

Identities and Self-Verification in the Small Group

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## Abstract

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 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 others verify (correspond to) the meanings contained in one's identity, and the consequences when these meanings fail to correspond. The results show evidence that a shared meaning structure among actors in a small group does develop that allows all members similarly interpret each other's behavior, and that this shared interpretation tends to verify the identities of group members. In addition, it was found that when there are discrepancies 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.

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

## Introduction

Both motivation and reflexivity are central components of the identity model as outlined in identity theory (Burke 1991). In applying identity theory to individuals in a group context, these two components become even more significant, because it is through them that a number of important processes take place. In the group context we have to account not only for the link between a person's identity and his or her behavior, but we have also to account for the *maintenance* of that link in the presence of other demands on the person's behavior; other demands in the form of others' behavior and expectations, as well as the situational demands of the group vis-a-vis the accomplishment of *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 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 ongoing role performance in ways that make 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 referred to as self-

verification, c.f., 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 continuously use both of those perceptions to modify their role performance so that it supports and is consistent with their identity standard.

This is the way that identity theory explains the relationship between identities and performances. However, the majority of the research actually examining this relationship has been from the perspective of one person (the actor) and the behavioral choices they make (Burke and Tully 1977; Burke and Reitzes 1981; Swann 1987; Burke and Hoelter 1988; and Burke and Reitzes 1991). While, strictly speaking, the identity model only talks about the *actor's* identity, perceptions (feedback), and behavior, and is thus 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.

By incorporating additional ideas from the symbolic interaction framework, this expansion of the model becomes possible. In the SI 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 to other interactants in the situation. It is of interest, therefore, to examine the process by which people maintain role performances that both verify or support their own identities as well as contribute to the overall group processes of achieving the group's goal. Do others perceive

the meanings of one's behavior in a similar fashion to oneself, and do those perceptions of others play a role in the feedback process? For self-verification to occur in group settings, the answer to both of these question must be yes.

The line of research that has most relevance to this issue is the work on reflected appraisals done by Felson and others (e.g., Felson 1980; 1985; Felson and Reed 1986; Ichiyama 1993). While much of the work of Felson, using survey techniques, tends to show that there is not much relationship between others' appraisals of one's identity and one's own identity, in the context of small group interaction studied directly, Ichiyama has shown a much better correspondence. 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 Wiley 1981; Alexander and Rudd 1984; Heise and Thomas 1989; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988). However, few studies have analyzed the relationship between identities and role performances in situations where multiple actors may disturb the identity/behavior relationship of any one person. The work of Alexander above, for example, was primarily confined to laboratory studies of an actor's ability to convey identifying meanings through behavior aimed toward an audience, while the work of Heise and his associates has been confined 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 the way in which both one's own as well as 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 to be 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 by not only calling up particular activity (relevant to a particular role identity), but 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 (Stryker 1980; Burke 1980; Burke and Reitzes 1981). Identities motivate role performances that sustain and verify the meanings contained in the identity, enabling people to predict and control the nature of social reality (which in turn is necessary for survival) (Swann, Griffin, Predmore and Gaines 1987). In sum, identities motivate role performances because those role

performances are meaningful. They are meaningful to the actor by providing self-verification, and they are meaningful to others by providing ways for them to identify and categorize the actor. It should also be pointed out that the self-verification motive is particularly strong because the failure of self-verification leads to dissatisfaction, discomfort and distress (Burke 1991). Hence, the motivation is in part 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 their self-conceptions leads to the second important aspect of the self, its reflexivity (Burke 1980; Swann 1987). Reflexivity is often described as the ability of individuals to see themselves as objects, thus allowing them to "self-consciously" take themselves into account in formulating action alternatives. It is reflexivity that allows the self-concept to first develop and then to 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 and then return to the concepts of motivation and reflexivity to understand identity in a group context.

Within identity theory, an identity is viewed as a control system (Powers 1973) composed of four parts (see Figure 1). *Input* from the 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. To the extent that they differ, there is error which is felt as a form of discomfort ranging from relatively mild levels of dissatisfaction to more severe levels of distress. *Output*, or meaningful behavior varies as a result of the magnitude of the error. This behavior in turn modifies the situation and creates new input perceptions. 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.

(Figure 1 About Here)

It should be emphasized that the negative feedback cycle of the normal operation of identities is a continuous processes. The feedback that takes place during social interaction is part of a continuous loop 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 upon 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 to maintain 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 context, a number of additional considerations arise. In a group situation it becomes more of a problem to control perceptions of self-relevant meanings by altering performances until there is some degree of correspondence between those self-relevant meanings and the meanings in the identity standard. One reason for this difficulty is that in the group the sources of some of the self-relevant meanings being monitored by the actor are 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 puts important sources of self-relevant meanings outside the direct control of the actor and creates more ways in which actors may fail to keep self-relevant meanings in alignment with their identity standard thus producing levels of dissatisfaction, discomfort or distress. Another reason for the difficulty of keeping self-relevant feedback consistent with one's identity in the group context is that each person must, to some extent, subordinate the self to the goals of the group. The coordinated activity of the group members necessary to achieve the group goals puts additional

constraints on the actors who are trying to maintain correspondence between their inputs and identity standards.

Within the symbolic interactionist framework, it is understood that people share and communicate with significant symbols, thus there can be a shared understanding of the meanings of behavior in the group. These shared meanings help to define or identify all of the members of the group each to another as well as to themselves. Because each can know the other as he or she knows his or her own identity, coordinated interaction which simultaneously accomplishes the goals of the group and sustains the identities of the individuals is possible. 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 context requires not only behavior on the part of the actor that confirms his or her identity, it requires also that behavior be interpreted and accepted by others, and that the behavior of those others confirm the identity of the actor. Thus, while the identity system operates on the basis of one person's activity and perceptions, social interaction requires share 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 what is important to the individual is not so much *others'* expectations concerning their role

performance as *their own* expectations. They point out that often other's evaluation is built into one's own self-expectations. Thus, in terms of the identity feedback process, when there is a gap 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 further reflected by Stryker and Statham (1984: 349-350) 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 actors are able to get others to assess their role performance as being representative of the actor's own self-image, the more likely the actor will be satisfied. Therefore, this 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 setting, then, leads to the following hypotheses: (1) *Because social interaction requires shared meanings, there should be a positive relationship between an actor's perceptions of his/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, there should be a positive*

*relationship between the meanings of their behavior and their identities; (3) Because coordinated interaction in group is based on the use of significant symbols, there should be a positive relationship between the meanings of an actor's identity and the meanings of his/her role performance as perceived by others in the group; (4) Because the failure of actors to keep their perceptions of the meanings of their role performances consistent with their identities leads to discomfort and distress, there should be a negative relationship between performance-identity discrepancies and satisfaction with the performance.*

## Procedure

### *Context*

This research will utilize a small group setting to test these hypotheses. While the task leadership role evolves in responses to the solution of certain group problems, Bales and his coworkers have shown that the person who plays that emergent role, though 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 be expressive of particular characteristics of persons that occupy a given position (leading to their persistence in the role), as well as the position itself, and those performances represent the way persons come to terms with expectations (both their own and others). While these individual dispositions to such leadership role performances have not been fully studied, a *leadership role identity* would be a good candidate for such an individual

characteristic, though until now it has never been investigated. In hypothesizing leadership role identity as an important determinant of leadership role behavior we are not suggesting it is the only determinant.

Studying the task leadership role (identity and performance) in the small task-oriented discussion group context 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 a very important role and this may act to reduce the effects we wish to test.

### *Sample*

The sample analyzed for this research consists of 48 four-person laboratory groups composed of two males and two females. To form the groups, undergraduate students from a large Midwestern university were randomly sampled from the student body as a whole, and invited to participate in a study of communication in small groups. The students arrived at a general meeting (of 50-60 students at a time) at which the study was explained 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 \$10.00 for filling out a background questionnaire at the

general meeting and participating in a discussion group at some point over the next two weeks.

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

The group discussion sessions were held over the next two weeks following the general meeting. Each group of two males and two females participated in four different discussions using group polarization or choice dilemma protocols<sup>2</sup> (two that usually showed a shift to risk and two that usually showed a shift to conservatism). The choice dilemma problems were used to provide the groups with a task in which they had to reach a consensus. The four discussions were held during the one session that the group met. Each session lasted about an hour and a half, with each discussion lasting from ten to twenty minutes.

Each of the discussions followed the same format. Prior to the discussion, the individual members<sup>3</sup> read the choice dilemma<sup>3</sup> and wrote down their personal recommendation. Following this, the members were instructed to discuss the problem and come to a group consensus for making a group recommendation. After each

discussion was completed, subjects filled out a questionnaire evaluating the discussion and rating 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 concerning task-oriented activities contained in the background questionnaire filled out at the general meeting one to two weeks prior to the discussions sessions. 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; Slater 1955; Burke 1967; 1968; 1971). Response categories consisted of five-point Likert scales ranging from either strongly agree to strongly disagree on some statements, or from usually to never on others. The responses were scored from one to five with low task-orientation receiving a one and high task-orientation receiving a five. As shown in Table 1, these items factored into a single factor with an omega reliability (Heise and Bohrnstedt 1970) of .79. Responses on these ratings were summed for each person, yielding a task leadership role identity score ranging from five to 25.

(Table 1 About Here)

The variable *perceived task leadership performance* was created in a similar fashion from items placed on the post-discussion questionnaire that 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). These 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 summed across items.

Two different measures were derived 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 was the rankings of 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 rankings, the mean rank of tied participants were used.

Two measures of *satisfaction/dissatisfaction* were used. Each was based on an 11 category Likert type post-discussion questionnaire item that dealt directly with satisfaction. The first of these is a general satisfaction item pertaining to the discussion as a whole (*To what extent do you feel satisfied with this last discussion?*), while the second is more specifically directed to satisfaction with the respondent's role in the discussion (*To what extent were you satisfied with the role you played in this last discussion?*). The eleven 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.

Two measures of *discrepancy* between identity and role performance were used. Each was based on the magnitude of the absolute difference between one of the two perceived task leadership role performance (as measured above) and the role performance expected given the task leadership role identity of the respondent. The expected role performance was measured as the predicted role performance based on OLS regression of perceived role performance on task leader identity<sup>4</sup>. *Other discrepancy*, is the magnitude of the absolute difference between the identity-expected role performance and actual role performance as perceived by others in the group. *Self-discrepancy*, is the absolute difference between the identity-expected role performance and actual role performance as perceived by the actor.<sup>5</sup>

## Results

Presented in Table 2 is basic information about each of the measures used in the study including means, standard deviations, and correlations for each of the four discussions. As can be seen in Table 2, a respondent's own perceptions of his or her task leadership role performance is highly correlated with other's perceptions of the respondent's performance (.6 to .7) indicating a high degree of shared understanding of the meanings of the role behavior being perceived in accordance with our first hypothesis. Each actor perceives his or her own role performance in very similarly to the way that others in the group perceive it. It is

also clear, however, that agreement is not perfect, and there is room for misunderstandings.

(Table 2 About Here)

To test our second hypotheses about the link between an actor's identity and the actor's own assessment of his or her role performance, role performance assessment measures were regressed 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 task leadership role performance assessment is strongly supportive of the second hypothesis. The standardized regression coefficients show a significant correspondence between the actor's task leadership identity as measured prior to the discussions and his or her own assessed task leadership performance in each of the four discussions. These results confirm the expectation that group members will maintain consistency between their role performances and their identities (as measured prior to the discussions) even in the presence of others trying to do the same thing. While it is clear that this is going on, it is also clear that the coefficients are not so high as to preclude other determinants of task leadership behavior and as a consequence there is 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 About Here)

Also presented in Table 3 are results relevant to a test of hypothesis three. These are the results of an analysis similar to that used for testing hypothesis two. 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 three. 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, but because an actor's performances are tied to that actor's identity, others are also able to correctly infer (with some margin of error) the task leadership identities of each other 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 associated with those identities (i.e., the self-relevant meanings associated with one's performance). As noted above, identity theory proposes that when there is a discrepancy between self-relevant perceptions and one's identity standard, this incongruence leads to some distress and may thus affect satisfaction. There were two measures of satisfaction: one pertaining to satisfaction with the overall discussion and the

other to satisfaction with one's role. These two satisfaction measures were each regressed on the identity/perception discrepancy magnitude scores. The results of the analyses of the effects of the discrepancy magnitudes on satisfaction with one's role in the discussion are given in Table 4

(Table 4 About Here).

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

Also presented in Table 4 are the results of an analysis where the discrepancy is measured 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 we get similar

results, though, as expected, they are not as strong as when the perceptions are the actor's own, and appear to be derivative of both self and others assessing the same role performance. For example, in an analysis not reported here, adding "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' (1978) suggestion that the expectations of others 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. The explanation for this lack of effect may be that since 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 does not preclude the possibility, however, 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 the case that with only a single item to measure general satisfaction, a potential relationship is being masked by unreliability. Perhaps, with a more reliable assessment of general satisfaction with the discussion, a relationship discrepancy and satisfaction would be found.

(Tables 5 About Here)

### Discussion

Identity theory suggests that people are motivated to control their behavior, not to bring that behavior into line with some standard, but 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). 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 prior to the occurrence of the behavior. We see a strong tendency for behavior meanings 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 identity-meaning/behavior-meaning relationship 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 a consensus on the discussion problem, each person is able to maintain a moderate relationship between their perceived leadership performances and their leadership identity.

While the identity model only considers the *actor's* identity, perceptions, and meaningful behavior, within the symbolic interactionist framework it is assumed 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 -- or else 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) both 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.

Looked at 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 of the actor and others are shared, because both the actor and the others share a symbolic system for interpreting the situation, and we have seen (Table 2) that each actor and the 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 behavior of the others, 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 behavior engaged in by the actor in a way that the actor interprets them,

and they would not be able to act in a way which confirms those meanings. Nor would the actor be able to interpret the behavior of others appropriately as confirming or disconfirming the meanings of their own behavior.

The second question that was raised in the paper concerned what happens when people are not able to behave in a manner that fully confirms their identity. Identity theory suggests that discomfort should increase and satisfaction with the role performance should decrease, thus producing motivation to maintain congruency (Burke 1991). Though discomfort was not measured, 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 leader 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 is that people segregate their responses in this situation and maintain role-specific reactions to the discrepancy. 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 are held for long periods of time remains to be seen. As mentioned above, some evidence suggests crossover effects do occur when roles are important and long term, for example between work and family roles (e.g., Bielby and Bielby 1989).

One question about these results that we have not discussed is, 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 examine this question, we looked at the correlations among the discrepancy scores over the four discussions to see if it was the case that persons who could not match the meanings of their identities and performances in one discussion were also the people who failed to match in other discussions. If this were the case, it would suggest that some persons are better able to keep congruence between their role performances and identities than others. It would then be important to explore the reasons for such ability. Does it rest in particular characteristics of individuals; that some are more competent in maintaining congruency? Does it rest in particular positions that have more power; that with power comes the ability to keep your role performance congruent with your 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 (indicating persistence) nor low (indicating compensation) discrepancies in subsequent discussions. Now such an outcome is also consistent with the idea that the discrepancy score is just a random variable. However, two factors 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 looked at the correlation matrix for task leadership performance scores across the four discussions (both those based on self-perceptions and those based on other's perceptions -- not reported here), and noted that these are moderately strong (.30-.35 for self-perceptions and .53-.58 for other's perceptions), indicating a general persistence in the task leadership role.<sup>7</sup> And, from the results reported already, we know that task leadership role performance is generally congruent with the leadership identity of the person.

Our conclusion, therefore, is that people actively try 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 not persistent winners and losers in the process suggests that the process does not depend on personal characteristics, nor do there seem to be any power differences that come into play among these essentially equal status student volunteers. This leaves some flux in the degree of which people are able to make their performances fit their identities, but it leaves persistence in the general levels of task leadership performance which depend upon differences in task leadership identities among the participants. Persons with a leader identity do perform more leadership behaviors across all the discussions, but the actual amount of that behavior randomly varies *around*

*that higher level.* Similarly, persons with a lower leader identity perform fewer leadership behaviors across the sessions, with the actual amount randomly varying around that lower level.

Clearly, the relationship between identity and role performance becomes more complicated as we move from studying that relationship for individuals in relative isolation (as much prior work has done), to studying it in a group or interactive context. This paper is a first empirical attempt, in the context of identity theory, to move our understanding of identity and interaction to this more complicated level. In doing so, we have seen that people are generally still able to make the meaning of their performances congruent with their identity meanings, even in competition with others for interactive resources. And, we have seen that to the extent that 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, there is a sharing of meanings such that people interpret each other's activity in much the same way which allows them to infer each other's identities and to thereby become predictable to each other and build stable interaction structures.

## Footnotes

- \* This research was partially supported by grants from the Division of Social Sciences, National Science Foundation (NSF BNS 76-08381), and from the National Institutes of Health (MH 46828).
- 1 Identity theory recognizes that persistent failure to achieve congruity by modifying the situation may result in first attempting to leave the situation (Swann 1990). Failure in that may ultimately lead to change in the identity standard defining who one is (Burke 1991).
- 2 The choice dilemmas represent fictitious life circumstances in which a person must make a choice 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 benefits, or a conservative alternative (e.g., an "OK" job with a very stable company, or no operation, but no threat to life). Subjects are to indicate the highest level of risk they would tolerate and still recommend the risky alternative (odds of failure being 1, 3, 5, 7, or 9 out of 10). The "shift to risk" (or conservatism) occurs when the average of the individual preferences prior to group discussion are less (more) risky than the group decision). An example protocol is contained in Brown (1965:657).
- 3 The four choice dilemma problems were presented in a randomized balanced order to remove possible effects of order

of presentation.

- 4 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  $b$  are OLS based estimates of the intercept and slope respectively, it can be seen 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) from the regression of perceived role performance on leadership identity.
- 5 The use of a composite (difference) score here is dictated by the theoretical construct that is being measured, a discrepancy. While it is true that a difference score is less reliable than either of the two parts which make it up (when the two parts are positively correlated), this only means 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 means greater difficulty in testing hypotheses since the power of the tests would be less. On the other hand, if results with the measure are significant, they are significant in spite of the somewhat lower reliability.
- 6 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. Those actors with the greatest discrepancy had satisfaction scores near 6, the middle of the satisfaction scale.

- 7 To understand how the discrepancy score is not correlated over time (across sessions) while the task leadership performance (perceptions) are correlated over time, and the identity score is constant over time, it must be recalled that the discrepancy score is a residual. The constant identity score has been subtracted from the perceived performance score.

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

A. 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 ( $\Omega$ )	.79

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B. 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 ( $\Omega$ )	.95

<sup>H</sup> Iterated principle factor analysis.

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations Among Measures

Discussion 1			Correlations					
	Mean	SD	(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			Correlations					
	Mean	SD	(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			Correlations					
	Mean	SD	(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			Correlations					
	Mean	SD	(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

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*

\*\*  $p \leq .01$

\*  $p \leq .05$

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**

\*\*  $p \leq .01$

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

\*  $p \leq .05$

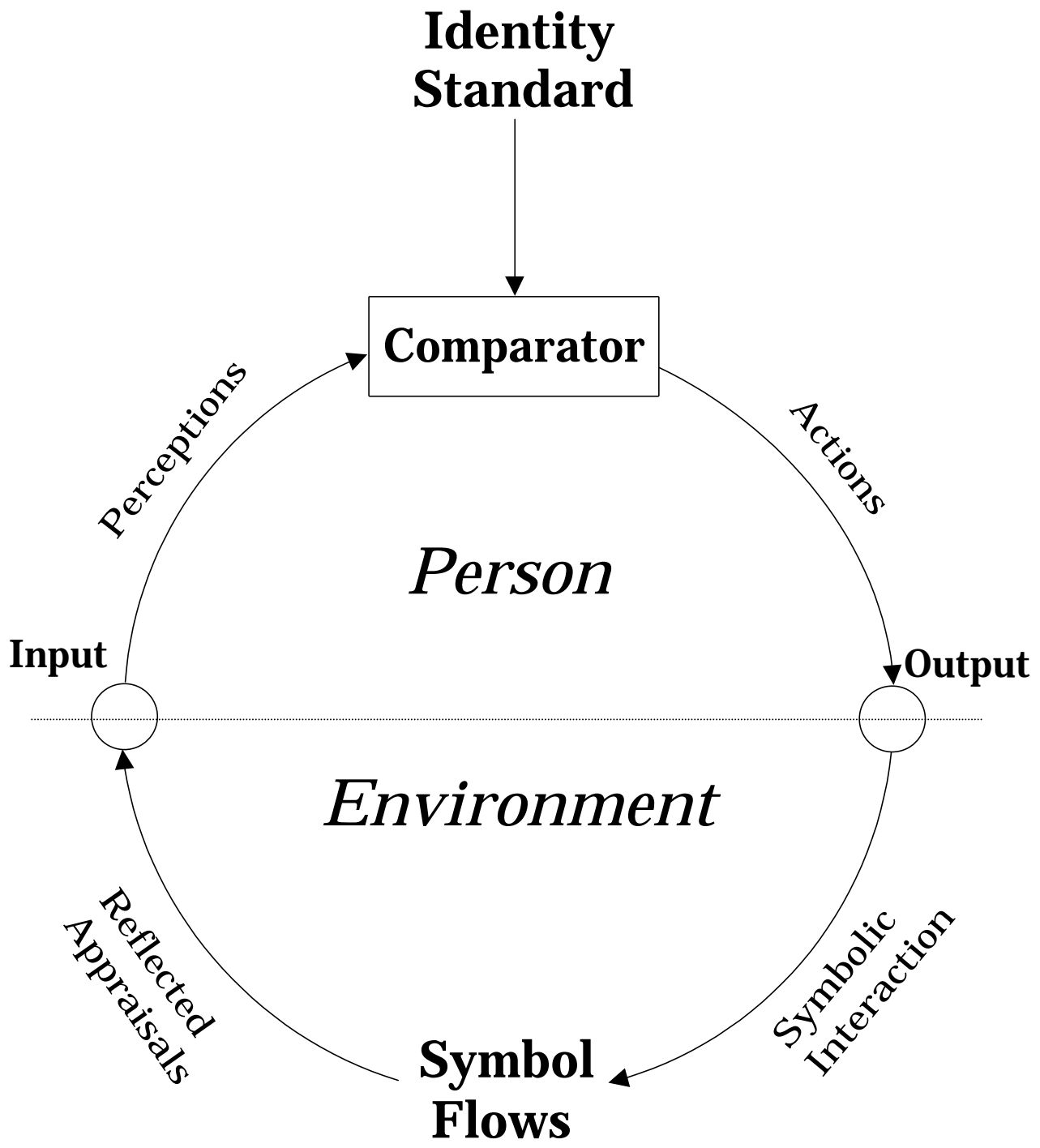


Figure 1. Model of the Identity Process

(Adapted from Burke 1991)