

The Moral Identity: A Principle Level Identity*

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Introduction

Identity Control Theory (ICT) (Burke 1991; 1996), one strand of identity theory (Stryker and Burke 2000), has been developing a program of research over the past decade that focuses on the internal dynamics within the self that influence behavior (Burke and Cast 1997; Burke and Reitzes 1991; Burke and Stets 1999; Cast and Burke 2002; Stets and Burke 1994; 1996; Stets and Tsushima 2001; Tsushima and Burke 1999). Essentially, according to ICT, when an identity is activated in a situation, a feedback loop that is already in place comes under conscious control of the perceptions involved in the identity. This perceptual control emerges primarily because an interruption has occurred in the ongoing feedback loop/identity process. The goal of an identity is to match situational inputs or perceptions (how persons perceive themselves in the situation) with the identity standard (the set of meanings attached to the self). The lack of congruence between inputs and the standard activates a change in what one is doing, the perceptions of the self in the situation, and/or the identity standards; in other words, something in the system is altered to counteract the incongruence. What the system attempts to control is the perceptual input (to match the identity standard).

One important challenge in developing ICT is to examine how identities are organized within the overall identity control system. In order to understand the overall organization of identities and in keeping with Powers' (1973) theory, a hierarchical structure has been offered (Burke 1997; Burke and Cast 1997; Stets and Harrod 2004; Tsushima and Burke 1999). Conceptually, the idea is that an identity higher in the hierarchy provides the reference or standard for an identity just below it. Looked at another way, identity standards of lower level control systems are the outputs of higher level control systems. Essentially, when a higher level identity brings higher level perceptions into alignment with the higher level standard, it does so by changing its outputs, that is, changing lower level standards (Burke 1997; Burke and Cast 1997; Tsushima and Burke 1999).

With the exception of some work (Burke 1997; Tsushima and Burke 1999), ICT researchers have not studied identities at the higher, more abstract level in the hierarchical structure. Because the overall perceptual control system is continuously operating to verify identity perceptions at all levels for identities that are activated, it is important that we investigate identities at all levels in the hierarchical system, including those at the some of the highest, abstract levels such as the principle level (Robertson and Powers 1990; Tsushima and Burke 1999). Further, because these identities are higher in the control system, they are particularly important to examine since they influence those identities below them. In this research, we examine the moral identity as a higher, principle-level identity. We do not claim that this is the only identity at this level--only that it is one identity that is important at this level. We investigate whether the moral identity guides moral conduct, and whether a discrepancy between perceptions of the self in the situation and the moral identity standard are related to reports of negative affect.

The Moral Identity

The Self and Identity

In defining the moral identity, we first define the self and an identity. When one has a self, the person is reflexive; that is, the individual has the ability to respond to itself as an object, to evaluate itself, to take account of itself and plan accordingly to bring about future states, to be self-aware or achieve consciousness with respect to one's own existence (Stets and Burke 2002). Since the self emerges in social interaction within the context of a complex, differentiated, yet organized society, the self must also be complex, differentiated, and organized, reflecting the dictum that the "self reflects society" (Stryker 1980). In Powers' (1973) theory, the self could be conceptualized at the system concept level--the level above the principle level. At the system concept level, we perceive organized entities in which their existence depends on its organization and not on the elements that make it up (Powers 1973). The self as an organized entity can be conceptualized as providing the reference value for principle level goals, and by extension,

program level activity.

The overall self is organized into multiple parts known as identities (Stryker and Burke 2000). A person has an identity, “an internal positional designation” (Stryker 1980, p. 60), for each of the different groups he or she belongs to (group identities), role relationships he or she participates in (role identities), and kind of person he or she claims to others (person identities). An identity is a set of *meanings* one holds as a group member, role holder, or as a person. For example, what it *means* to be a mother as in being nurturing and caring is part of the content of the mother role identity. These meanings guide the activity of the mother role as revealed in feeding and bathing the child and engaging in warm and intimate interactions with the child. Thus, identity meanings are the *standard* or goal state for behavior.

The three bases of an identity: the group, role, and person, operate to sustain different outcomes (Stets and Burke 2000; 2002). Group-based identities, for example, being an American, Catholic, or Democrat, operate to maintain groups in society including their values, goals, patterns of interaction, and boundaries. For individuals, maintaining group memberships leads to feelings of inclusion, acceptance, and self-worth. Role-based identities sustain the roles that individuals occupy in society such as the role of mother, the role of father, the role of child, and the role of sibling. Since roles exist within groups, role-based identities, by extension, maintain group-based identities such as the family identity. When individuals are successful in meeting the expectations tied to roles, they will experience feelings of efficacy and competence. Finally, person identities sustain the individual as a unique entity that is distinct and different from others such as being a moral actor, dominant person, or cynic. Since person identities are attached to the individual rather than to groups and roles, they operate across various roles and within different groups. For example, a dominant person may be a dominant manager in a company and a dominant father in the family. When individuals experience confirmation of their person identities in interaction, this brings about feelings of authenticity.

People learn the meanings of identities in interaction with others in which others act toward individuals *as if* they had the identities appropriate to the behaviors on display (Burke 1980). Thus, one's group, role, or person identities acquire meaning through the reactions of others. This is not to say that persons do not bring some of their own understandings of identities into situations that may be different from others' understandings. When this occurs, these differences in meanings are worked out through the negotiation process in interaction.

Defining the Moral Identity

We define the moral identity as a person identity in which the meanings that sustain the self as an entity distinct from others involves at least two main components: being just (for example, fair/unfair, and principled/unprincipled) and caring (for example, helpful/not helpful, kind/unkind, and compassionate/hardhearted) (Walker and Hennig 2004). Other components include being truthful, trustworthy, generous, selfless, and humble. We do not claim that these are all the components that make up the content of the moral identity, only that that they are important ones that we think are at the core of this identity. The components of justice and care reflect an earlier distinction that men tend to think of morality in justice terms while women tend to think of morality in terms of care (Gilligan 1982). Although the evidence indicates that there are few gender differences in terms of moral orientation (Jaffee and Hyde 2000), we think both the justice and care components are useful to include. While justice highlights issues of obligation, and what is right and fair based on principles that may be applied universally (Kohlberg 1969; 1976), care highlights issues of interconnections with others; what is required is being responsive to the needs, interests, and welfare of others (Gilligan 1982).

We want to be clear as to what the moral identity is not. It is not moral reasoning or moral thought. Moral reasoning, which is emphasized in psychology, particularly in the cognitive developmental model (Kohlberg 1969; 1976), focuses on how moral knowledge is accumulated over time, creating an internalized cognitive structure or schema that then serves as a guide for

moral action. In general, the more sophisticated one's moral reasoning, the more it predicts moral conduct (Blasi 1980). Like others (Aquino and Reed 2002), we think that defining the moral identity in cognitive terms is narrow. It isolates the individual from his or her social context, and it neglects the role of affect.

The moral identity as developed here, is rooted in sociology and identity theory (Stryker and Burke 2000). Given these roots, the focus is not on how cognitive criteria motivate moral action, but on how the self, which is multifaceted, complex, organized, and is embedded in the social structure, guides moral conduct. Further, because identity theory takes seriously the role of emotion in the maintenance of identities (an issue we discuss later), affect is not neglected, as it is in the cognitive developmental model. In general, we are not saying that moral cognition does not influence moral conduct--only that getting at the meanings of the moral identity may be a more reliable predictor of moral action because it is a general theory of the social actor.

The Moral Identity in Control Theory

We are interested in the hierarchy of control in perceptual control theory, particularly how the higher-order principle level of control influences and is influenced by the level just below it--the lower-order program level of control (Powers 1973; Robertson and Powers 1990). The program level of control controls the perceived accomplishment of goals reached by action-sequences, for example, going to work or returning a lost wallet. At the program level is a structure, which has a series of tests or decision points, with each test followed by a choice. It is an "if-then" structure: if this is true, do A; if it is not true, do B. The choice points may form a network, with different choices leading to different routes in the network. Ultimately, at the program level, we have action-sequences that are designed to control a desired state of affairs. Action-sequences can get interrupted, producing further programs (if-then structures) to reach one's goal state.

To illustrate the above, let us assume that someone is walking to work (the main program), and this program gets interrupted by the person finding a wallet on the sidewalk. If one is guided

by the program goal of returning the wallet to its owner, then the person will engage in various lower-level programs or action-sequences to attain that goal. For example, the person may look in the wallet to find identifying information so that the owner can be contacted. If no identifying information is found, the individual may locate the closest establishment to where the wallet fell. If the person finds out that no one reported a missing wallet, other action-sequences may be followed such as posting a “found notice” or contacting the police. The program terminates when the individual perceives that the goal of returning the wallet has been accomplished. The main program of walking to work then is resumed.

Just above the program level is the principle level. Principles provide standards for program level control. These standards are general and include one’s values, beliefs, and ideals. They guide the selection and implementation of programs. Principle level goals are achieved by appropriate action-sequences or programs. Looked at another way, action-sequences form a gestalt or exemplify something more general - a principle. Thus, in the example above, when the individual uses different strategies to return the wallet to its owner, such strategies may be exemplifying the principle of care. The person is thinking of the owner’s loss of the wallet, and the individual is trying to find a way to return it. Alternatively, a program of keeping the wallet exemplifies the principle of greed or selfishness. While program level standards represent more concrete goals in specific situations (as in returning the wallet to its owner), principle level standards represent more abstract goals (such as care) that operate across situations, and that may be revealed in different action-sequences in different situations.

Identities at the principle level have remained a relatively unexplored area in ICT with the exception of Tsushima and Burke’s (1999) work. In examining the role identity of parent, Tsushima and Burke investigated how parents relate standards at the principle-level (for example, their desire for the child to be a critical thinker, loving, and autonomous) with standards at the program-level (for example, ensuring that the child gets to school and does her homework).

Those parents with more fully developed principle level standards of the parent identity were able to relate the principle level to the program level to alter programs so that the programs not only accomplished the mundane goals such as getting the child to complete her homework, but also the higher level goals as in being independent.

In this research, we extend Tsushima and Burke's work by examining a person identity at the principle level rather than a role identity. We maintain that group, role, and person identities all operate at the principle level in the hierarchy of control. They are not at the program level because identities are not if-then structures. Identities are *meanings*, and these meanings serve as the reference value for programs. Burke (2004) has recently argued that person identities operate like "master" identities in that they may be higher in the hierarchy of identities, influencing the selection of role and group identities. This selection is based on the degree to which role and group identities contain meanings that are similar to those meanings found in person identities (Stets 1995). For example, a person who claims a moral identity that involves meanings of care, kindness, and compassion would be more likely to choose roles that also carry these meanings such as the role of parent, priest, or nurse. Groups that would encompass these roles would include family, a parish, and a hospital.¹

In this research, we conceptualize person identities as higher in the hierarchy of control at the principle level than role and group identities. We focus on the moral identity as a person identity. We do not examine how this person identity relates to role and group identities or even other person identities. We leave that to future theoretical and empirical research. Our thesis, developed out of ICT, is that the moral identity at the principle level will influence moral activity at the program level. When there is a discrepancy between the two, that is, the *meanings* of one's moral action at the program level is inconsistent with the *meanings* of one's moral identity standard at the principle level, negative emotions will be experienced. We do not examine how actors cope with their negative emotional state, for example, do they engage in some alternative action or

reinterpret the inconsistent state as consistent. That is another aspect of the thesis that we leave for future work.

The Moral Identity in Identity Control Theory²

An identity is a set of meanings that is attached to the self as a member of a group, while in a role, or as a person. This set of meanings serves as the standard or reference that guides action in situations. When an identity is activated in a situation a feedback loop that had already been established comes under conscious perceptual control. Figure 1 depicts the identity process given the principle and program levels of control. In keeping with our theoretical argument, group, role, and person identities are at the principle level in the control system. Multiple activities that follow from these identities are at the program level. Thus, in Figure 1, the moral identity is at the principle level, and multiple programs follow from the moral identity standard meanings.

(Figure 1 about here)

The feedback loops at the principle and program levels have several components. First is the internal *standard* or set of meanings tied to each standard. Second is the *perceptual input*. This is the way persons see themselves in situations. These perceptions are the result of both how persons *think* that others see them in the situation and how they see themselves in the situation. Third is the *comparator*, which compares the perceptual input meanings with the meanings held in the standard; it registers the degree to which there is a discrepancy between the two. Any discrepancy that is recorded is represented in negative emotional arousal, and a greater discrepancy reveals itself in more intense negative emotional arousal. Fourth is *output* or action, which, like emotional arousal, results from the comparison of the input meanings and identity standard meanings. This action enters the environment, and others react to the actor on the basis of the meanings that this action implies. The control system works by modifying the meanings in the situation to change perceptual input so that it matches the internal standard.

In this research, the moral identity at the principle level is a reference value, standard, or goal

state, and this state should be revealed in patterned moral conduct at the program level.

Specifically, we expect that the more persons see themselves in terms of the meanings that comprise the moral identity, the more they will engage in moral conduct. When they engage in conduct that is inconsistent with the meanings held in the moral identity standard, the more we expect them to report negative emotions. From these expectations, we develop the following hypotheses:

H1: The more individuals identify themselves in terms of the meanings that encompass the moral identity, the more they will engage in moral conduct.

H2: A discrepancy between the meanings of the moral identity and the meanings implied by individuals' conduct will result in reports of negative emotions.

We tested these hypotheses by administering a survey in several upper- and lower- division sociology classes at a large southwestern university in 2003. There are two parts to the survey. In the first part of the survey, respondents are asked to reflect upon how they see themselves. They are first given a list of characteristics (for example, honest, caring, fair, and stingy), and they are to indicate the degree to which these characteristics describe who they are. These characteristics are used to formulate the moral identity standard.

In the second part of the survey, respondents are to report on their conduct in four situations that they likely have experienced that could be construed as moral dilemmas. Then they identify how they felt /would feel following their actions. Examining multiple situations allows us to investigate different programs that may follow from the moral identity at the principle level. In the four situations, money is involved (or potentially involved) and moral conduct involves giving money in each situation, but for different reasons. In the first two instances, one is returning a surplus, and the moral act directly benefits another—a cashier at a store or the person who owns the wallet. In the other two instances, one is asked to make a donation, and the moral conduct directly assists the less fortunate in society. We deliberately investigate situations that are

somewhat similar compared to studying very different situations. In the latter, it would be more difficult to isolate the factors producing our findings.

The information that we are using as perceptual input in this analysis is the meanings implied by a respondent's reported actions. For example, if an individual reports not returning a wallet that he finds, we assume that others in the situation would provide feedback to the individual that the meanings associated with keeping the wallet are inconsistent with the meanings associated with the person's moral identity claims (such as being helpful, compassionate, and selfless). We also assume that one's reported behaviors (that is, one's perceptions of his or her behavior) are an appropriate proxy of the person's actual behavior since how people see themselves and what they actually do should correspond. Nevertheless, future research will want to obtain a better measure of perceptual input than that used here. Further, the emotions that we are examining are based on respondents' reports of what they were feeling at the time, or how they imagine they would feel if they had never experienced the dilemma. Again, while this is their perceptions of their feelings and may not reflect their actual emotional experience, the two should correspond. Nevertheless, future work will want to obtain a better measure of emotions.

Method

Sample

Of the students in attendance during class time, 444 completed the survey for a response rate of 79%. More women (72 percent) than men (28 percent) responded to the survey. The average respondent is 21 years old. On average, the parent's income ranges from \$35,000 to \$50,000. The sample is diverse in terms of race/ethnicity; there are 22 percent Whites, 31 percent Asians, 27 percent Hispanics, and 10 percent Black/African Americans. A little over one-third of the sample is Catholic, another 20 percent report no religion, another 10 percent are Protestant, and the remaining report some "other" religion.

Measures

The Moral Identity. In order to capture the meanings of the moral identity, respondents are given 12 bipolar characteristics (Aquino and Reed 2002). They are asked to think about how they see themselves given these characteristics and identify where they would place themselves between each bipolar characteristic. The characteristics include being honest...dishonest, caring...uncaring, kind ...unkind, unfair...fair, helpful...not helpful, stingy...generous, compassionate...hardhearted, unreliable...reliable, humble...arrogant, selfish...selfless, and principled...unprincipled. Responses ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 reflected agreement with one bipolar characteristic, 5 reflected agreement with the other bipolar characteristic, and 3 put the respondent in between the two bipolar characteristics. Since the focal point in filling out these characteristics is the person rather than a role or position that one holds in the social structure, the conceptualization of the moral identity as a person identity is reflected in how it is measured in this study. Four items are reversed coded (unfair/fair, stingy/generous, unreliable/reliable, and selfish/selfless) so that a higher value on all of the items represents characteristics consistent with a more moral person compared to a less moral person.

Compared to how identities are usually measured, we do not have at least two criterion categories for the moral identity that would establish the meanings that would discriminate between these categories.³ In the absence of criterion categories for the moral identity, we cannot use discriminant function analysis. We use principle components factor analysis as an appropriate alternative. In factor analysis, we identify a cluster of meanings that appear on one factor, and this becomes the dimension of meaning for the moral identity. The results of our principle components factor analysis are provided in Table 1. The items form a single factor with an omega reliability of .84. The items are summed, with a high score representing the moral identity. The moral identity measure is then standardized (mean = 0; 1 = variance). We are not interested in how the different components of the moral identity such as justice and care at the principle level

influence program level activity. We leave that to future research.

(Table 1 about here)

Moral Situations: Respondents are presented with four situations, and they are to think about the *last time* they were in these situations. We chose the time frame of “the last time” for ease of recall. If this experience had never happened to them, they were to imagine themselves in this situation and respond as to what they would do and how they would feel following their actions.

The four situations are:

- 1) “A cashier returns more money to you than what is owed you.” You “did not return the money” or you “returned the money” (coded 0-1).
- 2) “You found a wallet that contained cash and identifying information.” You “did not return the wallet with all of its contents” or you “returned the wallet with all of its contents” (coded 0-1).
- 3) “Just before entering a store, you are asked to donate to a charity organization.” You “did not provide a donation” or you “provided a donation” (coded 0-1).
- 4) “A homeless person comes up to you and asks you for money.” You “did not give money to the homeless person” or you “gave money to the homeless person” (coded 0-1).

In the above situations, the first response reflects less moral conduct while the second response reflects moral conduct.⁴

Most respondents reported experiencing these moral situations. In the situation with the cashier, 80% reported that the situation with the cashier had happened to them, 96% reported that the situation of donating to a charity had happened to them, and 98% reported that the situation of the homeless person had happened to them. Only in the case of finding a wallet did fewer respondents (36%) say that this had happened to them. In general, therefore, when respondents report their moral conduct and feelings, it is most often based on their experience rather than their

imagination. Clearly, what people imagine and how they actually behave and feel in a situation may not be the same. For all of the scenarios, we re-ran our analyses to see whether the moral identity was related to moral conduct differently for those who had imagined the event compared to those who had experienced the event. In no instance did this variable reach statistical significance.⁵

Emotions. After individuals report their responses for each of the moral situations, they are asked to indicate how they felt following their actions. They are presented with six emotions and on a scale from 0 (“Not feel the emotion at all”) to 10 (“Intensely feel the emotion”) they report how much they felt happy, guilty, sad, proud, angry, and shameful. Previous researchers have measured emotions using a one-time scale (Driskell and Webster 1997; Hegtvedt 1990; Lovaglia 1997; Lovaglia and Houser 1996; Ridgeway and Diekema 1989; Shelly 2001; Sprecher 1986).⁶

Identity control theory currently does not make predictions about specific emotions, only as to whether actors will experience negative emotions (given identity non-verification) or positive emotions (for identity verification). Therefore, the positive and negative emotions items were first factor analyzed for each moral situation. The emotional responses to each scenario formed a single underlying dimension with high Eigenvalues on the first factor.⁷ The emotions felt following each moral (or immoral) action were standardized and then summed, with a low score representing more negative emotions and a high score representing more positive emotions. The omega reliability for each emotions scale is high ($\Omega = .93$ for finding money; $\Omega = .94$ for finding wallet; $\Omega = .91$ for charity donation; and $\Omega = .89$ for homeless donation).

Results

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of the variables used in this analysis. Since the moral identity measure is standardized, the summary statistics on this measure is not directly interpretable. We constructed a second (unstandardized) identity measure to examine the sample distribution. Respondents have a tendency to rate themselves as more positive on the

characteristics that comprise the moral identity scale (mean = 4.01, sd = .46). For example, they are more likely to identify themselves as more honest, caring, and kind, and less stingy, arrogant, and unprincipled. This is not surprising since people's pursuit of positive evaluations as to who they are is considered one of the most powerful motives underlying the quest for self-understanding (Baumeister 1998). Overall then, respondents are more likely to see rate themselves as high than low on the moral identity.

(Table 2 about here)

The mean values on the moral actions in each situation reveal that while respondents have a tendency to return the money that they receive (mean = .64), they are even more likely to return a wallet with all of its contents (mean = .90). While there is a slight tendency for respondents to give money to a homeless person (mean = .57), they are not as likely to give to a charity (mean = .32). In general, therefore, when actors receive money unexpectedly, they are likely to respond in a moral manner and return it. However, when they are asked to give money, they are less likely to behave in a moral fashion.

Table 3 presents the zero-order correlations of all of the variables used in the analyses. The higher the moral identity, the more likely it is that these individuals will engage in moral conduct compared to immoral conduct as in returning more money that was owed to them ($r = .22$), returning a wallet with its contents intact ($r = -.17$), and providing a donation to a charity ($r = .11$). They are not more likely to provide a donation the homeless.

(Table 3 about here)

In examining the emotions following one's conduct in each situation, we find that when individuals engage in moral conduct, they feel better; when they don't engage in this conduct, they feel worse. For example, when persons return more money than what is owed them, they report more positive emotions ($r = .67$). Similarly, individuals report more positive than negative emotions when they return a wallet ($r = .57$), contribute to a charity ($r = .61$), and give to a

homeless person ($r = .58$).

Table 4 presents the results of the effects of the moral identity on moral conduct. Logistic regression is used because the dependent variables are binary (0/1). The estimates are in terms of changes in the odds ratio for a one-unit change in the independent variable. Departures from an odds ratio of 1 in a positive direction indicate the percent increase in the odds of engaging in the moral conduct for a one-unit increase in the independent variable. Similarly, departures from an odds ratio of 1 in a negative direction indicates the percent decrease in the odds of engaging in the moral conduct for a one-unit increase in the independent variable.

(Table 4 about here)

We find that the higher a respondent's moral identity, the more likely it is that the person will engage in moral conduct across all the moral dilemmas except for giving to a homeless person. Specifically, for a one unit increase in the moral identity: 1) the odds of returning the extra money increase by 60%, 2) the odds of returning the wallet increase by almost 70%, and 3) the odds of donating to a charity increase by at almost 30%. This helps illustrate how an identity at the principle level guides action at the program level. In general, this supports Hypothesis 1 with the exception of contributing money to the homeless.

In order to investigate whether individuals report more negative emotional arousal when their moral identity does not correspond with their moral conduct (Hypothesis 2), we carried out a series of OLS regressions. For each equation, emotional arousal is examined given the effects of one's moral identity, moral conduct, and the interaction (moral identity*moral conduct). If the interaction effect is significant and in the expected direction, that is, more negative feelings are reported when the moral identity is high but moral conduct is not reported as in not returning the money or not making a donation, then we have support for Hypothesis 2. Correspondingly, we should find more positive feelings when the moral identity is high and moral conduct is reported. The results of the regression analyses are reported in Tables 5 and 6.

(Tables 5 and 6 about here)

Across all four equations, we find that the interaction effect is significant. One's feelings are dependent upon one's moral conduct and the nature of one's moral identity. These interaction effects are graphically represented in Figures 2-5. As expected from ICT, the lower solid line in each of the graphs show that those who do not engage in moral conduct are more likely to report negative feelings when their moral identity is high compared to when it is low. Thus, those who do not return the money or the wallet, and those who do not donate to a charity or the homeless are more likely to indicate they felt bad when their moral identity was high. As revealed in the upper broken line in the graph, when respondents engage in moral conduct, their emotions become more positive as they move from a low moral identity to a high moral identity. Interestingly, in each graph, the upper slope is steeper than the lower slope, indicating that feeling good is much stronger for people when they do something good compared to feeling bad for doing something bad. More importantly, however, the findings support our expectation that negative emotional arousal emerges when program level activity is at odds with principle level goals.

(Figures 2-5 about here)

Discussion

In this research, we were interested in how the moral self functions when faced with moral dilemmas, but this functioning must be theoretically understood as operating within the perceptual control system where the principle level activation of the moral identity guides action in situations at the program level. We find that the moral identity is significantly related to all of the moral actions we investigated with the exception of giving to the homeless. Those who are more likely to identify with the meanings associated with the moral identity report activities in which the meanings imply being morally upright as in returning extra money that they receive, returning a wallet that they find, and donating to a charity. When there is a discrepancy between

the meanings associated with the principle level moral identity and the meanings tied to the program level moral conduct, it will register an error in the form of negative emotions at the program level. Indeed, our findings are consistent with this. When respondents more strongly identify with the meanings tied to the moral identity and do not return extra money they receive, they report more negative feelings. Similarly, when respondents more strongly identify with the moral identity meanings, and they do not return a wallet they find, do not donate to a charity when asked, and do not give money when approached by a homeless person, they report more negative emotions. In the language of ICT, the lack of correspondence between identity standard meanings and actions reflect a problem in verifying the self. In this study, in response to not being perceived as morally upright, persons may either change action-sequences at the program level to better meet the moral identity principle level goals, or their principle level standards will slowly change to match their program level activity.

The results in Table 4 revealed no significant effect of the moral identity on giving to the homeless person. Clearly, individuals do not consistently live up to their moral standards (Smith 2003). We have all been dishonest, hardhearted, or selfish in situations where we should have been truthful, compassionate, or selfless. Given this inconsistency, what might explain the lack of a relationship between principle level activity and program level behavior in the perceptual control model? We use the homeless situation to discuss this.

Of the situations we examine in this research, not only do most respondents (98%) say that they have experienced a homeless person asking them for money, but we suspect that they have frequently experienced this situation. It is possible that novel situations, which require more thoughtful and planned activity, encourage principle standards to be invoked more often than common situations in which individuals act in a habitual manner as in refusing to provide money in a perfunctory manner. In frequently encountering a homeless person asking for money, individuals may, over time, become less attentive to the abstract goal of being moral than the

situation signals, and become more attentive to concrete, albeit competing goals such as maintaining a conversation with a friend while passing the homeless person, making sure they do not run into other people along their path, getting to their destination, and so forth. Thus, there may be diverse goals in a situation at varying levels of abstraction that compete for attention. Individuals may simply “lose sight” of principle level goals because their attention is on other program level goals (Carver and Scheier 1998).

The above suggests that further research is needed to investigate the factors that may intrude into situations to make principle level standards inoperative. For example, time pressures or others in the situation may distract one from attending to principle level goals. However, it is also possible that particular situational features may cue individuals to principle level standards. For example, the presence of significant others such as family members may remind individuals of principle level standards. In general, we need to examine how varying contexts facilitate or impede into the control system process.

Although actors’ focus of attention may be on program level goals, this does not mean that the outcomes of program level goals do not have implications for principle level goals. For example, if one gives money to a homeless person because the homeless person is holding up the individual from getting to his destination in a timely fashion, the act of giving gets both the recipient and giver on their way and satisfies the principle level goal of being generous. Thus, program level goals can contribute to increasing or decreasing discrepancies at the principle level. As Carver and Scheier (1998, p. 88) remark, “The links between the goal qualities at the various levels haven’t ceased to exist just because the higher levels aren’t being actively used to guide action.” Our results are consistent with this. While the moral identity did not influence how individuals responded to the homeless person, respondents’ negative emotional arousal following their actions toward the homeless person was significantly influenced by the degree to which there was a discrepancy between the meanings of the program level behavior and the meanings of

the principle level moral identity (see Figure 5). Thus, although the principle of generosity may not be guiding activity, actors' actions have implications for this principle as revealed in the negative emotional arousal that emerges. Looked at another way, multiple meanings emerge in situations and when individuals respond to one set of meanings by enacting certain programs, other meanings and their corresponding programs are neglected. In the latter, the consequences of not enacting certain programs will generate negative emotional arousal, particularly when those programs support valued principles. In general, when we think about program level activity, principle level standards may not guide a particular action in a particular situation, but if we were to examine the meanings associated with an actor's action over a wide range of situations, these meanings should be consistent with the meanings held in standards at the principle level.

Given the above discussion, the relationship between the principle level standards and program level actions requires further study. Identities at the principle level such as the moral identity likely have multiple dimensions of meaning and multiple components within each dimension of meaning. Given this complexity, many different courses of action might follow from principle standards. For example, a helpful and generous person may contribute money to a local homeless shelter but not to a person on the street out of concern that the money may not be well spent. Food may be given to the homeless person rather than money. Thus, some principle level meanings may imply that different resources (such as money, food, love and so forth) be given when the conditions ensure that they will be consumed in the manner intended.

Alternatively, the individual may not give at all thinking that a lack of contribution would help the homeless person, encouraging him or her to find work and become independent. Here, principle level meanings may suggest when resources are likely to be of benefit. If we have a better understanding of the meanings of principle standards, we may be in a better position of relating principle level standards to program level activity.

The meanings of principle standards such as the moral identity standard may differ for

different groups in society. Variations may occur by gender and race. For example, the principle level standard of the moral identity for Hispanics may emphasize meanings of care (e.g. being helpful and compassionate) more than other ethnic groups. Additionally, because the principle level moral identity may be rooted in multiple institutions in our society such as religion, the family, and the educational system with these institutions orienting actors to what is good and right (Smith 2003), there may be variability among different groups in society as to where this principle level standard emerges. For example, given Hispanics greater devotion to family compared to other ethnic groups (Vega 1990), the moral identity may be rooted more in the family than other institutions.

More generally, the basis for understanding the moral order in society arises in identifying the principle level moral meaning structures and corresponding program level actions that individuals invoke across situations. To the extent that this varies for individuals in different structural positions, and we isolate how these patterns fit with the patterns of others to create larger patterns of behavior, then we see how individual action is accomplishing the work of society, and how the moral order is maintained.

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Endnotes

¹ To the extent that role and group identities are obligatory rather than voluntary and constrained by normative expectations as to how they should be enacted, then the influence of person identities may be limited. Alternatively, the meanings of person identities may be modified to adapt to the meanings of the role and group identities. It is also possible that person identities may influence role and group identities when they are first taken on, but once the role and group identities are established, any further influence of person identities may be insignificant. These theoretical issues are important in the development of Identity Control Theory, but they are beyond the scope of the current research.

² For a fuller discussion of ICT, see Stets and Burke (2002).

³ For example, for gender identity, we have the criterion categories of being male or female from which to discriminate between masculinity and femininity.

⁴ If respondents did something other than these two responses, they were to indicate what that was. When we examined this “other” category, some of these open-ended responses indicated that the respondents “returned” or “did not return” or “donated” or “did not donate.” Therefore, we recoded these responses to their appropriate score (0 or 1) and entered them into the analysis. Those individuals who provided responses that could not be recoded to a 0/1 category primarily because they said their actions depended upon other things being present in the situation were subsequently dropped from the analyses.

⁵ These results are available upon request.

⁶ Happiness, sadness, and anger are primary or fundamental emotions because they serve as the foundation from which all other emotions are derived (Kemper 1987), and they have a distinctive facial expression across cultures (Ekman and Friesen 1975). Guilt, pride, and shame are secondary emotions because they are socially constructed and emerge in the context of experiencing one or more of the primary emotions (Kemper 1987). For example, pride stems

from the primary emotion of happiness, shame emerges from anger, and guilt stems from the primary emotion of fear (Kemper 1987).

⁷ The Eigenvalue for returning the money = 3.54; the Eigenvalue for returning the wallet = 3.27; the Eigenvalue for charity donation = 2.94; and the Eigenvalue for homeless donation = 2.96.

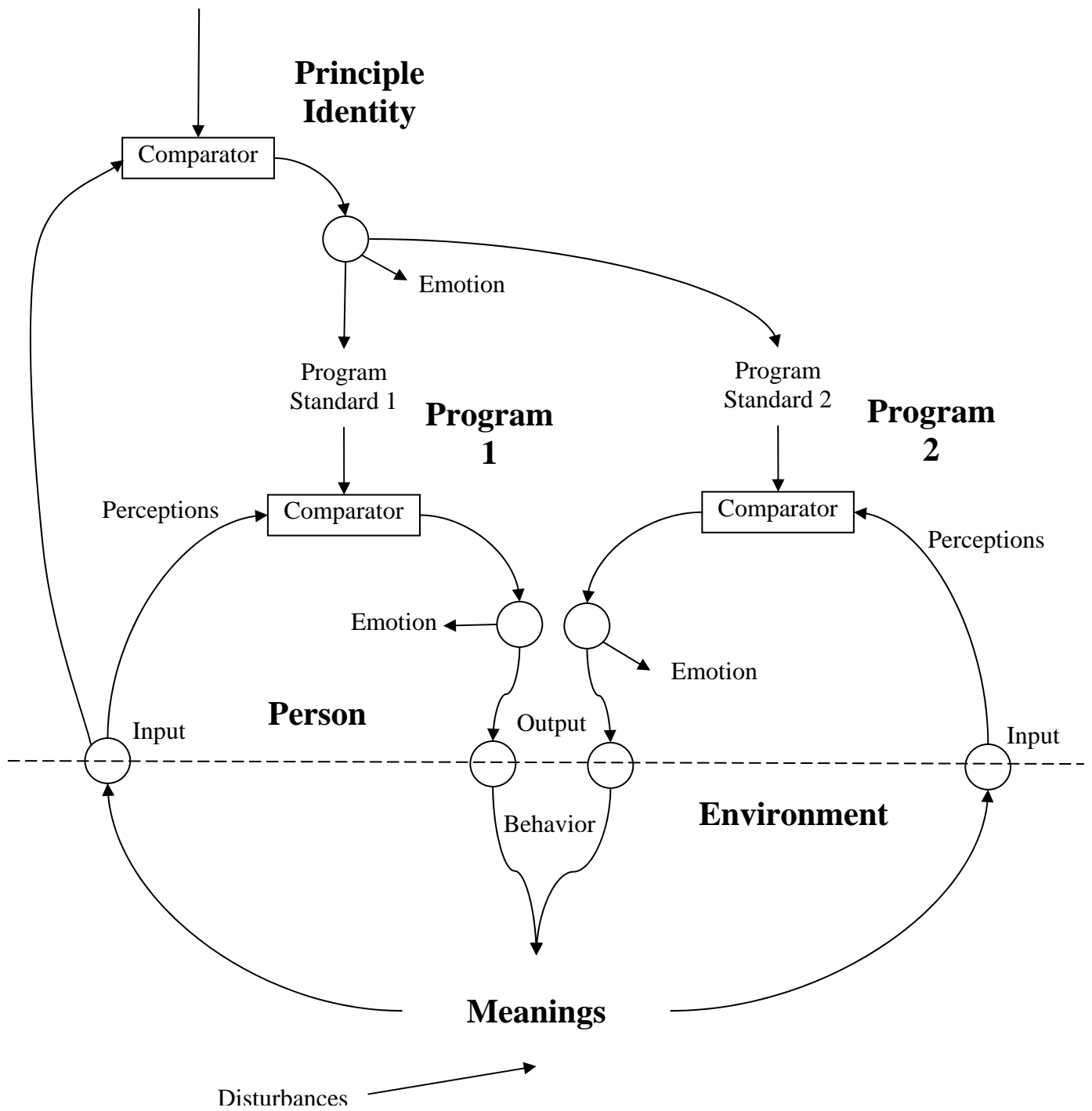


Figure 1. Hierarchy of Identity Control Process

Table 1. Principle Components
Factor Analysis for Moral Identity

Items	Factor Loading
Honest	.55
Caring	.75
Kind	.65
Fair	.41
Helpful	.53
Generous	.47
Compassionate	.59
Reliable	.52
Humble	.52
Selfless	.50
Principled	.48
Eigenvalue	3.30
Ω	.84

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Moral Identity	.01	1	-2.68	2.21	441
Return Money	.64	.48	0	1	408
Return Money – Emotions	.01	.76	-3.15	1.45	437
Return Wallet	.90	.29	0	1	432
Return Wallet – Emotions	.01	.73	-3.86	1.09	438
Charity Donation	.32	.47	0	1	401
Charity Donation – Emotions	.01	.69	-2.26	1.58	437
Homeless Donation	.57	.49	0	1	363
Homeless Donation – Emotions	.01	.70	-2.66	1.19	438

Table 3. Correlations Among Variables

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Moral Identity	1.00								
(2) Return Money	.22*	1.00							
(3) Emotions	.17*	.67*	1.00						
(4) Return Wallet	.15*	.23*	.10*	1.00					
(5) Emotions	.26*	.20*	.27*	.57*	1.00				
(6) Charity Donation	.11*	.08	.04	.09	.07	1.00			
(7) Emotions	.09	-.01	.14*	.03	.20*	.61*	1.00		
(8) Homeless Donation	.06	-.04	-.06	.03	.03	.27*	.17*	1.00	
(9) Emotions	.12*	-.07	.10*	-.01	.19*	.14*	.32*	.58*	1.00

* $p < .05$

Table 4. Logistic Regressions for Moral Situations

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables			
	Return Money	Return Wallet	Charity Donation	Homeless Donation
	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio	Odds Ratio
Moral Identity	1.61*	1.69*	1.29*	1.12
χ^2	19.82*	9.89*	5.23*	1.34
<i>N</i>	406	429	398	361

* $p < .05$

Table 5. Ordinary Least Squares Regressions of Emotional Reactions Following Moral Situations

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables					
	Return Money			Return Wallet		
	β	B	SE	β	B	SE
Conduct	.68*	1.04*	.06	.60*	1.46*	.10
Moral Identity	-.09	-.07	.04	-.12	-.09	.10
Conduct*Moral Identity	.18*	.18*	.06	.32*	.24*	.10
R^2	.47*			.39*		
<i>N</i>	405			427		

* $p < .05$

Table 6. Ordinary Least Squares Regressions of Emotional Reactions Following Moral Situations

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables					
	Charity Donation			Homeless Donation		
	β	B	SE	β	B	SE
Conduct	.61*	.90*	.06	.58*	.84*	.06
Moral Identity	-.08	-.06	.03	-.02	-.02	.05
Conduct*Moral Identity	.13*	.16*	.06	.15*	.14*	.06
R^2	.39*			.37*		
<i>N</i>	398			361		

* $p < .05$

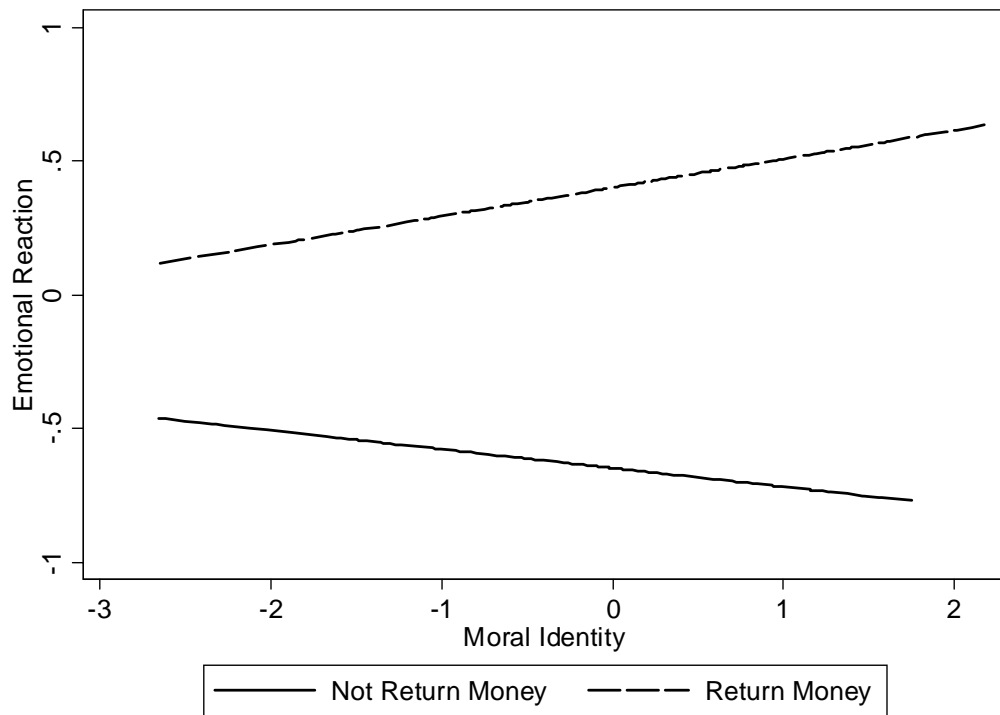


Figure 2. Emotional Reaction by Return Money and Moral Identity

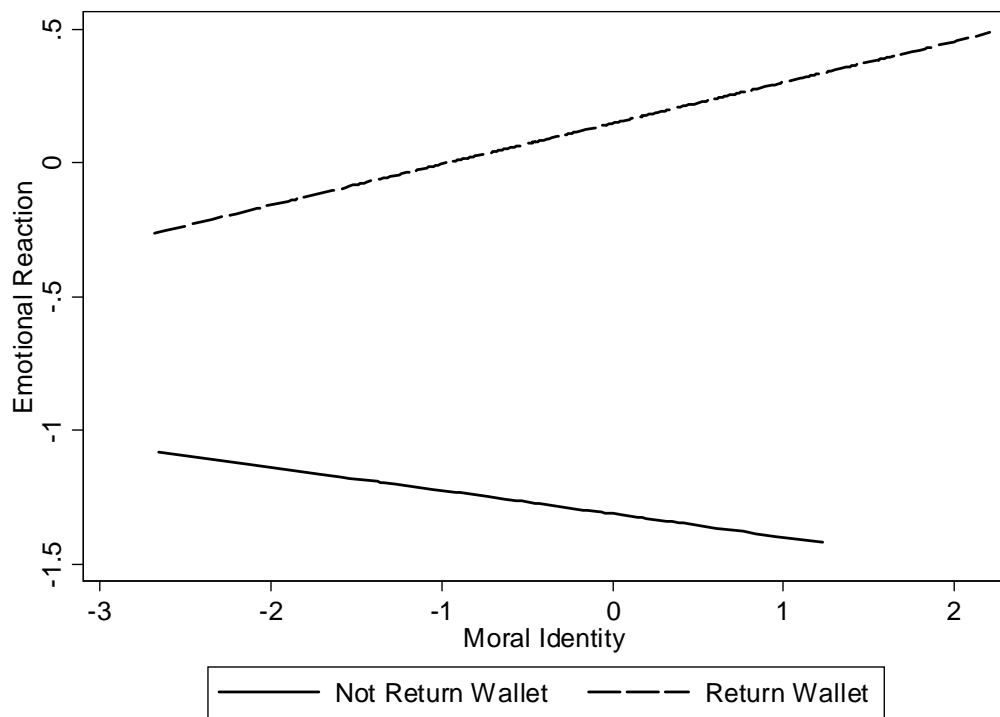


Figure 3. Emotional Reaction by Return Wallet and Moral Identity

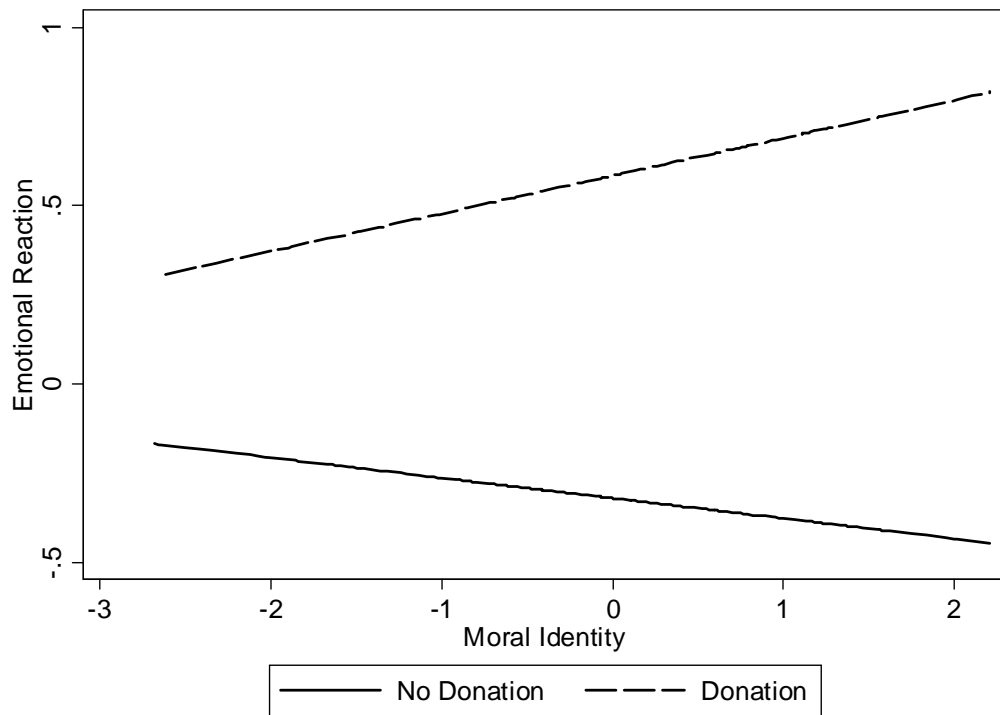


Figure 4. Emotional Reaction by Charity Donation and Moral Identity

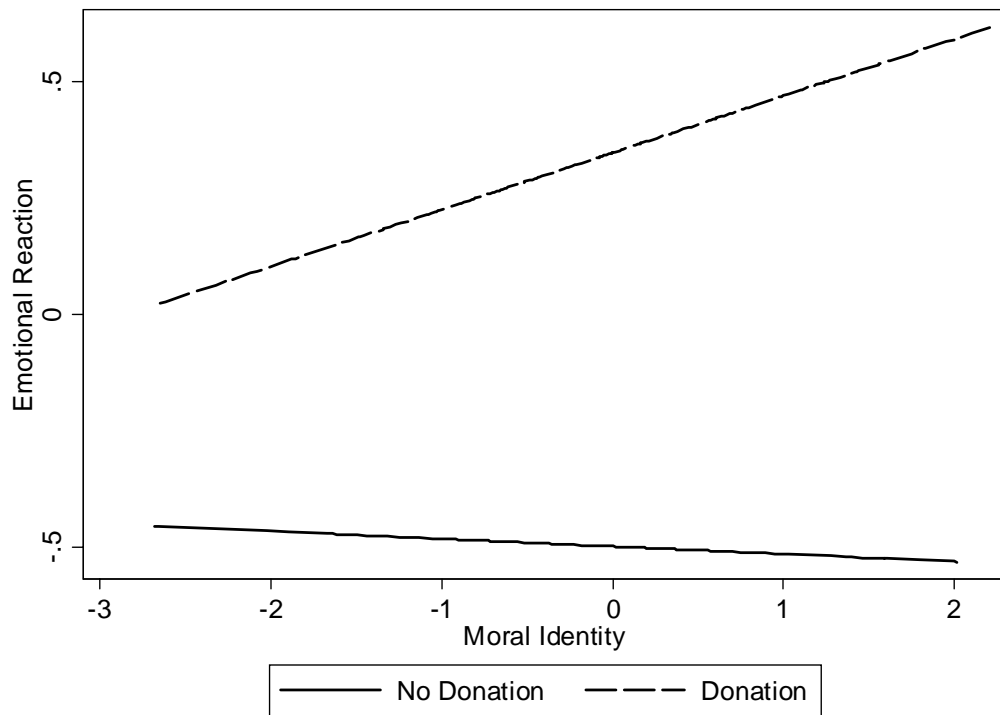


Figure 5. Emotional Reaction by Homeless Donation and Moral Identity