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Self-relations in Social Relations

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Abstract

This article contributes to an ongoing theoretical effort to extend the insights of relational and network sociology into adjacent domains. We integrate Simmel's late theory of the relational self into the formal analysis of social relations, generating a framework for theorizing forms of association among self-relating individuals. On this model, every "node" in an interaction has relations not only to others but also to itself, specifically between its ideality and its actuality. We go on to integrate this self-relation into a formal model of social relations. This model provides a way to describe configurations of social interactions defined by the *forms* according to which social relations realize participants' ideal selves. We examine four formal dimensions along which these self-relational relationships can vary: distance, symmetry, scope, and actualization.

Keywords

Simmel, relational sociology, self-relations, networks

This article proposes a new way to envision the self-relation as an integral element of the social relation. Like others developing and expanding "relational sociology" (Emirbayer 1997), we seek to conceptualize the relations between social interaction and areas of human experience normally understood as external to interaction, such as cultural meaning and personal identity. However, we reverse the typical conceptual pattern: instead of theorizing how contents "external to" social relations (e.g., tastes, attitudes, symbols) affect social structures, we extend relational analysis to the self itself.

The underappreciated late work of Georg Simmel is our touchstone. According to Simmel's late existentialist theorizing, social life is always "more than social" because the formal structure of the self includes an aspirational element. On this account, individuals must weave together the actual course of their lives with an evolving narrative of how their lives should proceed. Elaborating and building on this Simmelian theory of the self and related recent work in psychology and social psychology, we fold the relational self back into a Simmelian conception of interactional forms, suggesting that the forms of social interaction that occur among "nodes" can be disaggregated into interactions where each

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node interacts with itself. In this way, the self-relation can be conceptualized as an internal element of social relations. Although, as we show, many network researchers implicitly presuppose this principle in practice, little work has explicitly theorized it, let alone developed techniques for describing and analyzing it. This article aims to do both.

We develop our argument in four steps. First, we overview work in relational and network sociology concerned with extending relational thinking into new frontiers. Second, we briefly discuss Simmel's intellectual trajectory from a relational theory of society to a relational theory of the self in connection with related social psychological concepts, suggesting that these works offer significant but untapped resources for integrating the self-relation into analysis of social interaction. Third, we extend Simmel's insights by integrating the relational self into the social relation, showing that forms of association are defined not only by the forms of the relations between participants but also by the overlapping self-relations among participants. The result is a set of formal techniques for analyzing the social process as including the concrete relations not only between individuals' actions but also within and between the identities of its participants. We examine four formal dimensions along which these self-relational relationships can vary: distance, symmetry, scope, and actualization.

Theorizing social processes is the ultimate goal of our line of inquiry. However, we focus here primarily on static ideal typical patterns while introducing this theoretical framework. Much conventional work on social networks is similarly static, not to mention research on the aspirational self and cultural participation and evaluation (though some work in these areas does seek to incorporate movement; e.g., Bearman and Stovel 2000; Moody, McFarland, and Bender-deMoll 2005; Rosenberg 1989). Nevertheless, our framework provides a fruitful avenue for generating a multivalent picture of relational development. It helps, for instance, to raise questions about how discordances in dyadic relations resolve over time and how these moments of tension affect network composition. Accordingly, the fourth and final step of our argument offers some brief suggestions about how to shift from static to dynamic theorizing within our framework and outlines some potential directions for empirical operationalization.

NETWORKS AND THEIR ENVIRONMENTS

One of the most dynamic areas of recent theorizing and research in relational and network sociology has concerned various attempts to link social networks to other aspects of human action and experience, with the domains of culture and personal identity receiving the most attention. Much of this work assumes, as Mische (2011) outlines, a common conceptual orientation: elements presumed to exist in the external environments of social networks are treated as somehow feeding into or affecting established social networks. Social structures are thought of in this picture as pipelines or "conduits" transmitting tastes, attitudes, values, ideas, or innovations (Vaisey and Lizardo 2010). These pipelines in turn influence "culture" by, for instance, increasing the likelihood that people come into contact with new, similar, or divergent tastes, attitudes, values, or ideas.

This approach to networks and their environments as "mutually influencing," Mische (2011) argues, treats them as autonomous and ontologically distinct: networks and social relations have formal properties (positions, bridges, density, distance, symmetry, etc.) and are susceptible to formal modeling techniques; culture and personal identity are composed of unformalizable "contents," such as moral outlooks or tastes. These are located outside of the social relationship, typically somewhere deep in the unconscious (as in Vaisey 2009). Cultural contents can, of course, be transmitted through social relations (by, e.g., contacts, information flow, or opinion leadership, classically, as in Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955), and personal identity can influence the selection of network ties (when, for instance, those who

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share moral outlooks form friendships or persons with tastes for popular music form broad but loose relationships, as in Lizardo [2006] and Vaisey and Lizardo [2010]; Pachuki and Breiger [2010] summarize the growing body of literature on how taste preferences influence network structures and vice versa). But patterns of social ties are even here still conceived as structured independently from cultural symbols or personal identity, however much they mutually affect and feed into one another (as in Baldassarri and Diani 2007).

The great contemporary challenge for relational thinking, Mische (2011) suggests, is to move beyond thinking of cultural values, personal identities, and social interactions as somehow mutually impinging on one another but as in some way mutually constitutive. Some pioneering recent work moves in this direction by treating cultural symbols themselves relationally, analyzing networks of ideas, stories, representations, and more, such as scientific paper citation networks (Schwed and Bearman 2010), networks of representations of animals and occupational categories in children's books (Martin 2000), narratives as networks of events (Bearman & Stovel 2000), or musical genre networks (Sonnett 2004), among others (such as Carley and Palmquist 1992; see Mohr [1998] for detailed review of work in "measuring meaning structures"). Related work has brought the connection closer, analyzing how cultural networks and social networks "interpenetrate" by investigating, for instance, interrelations between representations of identity categories and poverty relief services (Mohr 1994; Mohr & Duquenne 1997), between group solidarities and interpersonal relations (Mische 2007), or between groups' "meaning structures" and their leadership structures (Yeung 2005; see also Breiger 2000).

Personal identity in sociology has been less frequently conceived relationally, although Somers (1998) points in this direction with her call for a "relational realism" that makes the unit of social analysis not whole societies or separate individuals but the process of interaction between and among identities (Somers 1998). In psychology, building on diverse traditions, including James's (1910) "potential social Me," Freud's (1925) "ego ideal," and Rogers's (1951) "ideal self" (among others), Markus and Nurius's (1986) work on "possible selves" treats individuals as relations between "current selves" and the range of selves they might be: good selves, bad selves, hoped-for selves, ought selves, feared selves, and more. Such possible selves guide future behaviors and define the meaning of present situations (see also McCall and Simmons 1966). However, this stream of research has rarely studied the role of possible selves *in* interaction, focusing primarily on individual psyches (though Marshall et al. [2008] move in this direction by treating possible selves as "joint projects"; see also Leary [2002] on the self as a source of "relational difficulties"). Similarly, the sociological and social-psychological traditions concerned with identity, self-concepts, and related notions for the most part investigate the situational sources of self-concepts (summarized in Owens, Robinson, and Smith-Lovin 2010; see also Ellemers, Speas, and Doosje 2002) and the effects of self-concepts on actions across situations (summarized in Stryker 2008). In so doing, they debate the relative importance of third-personal objective situations and first-personal subjective identifications (as in Archer 2003), while paying relatively scant attention to second-personal intersubjectivity, that is, self-concepts as defining features of dyadic interactions.

Erving Goffman has been a major inspiration for attempts to bring a richer notion of the self into an investigation of interactions and social relations, shifting attention to the ways in which social ties and selves are formed in one and the same activity. McLean's (2007) studies of Renaissance Florence draws on Goffman's theories to bring the mutual constitution of self and network front and center: patronage seekers do not apply their preconstituted orientations (e.g., honor, respect, loyalty, graciousness) to preconstituted network structures; rather, they rhetorically construct the type of tie they want (e.g., friendship) by simultaneously presenting a version of themselves consistent with being connected to that tie (e.g., loyal). Others have reframed networks as activities (i.e., "networking") constituted

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by the performative self-presentations of participants (Gibson 2003, 2005; Mische 2003, 2007).

These research traditions have made considerable progress toward loosening up the substantialist barriers between the worlds of culture and personal identity on one hand and the world of social interaction on the other (Emirbayer 1997). They provide a fund of useful distinctions about the self. Still, the richer conception of the self—a vital self constantly performing and seeking to somehow realize itself in action—toward which much recent work has built has not yet been integrated into the formal models of social interaction that have been so central to relational analysis. The present article aims to take this step in two ways: first, structurally, whereby we develop formal techniques to conceptualize and visualize the social relations among self-relating individuals statically, treating the self-relation as an architectonic feature of dyadic relationships; second, dynamically, whereby our framework provides a vocabulary for formulating propositions about potential mechanisms influencing the evolution and change of such relationships.

Georg Simmel provides much of the theoretical inspiration for this project. For one thing, Simmel is not only the principal classical sociologist of interactional forms (Levine 1991); he was also intensively concerned with cultural forms and forms of individuality. Thus, if we want to lay the groundwork for an intellectual project that incorporates networks, meaning, and identity, we would do well to return to the source and "think with" the classical theorist whose ideas spanned these domains in a uniquely powerful way. For another, Simmel's late writings sought a new synthesis of his lifelong concerns with forms of interaction and forms of individuality, an ambition that at once differs markedly from most current research reviewed above and is consonant with the theoretical ambitions of relational sociology detailed by Mische (2011). We therefore first review the main elements of these ideas in Simmel's writings before developing an original theoretical approach to reimagining standard network research in their light.

Individuality in Simmelian Sociality

It is no accident that the rise of relational scholarship and the return of Simmel to the theoretical stage of North American sociology coincided with the eclipse of Talcott Parsons. Parsonian sociology, following a certain interpretation of Durkheim and Weber, put the *content* of cultural systems at the center of sociological analysis (Levine 1991). Social groups hold together according to this view because of commitment to common values; sociological analysis of the structure of social life therefore takes as its prime object the content of the values around which social groups and institutions cohere, comparing variation in value contents across space and tracing the development and change of values over time. Simmelian sociological theory begins from a radically different starting point, namely, the *forms* rather than contents of interaction. Conflicts, exchanges, hierarchies, and consensus formation have formal and morphological properties independent of their contents. Conflict can be "about" business, romance, or honor just as much as exchange can, even if some contents may tend to join with some forms (e.g., loyalty with patron-client relationships). Sociological analysis in a Simmelian mode concerns itself with outlining the configurations of forms of interaction and demonstrating that these have characteristics separable from their contents, such as the position of an actor within a hierarchy or the intimacy or distance between antagonists, whether religious, business, or academic.

This conceptual shift from content to forms of interaction has been crucial for the theoretical development of relational sociology (as in Martin 2009) and in its development of empirical tools (see, for example, Schwed and Bearman's [2010] recent analysis of patterns

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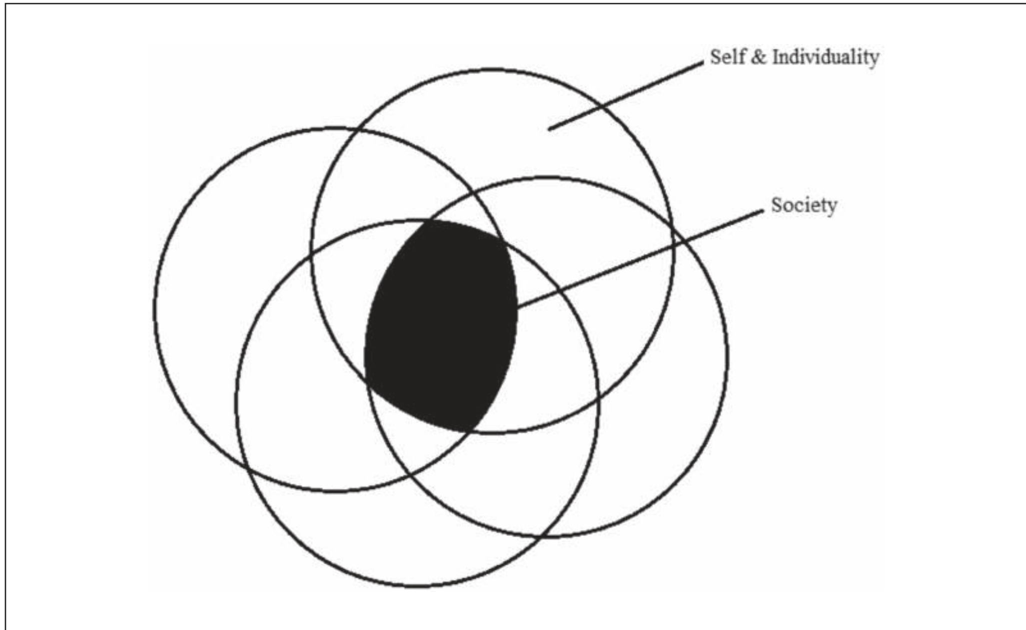

Figure 1. The Parsonian-Durkheimian mode

of consensus formation in scientific communities). But its consequences for how one conceives of individuals have been more ambivalent. It has seemed tempting either to treat individuals' ethical outlooks and characters as functions of their positions within forms of interaction (e.g., White, Boorman, and Breiger 1976) or to treat relational structures as resources—social capital, structural holes—that individuals use to pursue their goals (e.g., Burt 2005; Coleman 1990; Lin 2001; Lin, Ensel, and Vaughan 1981).[1] Simmel himself shared this ambivalence, sometimes stressing that the individual is an autonomous "being for itself" and sometimes stressing individuality as social product, the result of heightened social differentiation, urbanism, and the rise of a money economy.

This ambivalence about the social status of individuality is a crucial but underappreciated consequence built into the very fabric of the Simmelian, or any relational, style of thought. To see this, compare two sharply contrasting diagrams, as in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1 shows a picture of self and society in the Parsonian-Durkheimian mode. The darkened area represents the collective conscience, that common space shared by individuals that constitutes the essence of both society and each individual's authentic self.[2] In this picture, the study of society and the study of the individual's moral identity are quite naturally seen as one and the same project. Individuals are fractured between their socio-moral parts and their individual parts: the "higher" parts of individuals are their social being; their private being is their inessential, less "fully human" part. How those elements are negotiated in an individual has no inherent *sociological* interest, beyond a concern for individualism itself as a potential content of collective values ("the cult of the individual") or technical concern for socializing the individual personality into the common value structure.

Figure 2, by contrast, shows a picture of self and society in the Simmelian-relational mode. Each circle is now a "social circle," and the common section is now individuality. The more overlapping circles, the more refined, unique, and complete the sense of individuality. Each social circle, rather than each individual, is fractured; each individual is a

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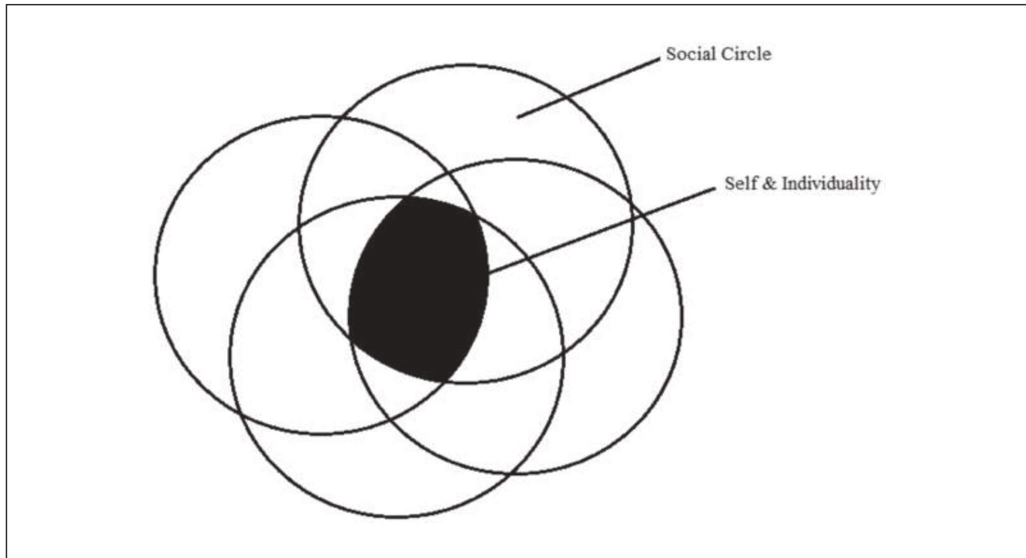

Figure 2. The Simmelian-relational mode

totality unto itself that reaches beyond any specific social circle. This means that (1) value commitments purport to cover the entire individual; they make claims on the whole person, including emotions, affects, and the body, rather than on a specific (typically rational) part that is purportedly shared with all others; and (2) social life is not synonymous with shared values; the cultural value contents of social institutions do not define their sociostructural properties; the cultivation of the self is an ethical project that "reaches beyond" social life and possesses its own "objective value," as Simmel puts it.

According to this approach, individuality, sociality, and their mutual influence on one another can be analyzed independently. Simmel's work pursued both forms of individuality and forms of sociality. *Sociology* investigates pure forms of sociality, abstracted from cultural values or personal psychology.[3] Studies of figures such as Goethe or Rembrandt investigate pure forms of individuality. And essays such as "The Intersection of Social Circles" analyze their mutual influence, arguing that as differentiation increases, so too does individuality, while at the same time, as individuality increases, social ties become "reconstituted" on a "higher order" on the basis not of primordial group attachments but of intertwining tastes and commitments (Simmel 1908).

The Relational Self in "The Individual Law"

The relational picture of society thus creates room for a rich sensitivity to the realm of individuality as a world unto itself with sociological interest—a sociology of individuality concerned with the social antecedents and consequences of increasingly individuated personalities. Yet at the same time, much like the social-psychological work reviewed above, Simmel's formal sociology can seem to dislodge that self from "pure" sociology, which Simmel insists must be directed toward pure forms of interaction, forms that derive their purity from remaining unmixed with psychological and moral considerations more appropriate for the individual's "being for himself." Simmel himself was sensitive to this problematic (Lee and Silver 2012). It became a more central concern in his later work.[4]

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Simmel's fullest elaboration of the conception of individuality that emerges from his relational sociology comes in his final work, *The View of Life*, in the fourth chapter, "The Individual Law" (Simmel [1918] 2012). Here, Simmel completes his lifelong engagement with Kantian morality and the Kantian theory of the self. The philosophical details of Simmel's critique of Kantian moral theory need not concern us in the present context. More important is the representation of the individual self he develops in the process, for Simmel's argument makes a key shift in how one might picture the role of the "higher" or "authentic" self in an individual life: not as what is shared with all others but as an "individual law."

Simmel develops his theory of the self in the context of a broader portrait of human life as moving among multiple "worlds."[5] In Simmel's account, two of these worlds are fundamental and predominant; individual life proceeds continuously according to its ideality and its actuality, even as it moves through a whole array of other discrete worlds. In this respect, he resembles Rogers (1951), for whom, drawing on William James, self-esteem depends on the degree of discrepancy between the actual and ideal self. However, in contrast to similar psychological and social-psychological ideas, Simmel sees this self-relationality as a formal property of social relations, not only as ideational contents that are causes or consequences of such relationships. Individuals all, as Simmel puts it in "How Is Society Possible?" evaluate themselves and others not only in reference to concrete deeds and conditions but also in reference to a "hypothetical personality" that projects a picture of what kind of life the individual "would display if it were, so to speak, entirely itself, if it were to realize the ideal potential that is, for better or for worse, in every person" (Simmel 1971:37).[6] This hypothetical self is reflected in Erickson's (1968) conception of creativity as the challenge of expressing and weaving together core aspects of one's self-concept.

For Simmel, the task of becoming this "ideal potential" constitutes each person's "individual law," although the character of that ideal is not fixed in advance and is experienced as a constantly unfolding challenge—Simmel's favored image of the life process was of a jellyfish. Simmel's picture of the individual life, in other words, is relational. The individual life is lived out through continuously relating its "actuality" and its "ideality," in reference to, on one hand, actual performances, deeds, thoughts, emotions, desires, and situations and, on the other, to an ideal version of what that individual life would be at its fullest. The self is a self-relation.

Setting aside for the present the significant philosophical difficulties this picture raises, we can represent Simmel's conception of the relational self as in Figure 3.[7] Figure 3 represents a formalized and simplified model of Simmel's conception of individual life as the relation between two circles, one representing the ideal version of each individual's existence and the other representing their actuality. The intersection between these circles designates that part of a life wherein the personality's highest ideals are realized in practice, what we could call ethical existence. The upper and lower sections represent those unrealized, yet nevertheless vitally significant, aspects of the individual's life that are, respectively, idealized yet not actualized or actualized yet not idealized. Simmel's complete individual is the totality of both circles. As the relation between the circles varies, so would the form of individual existence, moving between extremes of full self-realization (complete overlap) or full self-alienation (zero overlap).

The Social Relations of the Relational Self

This picture no doubt greatly simplifies the metaphysical richness of Simmel's notion of the individual law and his late conception of life (see Levine and Silver [2010] for a fuller account of these). Nevertheless, it supplies a useful figure for pushing both Simmel's and

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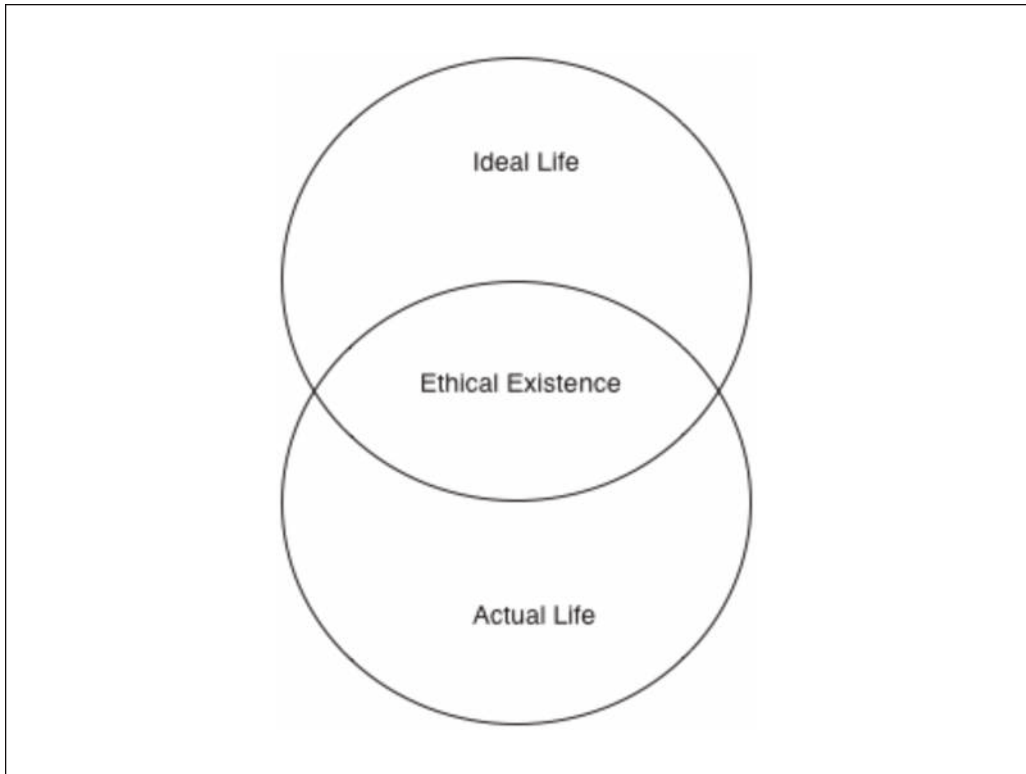

Figure 3. Simmel's relational self

contemporary relational sociology's thinking a step farther, for one can use this image to capture patterns of social relations *when one includes a relational self within them*. One simple yet powerful way to represent this inclusion would be as two lives intertwined, as in Figure 4. Figure 4 takes Simmel's figure of the relational self and crosses it with another life that possesses its own ideality, actuality, and ethical existence. It represents the relationship as "a relation between self-relations," that is, two individual *lives*, A and B, each relating both their actuality and their ideality to one another.

Figure 4 is a Simmelian exercise in how to picture configurations of social relations as *essentially* connected with configurations of self-relations, not as autonomous variables influencing one another but as architectonically built into one another. Drawing A and B in the traditional way, one is likely to view the relationship as somehow ontologically distinct from the lives led by A and B, even if one "knows" that this is not the whole story. One will then find oneself caught before an arbitrary decision to either "stand on the side of relations" or "on the side of persons" (cf. Martin 2009:14).

Representing the relationship as we do in Figure 4, however, provides a more integrated portrait and a better way to make our concepts and formal techniques match the richer understanding of the connection between self-relations and social relations with which most network and relational analysts already implicitly operate. The relationship between A and B is the overlapping parts of their lives; thus, the relationship and the self are analytically integrated. The fact that the relationship is fulfilling or repulsive to both, to one but not the other, or to each in the same way is a central feature of the formal model. It reveals a tense dynamic

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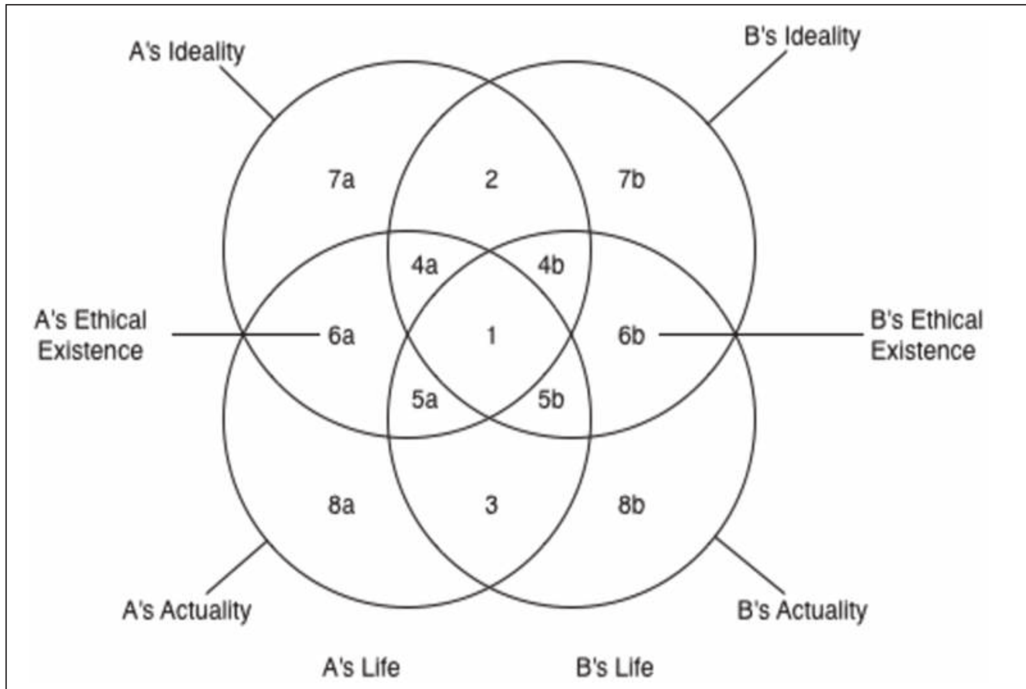

Figure 4. The social relations of the relational self
Note: 1 = Shared Ethical Existence; 2 = Shared Idealities; 3 = Shared Actualities; 4 = Attactiveness; 5 = Repulsiveness; 6 = Unshared Ethical Existence; 7 = Unshared Idealities; 8 = Unshared Actualities.

potential built into social relations, what one could call their "structural dynamism."[8] Moreover, this way of representing a relationship highlights the fact that parts of A and B's lives fall *outside* of the relationship to varying degrees. They engage in activities and have aspirations beyond their social interactions with one another. These "external" factors, too, bear on the relationship. The relationship may be a wholehearted realization of self, a matter of relative indifference, or an occasion for deceit and hypocrisy. These elements, hard to capture in conventional formal analysis, are brought to the center by this approach.

Describing Figure 4 in more detail is a first step toward developing a theory of social relationships that includes the self-relations of their participants. Each of the numbered sections in Figure 4 corresponds to an aspect of A's life, B's life, and their relationship. The heart of the relationship is depicted in the central five sections of the figures. Region 1 represents A and B's *shared ethical existence*, an aspect of the relationship whereby the realization of A's life helps to perfect B's life and vice versa—for instance, raising a family, playing in a string quartet, having a conversation together in a way that enables each to do and be the best version of themselves. At this level of analysis, we conceive these activities not as mutual influences, whereby B influences A's (separate) life and vice versa, but rather as characteristics of the *relationship*—some relationships *are* joint projects of mutual self-development; some are not (or are less so).[9] The regions labeled 4a and 4b represent the parts of the relationship between A and B's lives that one could designate as being *attractive* to one another. Region 4b, for example, lies in both A's and B's ideal life, inside B's ethical existence, but outside of A's actuality. It represents, in other words, a part of their relationship in which A's unrealized ideal potential is in fact actualized in B's ethical life. For example, A's unrealized ideal self might possess a refined sense of humor, whereas A's business partner, B, might in fact be an accomplished wit, delighting A with a model of a

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full existence toward which A's life strives. B's life actualizes the ideal yet unfulfilled aspect of A's life; B's life attracts A; the architecture of their interactions contains an element of moral attraction of A to B. The sections labeled 5a and 5b, by contrast, represent the *repulsive* dimension of the relationship. Region 5b, for example, lies in both A's and B's actual life, inside B's ethical existence, but outside of A's ideal life. It is a part of A's actual life that A is indifferent about or would rather disavow—a dirty little secret, we could say—whereas for B, it is a badge of honor.[10] By way of illustration, perhaps A and B each have earned Ivy League degrees; for B, this is a mark of excellence, but for A, it carries a stain of elitism. B's self-realization in this case would at the same time embody a part of A's life that A would sooner forget. B's ethical life repulses A's. Their relationship contains a built-in element of ethical alienation concerning a part of their lives that one affirms and the other rejects, but that part is nevertheless a basic feature that defines the configuration of their interactions.

Regions 2 and 3 represent the remainder of the shared aspects of A's and B's idealities and actualities in their relationship. Region 2 depicts the ideal potential that is shared but unrealized by both A and B. They might, for example, be residents of the same small town who are world travelers at heart. Their relations—perhaps they read travel books together in the public library—would therefore include the fact that both have so far failed to become who they would ideally be. Region 3 represents compromising facts shared by A and B. They might, for example, be colleagues at the same multinational corporation or neighbors in the same gated community who disown those parts of themselves—they "do not belong there" yet they are there nevertheless, they know that about one another, and that is an elemental fact of their relationship. Region 2 thus designates that aspect of a relationship marked by shared, mutual self-alienation.

The remaining regions—6, 7, and 8—represent the parts of A and B's lives that are not led in common, transcending their interactions with one another. Regions 6a and 6b indicate the parts of A and B's ethical existences that neither shares with the other. A's life might embody a deep sensitivity to impressionist painting, B's might realize a harmonious attunement to nature, but these fall outside of their competitive business relationship. Regions 7a and 7b represent A and B's unshared and unrealized ideal potentials. Regions 8a and 8b indicate the compromising facts about A and B that do not enter into their interactions. A's fullest potential might be the life of a self-reliant individual; 8a might include the embarrassing fact that A's parents pay the rent. Yet this compromising moral fact plays no role, let us say, in A's pedagogical relationship with B; it is a part of A's life that transcends the social circle shared with B.

Social life is represented in Figure 4, that is to say, according to one of Simmel's core sociological propositions, that individuality extends beyond social categories and that this "going beyond" is an elemental fact formally built into social relations.[11] In this way, we can capture crucial aspects of relationships that concern the self-relations of their participants: mutual or unreciprocated self-fulfillment and self-alienation, proximity or distance of a relationship to one's ideal self, attractiveness or repulsiveness of one interactant to another, degrees to which a relationship is engaged in with wholeheartedness of hypocrisy, and more. Our proposal builds these self-relational dimensions into the heart of social relations.

This picture of the social life of the relational self is broadly consistent with some of the most basic elements in the Simmelian intellectual orientation on which relational sociology relies. Four aspects are worth noting here. First, our approach remains oriented toward forms rather than contents of relations. The (fanciful) examples above and below are purposely drawn from many different arenas to show that the same relational forms apply to

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different material.[12] Second, it is consistent with Simmel's relative indifference within the domain of purely formal sociology to questions about why presocial individuals enter into society, how they select their interaction partners, or, from the other direction, how social interaction generates a sense of self or styles of taste. Instead, it is concerned with the forms and patterns of interaction themselves, whatever their etiology, so that even when it comes to analyzing change (below), our interest is in how *relationships* develop and expand (or not). Third, it captures Simmel's theory of the self, locating the authentic or higher self not in general laws common to discrete parts of all individuals or in introspective reflexivity but in unique but objectively valuable individual laws that define what each person's ideal complete self would be. Fourth, based on this theory of the self, it presents a picture of social interaction in which the fact that there is "something else"—their aspirational selves—to participants than their social categories and roles is integral to the character of the relationship as such, not just in its formation and effects but in its configuration. It makes transcendence immanent to society.

THE FORMAL DIMENSIONS OF SOCIAL RELATIONS AMONG RELATIONAL SELVES

Our present concern, however, is not to interpret, clarify, or defend Simmel. It is to draw from and extend his ideas about the relational self and fold these back into descriptions of the forms of interaction. The power of this neo-Simmelian picture of the social relations of the relational self lies in its ability to contribute to this project, for it generates a set of theoretical tools that permits us to deploy core Simmelian concepts of formal sociological analysis in new ways that contribute to contemporary theory work in relational and network sociology.

Our general theoretical strategy is to begin with familiar concepts from network sociology and integrate into them a relational self. In so doing, we show how our proposed framework allows for a deeper understanding of the self-relational dynamics inherent in these formal constructs. For instance, having acknowledged the role of self-relations in social relations, degrees of social *distance*, we suggest, cannot be understood without reference to degrees of moral and emotional proximity between interaction partners. Degrees of *symmetry* in social relationships consist not only in reciprocal exchange but also in mutual self-fulfillment or mutual alienation. The relative centrality of interaction partners may be fruitfully understood as the *scopes* of their lives. By treating the extent to which an interaction *actualizes* the ideal selves of its participants, we are able to treat identity and style as variable components rather than antecedents or consequents of social relations. All told, these respecifications pave the way for reinterpreting classic network concepts—distance, symmetry, centrality, and so on—as inherently containing a self-relational component.

Distance

We begin with distance, one of Simmel's fundamental concepts (Cooper 2010). In the contemporary network literature, relational distance is most closely approximated by relationship strength, most famously discussed by Mark Granovetter (1973). For Granovetter, a relationship is strong or weak depending on the amount of time it occupies, its level of emotional intensity, and its intimacy. A relationship's strength thus depends on both its objective manifestation (i.e., time spent together) and the internal/psychic life of its participants (i.e., emotional intensity). In that sense, relational sociology has always implicitly dealt with relationships in both their real and ideal forms, even if it has not explicitly developed conceptual tools for distinguishing between these forms and for fully understanding

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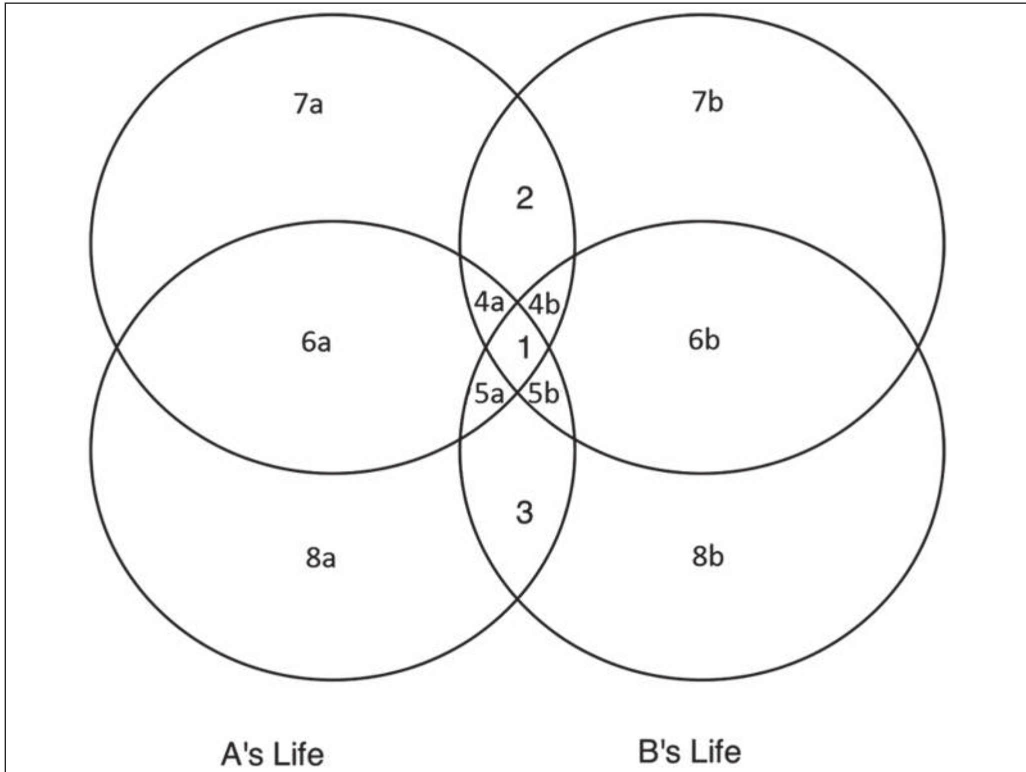

Figure 5. Distant relationship
Note: 1 = Shared Ethical Existence; 2 = Shared Idealities; 3 = Shared Actualities; 4 = Attactiveness; 5 = Repulsiveness; 6 = Unshared Ethical Existence; 7 = Unshared Idealities; 8 = Unshared Actualities.

the dynamics of their interplay. Recasting "strength" as the distance between interaction partners' ideality and actuality could provide a deeper understanding of this relational dimension that permits such distinctions and analyses.

A simple way to depict this aspect of distance between participants in a social relationship would then be to hold A and B's respective self-relations constant but move their lives farther apart or closer together along the *x*-axis, as illustrated in Figures 5 and 6. This permits us to describe two pure forms of association available to self-relating individuals, regardless of the content of those relationships: *distant relationships* and *close relationships*.

Figure 5 represents a distant relationship. A and B's lives barely overlap. Their mutual ignorance is high, whereas the degree to which their lives mutually realize one another is low, as is the degree to which their idealities and actualities are shared. The narrowness of this type of relationship is captured by the relatively small size of regions 1 through 5 in contrast to regions 6 through 8. The social relationship between A and B pictured here is one that leaves out the vast bulk of their selves. They interact every day but only, let us say, when A serves coffee to B at a chain café. After work, A is a local hip hop star living for the world of music; after grabbing some coffee, B spends the rest of the day in meditation, living in the world of religion. But these respective practices do little to contribute to the mutual realization of their individual ideal potentials through their relationship. Moreover, A and B share few common unfulfilled individual potentials and few personal ethical nightmares. One would work for a harmonious world polity whereas the other would gloriously shine on the stage; one is ashamed of being a member of a campus nationalist group, the other of being president of the

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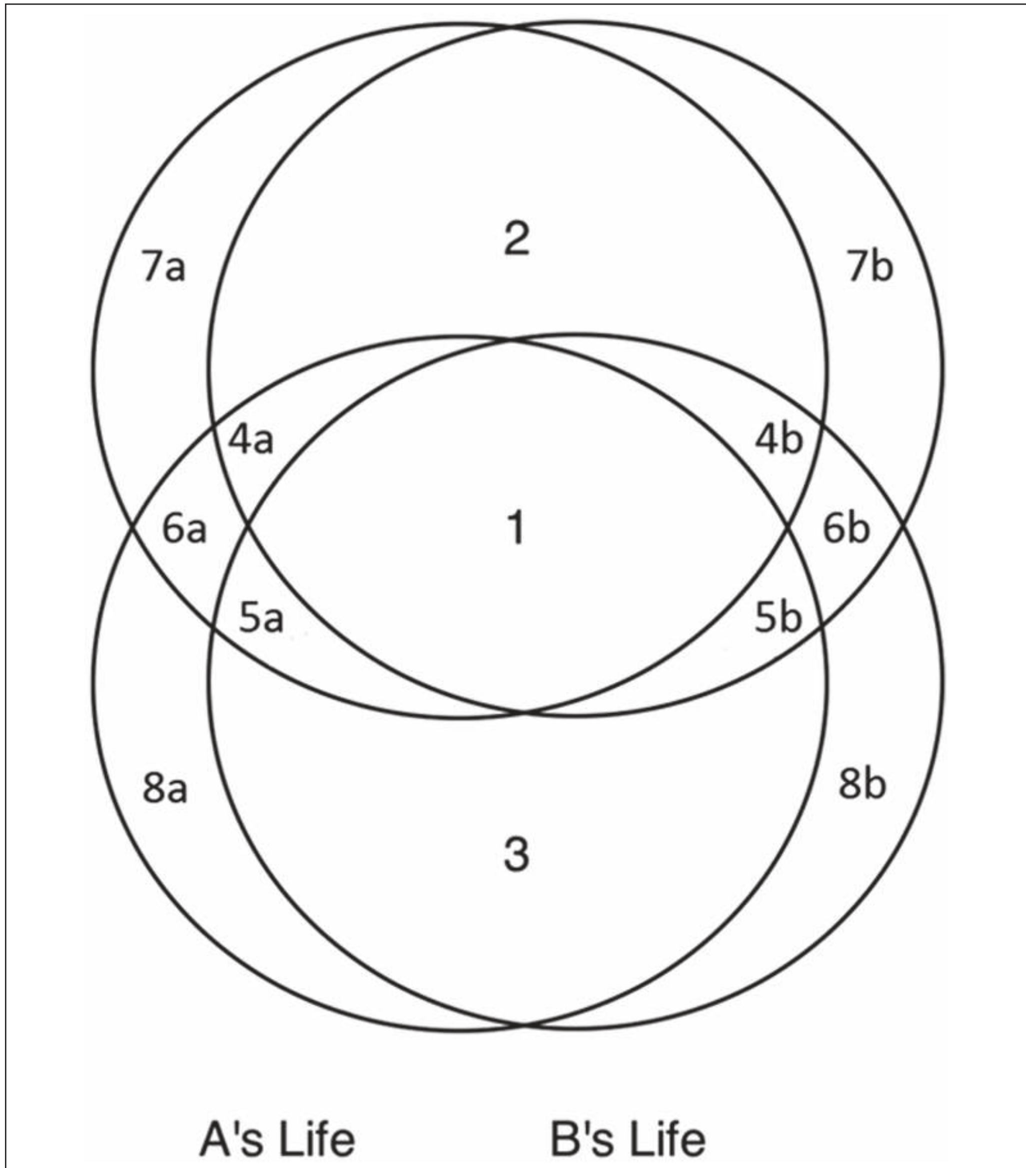

Figure 6. Close relationship
Note: 1 = Shared Ethical Existence; 2 = Shared Idealities; 3 = Shared Actualities; 4 = Attactiveness; 5 = Repulsiveness; 6 = Unshared Ethical Existence; 7 = Unshared Idealities; 8 = Unshared Actualities.

school chess club. Baudelaire's "To a Woman Passing By" perhaps captures this experience of distance (and potential longing for closeness) as the poet observes the urban scene carrying one life after another past him. Any relationship in which the lives of the participants are relatively distant—whether an exchange relationship as in this example, a romantic relationship, a competitive relationship, or some other type—will theoretically possess these sorts of formal features. Despite their moral narrowness, they are forms of interaction nevertheless, and they have their own distinctive sociomoral properties susceptible of formal description.

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Figure 6, by contrast, pictures a close relationship. It reverses the structural patterns of the distant relationship, making the lives of A and B more expansively intertwined. The intimacy of the relationship is depicted by the large size of regions 1 through 5 relative to the smaller size of regions 6 through 8. As in Figure 5, A and B interact, let us say, every day. But in this case, they are martial arts training partners. Their relationship is highly competitive; most of their days are spent trying to defeat one another. But in doing so, each contributes to the other's task of becoming their fullest version of themselves: A pushes B to develop new techniques; B demands from A higher levels of endurance and perseverance than A thought possible. Moreover, they each pour themselves fully into their interactions, leaving very little of themselves outside of their relationship. In the course of their training, let us say, their promotions through the ranks require them to write original poetry and critical essays, providing each an occasion to display what would have been otherwise hidden aspects of themselves to the other. At the same time, they become intimately aware of those parts of one another's lives that do not conform to their idealities. A knows, perhaps, that B is unhappy at work but lacks the courage to quit—not the sort of thing that would be true of "someone like B."

The close relationship describes those social relations marked by high levels of intimacy between its participants. Any relationship—not only a competitive one like the one described here but a romantic, exchange, or hierarchical relationship—in which those involved share large parts of themselves with one another will share some of its formal features, whatever those relationships are about.

Symmetry

Second, symmetry is another one of the formal dimensions Simmel thought crucial to social relations (Levine 1991:1109). Contemporary authors who discuss symmetry share Simmel's concern with reciprocity (e.g., Blau 1964; Hage and Harary 1983; Martin 2009). A friendship is the classic example of a symmetric relationship. I am your friend; you are my friend; we are friends. A relationship is asymmetrical when reciprocation is not present. Perhaps the best example of asymmetry is Levi-Strauss's (1969) generalized exchange, in which at least three parties pass a resource (e.g., marriageable women) around the circle. Each party will both give and receive, but each dyad among the three parties lacks direct reciprocation (see also Bearman 1997).

Exactly what is or is not reciprocated in such relationships could be better specified. Martin (2009) attempts to clarify this issue by locating symmetry and asymmetry in each individual's action profile. That is, each relationship requires certain actions from participants to maintain it. When those actions are identical, the relationship is symmetrical; when they differ, it is asymmetrical. But there is more to symmetry—or equality—in a relationship than action profiles. Relationships may be symmetrical in terms of each individual's actions vis-à-vis the other but still fundamentally unequal. For example, two people are for Martin friends in that their relationship is defined by mutually "spending time together." But the time spent together may mean much more to one than to the other. Whereas person A finds fulfillment in this friendship, person B is bored and disinterested.[13] Symmetry, in other words, has a self-relational dimension. This might be conceived of as symmetrical self-relation to the social relationship—the extent to which it fulfills each person's ideal potential in an equal way.

A simple way to highlight a relationship's degree of symmetry in this sense is to hold A and B's self-relations constant while moving their lives along the *y*-axis, as illustrated in Figure 7. This permits us to describe *symmetrical* and *asymmetrical* relationships, again, independent of their material contents.

Figure 7 shows a perfectly asymmetrical relationship.[14] The unbalanced character of the relationship is depicted by the relatively large size of regions 5a and 4b and the (vanishingly) small size of regions 1, 5b, and 4a. Consider an illustrative example in which the

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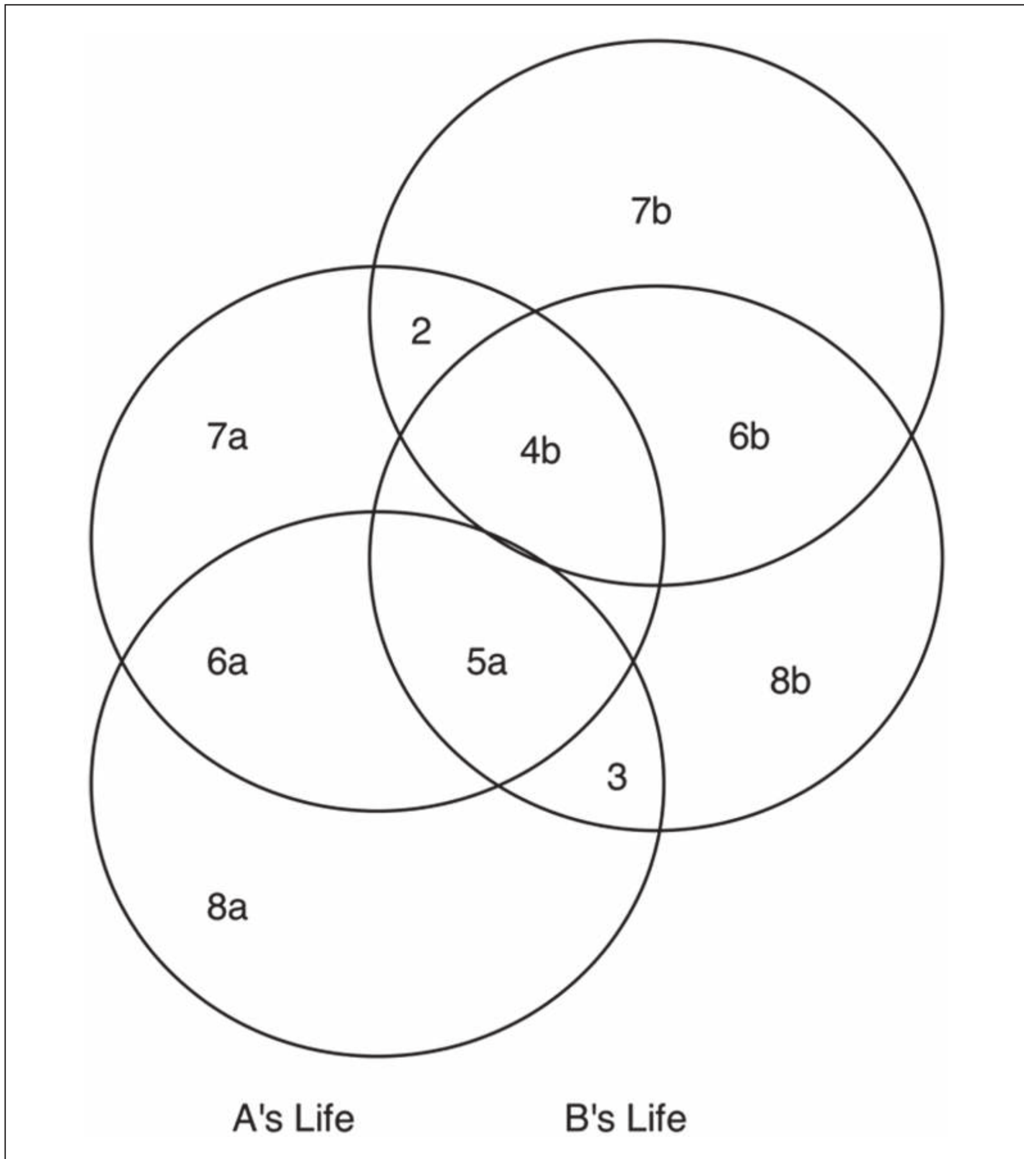

Figure 7. Asymmetric relationship
Note: 1 = Shared Ethical Existence; 2 = Shared Idealities; 3 = Shared Actualities; 4 = Attactiveness; 5 = Repulsiveness; 6 = Unshared Ethical Existence; 7 = Unshared Idealities; 8 = Unshared Actualities.

(large) extent to which B's life realizes A's ideal potential is proportional to the (large) extent to which A's life thwarts B's ideal potential. Perhaps B is A's superior in a nongovernmental relief organization. B's accomplished military prowess is an aspirational model for A's untapped potential as a courageous soldier (4b), offering to A a living exemplar of a morally attractive life, the life A would ideally be leading in "a perfect world." A's accomplishments as a diplomatic negotiator, by contrast, embody A's authentic self as a person capable of settling disputes in mutually beneficial ways (5a). But what is for A an ethical achievement presents as a moral model to B a part of B's life that, were B able to realize it

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fully, would not exist in B's perfect world, namely, the fact that B constantly is, let us say, making compromises with enemies. B's ethical existence affirms and supports A's ideal self; A's ethical existence affirms the compromising facts about B's life. B is ethically attractive to A; A is morally repulsive to B. The relationship between A and B is unbalanced, a clash of ideal worlds; and any interaction, not only one between super- and subordinates, that is asymmetric would share similar features.

Scope

Third is scope. In reference to the existing literature, the scope of a person's life is likely most similar to centrality within a social network, more specifically, to what is often called "degree centrality." Degree centrality is perhaps the most basic measure of network centrality, determined simply by the number of people to whom one is related.[15] A high level of relatedness indicates that one participates in a broad array of social contexts. This structural feature has a self-relational dimension that is largely unexplored by network researchers. Although many correlate a central network position with relational dynamics, such as interpersonal power (Bonacich 1987; Cook et al. 1983; Friedkin 1991), the "self" that is central and how this "structural-social" dimension translates into a component of the individual personality could be more fully elaborated.

Understanding degree centrality as *scope* helps to do so. A network position that situates one as a go-between for a diverse array of social contacts has an important analog for that person's life; one's *commitments* and *identity* may be larger or smaller. A person's life can be expansive in that one has many heterogeneous obligations to others, great aspirations, and a broader realm of expectations for one's own behavior. A person with a narrow life is much humbler in terms of social demands, ideals, and aspirations. These differences imply that the relative scopes of people's lives may be crucial dimensions in their social relationships.

We can represent the relative scopes of participants to one another, as in Figure 8, by changing the size of A's and B's life relative to the other. Stressing this dimension allows us to describe an *encompassing relationship*.

Figure 8 shows a relationship in which the scopes of its participants' lives are very different. B's dreams and aspirations are small, as are B's failings. A's personality is large; it contains worlds. The relative scope of B's life is so narrow that its dreams and compromises with realities can nearly be contained inside of A's. A intimately understands B (6b, 7b, and 8b are miniscule), whereas B is unable to grasp much about A (6a, 7a, and 8a dominate), as A's life extends into worlds far beyond B's experience or imagination. B's ethical existence barely realizes any of A's unfulfilled hopes just as little as it exhibits any of A's aversions (4b and 5b are tiny), whereas A's stands as both a living testament to many of B's wishes and a constant reminder of B's shortcomings (4a and 5a are large). Nevertheless, A and B's living service to their ideals does enhance the ability of one another to do and be what they values, and vice versa (1 is relatively large). Perhaps this configuration describes the relationship between a great cosmopolitan poet and thinker, such as Goethe (A), and his valet (B), whose life is restricted to the day-to-day affairs of the household. In any case, it gives us a way to describe the ethical dimension of interactions whereby the scope of the participants' ethical lives varies dramatically. Even where it might seem that one participant eclipses the other, this remains a genuine form of interaction with its own formal features.

In addition, a person's ideal and actual self may differ in scope, as represented in Figure 9. The scope of one's ideal self can be greater than that of one's actual self, or vice versa. To see this, compare the "unwitting celebrity" and Madame Bovary. The unwitting celebrity is an ideal typical example of someone of great actual scope but comparatively small ideal

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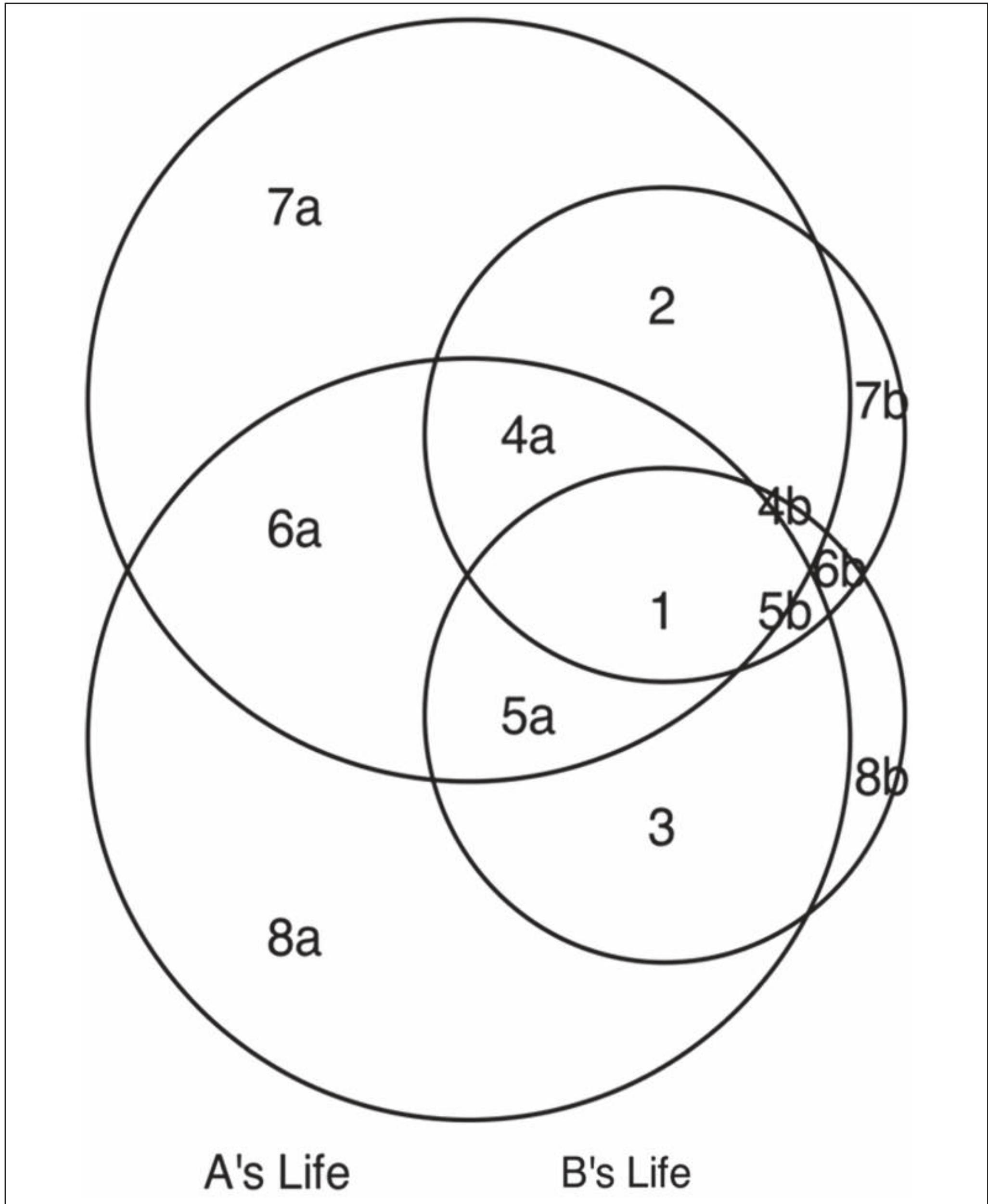

Figure 8. Encompassing relationship
Note: 1 = Shared Ethical Existence; 2 = Shared Idealities; 3 = Shared Actualities; 4 = Attactiveness; 5 = Repulsiveness; 6 = Unshared Ethical Existence; 7 = Unshared Idealities; 8 = Unshared Actualities.

scope. They have been thrown into the spotlight; everybody knows them, and they are in an optimal network position to achieve their desired ends. But the unwitting celebrity longs to be left alone, away from obligations to others: the ideal self is narrow. By contrast, Flaubert's Madame Bovary has numerous adulterous affairs and lives beyond her means in a lavish fantasy world of Parisian salons in denial of her banal provincial life. Her ideal self

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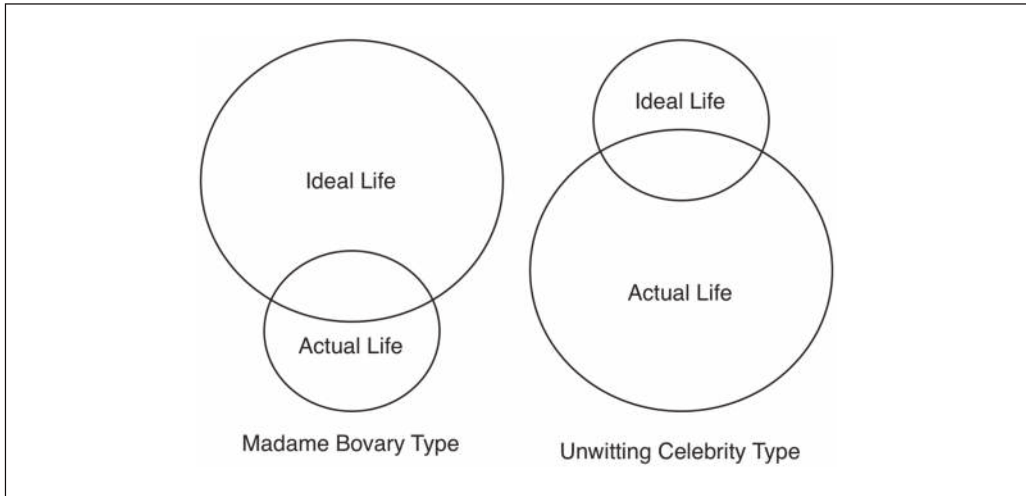

Figure 9. Variations in scope of self within individual lives

is large and cosmopolitan; her actual self is parochial. This dimension of the self-relation is hard to capture with a concept of "social centrality" that does not also reference the relation of the self to its structural position.[16]

Actualization

Fourth is actualization. In addition to their distance, symmetry, and scope, interactions are also shaped by the degree to which they actualize their participants' aspirational selves, or the degree to which the relationship fully realizes and embodies the participants' ideal form of individuality. In his sociological writings, Simmel treats something approaching this formal dimension as what Donald Levine calls "self-involvement," the extent to which an interaction pattern makes demands on the personality. A worship service, for instance, typically demands high levels of self-involvement, whereas taking a Spanish class demands low levels: to appropriately participate in the worship service means treating the interaction as an expression of one's genuine personality. But Simmel does not seem to have taken the next step of treating self-involvement not only as a formal property of interaction that distinguishes one interaction structure from another (worship services vs. Spanish classes) but also as a property that may vary within any and all social interactions. The worship service may normatively require much self-involvement yet represent a betrayal rather than realization of a (perhaps secretly lapsed) pastor's individual ideal persona. To the extent that it does, the form of the interactions that go on between pastor and parishioner would change.

The actualization dimension in our framework aims to capture this formal property of interaction. In recent literature, Godart and White's (2010) notions of "style" and "personality" might be the closest to our "actualization." Godart and White, for instance, think of unique personal styles as emerging out of efforts to maintain self-identity across multiple social circles. This is an analytic strategy generally consistent with the Simmelian picture in Figure 2. But Godart and White's primary concern is with the contestation out of which a style emerges and the capacity of styles to change or stabilize social structures. Some styles, they suggest, are more spontaneous and novel (dubbed "style alpha"); others more codified and imitable (dubbed "style beta") (Godart and White 2010).

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Powerful as it is, this approach leaves unanalyzed the duality of the emergent concepts of self and interaction. In fact, Godart and White (2010) point toward this challenge when they write, “a style is in many ways a precursor of identity, not only a follower” (p. 578). One way to escape these sorts of difficulties would be to treat selves not in the first instance as consequences of prior interactions or an antecedent to structural change but as formal elements of the interaction process itself. This would mean, for instance, treating style alpha and style beta as variable components of interactions rather than as discrete and separable types: in some forms of relationships, participants’ styles are more fully codified; in others, participants’ styles overflow or contradict actual social conventions. Although not identical with Godart and White’s notion of codified conventions and novel styles—accomplished ideals may overflow conventions—our notion of actualization is intended to build the self’s inner dynamics into social relations rather than leaving them as antecedents or consequences of such relations.

We can isolate this dimension by holding the relative positions of A and B’s lives constant while altering the overlap between their respective actual and ideal lives. This permits us to describe *hollow relationships* and *righteous relationships*, as represented in Figures 10 and 11.

Figure 10 shows a relationship in which both A and B are hypocrites. Their deeds belie their aspirations. Each partner is a stranger to himself. Let us say that A and B are married. Figure 10 would then describe a hollow marriage. It is captured by the relatively small size of regions 1 through 5. Perhaps A and B make pillow talk about helping the poor, but come morning, A is the president of a multinational corporation that exploits Third World labor and B runs the International Monetary Fund. Neither does much to help the other actually realize their highest ideals; they barely share a meal, spend most of their time traveling alone, and discuss very few topics personally important to the other. Nor does either A or B put their ideal potential into practice enough to actively repulse one another. If B criticizes A’s employment decision, A responds in agreement, “The most important thing in life is to help the poor.” A then returns to work the next day, as does B. Figure 10, that is to say, captures relationships dominated by unrealized dimensions of their participants’ selves.

Figure 11, by contrast, shows a relationship in which A and B’s actual lives accomplish in deed their ideal selves. Figure 11 could describe an ethically full marriage. Its distinctive formal feature is the relatively large size of region 1 and the small sizes of the other regions. In reliably fulfilling their own highest selves, A and B are actively working to help the other do so as well. Nearly every part of their lives finds some form of development in their relationship, and their interactions do not require large compromises of their ideal potential to reality. The relationship, let us say, gives full voice to both A’s and B’s erotic, parental, creative, and professional development; neither of their personalities is in any way stunted or unrealized. Although romantic relationships might be the easiest type of relationship in which to imagine this form of ethical interaction, it can exist elsewhere as well, such as in honest trade, sportsmanlike competition, or respectful obedience to noble superordinates.

The actualization of interaction partners’ unfolding potential need not vary in tandem, however. One may live farther “beyond reality”; the other may be more fully realized in existing practices. Figures 12 and 13 show two additional forms, where the ethical actualization of A and B vary to different degrees. Figure 12 shows a relationship marked by one partners’ *fear of commitment*; Figure 13 shows a relationship marked by one partner’s *ethical heroism*.

Figure 12 shows an ethically one-sided relationship, dominated by B’s fear of commitment. Let us depict A and B as college roommates. B’s relationship with A contains abundant shared unfulfilled potential and common skeletons in the closet (regions 2 and 3). Each is a promising scholar and would, if things go right, develop into a highly intellectually accomplished person. But B’s potential and actual performances routinely break apart. B vows to stop drinking and promises to coauthor a paper with A, to A’s delight; but every night, B downs a six-pack and

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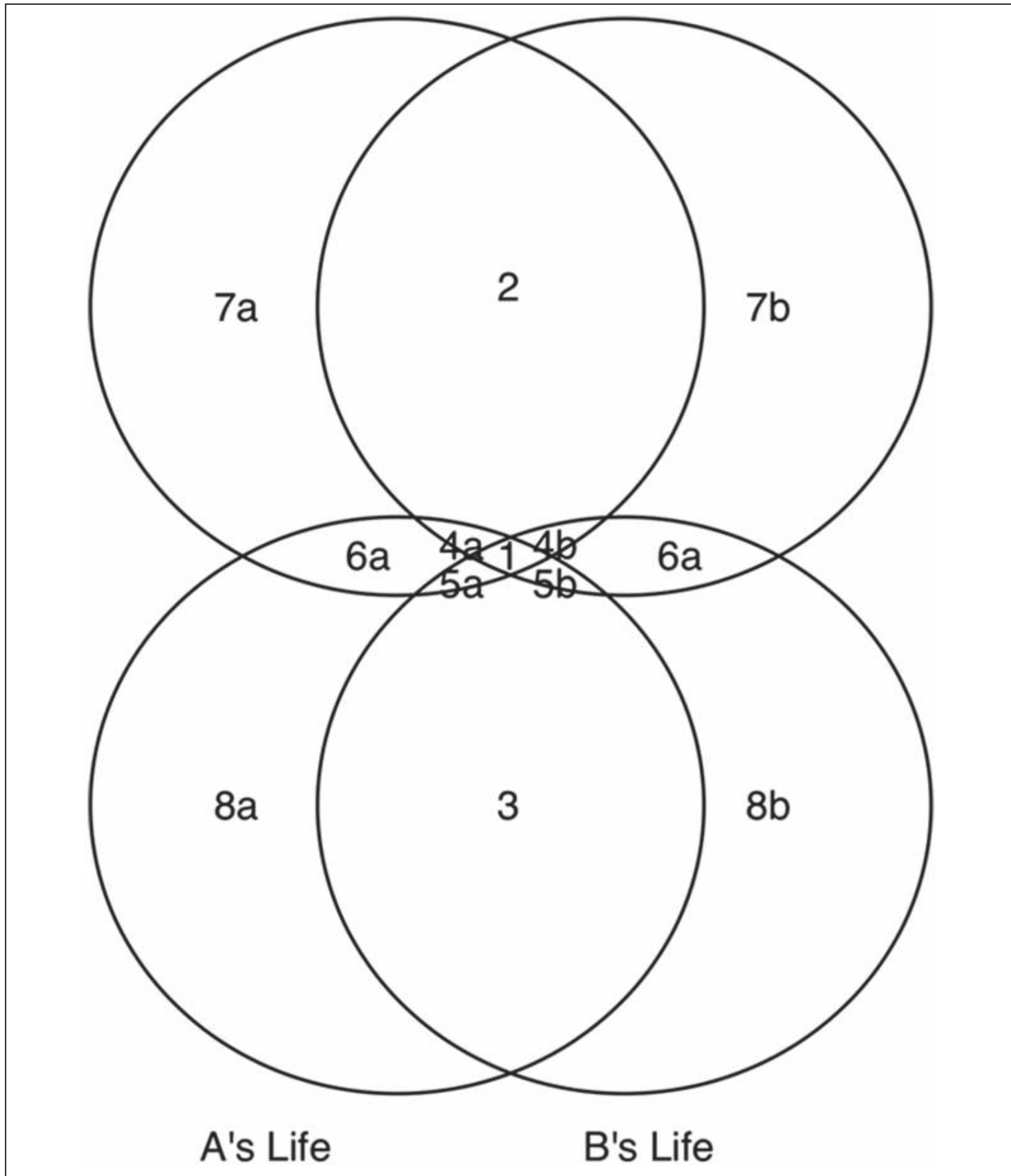

Figure 10. Hollow relationship
Note: 1 = Shared Ethical Existence; 2 = Shared Idealities; 3 = Shared Actualities; 4 = Attactiveness; 5 = Repulsiveness; 6 = Unshared Ethical Existence; 7 = Unshared Idealities; 8 = Unshared Actualities.

fails to work on the project. B is not what he or she seems, and this is the defining fact of B's relationship with A. A is living out a life that embodies B's unrealized potential; B is living a life that offers very little by way of idealized accomplishments for A, only unrealized potential. But this mismatched self-realization is built into the form of their relationship.

Figure 13, by contrast, shows a relationship in which B's ideality and actuality strongly overlap. This is a relationship defined one-sidedly by B's ethical heroism. Let us depict A and B as collaborators on a research project. A is a morally typical person, making some compromises but achieving some aspirations. B, however, is a moral hero.

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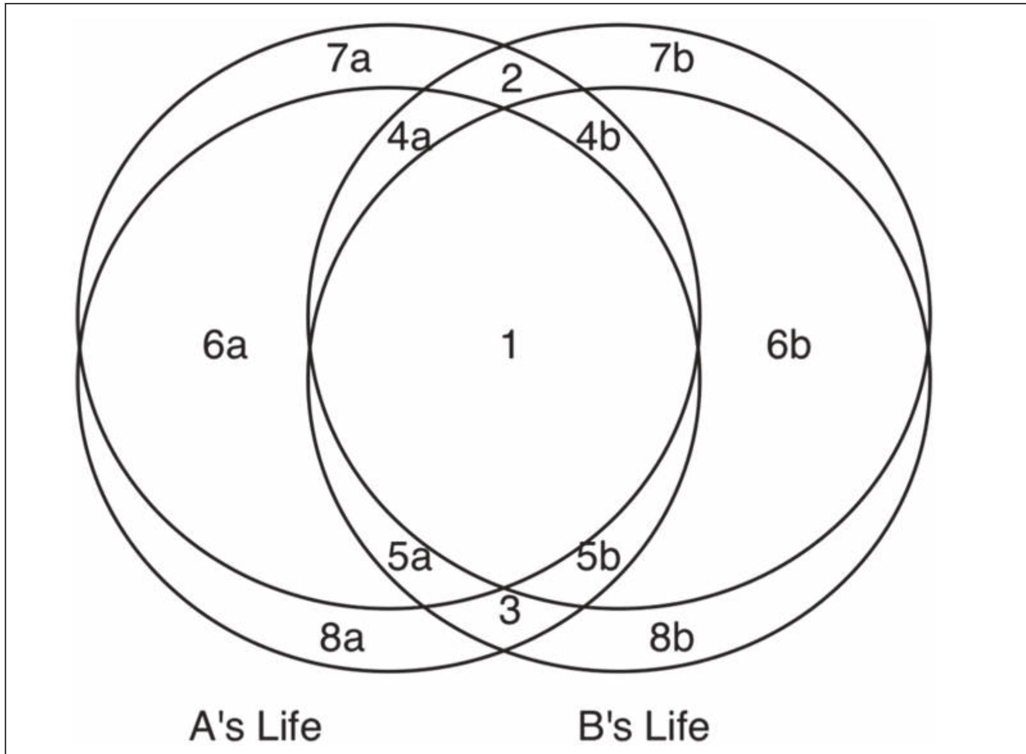

Figure 11. Righteous relationship
Note: 1 = Shared Ethical Existence; 2 = Shared Idealities; 3 = Shared Actualities; 4 = Attactiveness; 5 = Repulsiveness; 6 = Unshared Ethical Existence; 7 = Unshared Idealities; 8 = Unshared Actualities.

B is all that B aspires to be; B's ideal life is consistent with all B has actually done. B is fully engaged in the project; it is an opportunity to realize life's deepest and highest potential. B works late, sleeps little, and follows all research protocols to perfection. A works hard on the project and finds significant opportunities for personal growth through the collaboration. But A also loves poetry and dance, wants to have a family, and has had to compromise on those parts of parts of life in order to pursue the life of the mind. What is for B a complete self-realization is for A a mixed blessing. Thus, in this form of interaction, B is both highly attractive *and* repulsive to A (depicted by the relatively large size of 4b and 5b). B's dedicated, heroic work ethic is a model for the kind of person A could be; at the same time, B's complete, near-fanatical devotion to science repulses A, as it makes a virtue out of what for A are compromising facts, namely, being single, childless, and letting one's artistic talents atrophy. This combination of ordinariness and moral heroism is part of the basic structure of this form of interaction. Any relationship whose participants realize relatively different degrees of their ideal selves would possess similar features. Our model opens these configurations to formal analysis.

FROM STATICS TO DYNAMICS

These are the barest sketches of the formal dimensions of interactions among self-relating individuals. Countless further configurations are possible. Every dimension can be combined with the others at every point on their respective spectrums. For instance, relationships may

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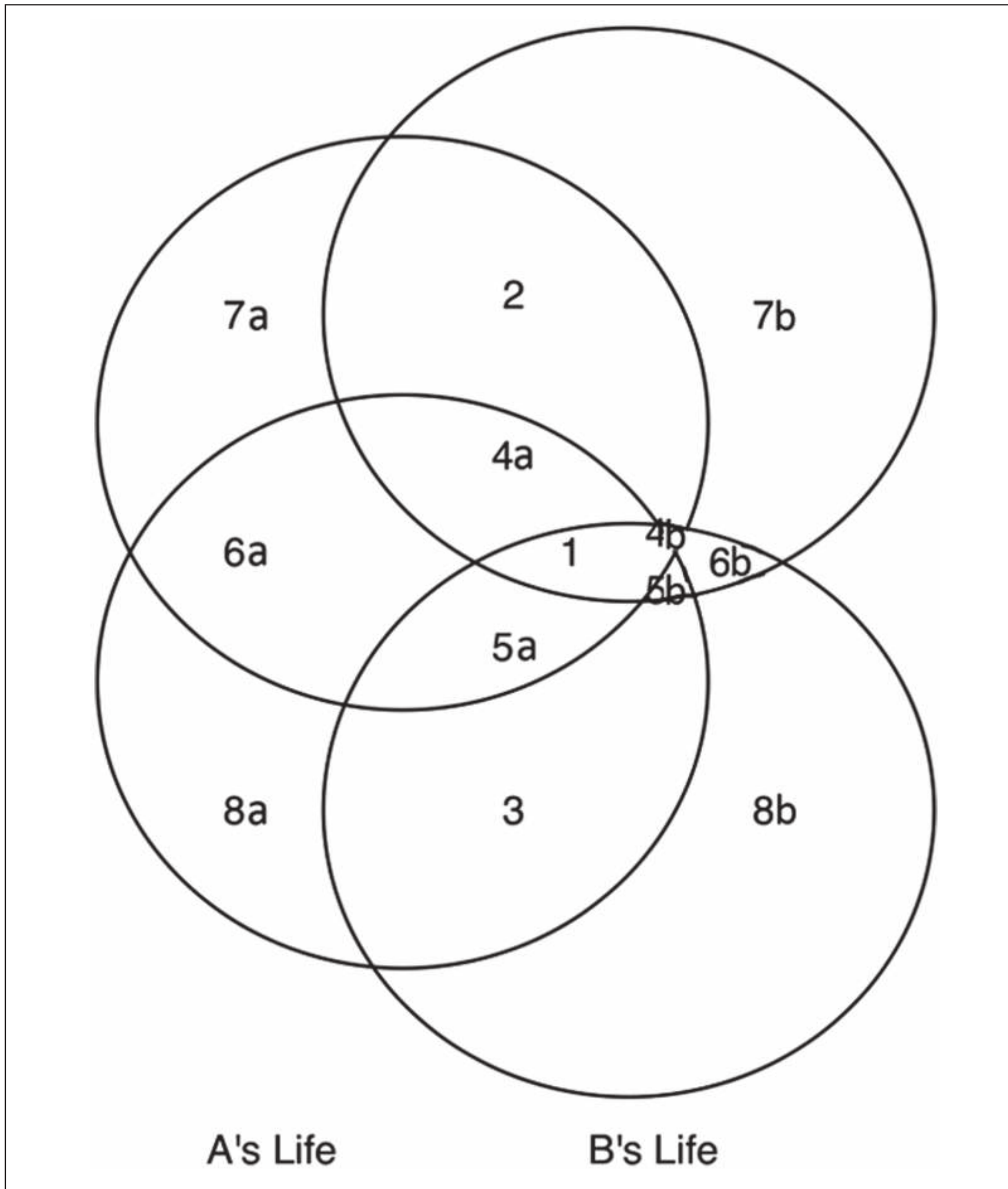

Figure 12. Fear of commitment
Note: 1 = Shared Ethical Existence; 2 = Shared Idealities; 3 = Shared Actualities; 4 = Attactiveness; 5 = Repulsiveness; 6 = Unshared Ethical Existence; 7 = Unshared Idealities; 8 = Unshared Actualities.

be both close and righteous, where the ideal lives of participants are both closely intertwined and fully embodied without reservation or remainder.

Having developed techniques for identifying patterns, we can use them to analyze processes, that is, to explain how one form of association would emerge, change or how it might relate to others. Although an in-depth study of such processes must remain a task for future work, we conclude with a brief proposal for how such study might proceed. A number

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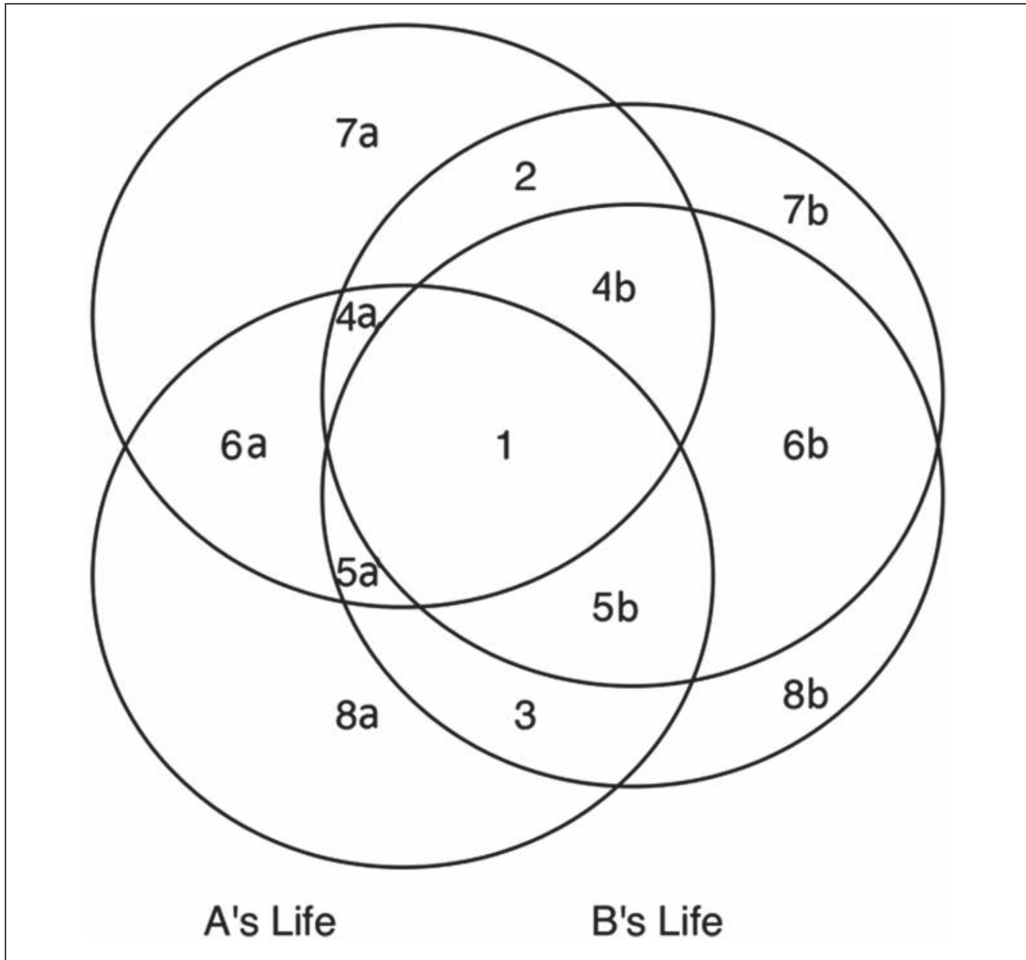

Figure 13. Ethical heroism
Note: 1 = Shared Ethical Existence; 2 = Shared Idealities; 3 = Shared Actualities; 4 = Attactiveness; 5 = Repulsiveness; 6 = Unshared Ethical Existence; 7 = Unshared Idealities; 8 = Unshared Actualities.

of directions are possible. For instance, researchers could construct empirical hypotheses about the conditions in which each configuration is likely to arise, about the likely consequences of inhabiting them, about typical developmental phases from one to another, or about the correlations between forms of association and forms of self-relations.

A precondition of such work would be specifying dyadic-level variables for analysis. We would propose four. The first would be the degree of overlap between the actual existences between actors. This would be similar to measuring relationship strength as it is conceived by network researchers, taking into consideration the time people spend together and the type and quality of the interactions they have. The second would be the degree of overlap between actors' ideal existences—the similarity between their goals, values, and beliefs. The third variable would be the degree of cross-overlap between actor A's ideal and actor B's actuality, and vice versa—the extent to which each partner attracts or repels the other. The fourth dyadic variable would be extent to which A and B's ideal selves are realized by their relationship. Then we would need three individual-level variables, one for actual

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scope, a second for ideal scope, and a third representing the degree to which one's individual ideals are achieved outside the relationship.

Empirical applications of our framework might first determine whether certain variables tend to correlate with others. For instance, our approach suggests a new way to empirically test the proposition offered by previous researchers that the status of the self may vary depending on the type of social relationship in which it is embedded and vice versa (cf. McLean 2007). Thus, even if theoretically all relationships are distant to some extent, empirically, extrinsic exchange relationships (i.e., market transactions), for instance, may tend to have higher levels of distance than do romantic relationships; similarly, asymmetric self-relations may be more likely to occur in hierarchical relationships. These are, of course, empirical hypotheses about tendencies and probabilities, subject to revision based on empirical research.

Second, researchers could develop propositions about the consequences of these variables as they arise in different contexts. One is that romantic relations with high levels of mutually repulsive existences may be unlikely to last. Another is that organizational solidarity and stability may be heightened when interactions strongly actualize participants' ideal selves. Another is that authority relations may be easily established when subordinates' ideal lives are not actually at stake in their interactions with a superordinate, since they might well be likely to cede power to other, more committed participants without contest. The point in the present context is not whether any of these propositions is empirically valid; it is that they are part of a whole host of questions that can now be clearly formulated and rigorously pursued on a sound theoretical basis.

Researchers could then investigate the ways in which one variable may affect another or multiple others. For example, we can think about how a person's admiration for another can influence the actual relationship and the person's own self-relation. When, say, a junior colleague greatly admires the successful career of a senior colleague and wishes to achieve what the senior has achieved, there is a high level of overlap between the junior's ideality and the senior's actuality. This admiration may cause the junior to forge a close relationship with the senior, increasing their degree of actual overlap. And in turn, this relationship may teach the junior important lessons that help in realizing their own professional goals, strengthening the junior's self-relation.

Another line of research might investigate how the interactions between two variables can affect a third. For instance, we might hypothesize that a large actual overlap accompanied by a small degree of ideal overlap results in a dwindling level of overlap between the ideal of actor A and the actuality of actor B. Perhaps a conservative Christian and a punkish anarchist are randomly paired as roommates in college. Each finds the other morally reprehensible, but they are forced to share a small living space and to spend a large amount of time together. During the course of the year, their mutual repulsion may radicalize their respective beliefs, driving their ideals even farther apart. They may deal with the situation by spending minimal time in the dorm room, reducing their actual overlap to its absolute minimum. Alternatively, one may find that in such situations, the students will learn to understand each other's values and moderate their own, increasing their level of ideal overlap and their shared ethical existences. They may then later find that their self-relations have altered; their actual behavior does not reflect their new values. Empirical study in this manner can help one discover the most common outcome of pairing ideological opposites as college roommates (building on recent social psychological work, such as Joiner et al. 2003).

One could move on from these simple correlational patterns to investigate more complex institutional processes. For instance, one could add significantly to the question animating Martin's (2009) *Social Structures*: how do small social structures become big ones? Martin focuses on the inherent potentials and limits of specific social forms—symmetrical, asymmetrical, antisymmetrical, transitive, and more—to find the relational components most

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amenable to institutional formation. Adding the self-relation into the structure of such forms could further enrich understanding of when and why some relational forms tend toward growth whereas others do not. For instance, a start-up company with two founders may often begin to grow by offering new employees an equity stake. Traditional structural analysis would have to schematize this growth as a dyad-turned-triad of equals, leaving unanalyzed the crucial questions of what type of triad the founders imagine and desire and how the interaction between individuals on the ideal level may aid or impede further growth.

Indeed, however equal all three are in terms of formal structure, the fate of the institution depends in large part on the unfolding of the group's interpersonal dynamics, in which members' ideals as well as their actions influence one another. We can describe a first scenario in which the two original founders are committed to the shared ideal of remaining the undisputed heads of a company. That is, we start with two people with large scopes who are close to each other ideally and actually; their scopes can be operationalized as value x, their degree of actual closeness can be operationalized as value y, and their ideal closeness as value z. They might seek a colleague with a life of comparatively small scope who does not imagine becoming a big boss at the helm. Or they may want someone who appreciates the interesting work and business opportunity but is not fulfilled by being part of the start-up; feeling personally uninvested, they are less likely to stick their noses into crucial managerial decisions. Put formally, they create a clique with a third of relatively small scope, of value $<x$, who is not as close to the first two as the first two are with each other. The third's actual and ideal relationships with the first two can be given the value of $<y$ and $<z$, respectively. We can thus watch the self-relations and social relations change in concert as the dyad becomes a triad.

By contrast, we can describe a second scenario in which the two founders do not share the same ideals; perhaps A secretly desires to assume total control of the company. That is, we have two people close in actuality but not in ideality. Their actual relationship may be value x, and their ideal relationship may be value y. A knows that guaranteeing the new third's support would" force founder B's hand in managerial decisions and become in effect the sole head of the company. Founder A might therefore look for a new person who admires A but does not admire B, a third who idealizes much about A but comparatively little about B, to join them as a triad. The overlap between the new third's ideality and A's actuality may be conceptualized as value z, the new third's ideality and B's actuality a value $<z$. Because the new developer would get more out of the relationship with A than with B, the developer will likely trust A and follow A's lead. And if A keeps the new developer close, loyalty—and with it, A's power—can be ensured. Over time, we would expect to witness A and the new member's actual and ideal relationship closeness to increase, whereas A and B's relationship closeness would decrease.

We could then develop propositions about the consequences of these divergent relational patterns for the success or failure of the firm. The first scenario may be more conducive to further institutional growth than is the second. The two original founders might remain committed to each other and simpatico in terms of their ideals. They could proceed to hire subordinates until the point where levels of middle or submanagement become necessary. Stunted institutional growth and greater structural volatility may arise out of the second scenario. Although it is possible that founder B resigns to founder A's power grab and accepts a subordinate role, it is perhaps more likely that B will see A's behavior as a betrayal. Ties between A and B on both the ideal and actual levels might therefore weaken as a struggle for power begins and animosity develops. B might then retaliate by becoming close to the new member in an attempt to bring them over to B's side, or B will make sure that future hires admire B but not A. As the company grows, it may split into factions and eventually two entirely different companies, becoming not a big structure but two smaller ones. And this would all be due not to strictly structural considerations as typically

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conceived but to the founders' conflicting self-relations within their social relations, that is, the expanded set of structural considerations opened up by our framework. A range of propositions about interpersonal dynamics can thus be integrated into standard formal accounts of organizational structure and change.

Empirical Operationalization

Clearly, to work with this type and multiplicity of variables, network researchers need appropriate data. Simple network data that unidimensionally maps the linkages among people will not suffice. Ethnographies, archives, interviews, and more detailed survey data are better options; these data can be organized into and analyzed as two-mode networks.[17] Existing studies provide fruitful examples of data that are rich enough to integrate a self-relation into the analysis of social relations. McLean's (2007) historical study of the Medicis uses archival data from letters to model forms of self-relation. Vaisey and Lizardo (2010) use the National Study of Youth and Religion to analyze the influence of cultural worldviews on changes in individuals' network composition. Rather than treating behavior as a control to test for the independent effects of culture, one could adapt these data to create measures of the interaction between ideality and actuality among network members. One could analyze levels and changes in the distribution of the types of relational patterns discussed here—close, symmetric, and so on—within and across organizational types.

Perhaps most promising is the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), which asks young people questions both about the form and direction their ideal romantic relations would take as well as about their actual romantic experiences. Add Health also contains detailed information about respondents' dyadic relations, which could be used to build measures of the overlap between ideality and actuality between and within couples as well as the relative scope of each partner's life in terms of educational and occupational ambitions and the extent of a current set of relationships. One could then investigate whether these dyadic variables influence relationship length, among other outcomes.

In addition, social psychologists have long worked on creating surveys that yield data geared toward representing one's self-conception: possible selves, actual selves, and their relations (Markus and Nurius 1986). Marshall et al. (2008) use multiple techniques to gather information about the possible selves that teenagers and parents negotiate as they plan for the teenager's future. Their approach includes observations of behavior as parents and adolescents converse about the adolescent's future and participants' reflections about their own cognitions and emotions as they watch video replays of those conversations. Forced-choice techniques (as discussed in Vaisey 2009) might reveal discrepancies between ideals and practice, which, when joined with relational data, could help to empirically measure key variables in our framework. Given the novelty of the approach, empirical operationalization will have to be experimental and tentative as one tries multiple options, but a host of existing data and techniques seem plausible candidates.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

We do not pursue these possible applications here. Our central point is that a strikingly rich portrait of the forms of associational self-relations can be achieved through reformulating those relationships to include the relation of interactants to themselves and to their relationships and that these formal techniques permit us to include the lives of interacting individuals as not only *influences on* social ties but as *constitutive of* social relationships. This is an extension and synthesis of Simmel's sociology and philosophy of life that we believe he would have appreciated.

Let us close by returning to the theoretical problematic with which we began: how to expand the boundaries of a relational conception of society. Standard approaches to answering

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this question have tended to at least implicitly remain within the Parsonian-Durkheimian framework, treating the contents of values, tastes, and attitudes as a uniting force that holds groups together; is transmitted through social networks; or induces some relations rather than others to be selected. Recent theoretical and empirical work has sought instead to treat culture and personal identity both formally and as internal to the interaction process, showing how the interpretation and presentation of self is part of the very process of relating to others; culture does not "precede" and "influence" interaction but is itself an element of interaction.

This article contributes to this ongoing effort to develop an expanded picture of the forms of interaction. Extending Simmel's late theory of the relational self, we have proposed a new way of integrating forms of self-relations into forms of social relations, shifting focus away from surveys of substantive moral commitments, their influence on social relations, and vice versa. Nor do we present selves and social structure as "mutually constitutive" in a merely verbal way. Our model instead describes forms of association among self-relating individuals. Extending Simmel, in our picture, every actual "node" in an interaction also relates to itself, to the self that it is and the one it would be were it able to develop itself to its ideal potential. The *form* of an interaction thus includes the degree to which the self is realized at all, in, and beyond the relationship, as *part of* the relationship itself. The self is an integral component of social interaction according to our neo-Simmelian picture because every participant in interaction is an ethical individual that lives in reference to some authentic—and inauthentic—form of that life.

Building from this insight, we went on to demonstrate how the Simmelian approach can provide a revised picture of the formal properties of interactions that includes the self-relations of their participants. The forms of association among self-relating individuals turn out to vary along a small set of dimensions. Social relations may be more or less distant, depending on the degree to which the interaction is an opportunity for each participant to fully or narrowly realize himself or herself. Social relations may be more or less symmetric, depending on the degree to which what is ideal for one participant is shameful for the other. The scope of social relations may vary depending on the relative expansiveness of the lives of its participants. And the actualization of participants in social relationships may vary, generating distinctive forms of interaction, such as hollow or righteous relationships. All of these dimensions are crucial parts of social relations; our approach provides a way to formally and conceptually access them.

These proposals can certainly be refined, extended, and combined. We need to develop rich empirical propositions about where and why one would be likely to expect one form rather than another to appear, how the forms might develop and change over time, or how they might relate to one another. The first step, however, is to theorize the relational self as an integral, formal component of the social relation without losing either the ethical integrity of the individual or the structural integrity of the interaction.

NOTES

1. Pachuki and Breiger (2010) discuss this ambivalence and point toward subcurrents within research on networks seeking a way out (such as Carley 1986; Mark 1998, 2003; White 2008). Emirbayer (2004) suggests, however, that these syntheses of matters of meaning and identity with matters of form and structure have been more verbal than substantive, as "mutual constitution" gives way to absorption; in any case, even if they suggest promising directions, the theoretical language is often difficult to penetrate. Our proposal is that we slow down and start by describing idealized forms of interaction in which the realization (or not) of participants' idealities plays a constitutive role—not as an influencing force on tie formation but as an internally differentiated relational component of the interaction as such.
2. "Even the moralist who believes he is able, by the power of thought, to withdraw himself from the influence of surrounding ideas, cannot succeed in doing so. For he is entirely permeated by them and,

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whatever he does, it is they that he discovers once more at the conclusion of his deductions" (Durkheim [1893] 1984:330). Lee and Silver 2012 situate these general differences between Durkheim and Simmel in the context of "Kantian" vs. "relational" sociology.

3. It would be a mistake to say that Simmel's forms of interaction include no moral aspect, for they do possess implicit relational norms. For instance, in "Sub- and Superordination," he discusses morality as a type of subordination under a principle that emerges when social authority is rooted not in subordination to persons but to general norms (Simmel 1908:234). But even in *Sociology*, Simmel did not believe that these sorts of relational norms could do justice to irreducibly self-relational character of morality (Lee and Silver 2012), and he consistently insisted on making norms secondary to forms (Levine 1991:1112). Simmel's moral thought thereafter tended to move toward his later "existential voluntarism" (Levine 2010).
4. Simmel's (1917) *Fundamental Questions of Sociology*, for example, bears the subtitle *Individual and Society*. In that book, he articulates a modern conception of individuality, expressed and embodied most powerfully by Nietzsche and Goethe, in which "the possibility that the perfection of the individual as such constitutes an objective value, quite irrespective of its significance for any other individuals" (Simmel [1917] 1964:60). Simmel developed this conception of individuality as an objective value in his various studies of personalities, such as Goethe and Rembrandt, in whom he thought one could see the forms of individual perfection realized and by whom those forms were brought out in others (as in Rembrandt's portrait paintings). At the same time, Simmel questioned the autonomy of individuals. He worried about the absorption of the authentic individual in collective phenomena, such as crowds, and in social scientific techniques, such as statistical sampling.
5. The scientist, for example, lives for much of his or her existence in "the world of knowledge," the artist lives in "the world of art," the believer lives in "the world of religion," and the moral person is oriented toward "the world of the ought." At times, these other worlds may matter much more and contain much more vitality than does what one commonly identifies as the world as such, the world of actuality, where "Is it real?" is the ordering principle rather than, for instance, "Is it beautiful?" or "Is it good?" Although Simmel insisted on this metaphysical multiplicity, he also argued that for an individual life, the worlds of ideality and actuality are the central existential terms—How should I live and what are the real constraints on my actions?—even if they are less relevant for the analysis of, say, the internal development of the sonata form from Haydn and Mozart to Beethoven and Brahms or the differences between classical and modern logic. For this reason, our discussion focuses on the interplay between ideality and actuality. William James (1890) developed a similar idea in *The Principles of Psychology*, which was taken up by Schütz (1945) and then by Goffman (1974) in *Frame Analysis.*
6. The fact that this ideal potential is individual does not for Simmel make it exclusively subjective or introspective. Portrait painting, Simmel suggests, is the art of seeing that potential and giving it shape, often more clearly than the subject himself or herself can, an insight carried forward in the "reflected appraisals" tradition of research (cf. Matsueda 1992).
7. Lee and Silver (2012) elaborate the philosophical significance of this model more fully as a "reversal" of Kantian moral theory.
8. "Structural dynamism" differs from change dynamics, where, for instance, changes in self-relations within actors influence social relations or vice versa or entering into new social circles leads to reconfigurations of the self. We briefly discuss change dynamics later.
9. Later we discuss briefly directions for using our framework to conceptualize mechanisms of influence as well as processes of network formation and self-development.
10. Although that which is lived but not idealized can range from indifference to total rejection, we maintain that anything in this category is repulsive to some extent. When one feels an abiding pressure to achieve one's potential, anything that does not bring one closer to it—even indifference—has a negative valence. Thus, the toxic polluter as well as the casual plastic bag user may be repulsive to the committed environmentalist.
11. Simmel attempts to demonstrate this especially in his analyses of insider-outsiders, such as "the stranger, the enemy, the felon, even the poor" (Simmel 1908:13). "What kind a person's socialized being is," he states, "is determined or co-determined by the kind of one's unsocialized being" (Simmel 1908:13).
12. The picture contains, as does Simmel's sociology, a relative indifference to facts as verifying causal propositions, at least at this theoretical level. For the formal level of sociological theorizing, the purpose of facts is to illustrate forms, not to verify propositions.

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13. Peter Blau in fact made this sort of asymmetry central to his exchange theory, where what one might call ethical imbalances in the relationship give one party heightened bargaining power, even if he did not make the theoretical step we are recommending.
14. We discuss only the ethically asymmetric relationship because in effect, we have already discussed a symmetric relationship with Figures 6 and 7.
15. Betweenness centrality may also approximate scope in certain types of social networks, such as “star” diagrams, that is, networks with high density. In these cases, high betweenness usually indicates one’s involvement in a myriad of diverse social contexts (see Freeman [1979] for a detailed discussion).
16. Although we do not explore relationships that include selves with internally varying scopes, such variations clearly define many forms of interaction. For instance, one could picture Emma Bovary’s outsized ideal self as part of both her hypocritical and manipulative relationship with Rodolphe as well as her asymmetrical relationship with the narrow yet honest Charles.
17. Specifically, the first mode could be individuals (each as both an actuality and an ideality), and the second could be aspects of selves. This would permit us to relate actual and ideal individuals to each other according to shared aspects of self.

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