Language in Society (2026), **55**, 654–675
doi:10.1017/S0047404525101462

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

On 'doing being moral' in the research interview

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(Received 24 January 2024; revised 1 April 2025; accepted 2 April 2025)

Abstract

In qualitative research interviews, participants sometimes relate vivid, ethically charged accounts of their lifeworlds. However, the genre constraints of the interview discourage interviewers from expressions of direct affiliation (agreement, approval, disapproval) with the interviewee's moral stances and rather encourage expressions of conversational alignment (attention, interest, comprehension) to keep the information flowing. Interviewees for their part may prefer and make a bid for more engagement from interviewers. We examine the affordances and constraints of the research interview and the discursive practices available to interviewees for 'doing moral action' in the interview: constructing their moral identities, describing their moral worlds, evaluating others, and attempting to more fully engage their interviewers. In the latter, interviewees employ a discursive 'recruitment to action' exercised subtly and indirectly by linguistically calibrating the space-time of their moral narratives to accord with the space-time of the interview and indexing their stories to transcendent norms and timeless truths. (Narrative analysis, indexicality, disaster, research interview, semistructured interview, social science interview, morality, ethics, nomic calibration).

Introduction

This article is about how interviewees discursively accomplish acts of moral identity, moral accounting, and moral recruitment to action within the affordances and constraints of the research interview. Not every interview is about morality. However, every interviewee engages in frequent self- and other-evaluations and gives accounts for his or her actions, and many of these stances and accounts do important moral work. Interviewees build a picture of their moral probity, populate their social worlds with moral/immoral characters, narrate moral events, and exhibit their moral reasoning. They accomplish these things through discourse: through the indexical invocation of macrosocial models of personhood and action, direct and indirect performatives, and narrative emplotment (Ochs & Capps 2001; Agha 2007; De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012; Wortham & Reyes 2015; Silverstein 2023).

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404525101462 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Crucially, interviewees do this moral work with and for their interviewers. Research interviews constitute an interactional environment structured around repeated question-answer sequences; asymmetrical obligations between interviewer and interviewee; differential expectations of and constraints on self-revelation, and role-based power imbalance (Koven 2014; Mann 2016; Roulston 2019). Interviewees are to engage in considerable self-revelation, while interviewers are not. Strategically, interviewers prefer to send signals of alignment that keep the information flowing (i.e. signs of understanding, interest, and encouragement) versus signals of affiliation that risk passing judgment on that information (i.e. overt approval, disapproval, or evaluation; see Stivers 2008). In short, interviewees who hear affiliation/disaffiliation might edit or silence their self-revelation.

Yet herein lies the conundrum. When interviewees claim a moral identity or give an account for their own or others' actions, they often actively seek affiliation. That is, they look for and even cultivate the interviewer's approval of or shared commitment to their moral stances and actions. Since interviewers are understandably reluctant to pass judgement, interviewees often engage in discursive indirection. Narratives prove quite useful in this regard since interviewees can calibrate or chronotopically align then-and-there events as here-and-now occurrences (Silverstein 1993, 2005; Perrino 2007, 2015; Koven 2016). Such narrative re-alignments effectively draw interviewers into the ongoing story, assign roles to them, and require moral responses from them. In essence, interviewees do more than report about their ethical lives, they do moral recruitment to action.

In the following sections, we review the nature and practice of the research interview in social science; we describe the discursive emergence of moral identity and moral accounting in the interview; and we demonstrate the specific notion of moral recruitment to action. To illustrate the dynamics of doing being moral, we conduct a close analysis of the moral identity work, moral accounting, and attempted moral recruitment by a paramedic being interviewed about his role in the emergency response to Hurricane María in a mountain town in Puerto Rico in 2017.

Morality, interaction, and language

Our approach to morality derives from three observations that are common in the anthropology of morality (reviews in Lambek 2010a; Fassin 2012; Lambek, Das, Fassin, & Keane 2015; Mattingly & Throop 2018) and in recent discourse analytic work on morality (Haugh & Márquez-Reiter 2024). First, the human propensity to evaluate one's own behavior and the behavior of others is at the core of ethical life, and the acts of such evaluation rest on the invocation of moral criteria. Second, by implication the moral or the ethical is inherently interactional. Laidlaw (2018:177) notes that 'recognition of persons, attributions of agency and responsibility, evaluation of states of affairs—are ubiquitous and built into the very structure of interaction'. Finally, the medium of moral interaction is language, discourse, or more broadly semiosis. In practice, language is the semiotic ground for making inferences about others' behavior (Keane 2016).

In sum, morality comes into being through ubiquitous moments of self- and other-evaluation that are enacted linguistically in social interaction (Haugh & Márquez-Reiter 2024). Collectively, these observations ground a discursive and

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anthropological approach to the context-driven, situated nature of ethical life, in contradistinction to philosophical approaches that privilege universalist theories of moral choice (e.g. utilitarianism, consequentialism) or sociological approaches that melt the moral into social norms and habits (Laidlaw 2014).

The social science interview

In this article, we address the qualitative, semi-structured, research interview and its variants (e.g. Kvale & Brinkman 2009; Mann 2016; Perrino 2022). The semi-structured interview is typically conducted face-to-face, guided loosely by a series of planned but often paraphrased questions, allowing for free-ranging responses by interviewees and ad hoc follow-ups and probes by interviewers. As a genred speech event, the interview is further specified by pre-arranged time and place that ensures little interruption, a prefatory consent process, and use of audio-only or audio-visual recording instruments. The goal of the semi-structured interview is to invite an insider's view of social or professional life by allowing interviewees to speak in their own words about their experience and expertise. The interviewer's open-ended questions encourage detailed accounts, allow for nuance and qualification, and presumably foster authentic self-expression. These affordances contrast with the more formal structured survey with its syntactically uniform questions and pre-set response options.

The form is ubiquitous across the social sciences and even the humanities. For example, in our own field of disaster research, the Social Science Extreme Events Research Network (SSEER) surveyed its 1,013 members about data collection methods used in their research (Peek, Champeau, Austin, Mathews, & Wu 2020) and found that 59% of researchers employed 'in-depth interviews' and over 20% reported using narrative analysis.

Methods of analyzing interviews have diversified over time, largely reflecting different interview ideologies (Briggs 2007; Koven 2014). An early, but still prevalent, positivist view focuses exclusively on the contributions ('answers') by interviewees and treats the extracted excerpts as stand-alone representations of the interviewee's thoughts, opinions, and feelings. Contributions by the interviewer are generally eliminated. More recently, an alternative, intersubjective and communicative view emphasizes the inherently interactional nature of the interview. In this view, the interview is a genred speech event in which interviewer and interviewee co-construct the data in their turn-by-turn talk (Briggs 2007; De Fina & Perrino 2011; Wortham, Mortimer, Lee, Allard, & White 2011; Koven 2014; Roulston 2019).

The interactional character of the social science interview

The basic text-metrical unit of the research interview is the question-answer sequence. The sequence begins with the interviewer's topical question, usually read or paraphrased from a preconceived list of questions, followed by the interviewee's comments and reflections. Frequently, the interviewer will follow up with requests to elaborate, paraphrased summaries to check for understanding, and probes for more detail. Though presumably neutral, the interviewers' questions subtly communicate the researcher's agenda, reflect selective uptake of prior responses, and imply a range of acceptable responses (Raymond 2003; Freed & Ehrlich 2010).

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For their part, interviewees accommodate to the terms of engagement. Research shows that participants adjust to the interviewer's social science agenda and craft their responses according to what they perceive the interviewer to need or want (Rapley & Antaki 1998; De Fina 2009). But not always. Interviewees sometimes challenge the questions put to them, resist the interviewer's assumptions, and even transform their agendas by strategically wording their stances and redirecting the topic (Stivers & Hayashi 2010). In short, interviewees' responses are recipient-designed for this particular interviewer in this encounter. Interviewees are sensitive to what the interviewer's purposes are, how the interviewer casts the identity of the interviewee, and where the talk seems to be going (Schegloff 2007:89). Thus, the interviewer and interviewee co-produce a flow of talk—a denotational text—consisting of propositions, assertions, commentary, questions, and narratives. That flow of talk simultaneously functions as an interactional text through which both speakers orient to one another, pursue their agendas, and influence one another's behavior (Silverstein 2003, 2023; Agha 2007; Wortham & Reyes 2015).

Hence, from an interactional perspective, we ask: What are they doing to one another? Who are they to one another? Or, more precisely, who are they BECOMING to one another? On one level, answers to these questions are found in pre-interview processes of participant recruitment. Interviewers usually represent some institution (e.g. business, politics, education, public health) that grounds their entitlement to recruit and interview people. For their part, interviewees know that they have been invited to the interview as representatives and spokespersons for a certain social identity, institutional membership, professional standing, or life experience (Potter & Hepburn 2005). Over the course of the interview, both interviewer and interviewee talk into being their social identities and social categories.

Asymmetric expectations

These conversational entitlements and obligations are not symmetrical, however. On the one hand, interviewees implicitly agree to be made accountable for their worlds and to engage in appropriate self-revelation, but they cannot expect the same from their interviewers. In fact, although interviewers are friendly, sympathetic, and curious, they learn to minimize self-revelation, unless it is strategically employed to encourage the trust and cooperation of the interviewee. Further, interviewers do not usually share their own opinions, make judgments, take sides, or criticize. Textbooks on interview methods in the social sciences often include the counsel: 'Avoid evaluation of the interviewee's contributions/keep it neutral' (Mann 2016:121).

In linguistic terms, trained interviewers prioritize alignment over affiliation (Stivers 2008). Signs of alignment (verbal and nonverbal) communicate acknowledgment, receipt, comprehension, and empathic understanding of what the interviewee says, and the strategic use of such signs is meant to keep the interviewee talking. By contrast, signals of affiliation or disaffiliation communicate actual agreement or disagreement, or endorsement or disapproval, of the interviewee's opinions, assertions, or claims. Crucially, because these may be heard as judgments or evaluations of the interviewee, they risk closing off or subverting the interviewee's authentic self-revelation. In short, signs of alignment may convey 'I'm interested, please

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continue', whereas signs of affiliation or disaffiliation may convey 'I'm evaluating you'. Hence, the savvy interviewer maximizes the former and minimizes the latter.

Nevertheless, these genre constraints are not absolute, and both parties may trope the norms. Subtly, for instance, the interviewer's acts of alignment may well be heard by the interviewee as endorsements. More overtly, interviewees sometimes directly query their interviewers about their opinions, positions, and life histories, and interviewers must make snap decisions about whether and how much to reveal. Alternately, interviewers sometimes boldly take sides and make explicit judgements precisely to provoke interviewees to elaborate.

Morality in the interview

Given the interactional dynamics of the interviewer–interviewee relationship, we ask: what moral work can participants in an interview do? We distinguish three important discursive tasks that interviewees engage during the research interview.

- IDENTITY WORK: constructing, claiming, and performing moral personhood
- MORAL ACCOUNTING: describing and evaluating actions and allocating responsibility
- RECRUITMENT TO ACTION: exhorting, conscripting, or guiding others

In the following paragraphs we explore the linguistic-discursive devices and practices that interviewees have at hand to do this work.

Identity work

The research interview is an interaction ritual, and as Silverstein notes: 'the creation, maintenance and transformation of identities is what interaction ritual, to resume Goffman's term, is all about' (2023:97). Over the course of an interview, interviewees build their moral identities and construct a world of other moral figures in their stories, anecdotes, and examples. They signal and construct their identities through behaviors, speech, and symbolic objects (e.g. clothing) that index social categories of personhood that are recognizable by others (Silverstein 1998, 2006; Agha 2007). Such identity formation is inherently reflexive, and speakers monitor and adjust their self-presentations (Goffman 1973) with an eye to how others see and hear them—that is, from a third-person perspective (De Fina & Georgakopoulou 2012; Keane 2016).

Identity work extends beyond such first-person claims, however. In their accounts and narratives, interviewees populate whole moral worlds by voicing and positioning other characterological figures (Goffman 1974; Bakhtin, Emerson, & Holquist 1981; Hill 1995; Agha 2007; Keane 2010; Wortham & Reyes 2015). This process too is reflexive. As Ochs & Capps (2001:284) note about storytelling: 'Each telling positions not only protagonists but also tellers as more less moral persons... tellers strive to represent themselves as decent, ethical persons who pursue the moral high road in contrast to certain other protagonists in their narratives'.

Critically, these sociological types have specific ethical associations as well. For example, whereas 'neighbor' might denote 'co-resident in a shared spatial

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surround', the term also indexes moral expectation: neighbors should exercise a basic existential concern for co-residents ('neighbors watch out for one another'). Similarly, 'first responders' refers to professional emergency personnel who manage immediate threats to survivors' physical well-being and provide medical treatment to victims of accident, crime, or disaster, but the term also indexes first-responders' selfless exposure to life-threatening dangers for the sake of victims. Neighbors and first responders are easily recognized as ethical agents or subjects. Correspondingly, however, there are also recognizable images of 'ethical others' (Faubion 2011) who are quintessential beneficiaries or 'objects' of ethical concern, as for example, children, the infirm, older adults, and victims of accidents or crime. These are categories of persons who are normatively deemed worthy of assistance, protection, or defense.

Moral accounting

As noted in the introduction, humans are forever evaluating themselves and others. This moral accounting involves orienting to right and wrong in one's own and others' behaviors, invoking and applying criteria, and allocating responsibility (Lambek 2010b; Laidlaw 2014; Keane 2016). In a seminal article, Scott & Lyman (1968:46) described accounts as a 'linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to evaluative inquiry'. Two specific kinds of accounts are: excuses (denying full responsibility for a bad action) and justifications (accepting responsibility but denying the 'badness' of the action). In practice, moral accounting extends to any denotational-interactional framing of an event AS MORAL by the interviewee (or interviewer, if that occurs). Thus, moral accounting is exercised in everyday acts of praise, blame, suspicion, accusation, excuse, forgiveness, and so on.

Although these acts may be accomplished semiotically through explicit performatives (*j'accuse!*), they are far more commonly mediated by indirection, implicit performatives, and context-dependent construals (Austin 1962; Lempert 2012; Fleming & Lempert 2014). Consider, for example, the following exchange between two college roommates.

> A: That twenty dollars I left on my desk is gone.
> B: The only other person that's been in here was the new guy from down the hall.

At an interactional level, A's factual observation infers that someone has either moved or taken the money from his desk (he orients to right and wrong). Equally indirectly, B exonerates himself and raises suspicions about 'the new guy from down the hall' (he allocates responsibility). Note that this two-turn act of moral accounting involves no explicitly moral vocabulary and is based entirely on hearable implication and inference. Such indirection is at the heart of a great deal of moral accounting, even in the research interview.

Narratives therefore are a primary resource for interviewees to people a moral landscape and display and perform moral accounting. Nevertheless, in the research interview such moral storytelling can be heard as plainly informational. How might an interviewee invite an interviewer to actually engage in some way?

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Recruitment to action

Recruitment to action refers to how we use language to get other people to do things in the constant, move-countermove (enchronic) social environment of human communication (Enfield & Sidnell 2017). In a research interview, for example, the interviewee might attempt to persuade the interviewer to approve, adopt, critique, or reject the interviewee's moral beliefs and practices or even to join the exercise of moral accounting. Interviewees quite reasonably expect their interviewers to share the seemingly pan-human propensity to evaluate human behavior. In the terms that we have adopted in this article, the interviewee is faced with the task of moving the interviewer from conversational alignment to affiliation at points where the interviewee seeks actual approval or even shared commitment about moral positions and actions. Of course, the interviewee could just ask the interviewer to join him or her in moral evaluation, but this strategy directly challenges the role constraints of their relationship. Instead, interviewees opt for more indirect or covert means, and narratives provide a useful tool for doing this.

The interactional work of moral narrative

To tell a story as a means of recruitment to action is not uncommon, though in a social science interview it may require some finesse. What linguistic-discursive affordances are available for doing this? How to get from a specific, evidential, moral tale to a more generic call to action? How to get a hearer to commit?

These are questions of calibrating an event. 'The notion of calibration designates how participants link a current, unfolding speech event (Es or the narrating event) to various spatiotemporal frames (Et or narrated events) (Silverstein 1993)' (Koven 2016:20). Silverstein (1993) marks reportive calibration whereby a past, there-and-then event is discursively linked in various ways to the here-and-now of the event of narrating, and nomic calibration whereby narrators link a realm of timeless truths or ways of acting (e.g. scientific generalizations, proverbs, moral codes or systems) to the narration of events. Both types of calibration are relevant to moral narrative.

Koven (2016:19) has developed these notions in compelling empirical work on essentialization. Specifically, she examined 'how storytelling participants produce and infer general "timeless", and essential social types, situations, and moral principles'. Her data came from sociolinguistic interviews in which young, Portuguese-descendent women, now living in France, talked about the social criticism meted out by their older Portuguese aunts and grandmothers. At issue in the stories were the competing gender norms of Portuguese rural female elders versus urban French peers. Interviewees told stories of their elders' criticisms in such a way as to recreate those encounters in the interview itself (reportive calibration). In these tellings, they also invoked general moral and social norms—'timeless truths'—to rationalize their attitudes and behaviors (nomic calibration).

Importantly, the interviewers themselves were also young women of Portuguese descent living in France, and hence both interviewers and interviewees shared the intergenerational tensions around 'appropriate' behavior, dress, and style. Through specific reportive and nomic calibrations, interviewees told stories which recruited their interviewers to agreement, approval, and ultimately affiliation with them. In

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short, interviewees succeeded in the moral recruitment to action that we wish to explore.

Reportive calibration

At a discursive level, Koven's narrators used deictic transpositions in verb tenses and spatiotemporal adverbs to re-enact in the sociolinguistic interviews their past encounters with older relatives. Narrators used the historical present tense of verbs to transform past actions into present actions. They also used proximal adverbs (here, now) instead of distal adverbs (then, there) to relocate the action in the interview. These deictic shifts give a sense of vividness, create tension, and invite affective response, which function to draw hearers into the action (Perrino 2007). Of course, narrators also at times used the opposite strategy to keep past events tidily in the past by using past tense verbs and distal adverbs and demonstratives (then, there).

In the tradition of Bakhtin's (Bakhtin et al. 1981) and Silverstein's (2005) treatments of chronotopes—the time (chrono) and space (topos) envelopes of events—Perrino (2007, 2015) distinguishes these two types of narrative alignment as displaced chronotope alignment (past events narrated as past events in the interview) and coeval chronotope alignment (past events narrated as present events in the interview). As it turns out, it is the alternation of these strategies that enhances their differential effects on listeners.

Nomic calibration

Nomic calibration links timeless truths to the current event of speaking. Direct or indirect appeals to 'the way the world is' or 'how things should be' are nomic because they index abstract realms of truth or normativity (Agha 2007:44). Moral commentary and idealized moral characters are also nomic in this way.

A crucial contribution of Koven's (2016) work on calibration is tracing HOW the shift from reportive to nomic calibration (from the specific to the generic) imparts compelling force to the nomic in the narrating event. She explores three narrative practices in this regard. First, as in reportive calibration, the use of present tense verbs to relate past events effectively stages the event in the timeless present.

Second, first-person plural pronouns (*we*), impersonal second person (*you*), or third person (*one, it*) work to invoke overarching social or cultural norms. Thus, 'We don't use *Professor* or *Doctor* here to address faculty, we use *Mr.* and *Ms.*'; 'You don't do that here'; 'It's not the done thing': all work to announce social norms.

Finally, a narrator might use a specific-to-generic voicing strategy to blur and fuse distinctions in their use of first-person pronouns. Koven (2016:23) notes three such usages of the narrator's 'I': (i) a here-and-now 'I' narrating a there-and-then event to her audience, (ii) a here-and-now 'I' addressing her audience about some point in the narrative (possibly from within the narrative), and (iii) the 'I' of the narrator's character in the story itself. As a result of this deictic prodigality, 'the distance between narrating and narrated events appears to collapse, creating an iconic parallelism between them (Silverstein 1993; Wortham 2001)', as a result of which the narrative audience may feel a powerful appeal to react, respond, or at least endorse the moral claim or course of action. This is precisely what happened in Koven's sociolinguistic

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interviews: interviewees successfully recruited interviewers to affiliate with their stances.

In sum, in both Koven's and Perrino's work we see that interviewee-narrators strategically shift deictic forms to alternate between holding narrated moments in the past versus projecting the action into the here-and-now of interview time. From these re-projected events, interviewees draw out timeless social types and moral truths. Finally, especially in cases in which interviewer and interviewee share moral worldviews, the interviewee can appeal to the interviewer to engage in the project of moral accounting; that is, to move from alignment to affiliation in the research interview.

In sum, we have described three core moral actions that interviewees 'do' during research interviews: identity work, moral accounting, and recruitment to action, and we have reviewed the semiotic-discursive practices through which they accomplish these actions. We have paid particular attention to how an interviewee might move beyond producing reports of his or her ethical life and attempt to conscript or co-opt the interviewer into the moral accounting. To explore these dynamics, we present a single narrative, from a study of post-disaster recovery in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria in 2017 (López de Victoria Rodríguez, González Márquez, & Colón Rivera 2022; Schrauf & López de Victoria Rodríguez 2024) for the purpose of exploring how one narrator accomplishes the various moral tasks outlined above. Our analysis treats one question-answer sequence from an interview with a paramedic, a sequence which demonstrates all three interactional effects adduced above as 'doing being moral' in a research interview.

Fieldsite and project

On September 20, 2017, Hurricane María, a category 4 storm, moved across the island of Puerto Rico from the southeast corner (near Yabacoa) and over the central mountain range that bisects the island on the east-west axis (the Cordillera Central), and then off-island over the northwestern shore (near Arecibo). Approximately 3,000 people lost their lives because of the storm. The response by the US Government was slow, anemic, and underfunded.

After any disaster, the immediate recovery constitutes a liminal period with several phases: emergency response, recovery, and reconstruction. Early on, a sense of communitas brings people together and creates a kind of disaster social capital that lasts variably into latter months (Matthewman & Uekusa 2021; Uekusa, Matthewman, & Lorenz 2022). This period is also marked by increased altruism, social collaboration, and often the suspension of social distinctions (race, ethnicity, economic status). Consequently, this is also a period during which people are faced with unique moral challenges that stretch them beyond their comfort zones and that sometimes trigger enduring changes in their moral trajectories (Schrauf & López de Victoria Rodríguez 2024).

Data collection: Ethnography and semi-structured interviews

Data for this article derive from a project that addressed medical help seeking among survivors of the hurricane living in the municipality of San Isidro Labrador (pseudonym), with a population of 48,000, located in the central mountain range.

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We conducted over 100 interviews at one- and two-year intervals after the event (see López de Victoria Rodríguez et al. 2022), and for this article we consulted interviews with recovery personnel (twenty-four interviews in the first year; sixteen in the second). The ninety-minute interviews focused primarily on participants' job responsibilities; sources of advice and equipment; other organizations in their professional networks; places where patients or clients might be referred; accounts of difficult or tense days; and estimations of when 'things seemed to be returning to normal'. None of our questions specifically addressed moral issues or challenges, but interviewers did ask participants about tense days or severe cases. It is these latter moments that are of interest in this article.

The interview and excerpts

The transcript below records one question-answer sequence between a twenty-five-year-old, male paramedic (P1; henceforth 'the paramedic') and a female research interviewer (E2; henceforward, 'the interviewer'), who was principal investigator of the project and an applied linguist at a local university. Also present in the interview were a second paramedic on duty (P2), and a second interviewer (E1). The interview was conducted in the offices of a private emergency medical services (EMS) ambulance company. All paramedics and interviewers were survivors of the hurricane, residents of San Isidro, and Puerto Rican islanders. The scheduled list of questions for these interviews included three versions of a request for a personal experience in each of three time periods: immediately after the hurricane (September 2017), three months on (January-February 2018), and one month before the interview itself (a year later).

(1) Interview Q&A: "Any really severe cases?"
P1: paramedic; E1: first interviewer; E2: second interviewer

3 E2: ¿algo que se te ocurre unos meses después del huracán,
'Anything you can think of some months after the hurricane'

4 como pa' diciembre enero, eh: eh casos que fuesen
'around December January uhm uhm cases that were'

5 bien severos en el: entorno profesional?
'really severe in your professional environment?'

6 P1: Ahí mayormente era el énfasis era eh las personas mayores
'There mostly it was the emphasis on older people'

7 Las personas mayores que literalmente no contaban con familia:res eh personas solas
'Older people who literally had no family to count on uhm people (living) alone'

8 Saes (.) no había: no había ese tipo de ayuda que que literalmente (1.0)
'Y'know (.) there wasn't there wasn't that kind of help that that literally (1.0)'

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9		ellos pudieran tener y nosotros queremos=yo específicamente yo 'they could have and we want=I specifically I'
10	E2:	mjm. 'mhm'
11	P1:	con los viejos y con los niños (.) soy otra cosa 'with old people and with children (1.0) I'm something else'
12	E2:	mjm. 'mhm'
13	P1:	Y yo no puedo ver: un viejo que literalmente: este pasando las de Caín como uno dice (1.0) 'I can't bear to see an old (person) that literally is going through hell as they say'
14		y que no tenga esa ayuda 'and who doesn't have that help'

Having established in these lines his particular moral concerns about old people and children (note the designation of specific ethical others), he goes on in lines 15–62 (not shown) to talk about resources for such individuals (e.g. the Department of Family Services), the dignity of older adults ("they're human beings"), and the lack of medicines after the hurricane (especially insulin). The interviewer finally brings him back to "an especially severe case", and he tells the following story (starting in line 63). The lengthy, continuous excerpt is separated into three sections by dashed lines corresponding to his three repeated recitals of the details of the event.

(2) The narrative: "When we got there"

ITERATION 1

63	Había una persona que: solita (.) una casa espectacular (.) pero era soli:ta 'There was a person tha:t alone (.) a spectacular house (.) but she lived alo:ne'
64	Eh: antes de María había sufrido una caída (.) y no se podía parar 'Uhm before María she had suffered a fall (.) and couldn't get up'
65	Yo la cogí (.) literalmente inundá (.) tiritando (.) casi desnuda (.) y con una fractura 'I picked her up (.) literally soaked (.) shivering (.) almost naked (.) and with a fracture'
66	Ese fue el punto que:: a mí me chocó 'This was the moment tha::t really struck me'
67	Porque llegar a la casa (.) en ese momento dado llegó su familia que casualidad (.) 'because arriving at the house (.) at that moment the family arrived what a coincidence (.)'

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68 este: (.) y los vecinos pues los vecinos sí estaban pendientes
'uhm: (1.0) and the neighbors so the neighbors were attentive'

69 por por lo menos en comida y aquello y lo otro
'to at least food and this and that....'
(two lines omitted)

72 Pero ese día nos activa(aron) fueron directamente donde nosotros para verficar la señora
'But on that day they alert(ed) they came directly to us to check on the lady'

ITERATION 2

73 Cuando llegamos (.) tirada en en en en la sala eh ya el agua estaba en la sala
'When we arrived (.) laying in in in in the living room uh the water was in the room'

74 Obviamente su orín y y y sus necesidades se las había hecho
'Obviously her urine and and and she had done her necessities'

75 Cuando nosotros llegamos fue: inmovilizar y vámonos
'When we got there it wa:s imobilize (her) and get out'

76 porque yo no pienso eh- estar un minuto más aquí...
'because I'm not thinking uh of being one minute more here...'

77 Porque la casa era por fuera enorme pero por dentro eso se estaba cayendo (.) sabes
'Because the house outside was enormous but inside it was falling apart, you know?'

78 Las condiciones que esa señora estaba (.) entra el protocolo del Manejo de Emergencias
'The conditions in which this lady lived (.) come under the protocol of Emergency Management'

79 pero lo que pasa es que si no lo (.) dicen no somos adivinos
'but what happens is if they don't (.) say anything we're not mind readers'
(two lines omitted)

ITERATION 3

82 Pero si (.) contra yo como vecino entro literalmente todos los días
'But if (.) damn I as the neighbor come in literally every day'

83 y sé que viene un un fenómeno atmosférico
'and I know there's a a weather event coming (.)'

84 ¿porque yo no puedo ↑alertar (.) y decir esta señora hay que ↓moverla
'why can't I give a warning and say this lady has to be moved (.)'

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85 Por qué tengo que esperar que se caiga (.) Y estar dos días en el piso después de=
'why do I have to wait till she falls (.) and being on the floor for two days after'
86 y cuando llegó María la encontró en el piso (.) y toda mojá
'and when María came, it found her on the floor (.) and completely wet (.)'
87 para entonces después °Ay la señora se cayó°
'So then afterwards °Ah the lady fell°'
88 En serio si tú sabes las condiciones que vive esa señora
'Seriously if you know the conditions that lady lives in'
89 Una señora que ni casi ni podía ni caminar y sola en la casa (.) sabes
'a lady who could almost not even walk all alone in the house (.) you know'

CODA

90 Hay puntos que (.) hay que darle ese énfasis que necesitan estas personas mayores...
'There are times when (.) you have to give it that emphasis that these older persons need...'
(three lines omitted)
94 (telefono) Hay que estar de de de mano con esas personas (1.0)
'(telephone rings) you have to be hand in hand with these people (1.0)'
95 °Pero no° (.) no está el gobierno (.) no está el gobierno (2.0)
'°but no° the government's not there (.) the government's not there'
96 no hay break en esta parte (.)
'There's just no break on this part'

At this point in the conversation, the second paramedic took a phone call and broke in to ask a question about the regional assignment of ambulances. The narrator resolved the issue, the second paramedic proceeded with the call, and the first paramedic turned back to the interviewers to finalize his story and repeat his special concern for old people and children. The interviewer then closed this sequence by moving onto her next scheduled question, which concerned sources of medical equipment in the months of December and January.

Analysis of the text

In analyzing the text, we trace the three kinds of interactional effects described in above in the section MORALITY IN THE INTERVIEW: identity work, moral accounting, and recruitment to action. A curious feature of the story is that the paramedic repeats the details in each of three iterations. These are marked by headers in the transcript and labeled as Iteration 1 (lines 63–72), Iteration 2 (lines 73–79), and

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Iteration 3 (lines 82–89). Within each iteration the paramedic repeats four essential components of the plot, albeit in different order each time: (a) the disabled, older woman living by herself, (b) the neighbors' commitment to look out for the older woman, (c) the paramedics finding the woman on the floor when they arrive, and (d) the neighbors failing to call 911.

Identity work

In response to the interviewer asking for an anecdote (excerpt (1), lines 3–5) from three to four months after the hurricane, the paramedic invokes a distressing picture of older adults, living alone, abandoned by their families (lines 6–8), a situation that violates the core cultural value of a family's responsibility for its older generation. In talking about the kind of help that "we want" for these persons (line 9), he abruptly cuts himself off and substitutes the first-person "I specifically I" (want them to have this help). He expands on this theme in line 11, "with old people and with children I'm something else" and in lines 13–14 "I can't bear to see an old (person)... who doesn't have that help". In the coda to the narrative (not shown) he returns to this opening claim by repeating his special concern for old people and children. These two concerns become emblematic (Agha 2007:235–36) of his moral identity.

His identity work includes three key social personae at the center of his story: the old woman, the neighbors, and the paramedics. Each of these is associated with certain cultural models that specify aspects of their social identities. Across all three iterations, the paramedic-narrator employs social indexicals that cumulatively configure each of these figures (Wortham & Reyes 2015). These social types, cultural models, and their constitutive indexicals are shown in Table 1.

Old woman: Living alone

The narrator's indexicals point to a common cultural model that integrally links old age, female gender, and physical disability, with social isolation and vulnerability. First, the narrator traces the woman's vulnerability, not to a lack of material resources (the house is "spectacular"), but rather to her living alone (line 63) and being unable to manage the home ("inside it was falling apart", line 77; "the conditions in which this lady lived", line 78). Second, she is significantly disabled: she "could almost not even walk" (line 89). Her vulnerable status and squalid circumstances render her the quintessential 'ethical other'—beneficiary of moral attention and concern.

Old woman: "Help, I've fallen and I can't get up"

The widespread cultural script of an elderly individual who lives alone, has fallen, and cannot summon help has been successfully packaged and popularized in television and internet advertisements for personal medical alert devices. In the contemporary social imaginary, this metapragmatic script links advanced age, loss of balance, accidental falls, breaking one's hip, and forced institutionalization (i.e. 'going to a nursing home'). Linked to the paramedic's five indexicals about the fall itself (lines 64, 73, 85–87), there is also the vivid description of her condition: "[laying in] her urine... she had done her necessities" (line 74). The woman's tragic accident is confirmation of her vulnerable, victim identity.

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Table 1. Social indexicals configuring three sociological types across three repeated iterations of narrative details.

Sociological type	Iteration 1	Iteration 2	Iteration 3
Old woman: Living alone	"spectacular house"/old woman lived alone (line 63)	(House) "falling apart" (line 77); "the conditions in which this lady lived" (line 78)	(Woman) couldn't walk; she was alone in the house (line 89)
Old woman: "Help, I've fallen and I can't get up"	before María, she fell, couldn't get up (line 64)	laying on the living room floor (line 73), her urine… she had done her necessities (line 74)	till she falls, being on the floor for two days (line 85); "found on the floor" (line 86); "she fell" (line 87)
Neighbors: Neighbors watch out for neighbors	family and neighbors arrive (lines 67–68); (neighbors) attentive to food and so on (line 69)	If they (neighbors) don't say anything (line 79)	(Neighbors) come in every day (line 82)
Neighbors: Call 911	that day they (neighbors) came directly to us (line 72)	If they (neighbors) don't say anything (line 79)	why can't I (the neighbor) give a warning? (line 84)
Paramedics: Ambulance runs	"I picked her up" (line 65); "the moment that really struck me" (line 66)	"When we arrived" (line 73); "immobilize her and get out!" (line 76)	

Neighbors: Neighbors watch out for neighbors

The social type 'Neighbor' links residential proximity with moral obligation: people who live near one another have the duty to be attentive to one another's basic safety and survival. Parallel indexicals include: the neighbors "[came] in literally every day" (line 82); they were "attentive to at least food and this and that" (lines 68–69); they had the obligation to "say [something]" (line 79). Indeed, it is their violation of this last moral duties that is at the core of his case.

Neighbors: Call 911

Calling for help via 911 is one of the most widespread metapragmatic models of action in the United States and elsewhere in North America. It links an onlooker or neighbor's perception of emergency, danger, or serious wrong, with making an immediate phone call to summon medical, police, or civil assistance. Note the references to the neighbors' responsibility: "they came directly to us" (line 72), "if they don't say anything [to us]" (line 79), and "why can't I [as the neighbor] give a warning" (line 84).

Paramedics

Paramedics provide on-call, emergency medical care to anyone in any situation. Here, the paramedic-narrator's references to arriving at the house (line 73) and picking up the woman (line 65) evoke iconic scenes of ambulances and first aid. Further, the 911 call is the fundamental appellation that creates the paramedic. The relevant indexicals (see previous paragraph) invoke the moral duty to call 911 and the consequences of failing to do so.

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Moral accounting

In the first two iterations of the narrative, the paramedic dramatically performs in reported thought and reported speech his dawning realization that the neighbors are at fault. In line 66, he says, "that was the moment that really struck me", but he doesn't say what struck him—though it seems that the arrival of the neighbors was the trigger (lines 67–69). Ten lines later (line 76) he says, "[Let's] get out because I'm not [staying here] one minute more", but again he doesn't say why he wants to escape—though he follows up by commenting on the deteriorating interior of the house (lines 77–78). The story finally comes together in (lines 82–89) when he explicitly lays out the case: the neighbors come in every day; they know a hurricane is coming; they do not give a warning; the old woman falls and lays on the floor for two days. This time he puts reported speech in the mouth of the neighbors whom he voices ingenuously: "Ah the lady fell" (line 87). In sum, through the slow disclosure of the details (Ochs & Capps 2001:135–41), he sets up a dramatic presentation of his case in the third iteration of the story.

A key feature of this narrative performance is a shift in reportive calibration. Iteration 1 tells the story as a completed event. Iterations 2 and 3 project critical past moments into the present tense of the interview. More specifically, in the first iteration (lines 63–72), the paramedics' finding the woman on the floor is wholly displaced from the narrating event (the interview) into the there-and-then of September 2017. All verbs are in past tense (lines 63–68, 72), and the narrator uses two distal demonstratives to qualify the events (line 67: *en ese momento* 'at that moment'; line 72: *ese día* 'on that day')

Throughout the rest of the narrative, the narrator shifts from past to non-past tenses and back again. In Iteration 2, line 75 suggests that he will preserve the past tense telling: "when we got there it was...", but he abruptly shifts his narration to the here-and-now. His "let's go", or perhaps "let's' get out" (*vámanos*, line 75) is in present tense and leads into a direct reported thought in line 76, also in present tense: "I'm not thinking uh of being one minute more here". This latter includes the proximal deictics (one minute more here). This coeval realignment has several possible effects: it expresses the emotional intensity of his psychological reaction (Perrino 2011:96), his remembered consciousness of the experience (Silverstein 2023:39), and it allows him to demonstrate (Clark & Gerrig 1990) for a second time the sudden insight that he reported earlier in line 66 (i.e. this event never had to happen). In lines 77–78, he describes the interior of the house, but as he goes on to frame the woman's situation as worthy of municipal attention, he shifts back into present tenses (lines 78–79).

In Iteration 3, he lays out his moral argument in three conditional if-then formulae in two separate verses in present tense (lines 82–85, 88). Then, in two interspersed verses, he describes the fate of the woman in past tense (lines 86–87), but he shifts again to present tense in expressing a third conditional (line 88).

Recruitment to action

Iterations 2 and 3 bring the case out of the past into the moment of the interview (reportive calibration) and in Iteration 3 the paramedic appeals to a realm of timeless moral principle and formal logic to prosecute the case and render its import

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(nomic calibration). This shift in calibration gives the case its moral heft in two ways.

First, the paramedic's narrative laminates three versions of his first-person role in reported thought and speech (Koven 2016). In Iteration 1, line 66, upon finding the woman on the floor, he says, "That was the moment that really struck me". His here-and-now, paramedic interviewee 'I' picks out a past self ("me") in a past moment ("that moment") in a there-and-then, completed event. Similarly, he begins Iteration 2 in first-person plural: "When we got there" (line 75), and again his narrating, paramedic-interviewee 'I' picks out a past self ("we") in a completed story. By contrast, in the next line (line 76), he voices his reported thought from within the narrative—"I'm not thinking uh of being one minute more here". This 'I' is the paramedic-in-the-narrative and offering his inner speech in the present tense of the interview.

Finally, in Iteration 3, he transposes his paramedic-interviewee 'I' to a hypothetical "if... I as the neighbor" (line 82), which he then repeatedly occupies through a series of if-then statements "[if] I know there's a a weather event coming" (line 83), then "I give a warning" (line 84), then "I have to wait till she falls" (line 85). In each of these instances, the 'I' seems deictically non-selective. It does not pick out an empirically real and situationally locatable 'I' but rather represents a sociological type (the neighbor). This hypothesized 'I' is arguably now a generic, impersonal nomic 'I'. This interpretation is confirmed by the paramedic's shift to the more common, generic, nomic 'you' in the conditional in line 88: "if you know".

Through this complex layering of the narrating 'I', the neighbors' act of negligence (a specific event) morphs into a timeless lesson in the interview (generic moral case). Importantly, the effect of the moral pronouncement derives from the performance of the moral anecdote, and the shift compellingly brings the case, victim and villain, into the interview frame itself. The paramedic-interviewee positions the interviewer as witness and attempts to win her judgment. This latter is the recruitment to action.

Iteration 3 lays out the moral case, and as noted above, this is the act of accounting. The case takes the form of a moral syllogism: If you know X, then you are morally responsible for doing Y. He instantiates this formula in three conditionals (Table 2).

In the first two *if*-statements (antecedents), he takes on the identity and moral responsibilities of the neighbor via a pronominal deictic transposition: "if I as the neighbor". Note that the plural 'neighbors' of the first two iterations (lines 68, 72, 79) becomes singular, deictically non-selective, and stereotypical in line 82: the neighbor.

Correspondingly, the first two *then*-statements (consequents) are cast as rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions, of course, grammatically prefer informational answers, but their illocutionary function is to make 'some kind of claim, or assertion, an assertion of the opposite polarity to that of the question' (Koshik 2005:2). Thus, the paramedic-narrator's rhetorical question in lines 84 and 85 invite the unspoken retorts of the opposite polarity: "(but I) CAN give a warning", and "(but I) don't HAVE TO wait" (third column of Table 2). The third conditional obeys the exact same dynamic, except that the paramedic shifts from the deictic 'I as neighbor' to voice a generic you: "if you know the conditions that lady lives in" (line 88). He leaves unspoken the *then*-statement at opposite polarity, but the generic 'you' extends

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Table 2. If-then conditionals (antecedents, consequents, and retorts) in Iteration 3.

If-statement (antecedent)	*Then*-statement (consequent)	Unspoken retort
if I as the neighbor come in literally every day (line 82)	why can't I give a warning and say this lady has to be moved? (line 84)	[BUT I CAN give a warning].
[if I as the neighbor] know that a weather event is happening (line 83)	why do I have to wait till she falls and is on the floor for two days? (line 85)	[BUT I DON'T HAVE TO wait].
If you know the conditions this lady lives in/a lady who could almost not walk (and) alone in the house, you know? (lines 88–89)	[left unfinished]	[BUT you do KNOW her condition]

responsibility for the woman to anyone who knows the conditions in which she lives.

However, in the final lines (90–96), the paramedic issues a direct nomic injunction in which the subject terms (who is responsible?) dissolve into universal obligation while the object terms (for whom are subjects responsible?) come to encompass all older people. First, in terms of who is responsible, he shifts from the pronominal generic you in line 88 to a desubjectified periphrastic deontic modal in lines 90 and 94. This is the hay *que* + infinitive form which is conjugated exclusively in the third person and communicates instruction, advice, or recommendation (Serrano 2021). Idiomatically, the closest English equivalent is the generic 'you' or perhaps 'one', but taken literally these utterances express pure obligation: "[there is the obligation] to give it that emphasis that these older persons need" (line 90) and "[there is the obligation] to be hand in hand with these people" (line 94). These impersonal moral modals bind not only the interviewers and reflexively himself but, more broadly, everyone.

Thus, the overall trajectory of the paramedic's response to the interviewer's request for 'a particular case' has gone from a story about an EMS run just after the hurricane to a nomic moral injunction about proper attention to the elderly before, during, and after a hurricane. Further, he has transformed a past event into a dramatized (litigated?) moral case, and he challenges the interviewer to endorse his judgment.

As a final point, we might ask whether and how the interviewers took up that moral challenge. Oddly and circumstantially, their talk was diverted almost immediately by a phone call, taken by the second paramedic in the room. This person took the first paramedic aside to deal with that call, and when the first paramedic returned, he wrapped up his story by confirming his claim that "with old people and children, I'm something else". The drama having drained away, the interviewer went on to her next scheduled question. In one sense, then, this recruitment to moral action does not seem to have met with success. In another sense, however, this narrative is but one moment in a ninety-minute interview in which the paramedic-narrator steadily performs his moral identity and issues other 'recruitments to action'. And, in the end, he is 'preaching to the choir' in that the interviewer already shares his moral commitments and concerns.

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Discussion

We have discussed the unique affordances and constraints that the research interview poses for an interviewee's doing moral work. On the one hand, interviewers provide ideal conditions for the interviewee to report and perform his or her ethical life (e.g. open-ended questions, ample floor time, repeated signals of alignment). The interviewee is thus relatively free to build his or her moral identity, construct the moral social personae of his or her lifeworld and conduct moral accounting of the goings-on in that world. On the other hand, because interviewers are discouraged from sending signals of agreement/disagreement, approval/disapproval, endorsement/rejection of the interviewee's moral accounting, the interviewees find little moral solidarity around their moral stance-taking or decision-making. This pattern contrasts with the powerful tendency toward joint social evaluation that is part of much daily talk. Hence, interviewees are mostly left to a strategic indirectness to pursue engagement-with-the-moral in the interview.

Nevertheless, moral narrative as a genre lends itself to this kind of indirectness. Historical characters in a story can be shaped up as sociological types that are linked to widespread cultural scripts and diagnostic of immediate concerns in the interview and the wider 'now' of cultural life. Narrators can reportively calibrate the spatio-temporalities of a past event so that the action seems to be occurring 'before our very eyes' for ethical appraisal. Such appraisal is conditioned on another calibration, a nomic calibration, that links persons and behavior to a transcendent realm of moral principle (i.e. 'how things should be').

In effect, a story becomes a case in a timeless present, and current interlocutors are invited to become witnesses and judges. In a research interview, this is the invitation to the interviewer to step outside his or her interviewer role. The invitation may or may not be successful, either in the next turn or over the course of the whole interview, but the interviewee has gone beyond describing and reporting his or her moral life to DOING BEING MORAL.

In the paramedic's story, the interviewee traversed precisely this path. He configured multiple indexicals to create sociological types of old woman, neighbors, and paramedic. He performed a complex reportive calibration in an almost slow-motion shift from story-told-entirely-in-the-past to the same story substantially re-told (twice) in the present tense of the interview. Through these tellings, it became increasingly clear that the neighbors did not fulfill their obligations to the old woman.

In the third telling the moral accounting became excruciatingly explicit as the paramedic staged the event as a timeless moral case in the form of a moral syllogism. His multiple use of generic pronouns (transposed 'I as the neighbor', the generic 'you', the desubjectified *hay que* form in Spanish) invoked a nomic moral order presumably shared by the interviewer. In short, the paramedic brought the villain into the room and asked the interviewer to judge the case. Oddly, the neighbor was 'saved by the bell' as an office telephone rang in the interview room and caused the drama to dissolve. Nevertheless, in this one question-answer sequence we see the interweaving of the three dimensions of 'doing being moral' in the research interview: identity work, moral accounting, and recruitment to action.

Of course, as any transcript does, this one also raises additional questions. First, one long narrative, facilitated by strikingly few interviewer turns, cannot be

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representative of the larger variability of intersubjective entextualization of moral talk in an interview. Many similar, morally themed, question-answer sequences are necessary to capture the interactional co-construction that we acknowledge as analysts.

A second question is: to what extent is moral performance, and especially recruitment to action, dependent on shared cultural and moral ground between interviewer and interviewee? In Koven's data (2016), both interviewees and interviewers shared age, gender, bicultural experience, and immigration history, and no doubt this sharing contributed to the interviewees' successful appeals for affiliation. In our data, Puerto Rican hurricane survivors were talking with Puerto Rican hurricane survivors, and the interviews show numerous instances where both relied on this sharing in their talk. Granted the ubiquitous moral tendency to evaluate oneself and others, it remains an empirical question to what extent shared moral ground is a key parameter of variation in moral talk in general and recruitment to action in particular.

A third question opens onto wider research opportunities. The research interview is intrinsically collaborative, meaning that interviewees 'put their worlds into words' (Strauss & Feiz 2014), not in some general sense, but FOR their interviewers. As we have shown, sometimes interviewees actively invite their interviewers into those worlds. Specifically, we have examined in detail one morally themed narrative in which this occurred. In what other situations, around what other topics, and for what other purposes might interviewees exercise this intricate, discursive recruitment to action?

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Cite this article: Schrauf, Robert William and Patria C. López de Victoria Rodríguez (2026). On 'doing being moral' in the research interview. *Language in Society* 55(4):654–675. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404525101462

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404525101462 Published online by Cambridge University Press