that reflect deeply entangled relations, rather than based on a clear narrative or identity standard that drives action (Bazzani, 2022). Put otherwise, there is an intersubjective emergence to moral decisions and courses of action that is not well explained in the prioritisations of self-narrative or self-verification.

But as well as moulding the course of moral decisions and actions, interactions also engender the confrontations of viewpoint and problematic junctures of action that stimulate reflexive contemplation upon one's own moral perspectives and standpoints (Joas 1990). In Mead's view, our interaction with differentially disposed individuals across a variety of discordant situations means 'habits and goods come into conflict with each other', both "within" the individual and between individuals and the social contexts in which they are acting (Mead, 1981, p.404). And this coming together of diverse perspectives means interactions regularly afford actors new perspectives on themselves and their action, leading them to calibrate and modify their standpoints, positions, intentions, and narratives of themselves and others (Crossley, 2006, p.90).

By centring the interactional processes in which moral consciousness is provoked, in contrast to perspectives based both on consistent identity standards or unifying narrative identity, Mead's theory produces a comparatively mobile view of moral identity (Emirbayer, 1997). Interactional situations more often than not *do* produce thoughts and courses of action that cohere with embodied understandings of one's own identity or moral identity standard. Stets and Carter (2012), as well as other psychological research into the significance of moral identities, evidence this point well, and the general thrust of this point is affirmed in Mead's emphasis on sedimented

moral habituation. However, what is missed when precedence is given to stable characteristics, and what Mead can add to these perspectives, is that complex interaction has the potential to de-sediment, as well as affirm, habituated moral stances and residing moral identities (Joas, 1996).

A notable example of this can be seen in transformations in attitudes towards LGBTQ issues and rights in the past fifty years. Whilst homophobia remains widespread, and whilst prevalence of anti-LGBTQ attitudes has increased among some groups in recent years (Cox, et al., 2014), by a number of measures Western societies have typically become significantly more accepting and supportive of LGBTQ issues (e.g. Loftus, 2001; Keleher and Smith, 2012; Martel, 2018). As Loftus (2001) illustrates, demographic shifts have played a significant part in this, as younger people who have been socialised into more tolerant views comprise a growing portion of the demographic. Common to what Hart-Brinson (2018) refers to as the ‘gay marriage generation’ is a broadened tolerance on a range of issues and a willingness to challenge older generations’ conservative views as a critical mass of generational support for inclusive attitudes is achieved.

Although by no means supported by all the younger generation—and, indeed, the success of the ‘gay marriage’ generation has been predicated on the organised resistances of many from older generations—a cultural and generational divide across such issues is often articulated as a key marker of ‘culture war’ type debates in many Western societies (Hart-Brinson, 2018). This is not dissimilar to generational divides that developed in Western societies in the 1960s, as young people began to distance themselves from the values of their parents’ generation. For those young people who identified with these movements of social change, a divide opens up between what Sève ([2008] in press) calls ‘forwards and backwards identification’: that is, many came to challenge the values of the older generation that they had been brought up with through identification with their peer group and, through them, the new social movements they stood for. Their forward identification was with the more radical elements of their own generation and their desire to create a new society. However, those who remained more conservative in their outlook stayed with a backward identification, sticking with the values of their parents’ generation and identifying with likeminded people and groups.

However, Loftus’s (2001) analysis reminds us that demographic shift cannot account for all of the shifts in attitudes towards homosexuality from around the 1980s onwards, as there has been a significant shift in the attitudes of people who have lived their adult lives across this period. Explanations for such shifts amongst older generations highlight the role of protests in the 1970s

and 80s, sympathy garnered in relation to the AIDS crisis, improved representation in the media, and the role of institutional and social policing of unacceptable attitudes, along with a rise in active policies and training measures of allyship in institutional settings (Keleher and Smith, 2012; Russell and Bohan, 2016; Martel, 2018; Michelson, 2019). Along with generational (though by no means complete) shifts in culture towards acceptance of diversity, the result has been a shift in social settings within which identities are constructed and reconstructed, which often includes active challenges to and rethinking of previously held attitudes that become the object of reflection and repudiation, yielding reflexive conversation about previously sedimented values and dispositions as certain social practices start to be debated.

This illustrates the ongoing aspects of identification that Mead saw as vital to the intersection between social habituation, interaction, and the construction and reconstruction of (moral) identities, and social transformation. As Mead (1913, p.148) argues, as our interactions drive our deliberations

we find in moral reflection a conflict in which certain values find a spokesman in the old self or a dominant part of the old self, while other values answering to other tendencies and impulses arise in opposition and find other spokesmen to present their cases.

Changes in valuation are predicated not on the relative success of identity verification or discursive articulations of one's narrative identity quest, but instead rest on the transformative powers of interaction to remould how people understand themselves and their world, leading to reflexive conversation about values and dispositions that may previously have been pre-reflexively assumed. As LaFollette and Woodruff (2015) point out, this not only challenges psychological theories that align moral attitudes with 'pre-wiring' of the brain (e.g. Haidt, 2013), but also illuminate important weaknesses with arguments where identity verification is given primacy in explanations of moral identity. Identity theorists, for example, understand the two important reasons for joining or identifying with a group or a movement are, first, self-enhancement and, second, uncertainty reduction (Burke and Stets, 2009). The first of these relates back to the primary need of individuals to verify their own identities and the second to reducing the stress of having one's identity and beliefs challenged. However, if the 'goal [of actors] is to verify their identities' (Stets and Carter, 2012, p.120), then wide-scale changes to previously dominant social attitudes seem unattainable. And the reduction of uncertainty reduces transformations in moral perspective to making oneself feel better, rather than, for example,

coming to recognise the harm done by a belief or a renewed empathy garnered through a conversation (LaFollette and Woodruff, 2015). A Meadian position can recognise the significance of ingroup identification and outgroup dis-identification (Gillespie, 2006). But his pragmatist position of explicating the relationship between consciousness and action within a world of social meaning understands identification in the context of social and internal conflicts through a process located in wider, dynamic social and personal dialogical challenges, which arise as a result of interactional engagement in a complex social world (Joas, 1996).

In these ways, a Meadian pragmatist-relational approach provides a means for explaining the link between morality and identity that does not prioritise the pursuit of a clearly articulated unity narrative, nor centre morality around singular self-processes, such as identity verification. Yet, one of the problems in Mead's approach is that he does not take account of the link between emotions and morality. For Mead, emotions only become reflexively conscious when we reach an impasse in everyday activity and we are thrown into an attitude of reflection in order to reconstruct activity. However, others have seen emotion as accompanying and 'colouring' all social activity (Leontyev, 1978), giving a wider scope for the role of emotion in social life. Cooley (1983), Mead's fellow pragmatist, also saw things this way, thinking that emotion and 'self-feeling' was an accompaniment to all social interactions. Although Cooley's position on society was much more subjectivist than Mead's, we believe that the latter's insights into the emotional processes of identification can be integrated into an approach that stresses the relational and interactive nature of morality and emotion.

Moral Identity and Emotion

Consideration of emotions continues to be side-lined in sociological accounts of selfhood and morality alike (Harkness and Hitlin, 2014), a point that Stets and Carter (2012) actively seek to redress through identity theory. Their approach understands emotion as related to the fundamental need of the self to be verified in its encounters with others, something that results in positive emotion if the self is verified according to its expectation states and negative emotion if it is not. Indeed, Stets and Carter (2012, p.125) argue '[n]egative emotions drive the identity control system to reduce the inconsistency by behaving differently'. While emotions are provoked by the perceived verifying judgement of others, Stets and Carter (2012, p.126) acknowledge that the emotions experienced are tied to situational meanings 'in the form of *feeling rules* that specify emotions individuals ought to experience, such as feeling sad at a funeral, [which] indicate the

direction of an emotion (positive or negative), [and] its intensity (from strong to weak)'. This leads the authors (ibid) to 'expect people to draw on cultural expectations about emotions that ought to be experienced when moral rules are present. The feeling rules in moral situations involve the idea that individuals should feel guilt or shame when moral codes are violated'.

This again betrays the simple confluence between identity verification and broad cultural norms in Stets and Carter's work, which misses the profound opacity of the moral situations in which people act: for example, when we feel justified in our angry response, when we get praised for actions we come to see as wrong, or when we feel awful for taking decisions about care for elderly relatives even if we and those around us feel it is the right thing to do. Complex emotions such as shame, or feelings of indignation at certain injustices develop in and reflect our particular relationships with others, as well as our specific experiences and how these relate to positions within relations. As Sayer (2011, p.147) argues, shame or sensitivities to feeling judged may reflect 'someone's social position and the lack of respect they may have received'. Such emotional sensitivities become embodied and affect how a person acts, thinks about themselves, and assesses how they are being treated in a way that is more intersecting than the straightforward experience of the extent to which an 'identity standard' is in alignment with the assessment of others.

Thus, rather than 'framing rules', we follow Gregory Bateson (1973, p.113) in arguing that emotions should be understood as reflecting 'patterns of relationship', which, as with moral habituations and sentiments, come to be part of our embodied experience, reflecting our habituation into patterns of experiences that are sedimented into our action. Yet, as Bakhtin (1990) illuminates, emotions are also evaluative and we take emotional-evaluative stances in relation to objects and to others, including in our moral valuations, in ways that are more complex than a corrective step on the self-verification process. Developing as beings whose self-understanding is formed from our relations with others embeds individuals within social relationships, normative understandings, and values, which carry with them not just expectations of roles and conduct, but also deep emotional meaning. Our experience as an emotional being means that just as we feel affirmed or ashamed, we also feel something is important to us, we feel let down, an injustice makes us angry, and we feel respected or judged when our views are challenged (Sayer, 2011). These emotions flood our conduct, our evaluations of situations, and the meanings that we take towards ourselves and towards others, allowing an action to be experienced as humiliating or rewarding, and allowing us to recognise the pain our action has caused or the emotional dissonance that may be evoked when faced with a difficult personal decision. Emotions are thus

part and parcel of how consciousness is intersubjectively provoked and how our immediate evaluations and subsequent ruminations about the situation are taken (Bakhtin, 1990).

Mead brings us to a point of being able to explain how we are relationally formed, morally situated and evaluative beings. However, he did not adequately account for the profound force with which emotional experiences colour our relations with others and our experience and evaluation of their actions and our own. Something of this is captured in Cooley's well-known idea of the 'looking-glass self', in that we do not see ourselves mirrored exactly in the attitude of the other but rather we *imagine* what the attitude of the other might be. Such a self-idea has three principal elements: 'the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgement of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling such as pride or mortification' (Cooley, 1983, p.184). The problem with Cooley's approach is that the imagination of our appearance (and only our appearance, not our actual acts or self) to the other seems to be based in knowing or imagining another person's mind, in terms of what they may be thinking about us—hence, his view of interaction is based on a 'society of mind'. In contrast, Mead's approach was based upon something more objective: the attitude of another communicated through social acts. If we take this to be the basic ontological starting point, rejecting the notion that society is purely subjective, there remains something of importance in what Cooley has to say about how this results in self-feeling and how this ties interactional and emotional exchange with moral experience. Cooley's argument is that a person's attitude towards me will have some evaluative content, some colouring of emotion and feeling, as well as some moral or value-based judgement, and my own response to that evaluation will involve self-feeling. Yet, these kinds of experiences are not purely 'ideas' that exist in imagination: they are embodied features of interactional exchange that produce powerful feelings evident on the body like visible signs of anger, appreciation, or hurt.

A point given little credence by perspectives that emphasise discursive narrativity is that it is through such everyday emotional-moral exchanges and evaluations that our action is moulded, and through which our moral stances and our thoughts about ourselves and our action emerge in relation to the (moral) feelings that arise in the interactions (Keane, 2010). Beneath these relations to others and our evaluative experience of them are deeper identifications with values and our moral understandings of ourselves and our social world: we may be angry not because we have been given extra work, but because we feel the way it was apportioned is reproducing existing inequalities. Or we may feel torn not just because we argued with a friend, but because we have

come to wonder if we can remain friends with someone whose worldview is so at odds with our own (Sayer, 2011). However, in our view, it would be a mistake to assert that these emotional experiences imply that our valuation and moral stances are discursively formed as part of our narrative quest in pursuit of the good, or is weighed up in relation to our own narrative and the narrative of others in the service of justifiable moral judgements. Mead allows us to see that such identification with values is firstly predicated on habituated social experience, out of which forms moral feelings, sensibilities, and beliefs. Indeed, recent psychological approaches to valuation (e.g. Haidt, 2013) affirm that even the values most important to us are seldom formed discursively, but rather reflect deeply sedimented intuitional orientations towards certain worldviews.

However, in contrast with social psychology models in which reasoning is presented as being almost entirely post-hoc to our intuitive-emotional responses (as with Haidt) or where emotions signify identity verification, our pragmatist perspective then allows us to conceptualise the role that emotions play in reasoning and how emotional reactions become objects of reasoning themselves, for example as we deliberate on our attitudes towards the rights of minoritized groups in relation to social discourse, or as the emotional burden of care leads us to reassess if we need help, or as a multiplication of improprieties leads us to rethink our loyalty to a political movement, our workplace, or a relationship.

It is these conflicts and considerations that emerge in consciousness as reflexive awareness, through internal conversations about moral affiliations and choices as we act within various social situations in relation to others. In this we dialogue not only with our own self and our concerns but also with others, both specific and generalised—whether in their presence or in imagination—, which inform the reconstruction discussed by Mead. Emotions are integral to this process as they are experienced as emotional-evaluative stances that arise in interactions in relation to our socially formed and mobile personal configuration of moral feelings, values, and beliefs. Because these emotional-evaluative stances are embodied they can be pre-reflexive and visceral, but that does not mean that they are without connection to our reflexive moral orientations. Rather, the reflexive and non-reflexive are mutually constitutive of the moral self. Emotions and intuitions inform moral reasoning but likewise the moral reasoning we learn throughout our life informs the intuitions we have in specific moments of action and shapes our emotional reactions.

In this view, the moral self does not function as it does in identity theory, driven by a fundamental need to verify its moral identity in terms of an internal standard, its relations to others limited to an appraisal of their responses. Instead, the moral and emotional self emerges within social relationships through processes of identification with others, in which individuals come to feel specific things about others and about themselves due to their interdependence with other people. This also allows us to understand how different people come to orient themselves differently in their morality and how this orientation changes over time as people come to identify and dis-identify with various values, positions, people and social groups. What was once non-reflexive and intuitive comes into reflexive awareness as people dialogue, socially and internally, about their moral values and their social world. Individuals come to adopt, enact and question moral values through social relations, interactions, and identifications with others that form them as moral selves, and it is within the conflicts and internal tensions in these relations that individuals and social groups play a role in reproducing and transforming the moral culture of which they are a part.

Conclusion

Morality has been taken to be central to identity across philosophical, psychological, and sociological literature. Yet, the current predominant frameworks through which the relationship between morality and identity is conceptualised in sociology each often miss important features of how moral identities form and are enacted. In our view, it is not narrative identity and its connection with the good that is ontologically basic, but social relationships and interactions that constitute the context in which moral identities and perspectives can be embodied and articulated through interactions with others (Crossley, 2006). For us, the question of how morality relates to identity rests upon a viable conceptualisation of subjectivity, one that takes the subject to be socially emergent, relationally situated, emotional, and reflexive—all of which are integral elements of self-identity. This position is also missing from much of the sociological social psychology approaches to moral identity based in identity theory, which have often reduced moral motivation to a basic need for self-verification. The fervent prioritisation of self-verification is made at expense of sufficiently situating the self within the social relations that provide the intersubjective fabric for identification, dis-identification, social and psychological conflict, and, thus, moral change.

These two dominant positions have been adopted widely in sociology. Yet in our view, this results in sociological conceptualisations of moral identity that rely on philosophic conceptions of narrativity that pertain poorly to social practice, or the focus on narrow self-processes that reflect poorly in how people feel and experience their sense of moral identity, how this is used to make sense of themselves and the world, and how moral identities might change. The pragmatist-relational approach offered here allows us to understand that moral identity is not just based on the discursive articulation of moral sources, but is also embodied, habitual and emotional, with reasoning and discursive articulations bounded up with intuitive and emotional judgements that arise in interaction. A Meadian approach allows us to see firstly that the social emergence of the self leads to the development of an identity and identity positions that the individual is able to engage with reflexively; and secondly that we move between the pre-reflexive and the reflexive as phases of consciousness in situations that require our judgement. Our social development habituates us into moral understandings and positions, disposing us towards identifying with certain people, groups, worldviews, and moral standpoints, which often reflect our position in social relations. Yet, the same process of the social emergence of the self leads to the development of dialogic capacities in the individual to form their own subjective moral positions in relation to ongoing interaction with the perspectives of others, in a way that is both thoroughly socially situated and potentially transformative of their own standpoints and courses of action.

Where Mead's perspective is weak, however, is in its consideration of emotions. Of central importance to the development of the moral self is the process of interactional identification with others that begins early in childhood and goes on throughout our lives, where we are the object of the emotional-evaluative attitude of others—becoming a subject to ourselves—yet at the same time identifying with others and the values they embody in social activity. We have argued that a pragmatist perspective to moral identity can be extended to account for the role of emotions within this via the work of Cooley and Bakhtin. As with morality, emotion is experienced not simply through personal meaning, stemming from our own biographical experiences, but also through social meanings which give evaluative content to our activities. Our social development as selves embeds us within relationships and moral understandings that are emotionally meaningful to us, which colour our experiences and become important elements of our evaluations of our selves and others, as our actions and the actions of others affect us emotionally. Our emotional-evaluative experience of ourselves and of others means that emotional experience becomes directed in two ways—outward towards others and inwards towards ourselves in some form of self-feeling, which, in certain situations, we experience in relation to our own self-understanding. Emotions

thus become integral elements not just of how moral situations are judged or how we judge others, but also in evoking internal deliberations about our selves as a moral person. We maintain that extending Mead's approach in this way results in a theory of moral identity that more adequately registers the role of emotional experience in moral identifications.

Of central importance to moral identity is the process of identification with others that begins early in childhood and goes on throughout our lives, where we are the object of the emotional-evaluative attitude of others—becoming a subject to ourselves—yet at the same time identify with the relational position of others who play a key role in our lives and with the values they embody in social activity. Through identification with certain others and with particular social groups, the way that our moral positions develop and change are never separate from our social relationships or from the emotional content of those relations as they endure, are tested, survive or break, and as new relations form through new identifications. What we therefore propose is a view of moral identity that develops as we are socialised and continue to interact within a social world awash with moral norms, values, and expectations, which situate and provoke our moral understandings, emotions and intuitions, including our reflexive capacities and the things we are reflexive about. The ways we identify with certain others and groups throughout our lives, how our moral positions develop and change, and the reflexivity and emotional evaluations of the moral self via which this occurs, are never separate from, or prior to, social relations and activities but instead are woven deeply into their fabric.

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