Am I who I say I am? Social Identities and Identification

When we talk about social identities we can have one of at least two senses of the phrase in mind. (1) We can think of social identities as a social status. On this view one bears some social identity S, just in case one can be classified as an S according to some criteria.[1] The social statuses relevant for considerations of social identity include gender and race, as well as familial roles like being a father, a mother, a sister or a brother and occupational roles like being a professor, a firefighter or a landscaper. (2) We can also think of social identities as psychological in nature. On this view one bears a social identity S, just in case one has the appropriate psychological attachment to some social status.

Social identity when thought of according to (1) is an objective matter, so to speak. That is, if one wants to know if some person bears some social identity S, one does not need to consult a person's opinion regarding whether or not they think of themselves as an S. There are social and historical facts that determine a person's social identity. In contrast, there is a tendency among theorist to think of social identities according to (2) as subjective. That is, on this view, bearing some social identity depends on whether a person endorses her social status or at the, very least, explicitly believes that she bears some social status. On this view, social identity, in the psychological sense, just is one's subjective take on one's social statuses.

This paper will focus on the second sense of social identity. I take the dominant view in the field noted above to be mistaken. Psychological social identity is not a matter of subjective self-ascription. It is instead a feature of a person's mental life that does not rely on a person's explicitly held understanding of who or what they are. Psychological

social identities are a product of our emotional life, which often operates below the surface of self-reflective awareness.

I arrive at this conclusion by first showing how the dominant view fails to address following cases:

The Phenomenon of Strategic Self-Avowal—cases in which someone avows some social status in order to achieve some further end;

The Phenomenon of Self-Hate—cases in which someone disapproves of the fact that she is classified in a particular way and yet she still identifies with the social status;

The Phenomenon of Self-Discovery—cases in which someone discovers that she identifies with some social status;

The Phenomenon of Poor Self-Knowledge—cases in which someone does not know that she identifies with some social status.

I then offer a more nuanced account of our psychological attachment to our social statuses that successfully deals with these cases. In addition, I suggest that since our own subjective take is not a sure guide for determining our psychological social identities we must elicit the input of others to determine who we are, socially.

In the first section of the paper, I introduce the concept of identification and explain how it applies to the issues surrounding psychological social identities. In the second section I introduce the account of identification that I take to have significant problems. I refer to this view as the self-avowal account. In third section, I critically engage three different unsuccessful attempts at making the self-avowal account work. In the fourth section, I move on to promote the idea that people identify with social statuses without taking up a robust self-reflective stance toward them and without the self-knowledge taking up such a stance requires. In the fifth section, I sketch my own account

of identification. In conclusion, I offer some thoughts on how one might gain epistemological access to their own psychological social identities.

I. Identification

Identification as a theoretical concept has its intellectual home in the work of agency theorists and moral psychologists, *a la* Harry Frankfurt.[3] Identification, roughly, is a psychological relationship that obtains between agents and their internal and external world by which the agent incorporates aspects of their internal and external world into his or her "self." The most recent work on the psychological sense of social identity applies the concept of identification to contexts in which the object of identification is some social status. The application of identification to questions about social identity will be adopted in what follows. Thus, when a person identifies with something let us say that this is one of her *identifications*. According to this terminology, then, it is the social statuses *we identify with* or it is *our identification* as an X, where X is some social status that constitutes our psychological social identities. For example, if a person identifies with being a Mom, this is one of her identifications and this identification is typically one among many identifications that constitute her social identities. So what is it to identify with a social status? Allow me to start with an initial intuitive answer to this question.

Suppose a person, call him José, is a day laborer and a father. Everyday José waits by a local hardware store hoping to get some work (a familiar scene where I grew up). One week he might be a gardener, another week he might be a mason, and the following week he might be a painter. He easily slides from role to role.[4] Without some further story, intuitively it seems that José has not identified with these roles, even though he, as a matter of fact, plays the roles assigned to him in these social contexts. Now suppose

that José is also a father. Moreover, suppose that while José finds it relatively easy to be a mason one week and then a painter the next, to change his role as a father would be a radical change. Indeed, it is only with great distress and disorientation that he could manage such an alteration. These reactions are not necessarily tied to these particular roles. One could imagine a dead beat dad who easily discards his role as a father and one could imagine a person whose role as a mason cannot be easily discarded. This is instead a fact about José's psychological relationship to these roles. He is psychologically attached to his role as a father in a way that he is not attached to the roles he takes up in the context of his work. We might say that José identifies with being a father but does not identify with his occupational roles.

The same distinction could be made for group membership. Maria describes herself as a Guatemalan. Suppose that after she came to the U.S., she also began to describe herself as a Hispanic. This was particularly important for getting employment because her temp. agency specializes in helping the government meet affirmative action expectations. Thus, describing herself as a Hispanic insures steady work. Now, as far as our use of ethno-racial terms in the U.S. goes, it seems right to say that she is both a Hispanic and Guatemalan. But it seems equally true that a person in Maria's situation might relate to these social statuses in very different ways. One could imagine that Maria has a very shallow attachment to being Hispanic and a very deep attachment to being Guatemalan. If next year the government decided to refer to people like Maria as simply a "minority" instead of Hispanic she would be fine with that as long as she can still find steady work. But if they also decided that in the U.S. people from Guatemala would now just be referred to as, say, Central-American, she might be upset and protest the change.

Why? Well one plausible reason for her reaction is that being Guatemalan holds a place in her life that being Hispanic doesn't share. It is a feature of her life with which she identifies.

I want to employ these examples as touchstones for cases of identification. That is to say, José's attachment to being a father and Maria's attachment to being Guatemalan will help us hone our intuitions when we look at other cases. When a particular case aligns with these examples we will have some intuitive grounds for thinking that the new case is a case of identification. When a particular case does not align with these examples we will have some grounds for think that the new case is not a case of identification.

With these examples in hand, let's move on to consider an highly influential approach to theorizing identification with one's social statuses, namely, the self-avowal account, and attend to some of its problems.

II. The Self-avowal Account

The self-avowal account tells us that identification requires a robust form of self-reflection or at least an explicit kind of self-knowledge. This view can be found in some social psychological work on social identity. Here is how one theorist explains it:

> Accordingly, one of the most direct measurement devices for discovering an individual's multiple identities has been the Twenty Statements Test of Self-Attitudes, or TST, in which one is given a paper of 20 numbered lines and invited to enter on those lines one open-ended response to the question, *Who am I?*[5]

The basic view we can distill here might be put as follows:

> SA: A person identifies with some social status S, if and only if she would avow S.

On this view, then, we avow S when we would give S as response to the question "Who am I?". Some answers to the question "Who am I?" might include responses like "I am a

father", "an intellectual", 'a Cuban", "a farm worker", etc. Let us call these responses "self-avowals". And just to be clear let us define self-avowals as follows: self-avowals are self-referring descriptions that a person avows or would avow in response to the question "Who am I?".[6]

This account makes an assumption that needs to be made explicit.[7] To see it consider the case of Maria described earlier. When she answers the question "Who am I?" in a certain context she would say "Hispanic". However as we noted earlier her psychological relationship to this social status does not amount to identification. So in this case it would seem that a self-avowal, by itself, does not get us to identification. What SA assumes is that people will understand that the question "Who am I?" is asking for a list of features that, in some respect, have a special *importance* to the person being questioned. That is, according to the self-avowal account, identification does not amount to simply *saying* that one is a thus and such. It is saying it and taking some kind of *importance-making psychological stance* toward the self-avowal. So the self-avowal account needs a story to tell about just what this stance is. Below I will look at some options that have been offered by philosophers that might help fill the lacuna in the account, starting with K. Anthony Appiah's work on this issue.

III. Making the Self-avowal Account Work

One finds Appiah's most developed approach to the issue of identification in his recent article "Does Truth Matter to Identity."[8] On his view, we identify with a self-avowal when we take it as reason to act in a particular way.[9] To see what Appiah means by this we first need to have a basic understanding of what taking something as a reason to act amounts to. As always, an example will help clarify things. Suppose George raises

his hand. When he performs this activity we typically assume that he has a reason for doing so. He has a question to ask, he needs to get someone's attention, or, perhaps, he wants to say hello. All of these considerations count in favor of acting in this particular way, i.e., raising one's hand. When a consideration counts in favor of acting in a particular way, I will call it a reason for action. Turning back to the example, for simplicity sake let's just say that George's reason for raising his hand is to say hello.[10] For a social status to be reason producing it must fill the role Georges's desire to say hello plays in the story above, i.e., it must give a person a reason to act. To see how a social status could play this role, consider a variation of one of Appiah's examples.[11]

Don avows being an Angelino. While on a trip to New York, he becomes stuck in a crowd in which people are being shoved and pushed. Among the mob he sees two other Angelino's, whom he recognizes because they are wearing shirts that identify them as residents of Los Angeles. He is a big strong guy, so he has no trouble maneuvering through the crowd. He wants to help some of the other people having a hard time and he reasons that since he is an Angelino he'll help the other Angelinos. One might think that this is a morally questionable decision. But that's not the issue we need to focus on. What is important about this example is that he is taking this self-avowal as a consideration that counts in favor of acting in a particular way, namely helping the other Angelinos. Likewise, suppose José thinks to himself "I am a Father now, I need to learn to balance my bank account" or Maria takes being a Guatemalan as a reason to protest the policy of referring to Guatemalan's as simply Central Americans. On Appiah's model Don, José, and Maria can be said to identify with their social statuses because they take them to be reasons for acting. Thus we might put Appiah's view as follows:

SAA: A person identifies with some social status S, if and only if she avows S and she treats her avowal of S as a reason to act in certain ways.

It seems to me that Appiah is right insofar as he analyzes our identification with a social status in terms of our acting on because of it. But this element of his account fails to tell the whole story and it may mislead us for, as I will show, one can take a social status as a reason to act without identifying with it. Thus Appiah's view casts the net too wide, including cases that don't seem to be cases of identification. Remember José, he takes up a number of odd jobs. In each case one could plausibly say that he takes his job as a reason to act. If today he is a carpenter he has a reason to bring his hammer and workbelt with him. Moreover, we could imagine that Maria takes being Hispanic as a reason to check the Hispanic box on AA forms. But as I noted earlier it would be a stretch to say that either of the two have identified with these features of their social life on this basis alone.

There are two other elements of Appiah's theory of identification that might help address the counter examples just proposed. Appiah tells us that "It is not sufficient to identify as an X that you act "because A thinks I am an X".[12] One might be inclined to read Maria's self-description as a Hispanic in this way. You might think that she checks the Hispanic box on AA forms just because other people believe she is Hispanic. However, I am imagining that Maria classifies herself as a Hispanic on AA forms because in the U.S. she is labeled Hispanic and she believes, given what she knows about the term, that such a classification is warranted. When we set up Maria's case in this way it is still plausible to think that she can take being Hispanic as reason to act and at the same time doesn't have a noteworthy psychological attachment to it, beyond her practical or strategic interest in marking the correct demographic box.

Appiah also tells us that it is not enough for identification that you, "act because 'I am a P' where P is a property you take to be sufficient for ascribing the identity X".[13] To use Appiah's example, suppose that in the U.S. having white skin is sufficient for having the racial status "White". It does not follow that a person who has white skin and takes his white skin as a reason to stay out of the sun to avoid sunburn, for example, identifies with this particular racial status. He must take "being White" as a reason to act not just a characteristic associated with "being White" or in Appiah's words, "It has to be "being White" itself that figures into your reasoning."[14] But the counter examples of strategic self-avowal noted above meet this qualification. José takes "being a Carpenter" itself, if only for a week, to be a reason to, say, bring his hammer to work. Maria, takes "being Hispanic" itself, as a reason to check the Hispanic box on AA forms.

What Appiah is missing is a way to distinguish between the different *motivations* we have for taking self-avowals as a reason to act. In the counter examples above José and Maria are motivated by their desire for work. Presumably their motivation for taking being a father and being Guatemalan, respectively, as a reason to act is quite different.[15] What we need then is some account of the motivation that leads to identification. Two ways of filling in what motivates people in this regard are found in the work of Christine Korsgaard and David Copp. It is important to note that I take these accounts, along with Appiah's, as further elucidations or variations of the self-avowal account. That is, they all begin with the thought that it is what a person *says* about herself that is key to understanding identification. Appiah adds that it is an avowal plus taking something as a reason to act that is sufficient. I will suppose that two approaches considered below, namely that of Christine Korsgaard and David Copp, essentially agree with this point, but

add an additional motivational story, namely valuing for Korsgaard and self-esteem for Copp.

For Korsgaard an identity or what she calls a "practical" identity is in her words a "description under which you value yourself."[16] We value ourselves under a description when we reflectively endorse it. Thus, on her view, when I step back and consider my life I can choose to endorse or not endorse certain features of it. For example, one can endorse one's gender role as a man or a woman or having a particular occupation. It is in light of these endorsements that one's gender role or having a particular occupation become part of one's identity. Insofar as people endorse social statuses, such as, teachers, mothers, being Black, being Muslim, etc., they have reasons for acting in a particular way. For example, suppose a person reflectively endorses being a musician. In light of this endorsement she has, at the very least, a reason to practice. So her actions and her life would need to be structured to make room for this activity. In addition, she may have a reason to attend a school for music, and so her actions need to be structured in light of this as well.

Now if what we are looking for is a motivation to take our social statuses as a reason to act that can help us distinguish between those statuses with which we identify and those with which we do not, Korsgaard has an answer: reflective endorsement. One might think that the difference between Jose's relationship to being a father, which is something he identifies with, and being carpenter, which he doesn't identify with, is that José *reflectively endorses* being a father. In addition, on this view, what makes the difference in Maria's relationship to being Guatemalan and being a Hispanic, is that she *reflectively endorses* being Guatemalan. But this doesn't seem quite right. Surely José in

some sense endorses being a carpenter and Maria in some sense endorses being a Hispanic. But keep in mind that they only endorse these social statuses instrumentally, namely as a means to being employed. So, to further refine the view on offer, the kind of endorsement that will result in identification, on Korsgaard's view, is endorsing something for its own sake. That is, while José endorses being a carpenter instrumentally, he endorses being a father for its own sake. Likewise, while Maria endorses being Hispanic instrumentally, she endorses being a Guatemalan as an end in itself. With this final point on the table we are now in a position to state Korgaard's view more clearly:

> SAK: A person identifies with some social status S, if and only if she avows S, reflectively endorses S for its own sake and she treats her reflective endorsement of S as a reason to act in certain ways.

SAK runs into a significant problem which I describe below.

There are cases where someone seems to have identified with some social status, but upon reflection rejects the status. [17] This is what I referred to in the introduction as the phenomenon of self-hate. As a matter of anecdotal evidence, in my conversations with students and friends over the years the sense of being stuck with a social identity is not uncommon. Typically, you hear the sense expressed as "Once an X, always an X" where X is some social status. Sometimes this is said in response to the inability of people labeled as Black or Latino, for example, to get away from the negative stereotypes and social hierarchy such labels imply. However, it is also said in response to the feeling that one just can't shake the deep attachment one has to these social statuses.

For example, consider the fictional but highly plausible case of Sarah Jane in the film "Imitation of Life". Sarah Jane is the daughter of a Black mother and a Black (although light skinned) father. She, like her father, has very light skin. Thus she is able

to pass as White. At one point in the film she admits to a close friend that she has decided to pass as White and that she would rather die than be Black. That is, she decides to reflectively endorse her whiteness and reject her Black social status. In order to successfully achieve this she must cut off all ties to the Black community and, in particular, her mother who, on my interpretation of the film, is a symbol of her Blackness. According to SAK, it seems that we should say that Sarah Jane does not identify with being Black, since she does not reflectively endorse this social status.[18] But in the context of the film it is not at all clear that Sarah Jane doesn't, in fact, identify with being Black. Throughout the film we realize that what Sarah Jane admits to publicly and privately in moments of self-reflection does not represent what is going on "inside", emotionally. This is made explicit in two scenes. In the first her mother comes to her hotel room to implore her to give up her charade and come home. In response, Sarah Jane reaffirms her rejection of being Black, which includes her rejection of her mother. But we see through her body language that this decision cuts against her true feelings on these matters. Her rejection is marked by obvious feelings sadness, discontent and alienation. In the second scene these feelings come to the surface. At her mother's funeral she pushes through a crowd of grievers, White and Black, crying and asking her mother to forgive her, thus acknowledging in public and to herself both her love for her mother and, because her mother is the symbol of her own Blackness, her psychological attachment to being Black.

What the case of Sarah Jane tells us is that our own reflective judgment about what we identify with doesn't always track the real status of our identifications. Thus SAK will not be able to accommodate cases of identification in which the two come

12

apart. Moreover, if it can't accommodate these cases, it is inadequate as an account of what it is to identify with our social statuses.[19] So let's consider another option.

In keeping with the criticism above, David Copp agrees that reflective endorsement is not necessary for identifying with aspects of one's social life. He proposes that instead of looking at valuing we look at how self-avowals are connected to a person's self-esteem. So, on his view:

> SAC: A person identifies with some social status S, if and only if she avows S, makes S a measure of her self-esteem and, due to this fact, she treats S as a reason to act in certain ways.

While SAC sounds a bit similar to Korsgaard, Copp does not focus on endorsement. Self-esteem is related to our values and endorsements, but, according to Copp, it also comes apart from them. A consequence is that he allows for cases in which people identify with some social status even though they might, like Sarah Jane, wish they didn't bear such a status. His account can allow for such cases because self-esteem, on his view, has a positive and negative valence:[20] one can have high self-esteem or low self-esteem. As long as one's relationship to a social status increases or decreases one's self-esteem one can be said to identify with it. For example, even though Sarah Jane, upon reflection, rejects her status as Black, as long as her self-esteem is grounded in this social status she still identifies with it. One might read her negative attitude toward being Black as a sense of shame. Shame, according to Copp, lowers one's self-esteem. Thus, on this interpretation it turns out that Sarah Jane identifies with being Black. Alternatively, consider a person who is proud of being a fire fighter. In this case, since she is proud, being a fire fighter increases her self-esteem and she therefore identifies with being a fire fighter.[21] Roughly speaking the point that Copp makes here maps on to a point that

Appiah makes that wasn't highlighted earlier. Appiah thinks that in addition to taking aspects of our social life as a reason to act, we sometimes *feel* like an X, where X is some self-avowal, and this influences our reasons to act. In this context he specifically mentions the shame and pride that we feel on account of our social statuses.

One can imagine how this model would help explain José and Maria's case. On this view, with regard to José, he identifies with being a father because he grounds his self-esteem in this social status. When he does well at being a father his self-esteem goes up and when he does not do well his self-esteem goes down. And he does not identify with being a carpenter because it does not ground his self-esteem in this way. Likewise, Maria takes her status as a Guatemalan as a measure for her self-esteem but not being Hispanic, which explains why she identifies with being a Guatemalan and not a Hispanic.

While this analysis improves on Korsgaard's model, in being able to account for the phenomenon of self-hate, it still has a significant problem, namely it requires that *we know* we bear a particular social status. And, as I will argue shortly, the phenomena of self-discovery and poor self-knowledge call this requirement into question.

Copp states that his theory of identification requires that a person *know* that they are classified in a particular way and that they take this status as a measure of their self-esteem. He says, "Now, according to my account of self-esteem identity…a fact about a person is not a part of her identity unless she knows about it or believes it"[22] He also writes, "Given the culture [of the West], most people who are aware that they have these characteristics [social statuses] are also such that their belief that they do grounds emotions of esteem, such as pride or shame[.]"[23]He hedges a bit in these quotes. It is not clear whether it is knowledge, awareness or just belief that is required. We can get some

clarity here by looking at the examples he employs. The paradigm case he asks us to consider is a woman who is the first female prime minister of Canada and takes pride in this fact. [24] This case assumes, of course, that the person in question knows that she is the first prime minister of Canada. We see this same reliance on self-knowledge when Copp turns to the case of the self-deceived homosexual. He tells us that because the self-deceived homosexual doesn't believe that he is, in fact, a homosexual he cannot ground his self-esteem in this particular feature of his life. Thus, it seems on this view, one must know one is a thus and such in order to esteem one's self in light of being a thus and such.

As I mentioned above, I think there are cases of identification that don't require self-knowledge. For example, consider the case in which a person discovers that they have *unknowingly* identified with some social status, namely cases of self-discovery. To illustrate this case let's modify Sarah Jane's story a bit. Suppose that Sarah Jane spent the first 3 yrs of her life with her mother and father in a Black community. But when she turned four she was given up for adoption to a White family. Having never been told of her adoption and since she has only vague memories of her early years, she grows up thinking she is White. However, throughout her life she feels a strong attachment to her Black friends and Black culture, but is unsure of where this comes from. Before she goes to college her parents tell her the whole story. With this new information in hand she is able to make sense of her sense connection to the Black community. She realizes that she never really gave up her psychological attachment to being Black. It was always with her. She identified with being Black even though she didn't know she was in fact Black. She, then, discovers one of her identifications. This case of self-discovery is a case in which

one is missing information regarding the social status one actually identifies with. There are also cases of poor self-knowledge where one gets the information wrong. Let's consider such a case.

Imagine a man who avows being a husband. If you sit down and talk with him about his take on his own identity, he'll tell you a story about how husbands are supposed to act and how they ought to treat their wives. By his lights, these norms partly define what it means to be a husband. Let us suppose that he tells us, sincerely, that from his point of view a husband ought not to treat his wife as a child and that he is committed to upholding this conception of being a husband in his relationship with his wife. But anyone can see that in practice he violates the norms he professes to uphold; that is, he treats his wife like a child.

There are a couple of ways that one could deal with this case. The first option is simply that what the man says and what he actually thinks are different. Although the man says husbands should not treat their wives like children, on the common sense principle of "actions speak louder than words" he must actually think otherwise. I take this to be a plausible way to understand the case. However, there is another assessment of this situation that is of interest to me. Suppose a therapist is called in to help sort through some of this couple's relational problems. After some discussion, she recognizes the disconnect between what the man says and what he does. So she delves deeper. After many sessions what she discovers is that the man exhibits in his actions and attitudes not responsiveness to the norms of a husband, but the norms that, by his lights, define a father. It is not that he has misunderstood the way to be a husband. Nor has he misunderstood the norms that define what it means to be a father. What the psychologist

might conclude, given the man's history, the community he lives in and other peculiarities of the case, is that in this relationship he is *actually* identifying with being a father and casting his wife in the role of a child. That is the husband gets his own psychological social identity wrong. If these cases are plausible, then Copp's self-esteem version of the self-avowal account will not do, for it makes identification rely on one's explicitly held beliefs. It also helps us see a common flaw of the different versions of the self-avowal account, namely, that they all require a highly explicit form of self-knowledge. I consider this point below.

IV. Psychological Social Identities without Self-knowledge

Let us distinguish two forms of psychological social identity—an actual identity and self-represented identity.[25] An actual identity, on my view, is the best interpretation of what our psychological social identities really are. That is, it is the best interpretation of the social statuses we identify with. In contrast, a self-represented identity consists of those identifications that a person explicitly avows. Now the important point I want to highlight here is that sometimes our self-represented identities correspond to our actual identities, sometimes they don't. What we actually identify with is not always easy for us to access. We may be confused or harbor false beliefs about our actual identities or lack introspective contact with them.[26]

I take it, that the distinction between self-represented identities on the one hand and actual identities on the other reflects a common feature of human life. Nevertheless, Appiah, Korsgaard, Copp, focus almost exclusively on self-represented identities. Now, in light of this criticism, one might say that self-avowal account is, as it turns out, only meant to provide a theory of self-represented identities. That is, the theory is not

concerned with giving an account of one's "actual" identity but instead its focus is simply on what people think about themselves. Thus, to fault the theory for only focusing on the self-represented form of identity is a non-starter. But this is not how self-avowal theorists frame their project. Appiah in particular tells us that his account of identification is supposed give us insight into how people *make* themselves into men, women, Black and Latino people.[27] Korsgaard echoes this point. It is well known that her theory of practical identity is a component of her more general theory of *self-constitution*. Copp is less clear on this point, but it seems that he also takes his account of self-esteem identity to explicate the identities people actually bear.[28] However, my contention is that these theorists have made a mistake. In their attempt to understand psychological social identity they have substituted self-represented identities for actual identities. This, in turn, leads to an impoverished theory of our psychological social identities, which doesn't have the resources to deal with the complex ways in which we identify with our social statuses as illustrated in the problem cases. Thus we need a more nuanced approach. I offer the outlines of such an approach below that I believe can succeed where the self-avowal account has failed.

V. Identification and Care

I favor an account that understands identification in terms of care. On this view one identifies with a particular social status just in case one cares about it. Now there are a number of views on the nature of caring. Due to the constraints of this paper, I will not rehearse these here. Suffice it to say that the view of care that I think best accommodates the problem cases is one that theorizes care as a complex emotion.[29] A complex emotion is a disposition to experience some combination of emotions in a predictable way in

response to some situation. Some of the emotions involved in caring are joy and satisfaction, anger and frustration. Further, these emotions are coupled with dispositions. For example, if one cares about one's career as an academic when things go well, say, when a paper is accepted for presentation at a conference, one is disposed to feel joy and satisfaction. When things do not go well, say, when a paper gets rejected from a journal with scathing comments, one is disposed to feel anger and frustration.

The components of this complex emotion are not only connected by virtue of being focused on an object, they also are connected to each other. That is, these emotions follow a more or less rational pattern. When we care about something certain emotions are called for at different times. And certain emotions yield to other emotions in the appropriate circumstances. Following Bennett Helms we can refer to the rational relationship between the components of caring as "Tonal Commitments" and "Transitional Commitments".[30] The former connect positive and negative emotions. For example, if one cares about one's career and feels joy at success, then one is required to feel sadness at failure. The latter commitments connect past and future directed emotions. For example, suppose you care about your child and tomorrow he or she will be taking the SATs. One might feel hope, i.e., you hope that your child will do well on the test. Alternatively one might also feel fear, i.e., you might be afraid that your child will do poorly. However, when one cares about a child, these emotions are required to change in light of what actually happens. If the day of the test comes and your child does well your hope and fear ought to turn to relief. If in the unfortunate circumstance that your child does poorly your hope and fear ought to turn to disappointment. The rational commitments among these different psychological states serve to unify them. They are no

longer disconnected states of mind but are now bound together by the object of care and connected by the tonal and transitional commitments of caring about a particular thing.

Not only does caring connect its component psychological states but it also produces cognitive activity that typically leads to action. Once a person cares about something it gives the object of care importance. When so endowed the object of care takes on a special status in one's practical reasoning. Specifically, caring about something provides a reason to act in a particular way. When one cares about one's career one has a reason to do the things necessary for being successful.[31] It is important to note that on this account caring does not require self-reflection or any explicit self-knowledge. All that is required is that a person's emotions are attuned to something in the right way for identification to be in the offing. So how might this approach to thinking about identification accommodate the problem cases?

Let's start with the problem case we confronted when surveying Appiah's take on identification; cases of strategic self-avowal. The issue, as I articulated it above, was that Appiah's view does not distinguish between two types of cases. Recall José, who takes his social status as a carpenter and as a father as a reason to act. However, as I constructed the case, he did not identify with being a carpenter but did identify with being a father. What makes the difference? Well, utilizing the conception of care on offer, we can say that the difference is that José *cares* about being a father. But he does not care about being a carpenter, *per se*. He would be happy with any line of work. In fact one might think that it is only because José cares about being a father, that the social status of being a carpenter is significant to him at all. Since he cares about being a father, he has a reason to find employment. The same reasoning can apply to Maria's case. Maria takes

being Guatemalan as a reason to act because she *cares* about being Guatemalan. Thus on the view I am proposing she identifies with being Guatemalan. In contrast, she takes being Hispanic to be a reason to act not because she cares about being a Hispanic *per se,* but because she cares about being employed. Thus, on this view, she doesn't identify with being Hispanic.

The second problem case was the phenomenon of self-hate. In this case we are asked to consider the story of Sarah Jane who acknowledges that she bears a particular social status, being Black, but upon reflection rejects this status. However, in spite of this rejection, she still identifies with this social status. The account of caring on offer can handle this case, because at the end of the day caring doesn't rely on a person's explicit opinion on the matter. All it requires is that the person's emotional life be attuned to the object of care. From various scenes in the movie we see that Sarah Jane's is still emotionally attuned to her Black social status. So what we should say about her case is that in moments of self-reflection she rejects this social status, but, nevertheless, she actually still cares about it. And since caring is decisive for determining identification, it is appropriate to say she identifies with being Black.

The next problem case is the phenomenon of self-discovery. This case was constructed to show that one can identify with a particular social status without knowing it. Using the emotional attunement account of caring we can deal with this case as well. What we should say about this modified rendition of the Sarah Jane story is that Sarah Jane has developed an emotional attunement to being Black as a child that endured up to this particular point in her life. Thus what she discovers when told that she is Black is that

she indeed cares about this social status. And since caring, on this view, determines

identification, she discovers a social status she identifies with.

In the case of poor self-knowledge a person professes that he wants to be a good

husband. But what his emotions are really attuned to is being a father. Thus what he

really identifies with is being a father, not a husband. All of these cases deserve a bit

more attention. But I think enough has been offered here to show the power of the

emotional attunement account of identification. The account avoids the tendency to

privilege self-represented identities over actual identities and it can handle the problem

cases the self-avowal account could not.

Conclusion: Discovering Identities

I have tried to show that our opinion of ourselves is not definitive for determining

the social statuses we identify with. What is definitive is that we care about them.

Furthermore, caring does not require any explicit self-reflection or self-knowledge. If this

is the case, however, one might wonder how we can ever discover, epistemologically,

someone's social identities. We, from the outside, can't just look into someone's head

and see what is that they care about it. So what can we do?

The problem articulated above is not unique. There are familiar cases in which we

would want to ascribe to a person a mental state that they would not ascribe to

themselves. For example, consider the more or less familiar situation in which a friend is

obviously jealous of some person, but he seems to be oblivious to this fact. Moreover,

when confronted, he denies that he his jealous. The fact that your friend doesn't

recognize his jealousy and even denies it does not automatically override your

observation that he is jealous. You might even think that anyone with adequate

knowledge of the situation would come to the same conclusion you have. So how do you pick up on the fact that your friend is jealous? This is a hard question to answer. There is not a well defined methodology for gaining access to such information about other people; it is more of an art than a science. Even so, we do it all the time. When my daughter holds herself in a certain way and makes a certain face, I can tell that she is sad. Or when she hides behind my leg when a stranger approaches, I can tell that she is afraid. What I pick up on in these situations are behavioral clues that I interpret as expressing different mental states. Detecting jealousy in others involves noticing similar clues in the way your friend talks about and acts around the person in question. He might make a point of putting the person down or you might notice that your friend consistently tries to upstage her in social settings.

A similar kind of observation takes place when trying to determine if someone cares about a social status. Through observing behavioral clues, there is a pattern of emotional resonance that one must key in on in order to discover if a person, indeed, cares about the status in question. Does this mean that only a third person observer can discover the social statuses we care about? Are we, the person who bears the social identity out of the loop, so to speak? The answer in short is: No. Let me explain.

My view takes psychological social identity out of the subjective purview of an individual. That is, a person's assessment of her social identity is not necessary or sufficient for establishing identification with a social status. However, this doesn't mean that when we critically reflect on our lives we cannot discover the social statuses that we, in fact, care about. Note that in general *critical* reflection requires that we be aware of the fact that our own *prima facie* assessments might be wrong. Moreover, it requires that

even after we come to considered judgments, we must be aware that sometimes we, as it were, "can't see past the end of our nose." That is, even after we critically reflect in a careful and thoughtful way, we sometimes come to conclusions that are a result of questionable assumptions and presuppositions. An important way to mitigate this tendency is to elicit the thoughts of others. That is, in order to get beyond our provincialism, we typically need to be in dialogue.

Dialogue is all the more pressing when it comes to critically reflecting on our identity because there are powerful incentives to misconstrue it. We are apt to interpret ourselves in ways that protect us from humiliation and prop up our self-esteem. One important way to mitigate these forces is not only to try to have an open mind in our critical self-reflection, but, also, to take seriously what other people see in us. It is often the case that our friends, family members and trusted advisers can see things in us that we can't see in ourselves. Thus, discovering our identities requires that we admit that our word is not the last word on who we are; we must listen to and learn about ourselves from others. When all is said and done, our take on our psychological social identity serves as one input that taken together with the input of others as well as evidence from our own emotional life and behavior gives a clearer picture of who we actually are as regards our psychological social identities.

---

[1] The sticking point for thinking about social identities according to (1) is figuring out what criteria determine one's membership in a particular class of people.

[3] For an articulation of Frankfurt's take on identification see Harry Frankfurt, *The Importance of What we Care About* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1988) 163-164.

[4] I was torn between casting José as an academic wearing different hats as he served on committees and the example I used above. The reason for my consternation is that on the one hand I think it is good to associate Hispanics with professions that challenge certain stereotypes. On the other hand, I think the example above is more true to the way in which a certain population in our society relates to their work. Not many people have the luxury of finding consistent jobs and jobs that they can identify with.

[5] Peter J. Burke and other, ed., *Advances in Identity Theory and Research* (New York: Kluwer Academic, 2003) 11. Also see Andrew J. Weigert, J. Smith Teitge, and Dennis W. Teitge, *Society and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 30-33.

[6] This is made explicit by Weigert and others in *Society and Identity* 30-35.

[7] David Copp calls attention to this problem in "Social Unity and the Identity of Persons" 37. Copp does not reject the questionnaire account in general. In fact he utilizes its basic structure. However he does try to offer a way to single out the self-avowals one might give in response to such a questionnaire that are relevant for a person's identities.

[8] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Does Truth Matter to Identity" in Race or Ethnicity? On Black and Latino Identity, ed, Jorge J.E. Gracia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008) 22.

[9] Appiah, 27.

[10] Or the consideration that he wants to say hello counts in favor of raising his hand.

[11] Ibid., 27.

[12] Ibid., 27.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] I made a similar point in the previous chapter with regard to the reasons people have to take the social rules that define social roles seriously.

[16] Christine Korsgaard, *Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 101. David Copp offers a similar description of Korsgaard's theory in "Social Unity and the Identity of Persons" 367**.**

[17] David Copp makes a similar criticism of Korsgaard's view. See "Social Unity and the Identity of Persons" 367

[18] It is important to note that SAK does not necessarily entail that Sarah Jane identifies with being White either. This is because one plausible interpretation of the film is that Sara Jane does not endorse being White as an end in itself but rather as a means to an end. She uses the fact that she can pass as White to pursue goals she otherwise would not be able to pursue.

[19] One might be inclined to think that this criticism of SAK doesn't hold because the correct analysis of the case of Sarah Jane would lead one to the conclusion that Sarah Jane does not in fact reflectively endorse being White. She instead reflectively endorses the social utility being treated as White provides. Thus she does not endorse being White as an end in itself. I take this to be a plausible reading of the case. However, it still does not help SAK. Whether she really endorse being White or not doesn't change the fact that in moments of self-reflection she does *not* endorse being Black. However, I submit, that she *in fact* identifies with being Black. Thus, SAK still gets it wrong.

[20] Copp, 371.

[21] Ibid, 369. Copp calls this way of describing identity "self-esteem identity" which is a variation of a theory of identity developed by the social psychologists Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams in *Social Identifications* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

[22] Copp, 373.

[23] Ibid., 372.

[24] Ibid., 373.

[25] Owen Flanagan, *The Varieties of Moral Personality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) 137-141. Here Flanagan makes this distinction which I will adopt, but without all the theoretical details he packs in.

[26] Getting in contact with these identities is often the goal of various forms psychological or psychoanalytic therapy.

[27] Appiah, 31

[28] In *Social Unity and the Identity of Persons* Copp nowhere claims that the concept of identity he is explicating is not metaphysically real. He only notes that it is not the concept that we associate with the metaphysics of personal identity over time.

[29] My thoughts on the nature of Identification have been heavily influenced by Agnieszka Jaworska work on this topic in "Caring and Internality" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 74, no. 3 (May, 2007)

[30] Bennett W. Helm, *Emotional Reason: Deliberation, Motivation, and the Nature of Value* (Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press, 2001) 67-69.

[31] It is important to note that the emotional attunement account of caring has affinities with Copp's self-esteem account. Both rely on considerations regarding a person's emotional life to explain identification. However the key difference is that for Copp self-esteem involves feeling emotions in light of one's knowledge of how one is socially classified. The emotional attunement account of identification has no such requirement.