

The Formation of Moral Identity In Thomas As The Main Character In The Maze Runner

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Abstract

This study examines the construction of moral identity through the main character, Thomas, in the dystopian film *The Maze Runner* (2014). In a narrative defined by survival and extreme social pressure, the development of a character's ethical framework becomes a central element of the storytelling. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research meticulously analyzes selected scenes and dialogues to explore the gradual evolution of moral identity as reflected in the character's critical decisions and altruistic actions. The study applies Augusto Blasi's theory of moral identity, which emphasizes the integration of moral values into an individual's self-concept and the consistency between moral judgment and action. The findings reveal that Thomas's moral identity does not emerge instantaneously but evolves progressively through distinct psychological stages. Initially, Thomas exhibits basic moral awareness sparked by his curiosity about the Glade's restrictive rules. This awareness then matures into empathy and a sense of responsibility toward his peers, particularly when faced with life-threatening situations inside the Maze. The analysis further demonstrates that his identity culminates in a strong moral commitment and leadership, where his self-definition is inseparable from his ethical duty to save others. The study concludes that moral identity is dynamically shaped through lived experiences, the resolution of complex ethical dilemmas, and social interactions within extreme, high-stakes environments. These results suggest that in dystopian narratives, the protagonist's moral growth serves as a critique of dehumanizing systems, highlighting the resilience of human ethics under pressure.

Keywords: *moral identity, character development, film analysis, Thomas, dystopian narrative, Augusto Blasi*

Introduction

Film is not only a medium of entertainment but also a powerful form of storytelling that reflects human values, social issues, and moral development. Through narrative structures, character interactions, and conflicts, films portray how individuals respond to challenges and construct their moral perspectives. In the context of literary and cultural studies, film can be analyzed as a text that represents psychological processes, including the formation of identity and moral values (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013).

One film that vividly illustrates this process is *The Maze Runner*, directed by Wes Ball. The film presents a dystopian narrative about a group of teenagers trapped in a mysterious place called the Glade, surrounded by a dangerous and constantly changing Maze. The main character, Thomas, arrives without any memory of his past, forcing him to adapt quickly to an unfamiliar and threatening environment. Unlike the other characters, Thomas demonstrates curiosity, courage, and a tendency to question the

established system, which gradually leads him to make significant moral decisions that affect both himself and the group.

The concept of moral identity is central to understanding Thomas's character development. According to Blasi (1984), moral identity refers to the extent to which moral values are integrated into an individual's self-concept and become a guiding principle in behavior. This perspective emphasizes that moral action is not solely determined by cognitive reasoning but also by personal commitment to moral values. When moral principles become part of an individual's identity, they influence decisions, actions, and responses to ethical dilemmas.

In addition, the development of moral identity is closely related to the concept of loss of innocence, which describes the transition from a state of naivety to a deeper awareness of complex moral realities (Hassan, 1963). In dystopian narratives, characters are often placed in extreme situations that force them to confront ethical challenges and make difficult decisions. These experiences act as catalysts for moral growth and identity formation. In Thomas's case, his memory loss symbolizes innocence, while his experiences in the Maze contribute to the reconstruction of his moral identity.

From a developmental perspective, adolescence is a crucial stage in identity formation, including moral identity. Hardy and Carlo (2011) argue that moral identity develops dynamically through experiences that challenge individuals to prioritize ethical values over personal interests. Thomas's journey reflects this process, as he is repeatedly confronted with situations that require him to choose between self-preservation and the well-being of others.

Previous studies on *The Maze Runner* have generally focused on identifying moral values, psychological identity crises, and specific character traits. While these studies provide valuable insights, they tend to examine these aspects separately and do not fully explain how moral identity is formed as a comprehensive and dynamic process within the main character. This indicates a research gap in understanding how moral values emerge, develop, and become internalized into a coherent moral identity through the character's experiences, decisions, and social interactions. Furthermore, limited studies have applied Blasi's theory of moral identity to analyze this formation process in a structured and developmental way.

Based on this gap, this study aims to provide a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of the formation of moral identity in Thomas as the main character in *The Maze Runner*. Accordingly, the research question of this study is: How is moral identity formed in Thomas as the main character in *The Maze Runner*?

Literature Review

The concept of moral identity has been widely discussed in psychological and literary studies as a fundamental aspect of human development. According to Blasi (1984), moral identity refers to the integration of moral values into an individual's self-concept, where these values become a central motivation for behavior. This perspective emphasizes that moral actions are not merely the result of cognitive reasoning but are deeply connected to personal commitment and self-consistency. When moral values are internalized, individuals tend to act in accordance with their ethical beliefs, even in challenging situations.

Furthermore, the development of moral identity is often associated with the concept of loss of innocence, which describes the transition from a state of naivety to a more complex understanding of moral realities (Hassan, 1963). In literary and film narratives, particularly within dystopian settings, characters frequently encounter

extreme conditions that force them to confront ethical dilemmas. These experiences function as catalysts that shape and strengthen moral identity through critical decision-making and reflection.

From a developmental perspective, moral identity evolves dynamically through social interaction and lived experiences. Hardy and Carlo (2011) argue that individuals develop moral identity when they are challenged to prioritize ethical values over personal interests. This process is especially evident during adolescence, a crucial stage in identity formation, where individuals begin to define themselves through their beliefs, actions, and responsibilities.

Several previous studies have explored *The Maze Runner* from different analytical perspectives. Qomaria et al. (2018) examined the moral values represented in the film, identifying themes such as cooperation, courage, and responsibility. However, their study primarily focuses on identifying moral values rather than analyzing how these values are formed within the main character.

In addition, Mustika et al. (2019) analyzed the role of memory loss in shaping the identity crisis experienced by the protagonist. Their findings highlight how amnesia creates psychological confusion and forces the character to reconstruct identity in a new environment. Nevertheless, the study does not specifically address the development of moral identity as part of this reconstruction process.

Similarly, Adi and Yanti (2022) focused on the sincerity of the main character, emphasizing traits such as empathy and willingness to sacrifice. While this research contributes to understanding specific moral characteristics, it remains limited to a single dimension of character analysis and does not provide a comprehensive explanation of how moral identity is formed.

Based on the review of previous studies, it is evident that existing research has not sufficiently addressed the process of moral identity formation in an integrative and developmental manner. Most studies tend to focus on isolated aspects such as moral values, psychological identity crisis, or individual character traits, without examining how these elements interact and evolve into a unified moral identity. Furthermore, there is a lack of analysis that applies a specific theoretical framework, particularly Blasi's theory of moral identity, to explain how moral values are internalized through actions, decisions, and social interactions over time. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the formation of moral identity in the main character, emphasizing the dynamic process through which moral values are constructed and embedded within the character's self-concept in a dystopian context.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the formation of moral identity in Thomas as the main character in *The Maze Runner*. This method is appropriate as it focuses on interpreting meanings, behaviors, and psychological development through scenes, dialogues, and character interactions.

The primary data consist of selected scenes and dialogues that reflect Thomas's moral development, particularly those involving decision making, ethical dilemmas, and social interactions. These dialogues are transcribed to ensure accuracy in analysis. Secondary data are obtained from academic books, journal articles, and previous studies related to moral identity and film analysis. This research applies Augusto Blasi's theory of moral identity as the main theoretical framework.

Data collection is conducted by repeatedly watching the film, selecting relevant scenes, and documenting important dialogues. The analysis involves several stages: data

reduction to focus on relevant information, data categorization based on aspects of moral development such as moral awareness, empathy, responsibility, and leadership, and interpretation using Blasi's theory to examine how moral values are internalized and expressed.

Finally, conclusions are drawn to explain the process of moral identity formation and the factors influencing it, including social interaction and experience.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents a detailed analysis of the formation of Thomas's moral identity through several developmental stages in *The Maze Runner* (2014). Each stage is represented by significant scenes and dialogues that illustrate the transformation of the main character.

1. Emergence of Moral Awareness

At this initial stage, Thomas begins to show signs of moral awareness as he encounters the unfamiliar environment of the Glade. His reactions are characterized by curiosity, critical thinking, and a refusal to blindly accept the established rules. This stage marks the beginning of his moral development, where he starts to question the norms that others have already internalized.

Data:

Thomas: "Why don't we just climb over the walls?"

Newt: "Because we already tried that. People have tried climbing the walls."

Thomas: "And?"

Newt: "And they didn't make it. No one has ever survived that."

Thomas: "But we can't just sit here and do nothing, there has to be another way."

The data excerpt shows Thomas's early moral awareness through his tendency to question the existing system in the Glade. His inquiry about climbing the walls reflects his refusal to accept established limitations without evaluation. This aligns with Blasi's (1983) concept of moral awareness, where individuals begin to critically assess norms rather than passively conforming to them.

The data excerpt also indicates that Thomas's lack of memory paradoxically enables independent thinking. Without being influenced by past failures or group conditioning, he is able to challenge assumptions more freely. This suggests that moral identity can emerge from present reasoning rather than solely from accumulated experience.

The data excerpt further demonstrates how individual questioning can disrupt collective passivity. Thomas introduces a new perspective that gradually influences others, showing that moral awareness is not only internal but also socially impactful.

2. Development of Empathy and Responsibility

At this stage, Thomas begins to develop empathy and a sense of responsibility toward others in the Glade. His moral perspective expands beyond personal survival as he starts to consider the well being of others, even when it puts him in danger. This marks a significant shift from awareness to action.

Data:

Minho: "We have to go! The doors are closing!"

Thomas: "We can't leave Alby out here!"

Minho: "If we stay, we're dead!"

Thomas: "He's not going to make it on his own!"

Minho: "This is how it works. You don't go out at night!"

Thomas: "Then maybe the rules are wrong!"

The data excerpt illustrates Thomas's empathy and sense of responsibility, as he refuses to abandon Alby despite the danger. His insistence that Alby cannot survive alone reflects a strong moral obligation that overrides the Glade's survival rules. This corresponds to Blasi's idea that moral motivation drives individuals to act according to their values.

The data excerpt also highlights the tension between ethical responsibility and survival logic. Minho represents the internalized rules of the Glade, while Thomas challenges them through empathy. This conflict emphasizes that moral identity develops through moments of ethical decision-making under pressure.

The data excerpt suggests that Thomas's actions begin to reshape group dynamics. His willingness to risk himself establishes trust and credibility, which later supports his leadership role. This shows that empathy is central not only to morality but also to social influence.

3. Moral Initiative and Problem-Solving

At this stage, Thomas demonstrates initiative by actively seeking solutions to the problems faced by the group. Rather than merely reacting to situations, he begins to analyze patterns and propose new strategies. This indicates a more advanced level of moral engagement.

Data:

Thomas: "Every night the Maze changes, but not completely."

Minho: "That's why we map it every day."

Thomas: "But the sections repeat. I've seen the same paths before."

Newt: "You're saying there's a pattern?"

Thomas: "Yeah, and if there's a pattern, then there's a way out."

The data excerpt reflects Thomas's development of moral initiative, where he actively seeks solutions for the group's survival. His observation about repeating patterns shows analytical thinking combined with a moral purpose—to help everyone escape. This aligns with Blasi's concept of moral agency.

The data excerpt also demonstrates the integration of logic and morality. Thomas does not act impulsively; instead, he carefully observes and interprets the Maze. This indicates that moral identity involves both cognitive and ethical dimensions working together.

The data excerpt further shows how initiative can inspire collective change. By introducing the idea of a pattern, Thomas shifts the group's mindset from hopelessness to possibility. This illustrates that moral action can influence broader social transformation.

4. Moral Conflict and Ethical Awareness

At this stage, Thomas begins to experience internal and external conflicts related to moral decisions. He realizes that the existing system may not only be ineffective but also unjust. This awareness forces him to confront difficult choices between following rules and pursuing what he believes is right.

Data:

Thomas: "We can't just keep doing the same thing over and over again."

Newt: "It's what's kept us alive."

Thomas: "No, it's what's kept us stuck here."

Minho: "You don't understand how this place works."

Thomas: "Then help me understand, because this isn't working."

The data excerpt represents a moment of moral conflict, where Thomas challenges the existing system. His recognition that survival does not equal justice reflects a deeper ethical awareness. According to Blasi, such conflict is essential for developing moral identity.

The data excerpt also highlights Thomas's courage in questioning authority and tradition. His refusal to accept ineffective norms shows a commitment to ethical reasoning rather than blind conformity. This is a key characteristic of advanced moral development.

The data excerpt suggests that conflict can drive change. Although it creates tension within the group, it also opens the possibility for new approaches. Thomas's stance becomes a catalyst for collective reconsideration.

5. Strengthening of Moral Commitment

At this stage, Thomas's moral beliefs become more stable and consistent. He demonstrates a strong commitment to his values, even when faced with uncertainty and opposition. This stage reflects the consolidation of his moral identity.

Data:

Thomas: "We're not going to just sit here and wait to die."

Newt: "You really think we can get out?"

Thomas: "I know we can."

Minho: "That's a big risk."

Thomas: "Doing nothing is an even bigger risk."

The data excerpt highlights Thomas's strong moral commitment and consistency between belief and action. His confidence reflects a stable moral identity, where values are internalized and guide decisions. This aligns with Blasi's concept of self-consistency. The data excerpt also demonstrates resilience. Thomas maintains his beliefs despite uncertainty and opposition, indicating that moral identity strengthens through persistence.

The data excerpt further shows how commitment influences others. His confidence inspires trust, reinforcing the connection between moral identity and leadership.

6. Sacrifice and Collective Ethics

At this stage, Thomas demonstrates a willingness to sacrifice for the greater good of the group. His decisions are increasingly guided by collective well-being rather than personal safety, indicating a deeper level of moral maturity.

Data:

Thomas: "If we don't try, we're already dead."

Newt: "You're asking people to risk everything."

Thomas: "I'm asking them to have a chance."

Minho: "Not everyone will make it."

Thomas: "But some will, and that's enough."

The data excerpt reflects Thomas's shift toward collective ethics. His reasoning shows that he prioritizes group survival over individual safety, indicating moral maturity.

The data excerpt also highlights the role of sacrifice in moral identity. Thomas understands the risks but still chooses action, demonstrating deep internalization of

moral values. The data excerpt suggests that shared sacrifice strengthens unity. This reinforces the idea that moral identity is closely tied to social responsibility.

7. Establishment of Moral Identity and Leadership

At the final stage, Thomas achieves a fully developed moral identity and naturally emerges as a leader. His actions, values, and influence align consistently, allowing him to guide others toward a shared goal.

Data:

Thomas: "This is it. This is the way out."

Newt: "Are you sure about this?"

Thomas: "No, but it's the best chance we've got."

Minho: "Then we follow you."

Thomas: "No, we go together."

The data excerpt reflects the full development of Thomas's moral identity. His leadership is based on trust, shared purpose, and moral consistency rather than authority.

The data excerpt also demonstrates inclusiveness and humility. Thomas emphasizes collective effort, showing that leadership is grounded in moral values. The data excerpt concludes that moral identity is both personal and social. Thomas's journey illustrates how ethical values can drive collective change and transformation.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the formation of moral identity in Thomas, as the main character in *The Maze Runner*, is a gradual and dynamic process shaped by continuous experiences, social interactions, and ethical challenges within a high-pressure dystopian environment. Rather than emerging instantly, Thomas's moral identity develops progressively through distinct stages, beginning with moral awareness, followed by the growth of empathy and responsibility, and ultimately leading to strong moral commitment and leadership.

The findings demonstrate that Thomas's moral identity becomes fully established when moral values are deeply integrated into his self-concept and consistently reflected in his actions. His decisions, particularly those involving altruism and collective survival, indicate that his sense of self is inseparable from his ethical obligations toward others.

Furthermore, this study highlights that moral identity is constructed through the resolution of complex moral dilemmas and is significantly influenced by extreme social conditions. In this context, the dystopian setting not only accelerates moral development but also reveals the resilience of human ethics under pressure.

In conclusion, the moral growth of the protagonist serves as a critical reflection on dehumanizing systems, suggesting that even in oppressive environments, individuals are capable of developing strong moral principles that guide their actions and contribute to collective well-being.

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