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## **Identities and Self-Verification in the Small Group\***

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*This research examines the relationship between the meanings contained in one's identity and the meanings attributed to one's behavior by both oneself and others in small-group interaction. The goal is to provide an empirical test of expectations derived from identity theory and from the structural symbolic interaction perspective concerning the link between persons' identities, their behaviors, their own interpretation of their behaviors, and others' interpretations of their behaviors. Of interest are three issues: whether others attribute the same meanings to one's role performance as does the self, whether the meanings attributed both by the self and by others verify (correspond to) the meanings contained in one's identity, and the consequences when these meanings fail to correspond. The results suggest that a shared meaning structure does develop among actors in a small group and allows all members similarly to interpret each other's behavior, and that this shared interpretation tends to verify the group members' identities. In addition, it was found that when discrepancies exist between the meanings of a group member's role performance and the meanings of his or her identity, the group member is less satisfied with his or her role performance in the group. The implications of these results for identity theory are discussed.*

Both motivation and reflexivity are central components of the identity model as outlined in identity theory (Burke 1991). These two components become even more significant in applying identity theory to individuals in a group, because it is through them that a number of important processes take place. In the group we must account not only for the link between a person's identity and his or her behavior, but also for the *maintenance* of that link in the presence of other demands on the person's behavior; these other demands take the form of others' behavior and expectations, as well as the situational demands of the group in regard to attaining *its* goals. Reflexivity and motivation are keys to this account.

Identity theory views reflexivity in terms of a control system (Powers 1973) which takes account not only of feedback about the self from the social environment, but also of self-views already incorporated into the identity standard. From a control system perspective, reflexivity is the self's way of taking account of both internal self-standards and external self-relevant feedback from one's current role performance to influence that role performance in ways that make the new self-relevant feedback consistent

with the internal self-standards (Burke 1980). The striving for consistency between one's self-relevant feedback and one's internal self-standards (also known as self-verification; see Swann 1983) is the motivational component of the identity model (Burke 1991). Thus persons can observe their own role performance as well as others' reactions to it, and can continuously use both of those perceptions to modify their role performance so that it supports and is consistent with their identity standard.

In this way, identity theory explains the relationship between identities and performances. Most of the research that examines this relationship, however, has been from the perspective of one person (the actor) and the behavioral choices made by the actor (Burke and Hoelter 1988; Burke and Reitzes 1981, 1991; Burke and Tully 1977; Swann 1987). Strictly speaking, the identity model is concerned only with the *actor's* identity, perceptions (feedback), and behavior, and thus is fairly psychological in its orientation; we must expand our model to consider sets of interacting persons or groups in order to deal with sociologically interesting issues.

This expansion becomes possible by incorporating additional ideas from the symbolic interaction framework. In that framework it is assumed that people share meanings and communicate with significant (shared) symbols. Thus the meanings of one's behavior to oneself should be "the same" as the meanings of that behavior

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to other interactants in the situation. Therefore it is of interest to examine the process by which people maintain role performances that both verify or support their own identities and contribute to the overall group processes of achieving the group's goal. Do others perceive the meanings of one's behavior as does oneself? Do those perceptions by others play a role in the feedback process? If self-verification is to occur in groups, the answer to both of these questions must be yes.

The line of research most relevant to this issue is the work on reflected appraisals by Felson and others (e.g., Felson 1980, 1985; Felson and Reed 1986; Ichiyama 1993). Much of Felson's work, using survey techniques, tends to show that there is little relationship between others' appraisals of one's identity and one's own identity. Ichiyama, however, has shown a much closer correspondence in small-group interaction studied directly. A number of other studies have examined others' assessments of the meaning of one's *role performance* and how that corresponds to the meaning of one's identity (Alexander and Rudd 1984; Alexander and Wiley 1981; Heise and Thomas 1989; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988). Few studies, however, have analyzed the relationship between identities and role performances in situations where multiple actors may disturb any one person's identity/behavior relationship. The work of Alexander cited above, for example, is confined primarily to laboratory studies of an actor's ability to convey identifying meanings through behavior aimed toward an audience; the work of Heise and his associates is limited primarily to paper-and-pencil studies of responses to written vignettes and stimulus sentences to describe the influence of various (written) behaviors on perceptions of meanings attributed to actors' identities. To further our understanding of the relationship between identity and role performance, this research considers the roles of reflexivity and motivation in extending identity theory to examine how both one's own and others' assessments of one's role performance correspond to one's identity, given multiple actors in the situation.

#### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

##### *Identity Feedback Model*

The concepts of motivation and reflexivity are not new to the symbolic interaction

tradition. They have always been considered critical for understanding the individual in a social context. Although the process has been conceptualized in different ways, identities are thought to motivate role performances. In each of these conceptions, however, meaning is a critical component. Foote (1951) argues that identities serve as a source of motivation not only by calling up particular activity (relevant to a particular role identity), but also by giving that activity meaning and purpose as belonging to the self. Symbolic interactionists indicate that identities motivate role performances because they classify (give meaning to) social objects including the self, others, and items of performances (Burke 1980; Burke and Reitzes 1981; Stryker 1980). Identities motivate role performances that sustain and verify the meanings contained in the identity. Thus identities enable people to predict and control the nature of social reality, which in turn is necessary for survival (Swann et al. 1987). In sum, identities motivate role performances because those role performances are meaningful. They are meaningful to the actor by providing self-verification, and to others by providing them with ways to identify and categorize the actor. In addition, the self-verification motive is particularly strong because the failure of self-verification leads to dissatisfaction, discomfort, and distress (Burke 1991). Hence the actor is motivated in part by the desire to avoid the dissatisfaction and distress.

The idea that people are motivated to sustain their self-views and that they do so by thinking and behaving in ways that reinforce those self-views leads to the second important aspect of the self, its reflexivity (Burke 1980; Swann 1987). Reflexivity is often described as individuals' ability to see themselves as objects, which allows them to "self-consciously" take themselves into account in formulating action alternatives. Reflexivity allows the self-concept to first develop and then sustain itself through self-verification. The feedback process of the identity model (described below) is based on the reflexive nature of the self and explains the relationship between identities and role performances. We describe the identity model below and then return to the concepts of motivation and reflexivity to understand identity in a group.

In identity theory, an identity is viewed as a control system (Powers 1973) composed of four parts (see Figure 1). *Input* from the

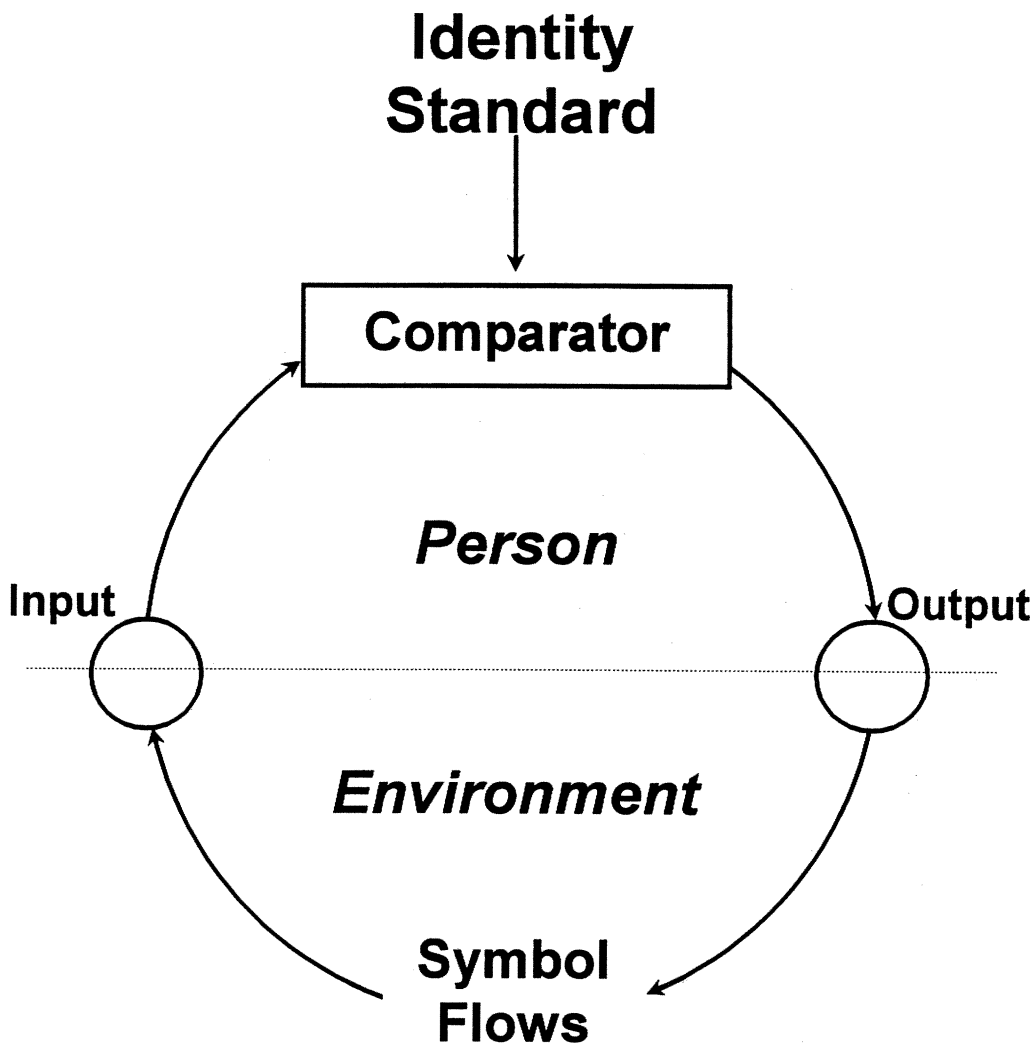


Figure 1. Model of the Identity Process (Adapted from Burke 1991)

environment, consisting of self-relevant meanings, is brought to the *comparator* along with self-defining meanings from the *identity standard*. Perception of the self-relevant aspects of the situation is the reflexive aspect of the self. The comparator relates the two sets of meanings. Insofar as they differ, error is present and is felt as a form of discomfort ranging from relatively mild dissatisfaction to severe distress. *Output*, or meaningful behavior, varies according to the magnitude of the error. This behavior in turn modifies the situation and creates new perceptions of input. The system operates on the principle of negative feedback to minimize the error between the input perceptions (self-relevant meanings) and the self-defining meanings from the identity standard. In this sense, the

input perceptions are the controlled quantity, and the "goal" of the system is to verify and support the self-defining meanings of the identity standard. Identities do this by inducing behavior that changes social situations so that the input perceptions conform to the self-defining meanings.<sup>1</sup> This is the motivational aspect of the self.

The negative feedback cycle of the normal operation of identities is a continuous process. The feedback that takes place during social interaction is part of a continuous loop

<sup>1</sup> Identity theory recognizes that persistent failure to achieve congruity by modifying the situation may first result in attempting to leave the situation (Swann 1990). Failure in that attempt may ultimately lead to change in the identity standard that defines who one is (Burke 1991).

from the input of the actor's perception of identity-relevant meanings to the output of the actor's meaningful role performance in the situation, and back again to the input. Depending on several factors such as the salience of the identity, the degree of commitment to the identity, or the importance of the identity, interruption or failure of this process of maintaining congruence between the perceptions of self-relevant meanings in the situation and the self-meanings in the identity standard will result in outcomes ranging from dissatisfaction with the role to psychological distress (Burke 1991).

### *Group Processes, Identities, and Satisfaction*

When we move from studying the relationship between identities and behavior in isolation to studying that relationship in a group, additional considerations arise. In a group it becomes more problematic to control perceptions of self-relevant meanings by altering performances until one achieves some degree of correspondence between those meanings and the meanings in the identity standard. One reason for this difficulty is that in the group, some of the self-relevant meanings monitored by the actor emanate from the actions of others, each of whom has his or her own goals (in part to sustain their own identities). In a group, every person must appraise everyone else. This situation places important sources of self-relevant meanings beyond the actor's direct control and creates more ways in which actors may fail to keep self-relevant meanings in alignment with their identity standard. Thus it produces dissatisfaction, discomfort, or distress. Another reason for the difficulty of keeping self-relevant feedback consistent with one's identity in the group is that each person, to some extent, must subordinate the self to the goals of the group. The coordinated activity of the group members needed to achieve the group's goals places additional constraints on the actors, who are trying to maintain correspondence between their inputs and their identity standards.

Within the symbolic interactionist framework, it is understood that people share and communicate with significant symbols; thus group members can share an understanding of the meanings of behavior. These shared meanings help to define or identify all of the members of the group to one another as well

as to themselves. Because each can know the other as he or she knows his or her own identity, coordinated interaction is possible; this simultaneously accomplishes the group's goals and sustains the individuals' identities. Achieving this coordination may well require negotiation and compromise (McCall and Simmons 1978). Hence we cannot expect a perfect correspondence. Sustaining and verifying one's identity in a group requires not only behavior on the part of the actor that confirms his or her identity, but also that the behavior be interpreted and accepted by others, and that the behavior of those others confirm the actor's identity. Thus the identity system operates on the basis of one person's activity and perceptions, whereas social interaction requires shared meanings (Mead 1934).

As we have seen, however, compromise in the self-verification process leads to distress and dissatisfaction. In considering this issue with respect to the two sources of feedback in the self-verification process, McCall and Simmons (1978:88–89) suggest that in most cases, individuals attach less importance to *others'* expectations about their role performance than to *their own* expectations. The authors point out that others' evaluation often is built into one's own self-expectations. Thus, in regard to the identity feedback process, when a gap exists between the meanings of one's identity and the meanings contained in feedback about one's performance, actors may respond by becoming distressed and thus dissatisfied with their performances or with the situation itself.

This idea is explicated further by Stryker and Statham (1984: 349–50), who suggest that satisfaction depends on the extent to which role performance and self-image are integrated into the interaction process. In other words, the more successfully an actor can cause others to assess his or her role performance as representative of the actor's own self-image, the more likely the actor will be satisfied. Therefore our research hypothesizes that correspondence between the actor's identity and others' assessments should give the actor a feeling of satisfaction with role performance, as well as with the situation itself. Conversely, dissatisfaction should arise from the lack of correspondence.

Investigating the relationship between identities and role performances in the group, then, leads to the following hypotheses:

1. Because social interaction requires shared meanings, a positive relationship should exist between an actor's perceptions of his or her role performance and others' perceptions of that role performance.
2. Because actors attempt to keep perceptions of the meaning of their role performances consistent with their identities, a positive relationship should exist between the meanings of their behavior and their identities.
3. Because coordinated interaction in the group is based on the use of significant symbols, a positive relationship should exist between the meanings of an actor's identity and the meanings of his or her role performance as perceived by others in the group.
4. Because actors' failure to keep their perceptions of the meanings of their role performances consistent with their identities leads to discomfort and distress, a negative relationship should exist between performance-identity discrepancies and satisfaction with the performance.

## PROCEDURE

### *Context*

This research uses a small group setting to test these hypotheses. Although the task leadership role evolves in response to the solution of certain group problems, Bales and his coworkers have shown that the person who plays that emergent role, while not elected in the context studied, nevertheless tends to persist in that position over a series of sessions (Slater 1955). Thus role performances seem to express particular characteristics of persons who occupy a given position (a situation leading to their persistence in the role), as well as the position itself. Those performances represent how persons come to terms with expectations (both their own and others). These individual dispositions to such performances of leadership roles have not been studied fully. Yet a *leadership role identity*, though not investigated until now, would be a strong candidate for such an individual characteristic. Even so, in hypothesizing leadership role identity as an important determinant of leadership role behavior, we are not suggesting that it is the only determinant.

Studying the task leadership role (identity and performance) in the small, task-oriented discussion group that Bales popularized provides an excellent context for testing our hypotheses. We are provided with 1) a way of studying face-to-face interaction, 2) a way to

examine the relationship between specific identities and the performances of activities associated with those identities, and 3) a method for examining others' assessments of each actor's performance in an interactive situation. On the negative side, the task leadership role in small laboratory groups is probably not very important; this may reduce the effects we wish to test.

### *Sample*

The sample analyzed for this research consists of 48 four-person laboratory groups, each composed of two males and two females. To form the groups we randomly sampled undergraduates from the whole student population at a large midwestern university and invited them to participate in a study of communication in small groups. The students attended a general meeting (of 50 to 60 students at a time), at which we explained the project in general terms as a study of communication in groups and the factors that influence communication. The students were told that they would be paid \$10 for filling out a background questionnaire at the general meeting and for participating in a discussion group at some point during the next two weeks.

Next the students filled out a schedule of times when they would be available; then they completed the background questionnaire, which took about 20 minutes. Meanwhile the investigator constructed groups randomly from the persons who were available at each specific time, with the added constraint that each group contain two males and two females. After the questionnaire was completed, group assignment times were given to each person along with a reminder slip. All subjects were called on the day preceding their scheduled meeting to remind them of that meeting.

The group discussion sessions were held over the two weeks following the general meeting. Each group of four persons participated in four different discussions based on group polarization or choice dilemma protocols<sup>2</sup> (two that usually showed a shift to risk

<sup>2</sup> The choice dilemmas represent fictitious life circumstances in which a person must choose between a risky alternative (e.g., an attractive job in a high-risk company that may fail, or a delicate but risky operation to relieve a condition preventing pregnancy) with potentially high

and two that usually showed a shift to conservatism). We used the choice dilemma problems to provide the groups with a task in which they had to reach a consensus. The four discussions were held during the one session in which the group met. Each session lasted about an hour and a half; each discussion lasted 10 to 20 minutes.

Each of the discussions followed the same format. Before the discussion, the individual members read the choice dilemma,<sup>3</sup> and wrote down their personal recommendations. Then the members were instructed to discuss the problem and to reach a consensus for making a group recommendation. After each discussion was completed, the subjects each filled out a questionnaire, in which they evaluated the discussion and rated each other on a series of items measuring the degree to which they performed various activities during the discussion.

### Measures

*Task leadership role identity* is measured from participants' responses to five self-descriptive statements about task-oriented activities; these were included in the background questionnaire filled out at the general meeting. The content of the items, shown in Table 1, is consistent with descriptions of the characteristics of task-oriented individuals described in the literature (Bales 1950; Burke 1967, 1968, 1971; Slater 1955). Response categories consisted of five-point Likert scales ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" on some statements, and from "usually" to "never" on others. The responses were scored from 1 to 5: low task orientation was scored 1. As shown in Table 1, these items factored into a single value with an omega reliability (Heise and Bohrnstedt 1970) of .79. We summed the responses on these ratings for each person, and obtained

task leadership role identity scores ranging from 5 to 25.

We created the variable *perceived task leadership role performance* in a similar fashion, based on items on the post-discussion questionnaire which were designed to measure task leadership performance. After each discussion (four times in all), the participants were asked to rank each other and themselves on four task leadership performance items (shown in Table 1). These have been used in prior research (Burke 1971). The items formed a single factor with an omega reliability of .95. The rankings were reversed so that a high number corresponded to a high ranking, and were summed across items.

We derived two different measures from the performance items. First was the set of self-rankings: each person received the average of their own rankings of themselves across the four questions. The second set consisted of the rankings by others (not including the self). Each person was assigned the average of the 12 rankings applied to him or her by the others in the group (three other members multiplied by four questions). In case of a tied ranking, we used the mean rank of the tied participants.

We employed two measures of *satisfaction/dissatisfaction*. Each was based on an 11-category Likert-type post discussion questionnaire item that dealt directly with satisfaction. The first of these was a general satisfaction item pertaining to the discussion as a whole (*To what extent do you feel satisfied with this last discussion?*); the second was directed more specifically to the respondent's satisfaction with his or her role in the discussion (*To what extent were you satisfied with the role you played in this last discussion?*). The 11 categories were anchored at the ends (*very little* and *very much*) and in the middle (*moderate*). The average correlation between the two items over the four discussions was .68.

We used two measures of *discrepancy* between identity and role performance. Each was based on the magnitude of the absolute difference between one of the two perceived task leadership role performances (as measured above) and the role performance expected, given the respondent's task leadership role identity. The expected role performance was measured as the predicted role performance based on OLS regression of perceived role performance on task leader

benefits, or a conservative alternative (e.g., a merely "okay" job with a very stable company, or no operation, but no threat to life). Subjects must indicate the highest level of risk they would tolerate while still recommending the risky alternative (odds of failure are 1, 3, 5, 7, or 9 out of 10). The "shift to risk" (or to conservatism) occurs when the average of the individual preferences before group discussion is less (or more) risky than the group's decision. An example protocol is found in Brown (1965:657).

<sup>3</sup> The four choice dilemma problems were presented in a randomized, balanced order to remove possible effects of order of presentation.

Table 1. Items, Factor Loadings,<sup>a</sup> and Reliabilities for Task Leadership Identity and Task Leadership Performance

Task Leadership Identity	Loadings
(1) When I work on a committee I like to take charge of things.	.71
(2) I am able to keep at a job longer than most people.	.55
(3) I try to influence strongly other people's actions.	.62
(4) I am a hard worker.	.70
(5) I try to be a dominant person when I am with people.	.72
Reliability (Ω)	.79
Task Leadership Performance	Loadings
(1) Providing fuel for the discussion by introducing ideas and opinions for the rest of the group of discussions	.96
(2) Guiding the discussion and kept it moving effectively	.90
(3) Attempting to influence the group's opinion	.83
(4) Standing out as a leader of the discussion	.96
Reliability (Ω)	.95

<sup>a</sup> Iterated principal-factor analysis

identity.<sup>4</sup> *Other discrepancy* is the magnitude of the absolute difference between the role performance expected on the basis of identity and the actual role performance as perceived by others in the group. *Self-discrepancy* is the absolute difference between the role performance expected on the basis of identity and the actual role performance as perceived by the actor.<sup>5</sup>

RESULTS

Table 2 presents basic information about each of the measures used in the study, including means, standard deviations, and correlations for each of the four discussions. As the table shows, a respondent's own

perceptions of his or her task leadership role performance is correlated highly with others' perceptions of the respondent's performance (.6 to .7), indicating (in accordance with our first hypothesis) a high degree of shared understanding of the meanings of the role behavior perceived. Each actor perceives his or her own role performance very similarly to the way it is perceived by others in the group. Agreement is not perfect, however, and there is room for misunderstandings.

To test our second hypothesis about the link between an actor's identity and the actor's own assessment of his or her role performance, we regressed measures of role performance assessment on the identity measures in each of the discussions, using seemingly unrelated regressions (Hanushek and Jackson 1977). Table 3 presents the standardized regression coefficients for the relationship between perceived task leadership performance and task leadership identity in each discussion. The effect of the actor's task leadership identity on his or her own assessment of task leadership role performance strongly supports our second hypothesis. The standardized regression coefficients show a significant correspondence between the actor's task leadership identity, as measured before the discussions, and his or her own assessed task leadership performance in each of the discussions. These results confirm the expectation that group members will maintain consistency between their role performances and their identities (as measured before the discussions), even in the presence of others who are trying to do the same thing. Although it is clear that this process is going on, the coefficients are not so high as to

<sup>4</sup> From the regression formula  $\hat{y} = a + bx$ , where  $x$  is the task leadership identity,  $\hat{y}$  is the predicted task leadership performance, and  $a$  and  $b$  respectively are OLS-based estimates of the intercept and the slope, one can see that using the predicted scores amounts to a rescaling of the identity measure into units of the measure of perceived role performance. Thus, when a difference is calculated (the discrepancy), we are dealing with the same units of measure. As can be seen from this procedure, discrepancy is equivalent to the absolute value of the residual (error) derived by regressing perceived role performance on leadership identity.

<sup>5</sup> The use of a composite (difference) score here is dictated by the theoretical construct that is being measured, namely a discrepancy. Although it is true that a difference score is less reliable than either of the two parts that make it up (when the two parts are correlated positively), this means only that the measure of our theoretical construct may not have as high a reliability as we might like. It does not mean that we should avoid the use of the measure, or that the measure has no reliability. This lower reliability can work against us because it implies greater difficulty in testing hypotheses: the power of the tests would be less. On the other hand, if results obtained with the measure are significant, they are significant in spite of the somewhat lower reliability.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Measures

Discussion 1	Mean	sd	Correlations						
			(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
(1) Other ratings	10.3	3.4							
(2) Self-ratings	9.2	3.2	0.71						
(3) Other discrepancy	2.8	1.8	0.00	0.03					
(4) Self-discrepancy	2.4	1.8	0.06	0.16	0.68				
(5) Discussion satisfaction	8.3	2.1	-0.02	0.05	-0.02	0.06			
(6) Role satisfaction	8.3	1.9	-0.29	-0.29	-0.26	-0.23	0.59		
(7) Task leadership identity	13.6	2.7	0.24	0.36	-0.05	0.10	-0.03	-0.19	

Discussion 2	Mean	sd	Correlations						
			(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
(1) Other ratings	10.2	3.0							
(2) Self-ratings	9.3	3.4	0.66						
(3) Other discrepancy	2.5	1.6	-0.02	0.03					
(4) Self-discrepancy	2.8	1.8	0.07	0.19	0.65				
(5) Discussion satisfaction	8.6	2.4	-0.04	-0.12	-0.06	-0.14			
(6) Role satisfaction	8.4	2.1	-0.14	-0.37	-0.15	-0.38	0.70		
(7) Task leadership identity	13.6	2.7	0.21	0.14	0.04	0.00	0.10	0.05	

Discussion 3	Mean	sd	Correlations						
			(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
(1) Other ratings	10.3	3.0							
(2) Self-ratings	9.2	3.4	0.60						
(3) Other discrepancy	2.4	1.6	0.03	-0.05					
(4) Self-discrepancy	2.7	1.8	0.05	0.19	0.57				
(5) Discussion satisfaction	8.6	2.2	-0.02	-0.09	0.00	-0.06			
(6) Role satisfaction	8.3	2.3	-0.18	-0.38	-0.15	-0.36	0.64		
(7) Task leadership identity	13.6	2.7	0.24	0.29	0.03	0.03	-0.10	-0.13	

Discussion 4	Mean	sd	Correlations						
			(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
(1) Other ratings	10.2	3.0							
(2) Self-ratings	9.3	3.7	0.62						
(3) Other discrepancy	2.5	1.6	-0.02	0.03					
(4) Self-discrepancy	3.0	1.9	0.03	0.19	0.61				
(5) Discussion satisfaction	8.5	2.2	-0.08	-0.12	-0.08	-0.12			
(6) Role satisfaction	8.4	2.2	-0.22	-0.34	-0.22	-0.34	0.76		
(7) Task leadership identity	13.6	2.7	0.14	0.25	0.03	0.04	0.02	-0.04	

preclude other determinants of task leadership behavior. As a result, we find a variable amount of discrepancy between the actual (perceived) role performance and the role performance expected on the basis of the participant's identity.

Table 3 also presents results relevant to a test of Hypothesis 3. These are the results of an analysis similar to that used for testing Hypothesis 2. In this case, however, rather than using an actor's own perceptions of his or her task leadership behavior, we use other group members' perceptions of the actor's task leadership performance. In this case we see a very similar pattern of results, thus confirming Hypothesis 3. The results show the expected consistency between the meanings of the actor's task leadership identity and the meanings of the actor's

role performance as perceived by others in the group. Thus group members not only share meanings of the role performances; in addition, because an actor's performances are tied to that actor's identity, others can infer correctly (with

Table 3. Standardized Regression Coefficients from Seemingly Unrelated Regressions of Perceptions of Task Leadership Role Performance on Task Leadership Identity

Discussion	Task Performance Ratings	
	By Self	By Others
1	0.357**	0.240**
2	0.139**	0.206**
3	0.290**	0.243**
4	0.253*	0.136*

\*  $p \leq .05$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

some margin of error) one another's task leadership identities from the role performances of those others.

The fourth hypothesis examines satisfaction as an outcome of consistency between identities and the actor's own assessed role performance as associated with those identities (i.e., the self-relevant meanings associated with one's performance). As noted above, identity theory proposes that when a discrepancy exists between self-relevant perceptions and one's identity standard, this incongruence leads to some distress and thus may affect satisfaction. We used two measures of satisfaction: one pertained to satisfaction with the overall discussion, and the other to satisfaction with one's role. We regressed each of these measures on the magnitude scores for identity-perception discrepancy. Table 4 displays the results of the analyses of the effects of the discrepancy magnitudes on satisfaction with one's role in the discussion.

Table 4 shows that the hypothesized effects of discrepancy between one's task leadership identity and one's own assessments of task leadership role performance were present in each of the four discussions. In each discussion, the greater the magnitude of the discrepancy, the less the satisfaction expressed by the respondent. Conversely, the less the discrepancy (i.e., the greater the consistency between actors' identities and assessments of their own role performance), the greater the actors' satisfaction with their role in helping the group to reach a consensus on a solution to the problem facing the group.<sup>6</sup> This finding does not mean only that persons who see themselves as leaders are more satisfied if they are playing a leadership role in the group. It also means that persons who do not see themselves as leaders are more satisfied if they are *not* playing a leadership role. As predicted by identity theory, the important consideration is not the level of leadership but the congruency between identity meanings and performance meanings.

Table 4 also displays the results of an analysis in which we measured the discrepancy between the meanings of the actor's leadership identity and the meanings of the actor's performance as perceived by others in the group. Again

Table 4. Standardized Regression Coefficients from Seemingly Unrelated Regressions of Satisfaction with Role on Discrepancy between Perceived Ratings and Identity Expectations

Discussion	Discrepancy with Ratings as Perceived	
	By Self	By Others
1	-0.326**	-0.332**
2	-0.408**	-0.215**
3	-0.375**	-0.196**
4	-0.380**	-0.251**

\*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

we obtained similar results, although (as expected) they are not as strong as when the perceptions are the actor's own, and they appear to derive both from self and from others assessing the same role performance. In an analysis not reported here, for example, the addition of "other" discrepancy to the regression equation examining the effects of "own" discrepancy on satisfaction does not result in a significant increase in explanatory power. These results are also consistent with McCall and Simmons's (1978) suggestion that others' expectations are already built into one's own expectations for performance.

Table 5 shows that the discrepancy magnitudes had little or no significant effect on members' overall satisfaction with the discussion, whether that discrepancy was measured between the actor's identity and his or her performance as perceived by others in the group or as perceived by the actor. A possible explanation for this lack of effect is that because we are examining the relation between a role identity and perceptions of the meaning of the role performance, the disruptive impact of incongruity does not generalize beyond the specific role. This explanation, however, does not preclude the possibility that such incongruity in a more important role (than that of a leader in an experimental group) may have effects which go beyond the immediate role. It may also be that because only a single item was used to measure general satisfaction, unreliability is masking a potential relationship. Perhaps a more reliable assessment of general satisfaction with the discussion would reveal a relationship between discrepancy and satisfaction.

## DISCUSSION

Identity theory suggests that people are motivated to control their behavior not so as

<sup>6</sup> Examination of the average satisfaction scores by level of discrepancy shows that those actors with the least discrepancy were highly satisfied, with scores around 9 on the 11-point satisfaction scale. Actors with the greatest discrepancy had satisfaction scores near 6, the middle of the satisfaction scale.

Table 5. Standardized Regression Coefficients from Seemingly Unrelated Regressions of Satisfaction with Discussion on Discrepancy between Perceived Ratings and Identity Expectations

Discussion	Discrepancy with Ratings as Perceived	
	By Self	By Others
1	-0.012	-0.084
2	-0.147*	-0.107
3	-0.086	-0.035
4	-0.132*	-0.107

\*  $p \leq .05$ .

to bring that behavior into line with some standard, but in order to use their reflexive ability to make perceptions of identity-relevant meanings in the situation, including their own behavior, congruent or consistent with their identity standard (Burke 1991). Furthermore, identity theory deals not with the behavior itself but with meanings of the identity and the behavior. The connection between identity and behavior is based on interpreting or assessing the meanings of each, such that the meanings of the performance are assessed in terms of the meanings of the identity (self) generated in the interactive situation (Burke and Reitzes 1981). This is the first study that looks at actual perceptions of behavior after the behavior has occurred and compares the *meanings* of that behavior with the *meanings* of the identity as measured before the occurrence of the behavior. We see that behavior meanings tend strongly to match identity meanings. This is also the first study to examine the relationship between identities and role performance meanings in situations involving multiple persons who may disturb the relationship between identity meaning and behavior meaning with their own demands. Again, in spite of the presence of three other persons, all of whose activity must be coordinated to achieve the group goal of achieving consensus on the problem under discussion, each person can maintain a moderate relationship between his or her perceived leadership performances and leadership identity.

Whereas the identity model considers only the *actor's* identity, perceptions, and meaningful behavior, it is assumed in the symbolic interactionist framework that people share meanings in a common culture. This assumption suggests that the meanings of one's behavior to oneself should be "the same" as

the meanings of that behavior to another interactant in the situation; otherwise there could be no communication or coordinated activity to work toward common goals. This paper shows that the behavior of each individual in a group is perceived similarly (in terms of meaning) by the actors themselves and by others in the group. As a result, when actors maintain congruency between the meanings of their identity standards and the meanings of their behaviors, others in the group are thereby allowed to correctly infer the actors' identities. As a result, all interactants in the group are granted some degree of consensus and predictability in the group context.

Viewed in another way, the input is the controlled quantity of the identity-feedback process model. The input comes from the social situation, and it consists of both the actor's perceptions of the situation and the actor's interpretations of others' perceptions of the situation. These perceptions by the actor and by others are shared, because the actor and the others share a symbolic system for interpreting the situation, and we have seen (in Table 2) that each actor and others in the group interpret the actor's behavior similarly. Others' assessments are important parts of the social interaction process because those assessments affect the others' behavior, which in turn is perceived by the actor and interpreted with respect to the meanings it conveys about the actor's role performances. If others did not share an understanding of the meanings of behavior with the actor, they would not be able to interpret the meanings of the actor's behavior in a way in which the actor interpreted them, and they would not be able to act in a way that confirmed those meanings. Nor would the actor be able to interpret others' behavior appropriately as confirming or disconfirming the meanings of his or her own behavior.

The second question that we raised here concerned what happens when people cannot behave in a manner that fully confirms their identity. Identity theory suggests that discomfort should increase and that satisfaction with the role performance should decrease, thus producing motivation to maintain congruency (Burke 1991). We did not measure discomfort, but this expectation was confirmed with respect to satisfaction, though in a very specific manner. The failure of a leadership role performance to match the meaning of

one's leadership identity did not affect general satisfaction with the discussion, but it did reduce satisfaction with one's role performance in the group. This was true whether the leadership role performance was assessed by oneself or by others in the group. One potential implication of this finding is that people segregate their responses in this situation and maintain role-specific reactions to the discrepancy. It remains to be seen whether this segregation of responses would remain true for roles that were more important than being a leader in a laboratory group, or for roles that were held for long periods of time. As mentioned above, some evidence suggests that crossover effects occur when roles are important and long-term—for example, between work and family roles (e.g., Bielby and Bielby 1989).

We have not discussed one question about these results: Who are the people who experience a discrepancy between their identity meanings and their role performance meanings? Do people who experience a discrepancy in the first discussion continue to experience that discrepancy in the second, third, and fourth discussions? To address this question, we examined the correlations among the discrepancy scores over the four discussions to learn whether the persons who could not match the meanings of their identities and their performances in one discussion were also the persons who failed to match them in other discussions. If this were the case, it would suggest that some persons are better able than others to keep congruence between their role performances and identities. Then it would be important to explore the reasons for such ability. Does it rest in particular characteristics of individuals—that some are more competent than others in maintaining congruency? Does it rest in particular positions that have more power—that with power comes the ability to keep one's role performance congruent with one's identity?

The results of a correlation analysis (not reported here) show almost no relationships among the discrepancy scores across the four discussions (averaging .08 to .10). People who have high discrepancies in one discussion have neither high discrepancies (indicating persistence) nor low discrepancies (indicating compensation) in subsequent discussions. Such an outcome is also consistent with the idea that the discrepancy score is merely a random vari-

able. Two factors, however, argue against that possibility. First, we have noted that persons with large discrepancy scores are not satisfied with their role performance, so the measure of discrepancy appears to assess something that has consequences. Second, we examined the correlation matrix for task leadership performance scores across the four discussions—both those based on self-perceptions and those based on others' perceptions (not reported here). We noted that these are moderately strong (.30–.35 for self-perceptions and .53–.58 for others' perceptions), an indication of a general persistence in the task leadership role.<sup>7</sup> Also, from the results reported already, we know that performance of the task leadership role is generally congruent with the person's leadership identity.

Therefore we conclude that people try actively to reduce the discrepancy between the meanings of their identities and the meanings of their performances, and they do this in the face of pressures to alter their performances to fit in with the other members of the group and achieve the group goal. That there are no persistent winners and losers in the process suggests that the process does not depend on personal characteristics, nor do any power differences seem to come into play among these essentially equal-status student volunteers. What is left is some variability in the degree to which people can make their performances fit their identities, but also persistence in the general levels of task leadership performance which depend on differences in participants' task leadership identities. Persons with a higher leadership identity engage in more leadership behaviors across all the discussions, but the actual amount of that behavior varies randomly *around that higher level*. Similarly, persons with a lower leadership identity engage in fewer leadership behaviors across the sessions; the actual amount varies randomly *around that lower level*.

The relationship between identity and role performance becomes more complicated as we move from studying that relationship for individuals in relative isolation (as in much

<sup>7</sup> To understand how the discrepancy score is not correlated over time (across sessions), whereas the task leadership performance (perceptions) are so correlated and the identity score is constant over time, one must recall that the discrepancy score is a residual. The constant identity score has been subtracted from the perceived performance score.

prior work) to studying it in a group or an interactive context. This paper is a first empirical attempt, in the context of identity theory, to raise our understanding of identity and interaction to this more complicated level. In doing so, we have seen that people generally still can make the meaning of their performances congruent with their identity meanings, even in competition with others for interactive resources. Also, we have seen that insofar as they cannot keep congruence between the meanings of their role performance and the meanings of their identities, they become dissatisfied with their role. Finally, as the symbolic interaction perspective has long held, meanings are shared such that people interpret each other's activity in much the same way; thus they can infer each other's identities, thereby become predictable to each other, and build stable interaction structures.

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