

The Cultural Construction of Moral and Civic Identities

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In this article, we explore the intertwining of moral identity and the social and cultural context. First, we review existing research on moral identity that has considered the role of social others and the cultural environment. Then we pose questions to further research in this area and offer a 3-level framework with which to understand how the cultural world influences moral identity development. Central to this framework is an analysis of the cultural practices within which moral identities develop, as well as the institutional contexts that support these practices and the social interactions that comprise them. Finally, we illustrate the components of framework using examples of data from 2 studies—1 focused on how an inner city Muslim school worked to foster the moral identities of students and the other on the development of civic identities among urban teens in a community action program.

Moral identity is defined as the convergence of moral ideals and one's personal identity or as the extent to which commitment to moral values is infused into one's sense of self (Colby & Damon, 1993; Damon & Colby, 1996; Damon & Gregory, 1997; Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1998; Hart, Yates, Fegley, & Wilson, 1995). The construct of moral identity offers a solution to a critical and longstanding conundrum in the moral development literature on the relation between moral thought and moral action. Despite the common-sense notion that there should be some relation between the ability to reason morally and the proclivity to act morally, research findings have been mixed, more often than not finding that there is little relation between moral thought and moral behavior (Blasi, 1993; Grusek & Lytton, 1988; Nucci, 2000). For example, studies have found that moral exemplars (nominated for their high level of moral action) are no different from comparison groups in their complexity of moral judgment (Colby & Damon, 1996; Hart & Fegley, 1995). Although moral reasoning does not seem to explain differences in moral behavior, research findings support the conclusion that sustained moral action often results when people conceive of themselves and their goals in moral terms and identify with moral standards (Damon & Gregory, 1997).

Research on moral identity has been primarily concerned with understanding its nature and correlates. However, oft neglected are questions of how moral identity develops in relation to the environments within which individuals live and grow and how it can be fos-

tered in children and adolescents. It is this core issue that we take up in this article. We take the perspective that development is inherently a social and cultural process, as it inevitably occurs with social others in the cultural activities of daily life (Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). However, the development of moral identity as a part of a larger developmental and cultural task has not been well theorized or well understood. Our goal in this article is to begin to explore moral identity development as both a cultural and a developmental process and to suggest conceptual tools and methodological approaches that enable careful study of it.

We begin by reviewing treatments of moral identity to date, which offer some preliminary understanding of how the social and cultural world can come to influence children's moral life. We then raise several important questions for the field to consider in understanding the relation between culture, development, and moral identity. Although we do not attempt to answer these questions, we do use them to ground our discussion of possible conceptual tools with which to understand, explain, and elaborate on how the social world, in the context of cultural activities, may come to support individuals in identifying themselves as moral. In doing so, we outline a preliminary framework for understanding the development of moral identities in the social world. We offer a set of conceptual tools with which to capture and articulate the moment-to-moment social moves and interactions that become intertwined with individuals' moral selves as they participate in cultural activities in their communities.

Specifically, we argue for a perspective that takes cultural practices as a core unit of analysis. By cultural practices, we mean the reoccurring, structured activities that make up daily life. A treatment of cul-

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tural practices requires a different set of conceptual and methodological tools than those conventionally used to study moral identity. Although conventional studies have primarily relied on survey and interview data, a cultural practice perspective also incorporates ethnographic and other qualitative data.

However, the approach we propose is not limited to an analysis of stand alone cultural practices. These cultural practices occur within institutional contexts, which inform both how the practices are structured and who has access to them. Additionally, the social interactions that comprise practices are an important focus for analysis, as they provide a moment-to-moment analysis of the unfolding of cultural and developmental¹ processes. Hence, we argue for three nested levels of analysis for studying the development of moral identity in cultural context: *the institutional context*, *the cultural activities* within these institutions, and *the social interactions* that comprise the activities. Although this is primarily a conceptual article, to illustrate the constructs we use examples from two recent studies—one focused on how an inner city Muslim school worked to foster the moral identities of students and the other on the development of civic identities² among urban teens in a community action program. Our hope is that this approach will push the field toward greater conceptual clarity about the cultural process of moral identity development, as well as offer a beginning scheme with which we can study environments that foster moral identity.

Current Treatments of Moral Identity

One central methodology for studying moral identity has been to study moral “exemplars,” who are nominated for their extraordinary moral commitment as compared to a control group (Colby & Damon, 1995; Hart & Fegley, 1995; Matsuba, 2002; Reimer, 2002). Although the criterion has varied slightly from

study to study, the central idea is to look for people who have dedicated themselves to improving the lives of others. These inquiries provide useful evidence that morally committed people more fully integrate moral concerns into their sense of identity and give credence to the idea that “moral identity” is a meaningful construct that integrates reflection and behavior. What remains underdeveloped in the literature is a clear conceptual understanding of the dynamic relation between moral identity and social context. Although there is evidence that morally exemplary persons think about their goals, values, and relationships differently than persons who are not moral exemplars, we have less understanding of how their moral identity develops in specific social and cultural contexts.

Although social context has not been the focus of most moral identity studies, prior research has acknowledged some ways that social and cultural influences play a role in the construction of moral identity. For example, research among adolescents has looked at the unique ways in which moral exemplars incorporate important interpersonal relationships into their sense of self (Hart & Fegley, 1995; Reimer & Wade-Stein, 2002). Colby & Damon, who relied not just on self-descriptions (i.e., participants choosing words that describe who they are or interviews focused on elaborating such descriptions) but also extensive autobiographical accounts (i.e., participants telling the “story” of their lives), gathered rich evidence describing adult moral exemplars’ interpretations of the significance of interpersonal relationships for their moral development. They describe a dynamic interplay between social influence and moral development, in which individuals cooperatively shape their new perspectives in the course of multiple negotiations with others.

In addition to studying the importance of interpersonal relationships, research on moral identity has also begun to explore the ramifications of socioeconomic context for identity development. In a line of research discussing exemplary youth who have managed, despite the odds, to engage in sustained moral behavior such as community service, Hart and colleagues focus on the way that social structure influences the life opportunities of young people (Hart et al., 1995, 1998). They suggest that moral and civic involvement is possible only when young people have acquired knowledge about their communities as well as opportunities to participate in them, which fosters a sense of connection and responsibility to their community. Urban and suburban youth have different opportunities for extracurricular involvement and relationships with adults; youth living in urban contexts are more likely to encounter obstacles depriving them of such knowledge and participation (Atkins & Hart, 2002). Important for our purposes is the idea that the socioeconomic context or the social structure can have profound influences on

¹We conceptualize development as both microgenetic development (change over moment-to-moment time) and ontogenetic development (changes over longer stretches of time—months or years). The approach that we put forth in this article is particularly well-suited to understanding the intertwining of culture and moment-to-moment development.

²We are not suggesting that civic identity and moral identity are exactly the same. Whereas civic identity pertains to one’s connection to and participation in a civic community (Atkins & Hart, 2002), moral identity can be more broadly defined in terms of a personal commitment to lines of action that support the welfare of others. However, clearly moral and civic identities are related—participation in a civic community implies a concern for the welfare of others, so in that respect, we treat these constructs (and the way each is fostered in cultural contexts) as similar.

the kinds of activities young people get involved in, through which they develop and display moral and civic identities.

A third way that the study of moral identity has addressed social context has been to examine young people's understanding of their place in history. In their work on civic identity development, Yates and Youniss (1996) suggested that to develop a civic and moral identity young people must come to identify with "transcendent" values and ideologies that link the self to a past and present. Such values provide meaning and purpose, and motivate students to engage in community service. In turn, community service provides opportunities for young people to reflect on society's political organization and moral order.

Although these different ways of making sense of social and contextual influences provide an important starting point, their diversity of levels of analysis leave a somewhat fragmented picture. How can we understand the process by which social and cultural factors interact in children's moral lives and conceptions of themselves as moral actors? To begin to address this question, we need a conceptual framework that brings them together in a coherent manner. Further, the methodologies for much existing research on moral identity have been self-reports by individual participants, which pose limitations for our understanding of the interaction between context and identity development (Reimer & Wade-Stein, 2002). Hart and Fegley (1995) acknowledged this point in reflecting on their own study of adolescent moral exemplars. Although most of their exemplars came from community groups and grass roots organizations, the data did not allow them to draw conclusions about what was happening in those environments that was important for moral identity. They wrote: "In future research it would be quite useful to understand the ways in which these groups, each constituting a unique social institution with ties to the community, provide contexts within which strong moral commitments can develop and flourish" (p. 1357). It is the task of developing constructs to make such analyses possible that we take up in this article.

Questions to Guide Future Research

The endeavor to better understand how social and cultural environments influence moral identities involves new kinds of questions—questions that inquire not only about the nature of moral identity and its correlates, but which are fundamentally concerned with process. Some of these questions include the following:

1. What are the multiple settings that youth participate in that have implications for their developing moral identities?
2. How are organizations, institutions, and cultural settings organized in ways that foster the development of moral selves?
3. What practices occur in these institutions that help shape youth's sense of themselves as moral? How do social interactions with others transmit moral values and identities?
4. What role might relationships play in the development of moral identity? What are the multiple ways these relationships foster moral identity?

Currently, the field of moral psychology is not well equipped to answer these questions and we do not attempt to do so in this article. Such a task is beyond the scope of one article or research study. Rather, we raise these important questions as a guide for future research and as a launching point for a discussion of the kinds of conceptual approaches we might incorporate as we seek to understand the intertwining of cultural and development in moral identity research.

A Cultural Practice Perspective on Moral Identity Development

The approach that we propose conceives of the individual as inextricably bound within social and cultural contexts and views developmental processes as intertwined with such settings. This concern with multiple layers of process adds complexity to the study of human development and makes problematic how one should frame, bound, and study such complex phenomenon.

We take cultural practices as our core unit of analysis. Cultural practices allow for a close look at both cultural and psychological processes, as they incorporate the individual and social partners and allow for the analysis of joint activity as well as the individual's role in that activity. In addition to being a bounded unit within which to try to understand culture, practices also provide a context within which relationships are developed and maintained and in which one can view both socialization and active sense-making on the part of the child. From this perspective, culture does not exert unilateral influence on the child but rather interacts with individuals in a bidirectional process, whereby people play an active role in their own development.

However, cultural practices do not exist apart from the institutional contexts within which they are set. The histories, guiding philosophies, and notions of membership in these institutions influence the nature and structure of the cultural practices within them. Further, cultural practices are comprised of local moment-to-moment social interactions—interactions within which relationships are built and three complementary processes of establishing the relationship between self and social others (social positioning,

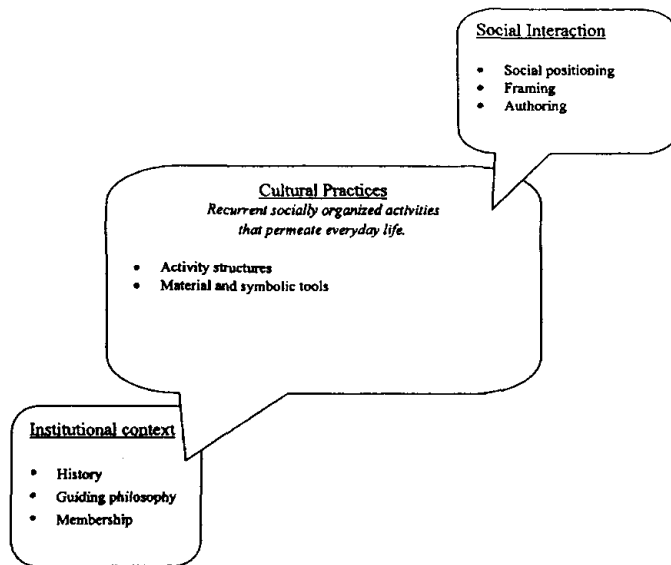


Figure 1. The cultural construction of moral and civic identities.

authoring, and framing) occur. These three levels of analysis—institutional context, cultural practices, and social interaction—comprise our framework and are represented in Figure 1. Although we treat them as distinct levels for the purposes of analysis, in reality they are deeply interwoven in practice.

In the following sections, we draw on data from two studies to help illustrate the framework we have proposed. One set of examples is drawn from a study by Na'ilah Nasir of an inner-city Muslim school and the ways in which the school sought to foster the moral identities of students. The data illustrate how the institutional context not only relates to the nature of the cultural practices that take place within them but also how the social interaction within such practices both reflects and constitutes a particular set of values and cultural norms associated with morality.

The second set of examples is drawn from Ben Kirshner's study of a program that encourages youth participation in community change and the kinds of civic identities students developed as they progressed through the program. Unlike typical community service programs that place students in service-delivery roles such as tutoring or litter abatement, this program—called here Community Youth Leaders (CYL)—sought to help young people solve problems facing their own communities. This study further demonstrates the intertwining of the institutional contexts, cultural practices, and social interactions and provides evidence for the active nature of the structuring of moral and civic identities in cultural contexts. We use data from the first study to illustrate and ground the ideas we develop as we present the framework, then we draw on the second example as a further illustration and extension of the constructs.

Institutional Context

Institutional contexts provide a critical backdrop for understanding how development plays out within cultural practices. Institutions might be churches, schools, social service agencies, community centers, or families. Analyses of the institutional context include the guiding philosophies and histories of the host institutions as well as institutionally held cultural belief systems. Analysis at this level might also focus on what membership in the institution or organization entails, and how the nature of membership might have implications for individuals' participation in particular activities within the institution. It is important to note that the institutions themselves are set in neighborhood, city, state, and even national contexts that are critical for understanding the events at hand; such settings influence who has access to what practices as well as fundamentally shape the nature of the practices themselves.

For instance, the practice that we focus on at Bilalian Islamic School is a weekly instruction on morality called Jr. Jummah. The institutional context of the K–8 school shapes this practice in fundamental ways, both giving rise to its existence and influencing its structure and content. The school and the broader religious community are located in a large urban city in the western United States. The predominantly African American community began as a Nation of Islam community in the early 1960s and transitioned to orthodox Islam with other communities across the nation over a period of 3 to 4 years beginning in 1976 (when Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammed died and leadership was assumed by his son, W. D. Muhammad). The philosophy of this founding organization was strongly rooted in race-based community building and black racial pride, and many of the older members have been members of the community since before this transition (including the *Imam* or leader). Hence, the cultural belief system in the community and in the school incorporates both Islamic and African American culture and this belief system plays out in the teaching in Jr. Jummah.

In addition to Islam and African American culture informing the guiding philosophies of the school, a more specific guiding philosophy relates to the nature of children and the goal of schooling. Children are viewed as spirits to be nurtured, as well as minds to be taught, and teachers view their jobs as very much about teaching core principles of love, compassion, and good conduct. This commitment to developing minds, spirits, and people is reflected in the school mission statement. Posted in the front hallway, it reads: "The mission of Bilalian Islamic School is to produce a student who is morally conscious, literate, and capable of functioning in modern society as a leader." The statement voices the core con-

cern with morality in addition to academics, and this goal for student development both takes shape and is structured in practices like Jr. Jummah.

The nature of membership in the school and in the broader religious community may also have implications for understanding the function and structure of Jr. Jummah. The school site is adjacent to the community mosque (masjid), and participation at the school is tied to membership in this broader community in multiple ways. One link is the fact that many teachers and students share membership in the religious community. Most teachers and students are drawn from this community, strengthening the family-like spirit that teachers articulate as a goal for their interaction with students and families. The close ties between school community members also contributed to the existence of an agreement about the content of moral instruction for students—one that is rooted in Islamic culture and values.

We should note that the history, guiding philosophies, and nature of membership are themselves elements of the institutional context that are closely linked. Clearly, one link is that they all come to influence the relationships between school community members—relationships within which the nature and structure of school cultural practices are negotiated.

Cultural Activities

To analyze cultural activities as contexts for moral identity development, we focus on the activity structures in the practice and the tools and artifacts that participants use to carry out the activity (Saxe, 1999). Activity structures include the cycles of activity in a practice—that is, the components that make the activity coherent. These activity structures fundamentally shape the nature of the cultural practice, how activity is accomplished, and the roles available for participants. Tools and artifacts refer to the material and symbolic goods with which we accomplish activity (Cole, 1996). Material tools include physical cultural props (i.e., desks, computers), whereas symbolic tools are more abstract—the ideas (often collectively held) that come to structure our activity as we participate in the environment. Symbolic tools include cultural belief systems that people use to understand their activity and that newcomers (including children) are socialized into through activity.

The activity structures of Jr. Jummah were related to the institutional goals and philosophy and taught students how to be participants in a standard moral-religious practice. Jr. Jummah was a scaled down version of the adult Friday prayer service and lecture and was held in the same space as the adult service. The activity had several phases, beginning with an eighth grade male student making the call to prayer in the school hallway (announcing that Jr.

Jummah will begin soon), signaling the students to wash up for prayer and congregate in the masjid prayer area. The service began with a short prayer by the teacher, followed by a lecture that lasted from 30 to 50 min, followed by another short prayer, and concluded with a group congregational prayer that all of the first- through eighth-grade students participated in. During the lecture (called a khutba), students were not to talk, rather, they were to listen respectfully. However, there were times when students were asked to respond to a question, and spontaneous verbal acknowledgment or laughter was considered acceptable, if they were a genuine emotional response to the lecture. Additionally, students took on key roles in the activity, including making the call to prayer and joining in the congregational prayer at the end of the lecture. These activity structures mirrored those of the adult Jummah service and socialized students into the appropriate ways of participating in this service.

Despite this formal structure, the teacher who conducted the Jr. Jummah sessions (also the fifth- and sixth-grade teacher) wanted his lecture to touch the students deeply. He articulated this concern both in interviews and to the students directly: “We don’t want this just to be talk . . . we want this to seep inside you and be real.” Further, often during the lectures the teacher stopped to make sure he was connecting with his audience, asking if they understood or if what he was saying made sense to them. This reflects the institutional goal of helping students develop their own sense of themselves as moral, as opposed to encouraging them to mimic religious behaviors without internal meaning.

Because the activity involved very little action, there were more symbolic artifacts used than material ones. Material artifacts included the books that the teacher used in the lecture, which were present on the podium, including the Qu’ran and a book of Hadith (stories of the prophet Muhammed). The speaker read from these texts during the lecture, reflecting the reliance on religious texts as a critical source of knowledge on morality. The physical worship space can also be regarded as a material artifact—that the service was held in this space reinforced the seriousness of the activity as well as the alignment between Jr. Jummah and the adult service. The primary symbolic tools in this activity included concepts from the religion of Islam as well as hip-hop music and the historic figure of Harriet Tubman. These material and symbolic artifacts gave shape and meaning to the cultural activity of Jr. Jummah and reflected the broader institutional philosophy and goals for students’ moral development.

Social Interaction in Practices

The third level focuses more specifically on social interaction within cultural practices. Social interac-

tion is particularly rich for understanding how participation in cultural practices comes to mediate moral identity. Prior literature has drawn relations between the presence of certain kinds of social others and the development of moral identity but has not articulated the microprocesses that occur within interactions that shape development. It is as individuals interact and talk with one another that identities (moral and otherwise) are shaped (Ochs, 1990). In particular, at this level of analysis, our concern is to understand the microgenetic (moment-to-moment) development of moral identity. In other words, how moral identities are encouraged, maintained, taken up, and rejected in social interactions within activities.

We employ several key conceptual tools that we find helpful in elucidating this microgenetic developmental process. One of the processes that we focus on is that of "social positioning." Social positioning occurs as people are offered particular roles relative to others in the setting. A second process is "authoring." As Holland, Lachoite, Skinner, and Cain (1998) argued, people actively create or author themselves by drawing on the resources of their environment to accept, reinforce, challenge, or deny positions and identities. A third process is that of "framing" (Goffman, 1974). We use the concept of framing to describe how participants (especially those with less power) are encouraged to interpret the activity, their role in it, and the world around them.

Consider how students were positioned and how ideas were framed in the following Jr. Jummah interaction. The transcript that follows occurs on a day that the topic of discussion is love.

The teacher, Brother Kamani, began with a Qu'ranic verse on love. He explained the verse and introduced the topic of love as an extension of the previous week's lesson on kindness. Next, he referenced a new CD from hip-hop artist Lauren Hill ("You know, Lauren Hill has a CD out, a lot of questions about love. What is this? What is love?") as a transition from the Quranic text. After acknowledging the many possible meanings of love, he defined love as "very simply, the peace and contentment that only Allah (God) can give you. Love is an energy, a feeling, an emotion." Examples of love included a cut on the finger that heals, a plant coming up, and each of the students being born. After an extended discussion of prophet Jesus as an example of love and loving action and a reference to the Christians who assisted Harriet Tubman as acting in love, he told a story about a friend of his who got shot outside of a recording studio and

healed as another example of Allah's love. Then the khutba continued:

T: "What is love? True love is the real caring for, (listen), the soul, health, and sanity of others. You guys are like, what did you just say? True love is you really caring for somebody's soul—we all have souls, right?—and when we die, where does our soul go? With Allah ... "So we as your teachers, we're not just here to teach you the ABC's. That would be easy. We care about your souls, too. Does that make sense? So when you guys do something wrong, we try to, wait, stop, don't do that, because if you keep doin' that your gonna hurt your soul. I hope that that makes sense to you. "The other thing that when you love someone you care about their health. Are they doing drugs? If their doing drugs, they are tearing away their health and their what? Their soul. So we might care about that.

"And the other one is sanity, their minds. When you tease somebody, you are not loving them. You are not caring about them."

Finally, Brother Kamani acted out a scene in which a student is teased and not allowed to play with the other children, then told an extended story from a book of inspirational stories about a boy in high school who prevents the suicide of a less popular boy by befriending him. The Jr. Jummah ended with the group congregational prayer. (Observation, 10-13-01)

There are several points to be made regarding how students were positioned and how ideas and concepts were framed during this interaction. Students were positioned through this khutba as members of multiple communities. They were positioned as members of the religious community, as well as members of the school community with a concern for the positive development of their peers. They are also positioned as consumers of hip-hop music and members of the African American community (like Harriet Tubman). It is interesting that these multiple positionings and memberships are not viewed as being in conflict, nor does any one of them preclude a conception of the students' ability to act in love. In the second paragraph of the data, students were also conceptualized as souls—and immoral (or unloving) behavior is framed as hurting one's soul (rather than being a criteria of "goodness").

The speaker also framed love in what may have been a new way for students. Typically, the word *love* evokes images of romantic love, such as that between a man and a woman. Alternatively, the teacher reframed love as more universal and pervasive—both an emotion and a quality of action. This view of love relates to bodies, minds, and souls and defines moral-

ity as occurring at all of these levels. Morality and love were framed as being interactional in nature and rooted in cultural and community issues, such as drug abuse (a rampant problem in the local geographical community). The reference to drug use conceptualizes moral action (or acting in love) as being enacted as one participates in one's local environment. Similarly, Brother Kamani framed teacher cautions and discipline as acts of love and concern for their souls, reinforcing the point that morality is constituted by how one relates to those around them.

These ways of positioning students and reframing cultural notions of morality and love constitute a cultural-developmental process, by which students are encouraged to see themselves as moral (as beings of love) and to act morally in their local environment. In this way, the environment can play a role in offering both conceptions of self and ideas about how one should participate in the world.

The social interaction within the practice (through which students are positioned and cultural beliefs framed and reframed) is fundamentally linked to the activity structures and cultural tools in the practice as well as by the history, philosophy, and nature of membership in the institution. For example, this is evident in the khutba in the line, "So as your teachers, we are not just here to teach you the ABC's ... we care about your souls, too." This constructing of the role of the teacher, and positioning of students as having souls, reflects the institutional goal of moral development of students, as well as the conceptualization of students as spirits to be nurtured and developed. The institutional philosophy is enacted through the structures of practice like Jr. Jummah and is offered to students as a way to make sense of themselves and the world in the contexts of those practices.

Our point in this article has been to understand how we might study how the social and cultural environment within which individuals may be developing moral identities supports the development of those identities. We have argued that moral identity is potentially fostered in cultural spaces through participation in cultural practices and the social interaction that comprises them. Obviously, we have not provided data or methods that speak to how individuals conceive of, understand, internalize, or resist such identities. Ideally, the kind of data we have presented would be paired with interview and survey data that offers a detailed treatment of how the cultural processes we have outlined relate to students' conceptualizations of their own developing moral identities. Therefore, what we propose is not a substitute for existing methods but rather an important additional focus. Another way to capture such changes would be to use longitudinal ethnographic data (over months or years) to document changes in the nature of participation in cultural prac-

tices. A key task would be to understand the relation between the microgenetic developmental processes that we focus on—that is how particular conceptions of self and notions of morality are produced in moments of cultural activity—and longer term ontogenetic changes in students' moral identities.

Moral and Civic Identity in a Community Youth Program

Thus far, our discussion has sought to illustrate how environments can structure and frame moral identity in the context of practices that are fundamentally tied to institutional settings and cultural belief systems. However, in the data we presented, students were primarily positioned as consumers of moral ideas and practices. In our second example, we analyze civic identities in a youth community action program, highlighting the agentic nature of authoring and social positioning as it is locally constructed in practices.

Institutional Context: A University–Community Partnership

Unlike the direct focus placed on moral development in Jr. Jummah at the Bilalian Islamic School, CYL was an after school program that focused on civic engagement. The history of the CYL program did not go back very far—its first year started in November 2000. The program was a collaboration between a university center and community leaders from a neighboring city. The idea was to develop a project that would train young people to be "community mappers." Community mapping bears some similarity to participatory action research (Penuel & Freeman, 1997) as well as recent youth mapping programs that train youth to identify resources and needs in their communities (Academy for Educational Development, 2001).

The collaboration was motivated by multiple purposes. The university sought to develop a new kind of university–community partnership, by offering tangible, on-the-ground resources to youth development efforts in the surrounding region. In doing so it would strengthen community development efforts and gain the opportunity to study the process of youth development and systems change. The partner city gained resources for supporting youth development, such as a new after school program in their city that would train home-grown leaders. Young people themselves had several reasons for joining the program. The most common were that it offered a chance to help the community, a safe place to hang out after school, and a job with a stipend.

One guiding philosophy of the CYL program emphasized the role of information in community

change. The belief was that community-driven research, especially that which foregrounded youth's experiences, could be a useful resource for community and youth development. CYL was set up in part to help get youth-oriented information into the hands of local policymakers and decision-makers. Because of this, youth participants were expected to use accepted methods of social research—interviews, surveys, photo essays—to gather data that highlighted youth's experience in their city.

A second guiding philosophy focused on developing young people who would have leadership skills and who could act as advocates for youth in their city. Program staff espoused ideas of youth empowerment—that youth should participate in decision-making about the direction of the project and that they should receive training that would enable them to participate with adults as equal partners in policy discussions and decision-making.

The Cultural Practice: CYL

CYL met 2 afternoons a week for the duration of the school year. There were roughly 15 students and three adults who attended these meetings. CYL was housed in a middle school, where staff hired by the university recruited and trained eighth graders (13 to 14 years old) for the project. One adult coordinator ran the project with the help of two undergraduate assistants; one graduate researcher (Ben Kirshner) documented the program's pilot year.

The activity structure was guided primarily by a project-based "youth mapping" curriculum. At the beginning of the year, participants identified a problem they cared about and learned about methods for doing research pertinent to their problem. The youth decided they wanted to make their city "better for youth." To do this, youth participants split into three research groups—video documentary, interviews, and survey. Each group collected and analyzed information about youth's experiences in their neighborhoods and schools. The research was just the first step—on completion of data analysis, the group worked to turn their findings into recommendations, which were presented to city government and school officials. In all, the youth researchers made four presentations, to audiences that included community groups, schoolteachers, and the city council. Importantly, the activity structure of this group was set up to foster democratic decision-making about key decisions. So, for example, although the basic elements of the curriculum were put in place in advance, the youth decided which leadership bodies to make their presentations to.

There were several important cultural artifacts that were central to this activity. These included material tools, such as computers, tape recorders, and a video

camera, which were used to conduct research. These also include symbolic tools, in other words, key ideas or beliefs that helped to frame the way they completed their project. These symbolic tools reflected the guiding philosophies behind the creation of the program. For example, the idea that information can be a useful and credible tool for change was emphasized throughout the project. Members discussed how they could use evidence to persuade city officials about where the needs in the city were. As opposed to advocating based on the opinions of a small number of eighth graders, these youth learned how to couch their recommendations in terms of findings from their surveys and interviews. In this sense, they came to appropriate some of the basic principles of research.

A second symbolic tool relates to styles of discourse. Young people learned about public speaking and formal presentation skills. They drew a distinction between how they would speak with each other and how they would speak when presenting to leadership bodies, such as the city council or school board. This appropriation of a certain kind of discourse can be seen as a tool because it facilitated their participation with adults in the civic arena.

Social Interaction in a Community Forum

Analysis of social interaction provides evidence of the kinds of roles and identities available to members of the cultural practice of CYL. Our analysis focuses on a segment of social interaction that took place during a "community forum," which was sponsored by a local nonprofit group whose mission was to improve youth development outcomes in the city. Community members, nonprofit staff persons, city officials, and schoolteachers were present. Here is an excerpt from narrative field notes:

Youth from CYL used PowerPoint technology to present findings from their research. One consistent message in the youth's presentation was that there were more needs and problems on the east side of the city than in other parts. For example, one slide summarized survey data by finding that "youth in the east side of the city reported having more gangs in their neighborhood than in other parts of the city."

After the presentation, adults were asked to discuss the presentation and make suggestions for how to improve youth development outcomes in the city. Several viewpoints were raised: One adult member of a civic association commented that the problems start with the parents who are not at home for their kids; youth take drugs and join gangs when they do not have parents telling them they are worth something. An adult from a city department expressed concern about the finding that only 30% of young people reported having "amusing things for youth in

the neighborhood." Other people commented that the presentations showed that there is a need for activities and opportunities that would connect youth with safe places and supportive adults. As evidence of recent progress, one city official pointed out that a skate park had recently been built at the city Youth Center and other services to youth had been expanded there.

At this juncture one of the members of CYL raised her hand and spoke: "I have a question about the skate park being built. For other kids on the other side of town, it's good to head in the right direction. But there is already so much on that side (the west side). What about the other side of the city, where there's no transportation? More services are great, but more is needed on the east side."

The next speaker voiced her agreement, saying, "This young woman said everything is at the Youth Center, and she's right. We need to build something on the east side." Another adult added, the kids "screaming" for help are on the east side. This theme—of a problematic barrier in their city between east and west sides—was a prominent part of the ensuing discussion.

Analysis of social interaction provides evidence of the kinds of roles and identities available to members of a cultural practice. Concepts such as social positioning, framing, and authoring help us to make sense of these interactions in a systematic manner and understand their implications for identity development.

Over the course of the interaction, the youth presenters (including Cristina) were socially positioned in multiple ways. On one hand, they were positioned as experts on youth's experiences in their city. They made a formal presentation, using PowerPoint technology, which shared research findings from their project. In this sense they were treated as authorities, as people with information that would be useful for decision-making about community and youth development. More than just passive recipients of support services, these young people were acting as resources for the nonprofit initiative.

At the same time, much of the discussion focused on the problem of disaffected kids; youth who were alienated or not thriving and for whom there seemed to be no obvious solution. Although some of the adults there might have thought of the three youth researchers as exceptions to the rule, this did not take away the fact that, by virtue of their status as young people from the east side of the city, these youth were implicitly positioned, by association, as problems.

An analysis of social positioning highlights the fact that the roles available to a person in an interaction are partly arranged by others. However, it is important also to recognize how people creatively shape those interactions. In the case recounted earlier, Cristina spoke up, not merely to convey information in a neutral manner but to challenge an

adult's assertion that building a skate park represented progress for youth in the city. Cristina "reframed" the conversation to focus directly on equity issues. Interestingly, adult community members validated this reframing, by taking it up and reinforcing it.

"Authoring" is the third relevant concept here. By engaging in the dialogue in this manner, Cristina authored herself as an active, assertive participant in the local practice of the meeting and, in doing so, as a participant in creating policies for youth in her city. She authored herself as a civic actor, one who is committed to making more equitable the distribution of resources in her city.

The interaction described here can be seen as part of a cycle in which these youth engaged in the cultural practices available to them. Through their participation they were positioned as resources for the community, which in turn may begin to reinforce their own sense of civic identity. Like the Jr. Jumah example, this example does not address the way that these young people talked about themselves, their future goals, and their own self-reported identity. Again, our focus in this article has been to show how one might proceed with an analysis of the cultural formation of identity, one that takes into account institutional context, cultural practices, and social interaction.

Concluding Remarks

Our contextualized account has linked the nature and development of moral identity to the specific cultural activities within which it develops. We have presented a potential framework to enrich the study of moral identity development in these cultural practices. Such an approach may offer valuable tools for researchers seeking to understand the nature of the social contexts and cultural practices that support moral and civic identities. By considering these cultural processes in concert with data that shows how different youth respond to and shape these contexts, we are better suited to make sense of the complexity of moral identity development.

In this sense, it could be said that we have put forth a particularistic account of development. We view the development of moral identity, however, as an innately human process, whose development in different cultural spaces moves from the local, shaped in social interactions with cultural actors, to the general, as behavior as a moral being and sense of oneself as moral then moves to other environments and is taken up in other social practices. Indeed, a critical point in distinguishing moral identity from simply fulfilling a role or acting as a member of a practice is that a moral identity is enacted across practices and settings. This conception of the relation

between culture and moral development extends the idea that moral development consists of both universal moral principles and locally held social conventions regarding right and wrong (Nucci, 2001; Turiel, 2002). Although people make distinctions between social conventions and universal moral principles, they come to understand, embrace, and enact universal moral principles within their local cultural worlds.

So what is cultural about moral identity? What is cultural about moral identity is the very way that a commitment to the social good, to human others, arises and is fostered through local, culturally structured human connections and interactions. What we have offered, we hope, is a useful set of constructs with which to study this process.

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