

## Article

# Moral Identity and Subjective Well-being: The Mediating Role of Identity Commitment Quality

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**Abstract:** Moral identity can promote people's well-being, but existing research has paid little attention to the mechanism of the link between the two. The current study proposed that the eudaimonic identity function is a critical mechanism that links moral identity and well-being. Specifically, the quality of identity commitment mediates the link between subjective well-being and the two dimensions of moral identity, namely, internalization and symbolization. We examined these hypotheses in 419 participants, who completed the Self-importance of Moral Identity Questionnaire, Satisfaction with Life Scale, Scale of Positive and Negative Experience, and Questionnaire for Eudaimonic Well-being. Results from the obtained data confirmed our hypotheses: There is a significant correlation between moral identity and subjective well-being. Both the internalization and symbolization dimensions of moral identity promote subjective well-being through the mediating role of identity commitment quality. We discussed these findings with respect to implications and proposed research suggestions for future studies.

**Keywords:** moral identity; subjective well-being; identity commitment quality; internalization; symbolization.

## 1. Introduction

In the past decade, empirical research on happiness or well-being has grown enormously [1]. Morality is believed to be strongly associated with happiness [2]; even young children believe that a moral person would be happier [3]. Empirical evidence on the link between morality and happiness has been presented in research [4,5], which has shown that engaging in moral behavior can improve our happiness (for a review, see [6]). However, the relation between morality and happiness or well-being remains vaguely understood, especially during the critical period of identity formation in late adolescence and early adulthood.

In personal and moral development, an important task is to form an integrated moral identity, because morality and identity are two facets of the same development system that are unified in late adolescence [7]. Therefore, identity formation may play a critical role in the relation between moral identity and well-being in this period. However, the exact mechanism by which an important identity—moral identity—is linked to human well-being. Therefore, the present study aimed to fill this gap and focus on the relation between moral identity and subjective well-being (SWB) by exploring a possible mechanism between people's moral identity and their SWB, with the quality of identity commitment functioning as a mediating variable.

### 1.1. Moral identity and well-being

Moral development is closely related to identity formation, and moral self-identity is crucial for living a purposeful life, thus contributing to one's well-being [8]. Research in the identity development domain has confirmed the positive association between identity achievement and different kinds of happiness measures [9]. Individuals with a more mature sense of identity have better mental health and psychological well-being [10]. However, identity development research has tended to measure the sense of identity as a unitary construct, paying little attention to the relative importance of identity content on which one's identity is based. A recent study found that identity commitment and in-depth exploration significantly predicts well-being in many identity domains [11]; however, their research failed to include moral identity.

Given that human morality is much more essential to identity than personality traits, memory, or desires [12], more attention should be given to the relation between human well-being and moral identity, which is an important impersonal identity. A few recent studies have investigated the important role of moral identity in predicting human well-being [4,13,14]. Garcia et al. (2018) found moral identity associate with meaning, engagement and identification with others, acceptance of others, and the sense of being part of something bigger than the self. Hardy et al. (2013) examined the role of moral identity in predicting mental health and meaning, reporting that identity maturity interacting with moral identity predicts mental health and life meaning. Moreover, moral identity has been found to predict eudaimonia in youth footballer, specifically, when social affiliations are low [14]. However, these studies have either focused only on the internalized aspects of moral identity [13,14] or failed to distinguish internalization from symbolization [4], neglecting the fact that symbolization dimension of moral identity may play an important role in promoting well-being.

Meanwhile, studies have found that moral identity can guide people to experience SWB through prosocial behaviors, such as volunteering and charity donation; engaging in prosocial behaviors has been regarded as an effective way to promote human well-being [15]. Moral identity is thought to be an important psychological antecedent and individual difference variable related to prosocial behavior. Individuals with a strong moral identity are more likely to volunteer in the community, donate food to help the needy [16], give money to a charity that benefits an out-group [17], and make prosocial business decisions [18]. A recent meta-analysis has also indicated that moral identity is significantly associated with prosocial behaviors [19]. Individuals with a strong moral identity consider being helpful to others important, behave in a prosocial manner out of autonomy motivation, and experience positive affect association with such action [20]. A recent representative cross-sectional study in 166 countries has proven that prosociality is significantly associated with positive affect, one of the important components of SWB [21]. Thus, "doing good" may be an important avenue by which people create meaningful and satisfying lives, and moral identity can be considered a promising variable in predicting SWB.

Moral identity not only leads to SWB through prosocial behavior, but is also positively associated with affective experiences, such as more positive and less negative affect (for a recent meta-analysis, see [22]). People with higher levels of moral identity internalization have higher levels of sympathy and moral reasoning [16], and have heightened moral elevation, such as positive emotions, positive views of humanity, and the desire to be a better person [23]. Thus, moral identity, when considered a personality trait, is associated with life satisfaction. However, specific mechanism by which moral identity relates to SWB need further exploration, given that moral identity promoting SWB has only been considered under specific contexts and specific activity experiences in life span of typical individuals.

Considering this research gap, and drawing on eudaimonic identity theory [24], which states that identity formation can bring eudaimonic well-being rather than hedonic pleasure, we assumed that the development and formation of moral identity in late adolescence or early adulthood would lead to eudaimonia [24], which would be bound to produce SWB. Our work intended to expand existing research on the relation between identity formation and psychosocial benefit. Which has mainly considered the relation

between specific identity and psychosocial benefit. For instance, people who engage in community identity, express more satisfaction with their community [25], and according to eudaimonic identity theory, such optimal experience of enjoyment is associated with identity: personal, social, and place identity [26]. However, whether such relations can be applied to moral identity remains unclear. Therefore, this study's examination of the relation between moral identity and SWB is a novel effort in this area.

### *1.2. The mediating role of identity commitment quality*

Extensive research in the field of identity has provided substantial evidence of a positive relation between identity formation and well-being. This trend of work inherits Ericson's classical theory of identity development, which highlights exploration and commitment as central processes by which individuals form personal identities [27]. Traditional identity research has fixated on the relation among identity commitment, exploration, and psychosocial functioning, and a consistent finding of these studies is that status, characterized by identity commitment, is generally associated with higher levels of psychosocial functioning [28]. Identity commitment is also significantly correlated with different kinds of happiness [9]. Individuals who have established identity commitments are more likely to report feelings of personal expressiveness, which is a core concept of eudaimonia [29]. In other words, involvement in identity-related and personal expressive activities is associated with more positive psychosocial outcomes.

However, in addition to identity formation and identity content, differences in the quality of identity choice related to adjustment and psychosocial functioning may also come into play. Differences in motivation or quality of identity choice is called identity commitment quality [30,31]. Soenens et al. (2011) examined the role of commitment quality in terms of autonomous and controlled motivation associated with identity commitment based on self-determination theory. A main finding is, even after controlling for identity commitment, autonomy motivation is still positively associated with adjustment, whereas controlled motivation is negatively related to adjustment, and the quality of identity motivation partially mediates the link between identity styles and adjustment. Drawing upon eudaimonic identity theory, Waterman et al. (2013) investigated the quality of identity commitment and found that commitment quality accounts almost entirely for the association of identity commitments with psychosocial functioning. In other words, for people who have low-quality identity commitment, identity commitments are associated with costs instead of benefits. The results of these studies suggest that the quality of commitment has an independent effect on psychosocial benefits other than identity commitment. However, identity formation does not end in adolescence, but continues into adulthood [32]. In late adolescence or early adulthood, moral identity development and self-development undergo integration, and the formation of identity commitment, as well as the quality of identity commitment, may influence psychosocial functioning. However, none of the existing studies have addressed the important relation between the quality of an important personal identity, moral identity, and SWB.

Based on eudaimonic identity theory, living in truth to one's true self gives rise to eudaimonia, which certainly leads to SWB [24]. The formation of identity, especially important personal moral identity, will lead to positive subjective experience. Notably, eudaimonia is not an innate structure but one that requires active development. College students face the process of identity development and integration as they will gradually form their moral identity. One's defined moral identity captures the importance of morality to one's self-identity and is an identification with a specific commitment, whereas high-quality commitment reflects optimal psychological functioning. Therefore, in addition to moral identity commitment, the quality of identity commitment also has an important impact on the subjective experience and cognitive evaluation of happiness. Moral identity commitment, which is consistent with personal expression, promotes well-being more than other commitments [31].

Therefore, the present study sought to investigate not only the relation between moral identity and SWB, but also the role of identity quality commitment to examine the mediating role of moral identity and SWB. We assumed that both the self-importance of moral identity and quality of identity commitment contribute to SWB, whereas the self-importance of moral identity would produce SWB through the mediation of the quality of identity commitment.

### *1.3. The role of internalization and symbolization in promoting happiness*

Generally, moral identity is thought to signify the importance or salience of morality in one's identity [33]. The more a person's moral identity is central to their sense of self, the bigger the role it plays in behavior and commitment. From a social cognitive perspective, Aquino and Reed (2002) defined moral identity as the extent to which being a person with moral traits is a social identity that is salient to one's self-concept. The moral identity model has two sub-dimensions: internalization and symbolization. The former refers to the extent to which moral self-schema is experienced as being central to one's self-definition, whereas the latter refers to the extent to which the moral person's social identity is expressed through one's real-world behavior [16]. This two-dimensional distinction corresponds to many concepts in social psychology, such as the "having" side and "doing" sides of the moral self [34], and the view that people are simultaneously both agent and actor [35].

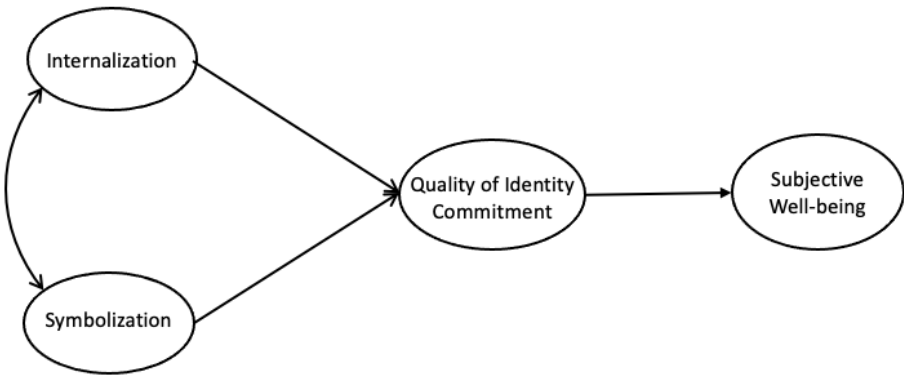
In the prediction of moral behavior and prosocial behavior of individuals, internalization is generally believed to have more robust effects than symbolization [36]. However, many studies on the consequences of moral identity focus only on the internalization dimension of moral identity, especially the existing research on the relation between moral identity and well-being [13,14]. Although symbolization is considered more of self-presentation driven by impression management rather than a valid representation of "having" a moral identity, some studies have pointed to a unique role of symbolization [36–38]. When prosocial behavior is expected to be recognized, symbolization will show a stronger positive relation with such behavior for people who report low (compared with high) internalization [38]. Symbolization also plays an important role in charitable giving, whereas internalization does not [36]. Symbolization is a better predictor of public and private prosocial behavior than internalization [37].

These previous results illustrate that symbolization reflects the degree to which an individual's moral identity is expressed through action. Engagement in meaningful behavior is an important avenue for people's well-being [39]. To capture the full picture of the role that moral identity plays in human well-being, research should examine both internalization and symbolization dimensions. A correlational study of moral identity and happiness has found that symbolization is a stronger predictor of positive well-being than internalization [5], but the different mechanisms of internalization, symbolization, and happiness have not been explored. Few existing studies have explored the relation between the two dimensions of moral identity and SWB, and no study has examined whether the two dimensions of moral identity affect SWB through the quality of identity commitment. The current study examined the role of two dimensions of moral identity, internalization and symbolization, on SWB through the mediation effect of identity commitment quality.

### *1.4. Present Study*

In summary, the current study was designed to examine the mediating role of identity commitment quality in the relation between moral identity (internalization and

symbolization) and SWB among late adolescent students. The expected relationships among the study variables were shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The assumed mediation model.

Based on the literature reviewed above, five specific hypotheses were proposed as follows:

Hypothesis 1a: The internalization dimension of moral identity would predict SWB.

Hypothesis 1b: The symbolization dimension of moral identity would predict SWB.

Hypothesis 2: The quality of identity commitment would predict SWB.

Hypothesis 3a: The quality of identity commitment would mediate the link between the internalization dimension of moral identity and SWB.

**2. Materials and Methods**

*2.1. Participants and procedure*

A total of 463 college students in central China participated in the current research. 44 participants were excluded because they did not pass attention monitoring question. The final sample consisted of 419 participants ( $M_{age} = 19.4$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ), of which 326 were female (77.8%,  $M_{age} = 19.5$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ).

The study protocol was approved by the first author’s university. Participants were recruited via psychology class. This study used an online questionnaire to collect data. Participants scanned the QR code to fill the questionnaire and provided informed consent before formally answering the questionnaire. Student participants could obtain credit for participating the research. All participants could quit at any time during the study. Participants need to complete the measures related to moral identity, quality of identity commitment, positive and negative experience, life satisfaction, and demographic questions.

*2.2. Measures*

*2.2.1. Moral Identity.*

Moral identity was measured by the Self-importance of Moral Identity Questionnaire (SMIQ) [16]. This instrument contains two dimensions: internalization and symbolization. The first dimension reflects the degree to which moral traits are reflected in the self-concept (sample item: “Being someone who has these characteristics is an important part of who I am.”), and the second reflects the degree to which these moral traits manifest in the person’s choices and actions (sample item: “The types of things I do in my spare time (e.g., hobbies) clearly identify me as having these characteristics.”). The measure presents participant with a list of nine characteristics that might describe a moral person (i.e., caring, fair, honesty kind et al.), then let them to imagine a moral person who have these characteristics. After that they were asked to indicate their opinions about ten items on a 5 points



Likert-type scale (1 = “strongly disagree,” and 5 = “strongly agree”). The SMIQ exhibited good psychometric characteristics in Chinese context [40]. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of internalization, symbolization in current research are .81 and .67, respectively.

### 2.2.2. Quality of Identity Commitment.

The Questionnaire of Eudaimonic Well-Being (QEWB) was used to assess participants’ quality of identity commitment [41]. QEWB has been used as the indicator of quality of identity commitment by previous research [31]. Since there was no Chinese version QEWB until the time of our study, we used the back translation procedure to form a Chinese version QEWB and examined its structural validity. It is worth noting that the original QEWB was a single dimensional structure [41], but subsequent research found it was difficult to verify this single dimensional structure without parceling items [42]. Recent studies have proved that there is a general factor for QEWB by using the bifactor method [43,44]. Therefore, in this study, we adopted the bifactor-ESEM method to verify the three-factor solution proposed by Schutte et al. (2013), and the result revealed an acceptable fit to the data:  $\chi^2 = 236.83$ ,  $df = 116$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .94, TLI = .90, RMSEA (90% CI) = .05 (.05, .06), SRMR = .06. After checking the correlation between each item and the general factor, it was found that three items (item 7, item 10, and item 17) were not significantly correlated with the general factor. After deleting these three items, it was found that the model fit was significantly improved:  $\chi^2 = 161.52$ ,  $df = 74$ ,  $p < .001$ , CFI = .96, TLI = .92, RMSEA (90% CI) = .05 (.04, .06), SRMR = .03. The mean scores of 18 QEWB items were used to represent the quality of identity commitment. The Cronbach’s alpha of the 18 item Chinese version QEWB was .81.

### 2.2.3. Subjective well-being.

Subjective well-being contains three components: positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction [45]. We used Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) to assess participants’ positive and negative affect [47]. SPANE includes the general items of feelings, such as “positive” and “negative”, so it can reflect more general states such as interest, flow and engagement and physical pleasure [47]. SPANE have 12-item, with six items tap positive experience, and six items tap negative experience. Participants responded to these items on a 5-point Likert-scale (1 = not at all; 5 = always). The Chinese version SPANE has good reliability and validity [48]. The 5 item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was used to assesses global life satisfaction [49]. The scale has shown fine reliability and validity in Chinese culture [50]. A sample item is “I am satisfied with my life”. Participant rated their agreement from 1 for “strongly disagree” to 7 for “strongly agree”. In our sample, PE  $\alpha = .85$ , NE  $\alpha = .83$ , SWLS  $\alpha = .87$ .

## 2.2. Analysis Strategy

The data was analyzed by SPSS 25.0 and Mplus 8.3. The correlations between all the research variables were calculated using SPSS. In the main analysis, our hypotheses theoretical model was assessed via structural equation model (SEM) with latent variables using Mplus. The two-step procedure [51] was followed to examine the mediation effect of the quality of identity commitment between two subdimensions of moral identity and SWB. Firstly, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the measurement model was conducted to estimate the extent to which each latent variable was represented by its indicators. To control for the inflated measurement errors caused by multiple items, we created two parcels for each of internalization and symbolization dimensions and three parcels for the quality of identity commitment. SWB were represented by three components: positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction [52]. Secondly, the structural model was examined if the measurement model was satisfactory. The maximum likelihood method (ML) was used as the estimation method. 95% bias-corrected bootstrap was used to test the significance of the mediation effect.

To evaluate the overall fit of the model to the data, several indices were calculated in current study: RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation), CFI (comparative fit

index), TLI (Tucker-Lewis index), SRMR (standardized root mean square residual). The Chi squared test was also included to compare the estimated models. For the CFI and TLI, the values over .90 indicate acceptable fit, whereas values over .95 indicate a good fit. For the values of RMSEA and SRMR, near .05 indicate an excellent fit, between .05 and .08 indicate an acceptable fit [53].

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Statistics and zero-order correlation

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics and zero-order correlation for the all the study variables. There were significant positive correlations among all the study variables, the two sub-dimensions of moral identity (internalization and symbolization), both positively related to quality of commitment and SWB. The quality of identity commitment significantly associated with SWB. Therefore, the correlation between the study variables supported the prediction of Hypothesis 1a, 1b and Hypothesis 2.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations of measure

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Int	4.25	.52	-					
2. Sym	3.41	.52	.41***	-				
3. QIC	3.73	.42	.34***	.25***	-			
4. LS	4.28	1.03	.13**	.19***	.40***	-		
5. PE	3.80	.55	.24**	.26***	.50***	0.48***	-	
6. NE	2.17	.57	-.14**	-.05	-.36***	-.27***	-.48***	-
7. SWB	-.01	2.35	.22***	.21***	.54***	.75***	.84***	-.75***

Note: Int = Internalization of Moral Identity, Sym =Symbolization of Moral Identity, QIC= Quality of identity commitment. LS = Life satisfaction, PE = Positive Experience, NE = Negative Experience, SWB= Subjective well-being.

\*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.

3.2. Measurement Model

CFA analysis was conducted to test the measurement model. The measurement model consisted of four interrelated latent variables (internalization, symbolization, quality of identity commitment, and SWB) and ten observed variables. The results of this analysis revealed a good level of model adjustment:  $\chi^2 = 75.67$ ,  $df = 29$ ,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .97, TLI = .95, SRMR = .04, RMSEA (90% CI) = .06 (.05, .08).

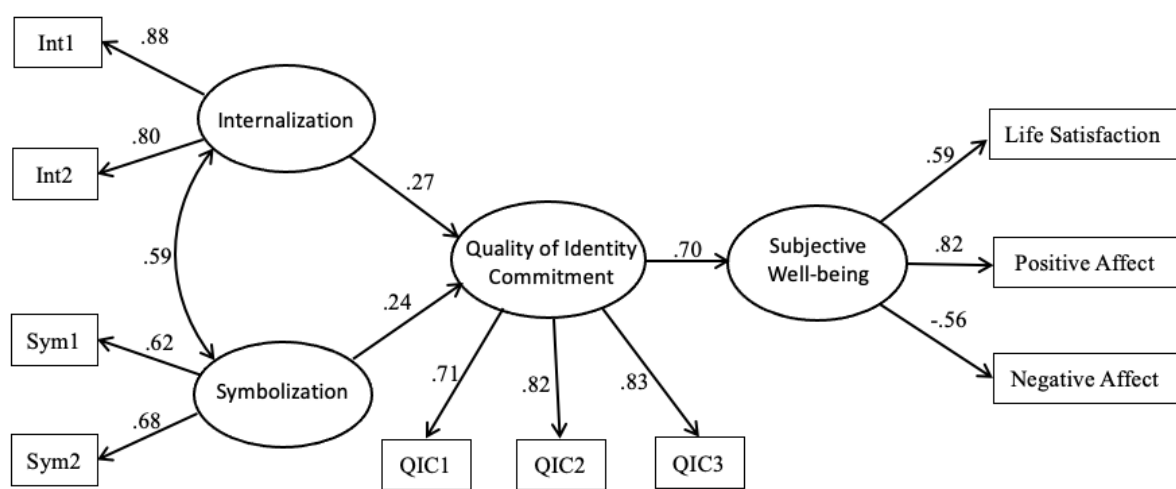
3.3. Structural Model

The assumed mediating effect of identity commitment quality between the two dimensions of moral identity and subjective well-being was verified by structural equation model. The goodness-of-fit indices for the following two models were compared: 1) the partial mediating model between moral identity and SWB through quality of identity commitment with directs paths from both dimension of moral identity (internalization and symbolization) to SWB (model 1). 2) the full mediating model between both dimension of moral identity (internalization and symbolization) and SWB through the quality of identity commitment with direct path from both dimensions of moral identity to SWB constrained to zero (model 2).

The partial mediating model posits the indirect effect of both components of moral identity (internalization and symbolization) on SWB through quality of identity commitment including the direct effects from both dimension of moral identity to SWB. The partial mediating model provided a good fit to the data:  $\chi^2 = 73.41$ ,  $df = 29$ ,  $p < .01$ , CFI = .97, TLI = .95, SRMR = .04, RMSEA (90% CI) = 0.06 (.04, .08). However, after a though analysis of the estimated parameters, it was found the direct path from the two moral identity dimensions to SWB did not reach statistically significant level: from internalization to

SWB ( $\beta = -.01, p = .59$ ), and from symbolization to SWB ( $\beta = .25, p = .10$ ). These results indicated that internalization and symbolization may not directly associated with SWB.

Next, the full mediating model (model 2) was tested. The resulting parameter indicated that the full mediating model also fit the data well:  $\chi^2 = 76.61, df = 31, p < .01, CFI = .97, TLI = .96, SRMR = .04, RMSEA (95\% CI) = .06 (.04, .08)$ . According to the regression coefficients, all the proposed pathways reached significant level ( $p < .05$ ). When comparing the model 2 with the model 1 ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 3.20, \Delta df = 2, p = .10$ ), the result showed that the differences between the two model was not significant, and both models fit the data well. Based on the principle of parsimony, model 2 constituted the first choice for explaining the relation between SWB and moral identity through the mediation of the identity commitment quality (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The final mediation model. Note Factor loadings are standardized. Int1 and Int2 are two parcels of internalization; Sym1 and Sym2 are two parcels of symbolization; QIC1, QIC2 and QIC3 are three parcels of quality of identity commitment; All the path coefficients are significant at the .05 level.

The Bootstrap estimation procedure (5000 bootstrapping samples were used) was applied to examine the indirect effects. The direct and indirect effects was shown in Table 2. As expected, the confidence intervals of both indirect effects—internalization (95% CI = [.06, .32]) and symbolization (95% CI = [.01, .30])—did not contain zero, these results indicated internalization and symbolization respectively played a significant role in SWB through the mediation of identity commitment quality. We also examined which dimension of moral identity exhibits a more crucial role via indirect effect comparison analysis, and the confidence interval of the difference between the two indirect effects (95% CI = [-.46, .41]) contains zero. This result showed that there is no significant difference between internalization and symbolization. According to these results, both dimensions of moral identity exerted their indirect effect on SWB through quality of identity commitment.

**Table 2.** Standardized effects and 95% confidence intervals

Model pathways	Estimate	SE	Bias corrected bootstrap		Est./SE	p
			95%CI			
			Lower	Upper		
Int→QIC→SWB	.19	.07	.06	.32	2.81	<.001



Sym→QIC→SWB	.16	.08	.01	.32	2.05	<.05
Int→QIC	.27	.10	.08	.46	2.82	<.001
Sym→QIC	.24	.11	.02	.45	2.12	<.05
QIC→SWB	.70	.05	.60	.80	13.95	<.001

*Note:* Int =Internalization of Moral Identity, Sym =Symbolization of Moral Identity, QIC = Quality of Identity Commitment, SWB= Subjective Well-being

4. Discussion

This study primarily aimed to examine the relation between the two dimensions of moral identity and SWB and to investigate the mediating role of quality of identity commitment in late adolescent college students. Our results revealed that moral identity was significantly associated with the quality of identity commitment and SWB. The two sub-dimensions of moral identity (internalization and symbolization) were both independently linked to SWB through the mediation of identity comment quality.

Our first two hypotheses predicted the positive association of both internalization and symbolization of moral identity with SWB, and our findings supported these hypotheses. Both dimensions of moral identity positively predicted participants’ SWB. These results are in line with the view of identity domain that identity formation pave the way for better health and well-being in adolescence [54]. Identity achievers, or those who have formed their identity, have more healthy and positive psychosocial functioning compared with people who have diffusion identity [9,10]. However, identity studies have concentrated on identity status and neglected important identity content (e.g., moral identity) in predicting these outcomes [13]. Our study explored the role of moral identity—an important personal identity—in predicting SWB in late adolescent or early adulthood. Consistent with previous research on moral identity and well-being [5,13,14], our study further demonstrated a close link between moral identity and SWB, which is defined as one’s general, and context-free feelings and evaluations of life experience [55].Using SWB as an indicator of well-being, our finding on the strong relation between moral identity and SWB supports the folk concept that moral people are happier [2] and suggest that people with high moral identity self-importance are more likely to have high levels of SWB.

The hypothesis that the quality of identity commitment would be positively correlate with SWB was also confirmed. This result consistent with previous research on identity commitment motivation [30] and identity commitment quality [31]. Waterman et al., (2013) found that identity commitment quality plays an important role in emerging adult’s psychosocial functioning, whereas low-quality commitment is associated with psychological costs. Our findings extended the research on identity commitment quality and well-being by specifically examining the SWB of moral people. Both the self-importance of moral identity, which can be interpreted as moral identity commitment, and the quality of identity commitment played important roles in predicting SWB. This result is consistent with the view of eudaimonic identity theory that the quality of identity commitment, rather than the presence of commitment, predicts positive psychosocial functioning [31]. Thus, the happiness of a moral person may derive from the quality of their moral commitment.

The main goal of our study was to examine the mediating effect of identity commitment quality on the relation between moral identity and SWB (Hypothesis 3a and 3b). To test our hypotheses, we used the QEWB [41] to assess identity commitment quality. The specific indirect effects of internalization and symbolization on SWB through identity comment quality were significant, suggesting the importance of identity commitment quality as a likely route through which moral identity would be associated with positive psychological functioning. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to examine the role of identity commitment quality between moral identity and SWB. Our findings are consistent with existing research on the importance of identity commitment quality [30,31]. According to eudaimonic identity theory [24], personally expressive identity is experienced as reflecting one’s “true self”, an experience that is likely to produce

eudaimonic well-being. Our findings support this theory and show that the important contribution of a personality identity—moral identity—to SWB is achieved through the quality of identity commitment, as an expression of the individual's true self. The quality of moral identity commitment was mainly reflected in the fact that it expressed the participants' purpose and meaning in life, as personal expressiveness. This result also consistent with the eudaimonic activity model [55], which argues that eudaimonic motives/activities may not directly bring well-being, but rather satisfy people's basic psychological needs by compelling people to do things well, which would lead them to feel well. Moral identity provides such a eudaimonic motive. In our research, the relation between moral identity and SWB was almost indirect; after the quality of identity commitment was controlled, the direct effect between internalization, symbolization and SWB was not significant. This pattern of outcomes was largely congruent with prior findings on the link between moral identity and happiness through prosocial behavior [21] and on the significant association between moral identity and prosocial behavior [19]. That is, doing good deed may not directly lead to happiness; the happiness effect may come from congruence with an individual's identity [56]. Thus, as moral identity can provide the motivation for moral behavior and contribute to SWB [57], it can be seen as a eudaimonic motive for doing well. This integration of motivation and identity promotes happiness. In summary, these results suggested that high-quality commitment to moral identity provided eudaimonic motivation that ultimately promoted SWB.

Finally, we distinguish the different effects of internalization and symbolization on SWB. Although the definition of moral identity contains two conceptual components, namely, internalization and symbolization [16], corresponding to the "having" and "doing" aspects of people's moral self [34], the existing literature on moral identity and well-being has focused only on internalization and not adequately captured symbolization. Our result indicated that both internalization and symbolization play an important role in promoting happiness, and both dimensions have an indirect effect on SWB through the mediation of quality of identity commitment. Although some studies have expounded that symbolization has a greater impact on behavior [36–38] and well-being [5] compared with internalization, our study compared the indirect effects of internalization and symbolization and found no difference in the effects between the two. In terms of the mechanism by which moral identity leads to happiness, our research finds that both internalization and symbolization act through identity commitment quality.

In conclusion, the present study shed light on the relation between moral identity and SWB. First, our study extended the discussion on moral people's happiness. We further confirmed the significant correlation between moral identity and SWB. Second, the present study is the first to examine the mechanism of mediation of identity commitment quality in the relation between moral identity and SWB. More than the happiness of moral identity, the quality of commitment to a moral identity plays a larger role in promoting well-being. Third, this study supplemented the lack of attention paid to symbolization of moral identity in research. Like internalization, symbolization also promotes happiness through the mediation of identity commitment quality.

#### *4.1. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies*

Through the results show a significant relation between moral identity and SWB, with identity commitment quality defining the mechanism at work. However, the study had several limitations that should be considered. First, the cross-section nature of our study could only indicate correlation; the data were gathered from self-report tools. As such, causal conclusion could not be drawn. Further studies should use experimental methods, such as manipulating the accessibility of moral identity or adopting longitudinal data to explore the relationship between moral identity and well-being. Second, our data were obtained from students in college, and such a sample undoubtedly posed limitations on the generalizability of our findings. For one, the sample has a gender imbalance, with significantly more women than men. However, studies have found that demographic

variables have little impact on well-being [41]. Indeed, we found no difference in SWB between different genders, and this imbalance may not have affected our conclusion. Future studies can collect data from more diverse samples and control for demographic variables. Third, regarding the relation between identity formation and SWB, we only focused on the role of self-importance of moral identity and did not measure specific indicators of identity formation. Since our participants were college students in emerging adulthood, although the traditional perspective of identity development perspective indicates that they have basically formed a stable identity, they are still in the integration process of moral identity and self-identity. Further study can better consider both domain-specific and general identity status. Despite these limitations, the present study provides solid evidence for the importance of moral identity and identity commitment quality in promoting SWB.

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, our results suggested that moral identity significantly predicted participants' quality of identity commitment and SWB, and identity commitment quality mediated the relationship between moral identity and SWB. Both internalization and symbolization dimensions of moral identity played important roles in promoting people's SWB.

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