Identity Change*

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This research examines two mechanisms by which persons' identities change over time. First, on the basis of identity control theory (ICT), I hypothesize that while identities influence the way in which a role is played out, discrepancies between the meanings of the identity standard and the meanings of the role performance will result in change. That is, due to the hierarchical structure of identity systems, change will occur not only to the role performance (to counteract the discrepancy), but also to the meanings of identity standard over time (to bring them more into line with the disturbance). A second mechanism of change in identities is hypothesized to result from persons holding multiple identities that share meanings. Identities that share dimensions of meaning influence each other's standard to maintain the shared meaning at a common level. Changing identity standards redefines who one is. Using data from the Marital Roles Project, I examine the spousal and gender identities of newly married couples over the first years of marriage as couples engage in routine activities. Hypotheses about change in identities are supported; implications for extending identity control theory are discussed.

The question of how identities change has been a topic of theoretical interest for a number of years (Burke and Cast 1997; Deaux 1993; Gecas and Mortimer 1987; Kiecolt 1994, 2000; McNulty and Swann 1994; Serpe 1987). That identities change has not been in dispute, but the demonstration of the theoretical mechanisms involved in this change has not been resolved fully, in part because such mechanisms must account for both the stability and the change of identities over time. Identity control theory (ICT), with its hierarchical view of identities as control systems, is able to address these issues.

I begin by reviewing the central aspects of ICT that are relevant to our understanding of both change and stability. First, to be clear about what identity change involves, I discuss the nature of identities as the self-meanings that define who one is, and identity change as change in these meanings. Then I point out that these meanings, even while providing the standard against which self-relevant meanings in the situation are judged, are themselves the product of higher levels in the identity system; therefore they are dynamic and change, though at a much slower rate than the meanings in the situation. Because these self-meanings held in identity standards are dynamic, the conditions under which they may change can be seen readily in the way the whole identity system operates; hypotheses about identity change may be derived from these principles.

IDENTITY CHANGE IN THE CONTEXT OF ICT

Identities As Meanings

Within ICT, an identity is viewed as a set of self-relevant meanings held as standards for the identity in question (Burke 1980, 1991; Burke and Tully 1977). For the role identity of spouse, for example, the standard would include what it means to be a husband or a wife. Following the work of Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957), meanings are understood to be one's mediational responses to stimuli. These responses include not

only what are typically understood to be the denotative responses, but also the connotative (including affective) responses. In this view, responses are assessed along the dimensions that underlie the meanings. Osgood and his colleagues (1957) devised the semantic differential as a method for the quantitative measurement of meaning in terms of the strength of a person's response along various underlying dimensions. Burke and Tully (1977) adapted this procedure to allow measurement of self-meanings, or reflexive responses to the self as a stimulus, and showed how to measure self-meanings along culturally shared and relevant dimensions. Examples of such dimensions that have been useful in understanding identities are masculinity/femininity for the gender identity (Burke 1989; Burke and Tully 1977), "intellectualism" and "sociability" for the student identity (Burke and Reitzes 1981), and "task-orientation" for a leader identity (Burke 2003).

For each identity there is a standard that indicates the level of each dimension of meaning (for example, of "task-orientation" with respect to the leader identity), which defines the person's identity: what it means to be who one is. The meanings that define an identity are the identity standards of any group-, role-, or person-based identity such as American, spouse, or "honest." Change in identities thus refers to changes in the meanings within the identity standard—changes, for example, in what it means to be a spouse.

Insofar as persons make the same responses to stimuli (similar strength of response along the same dimensions), the meaning is shared and the stimulus is a significant symbol. Shared meaning allows communication as well as shared understandings and expectations. Measuring self-meaning thus involves measuring the strength of a person's responses to the self along the relevant dimensions (Burke and Tully 1977). Thus identities can change in two ways: by changes in the strength of the response along a given dimension (e.g., how "task-oriented" one is as a leader), and by changes in which dimensions are relevant for a particular identity (e.g., changing what it means to be a leader from considering lev-

els of "task-orientation" to perhaps considering levels of "dominance"). In the present research I consider only changes in the strength of the response, with the dimensions fixed.[1]

Managing Situational Meanings

To see how identity meanings change, first we must understand that within ICT, the identity standard, or set of meanings defining the identity, is part of a dynamic, self-regulating control system that operates when an identity is activated. To begin, I outline the basic identity system and its functioning; then, I discuss how the meanings can change.

In addition to the *identity standard* or set of meanings defining who one is (as a spouse), there is a set of *perceptions* of self-relevant meanings in the social situation, as illustrated in Figure 1. In identity 2, for example, depicted on the lower right-hand side of the figure, we see that when the identity is activated, the individual perceives the meanings implied by his or her ongoing behavior in the situation (either observed directly or received through reflected appraisals). As Burke and Reitzes (1981) showed, the link between identities and behavior lies in the shared meanings of each: people engage in behavior to create meanings that correspond to the meanings of their identity standard.

The perceptions of these self-relevant meanings are fed into the *comparator,* a mechanism that compares one's perceptions of self-relevant meanings with the self-defining meanings of the identity standard. Differences between these two are output as an *error* or discrepancy signal. The discrepancy represents a lack of correspondence between the meanings in the identity standard and the meanings in the situation.

Another element is one's *social behavior* in the situation. As shown in Figure 1, behavior is a function of the error or output of the comparator. The meanings implied by

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[1] Future research must deal with questions of shifts in the dimensions of meaning or of the emerging relevance of new dimensions: for example, changes in what it means to be male or female that occur when one goes through puberty.
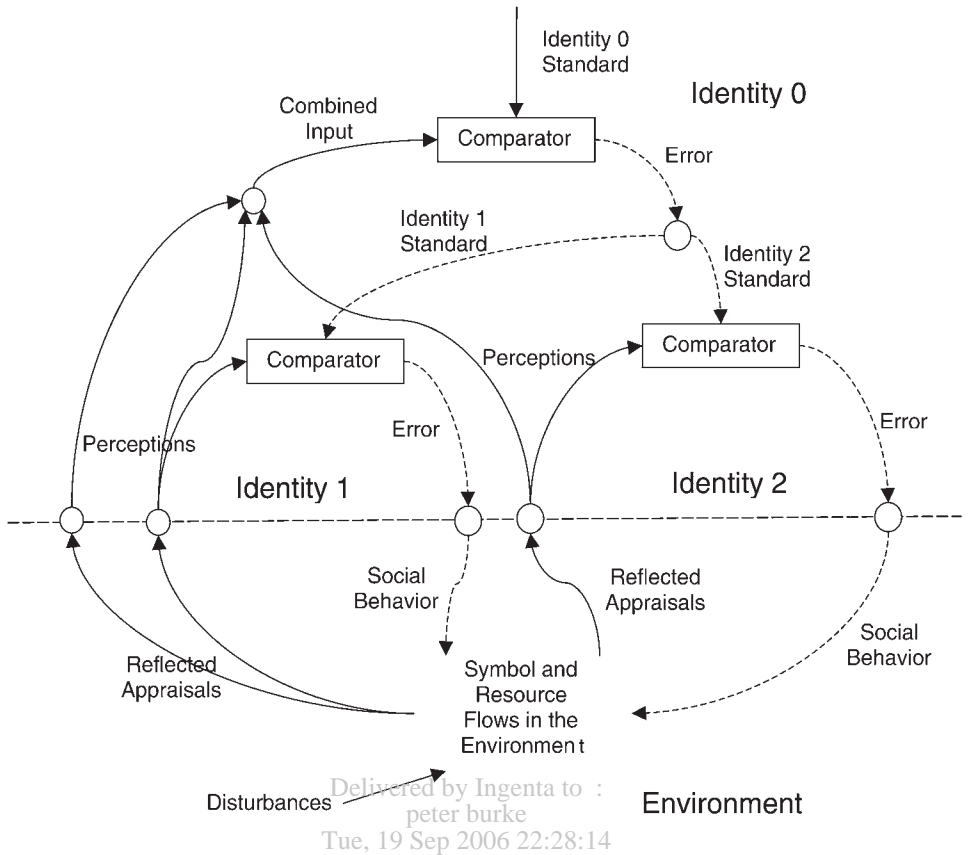
Figure 1. Identity Model Showing Two Levels and Two Identities

the behavior change meanings in the situation, thus altering reflected appraisals and perceptions, and reducing any discrepancy (any error between perceptions of self-relevant meanings and the meanings held in the identity standard). This process of making self-perceptions match the identity standard is the process of identity verification. In this sense, an identity is a perceptual control system (Powers 1973). When an identity is activated,[2] perceptions of meanings are

controlled (by modifying the meaningful behavior in the situation) to match meanings in the identity standard. Should some disturbance in the situation (perhaps another's behavior) cause the perceived self-meanings to deviate from the identity standard, the person will behave so as to shift the perceived self-meanings back into agreement with the standard.

The error or discrepancy between the perceptions and the identity standard not only governs behavior, but also produces an emotional response. We feel distress when the discrepancy is large or increasing; we feel good when the discrepancy is small or decreasing (Burke and Harrod 2005; Cast and Burke 2002). These emotional responses provide some motivation for reducing any discrepancies between perceptions and

[2] Activation is the process of bringing an identity "on line" to control perceptions. Theoretically this occurs when identity-relevant meanings are perceived in the situation. Perceptions that do not exist cannot be controlled, and without relevant stimuli in the situation there can be no relevant perceptions (meanings) to be controlled. As Oakes (1987) points out, however, this is not a matter of the attention-grabbing properties of social stimuli but a combination of accessibility and fit. Accessibility is the readiness of a particular dimension of meaning to become activated in a person; fit is the degree to which perceived prop-

erties of the situation are congruent with the dimension of meaning (Oakes 1987).

the standard, and in general for keeping them small.

Managing Self-Meanings

Thus far the model assumes that the identity standard is unchanging and that behaviors change situational meanings, thereby leading to changes in perceptions to match the unchanging standard. This view, however, is incomplete. The identity standard in ICT is itself the output of a higher-level control system. This is illustrated in Figure 1, where we see a lower-level control system (for example, identity 2, with its identity standard, perceptions, comparator, and behavior), and a higher-level control system (identity 0), in which the output of the system (corresponding to the behavior in the lower-level system) is the identity standard of the lower-level system. When the higher-level system is activated, it changes the meanings of the standard in the lower-level identity system as the mechanism by which the higher-level control system controls the higher-level perceptions.[3]

This higher-level control system (for example, an identity associated with a master status or a personal identity that operates across role identities and situations) also possesses perceptions, standard, and comparator, and is also a perceptual control system. If this higher-level identity system is to control its perceptions, it must alter its outputs, which are the standards of the lower-level systems (Burke 1997; Tsushima and Burke 1999). Because both higher- and lower-level control systems operate continuously when activated, the identity standards as well as perceptions and behaviors are changing in the situation. The higher- and lower-level control systems operate at different rates, however.

Behavior in the situation adjusts so as to alter perceptions of meaning at all levels and thus to correct discrepancies as they occur. The standard also adjusts continuously so as to reduce discrepancies as they occur by moving toward the current perceptions.

Standards adjust at a much slower rate, however; thus, in the normal course of events, we may not notice that the standard has adjusted at all. Yet, when our behavior, for some reason, does not reduce the discrepancy, or when we are prevented from countering the disturbance so as to change our perceptions, the standard will continue over time to change toward the perceptions until the error signal is reduced to zero — that is, until our perceptions match the changed standard.

The Sources of Identity Change

Identity change thus is ubiquitous in ICT, but in normal circumstances the change is small and slow. Insofar as identity verification occurs and people successfully bring meanings in the situation into agreement with the meanings in their identity standards, the standards are subject to little systematic pressure to change in any particular direction. Slow fluctuations may occur around a central value, but these should be small. The conditions for dramatic identity change are manifested only in unusual circumstances such as religious cults or the prisoner of war camps in the Korean conflict (Schein 1958).[4] Smaller changes that accumulate over time are more common.

Burke and Cast (1997), for example, documented the changes in the meanings of the gender identities of newlywed husbands and wives that occur with the birth of their first child. This birth represents a change of meanings in the environment (a disturbance in the model) that persists and is not countered easily. Under these conditions, Burke and Cast found that husbands' gender identity became somewhat more masculine over the year following the child's birth, while that of wives became somewhat more feminine. The presence of a child changed the meanings in the interactional setting in a way that was not easily changed back or countered; thus a continuing discrepancy was present between situationally self-relevant meanings and the

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[3] The higher-level perceptions are patterns or combinations of the perceptions from the lower-level system.

[4] The prevention of any control over perceptions is primary among the techniques used. Thus individuals in these conditions are allowed to perceive only what the "captors" wish them to perceive. Over time, then, identity standards shift in the direction of the allowed perceptions.

meanings contained in the couple's identity standards. This prolonged discrepancy over time allowed each of the identities to change slowly to match the perceptions of the new self-relevant meanings in the situation; in this way the discrepancies were reduced slowly over time toward zero. This is the first way in which identities change.

Identity change also may occur when people have multiple identities that are related to each other in the sense that they share meanings and are activated at the same time (Burke 2003; Deaux 1992, 1993; Stets 1995). Thus, as one controls perceptions of self-relevant meanings to match the standard for one identity, they may become discrepant with the standard for another active identity if they also are relevant for that identity.[5] For example, one person's gender identity as a woman may suggest that she must be strong and independent, but her wife identity may suggest that she must let her husband take the lead in family matters. Insofar as these identities are activated at the same time and she cannot act on the basis of one without creating a discrepancy with respect to the other, the two identities are in conflict. She cannot reduce both discrepancies at the same time.

To continue this example, as these discrepancies persist, ICT suggests that the identity standards for both of the woman's identities will shift slowly toward each other, becoming identical at some "compromise" position so that meaningful behavior can verify both identities at the same time. She may become less strong and independent in her gender identity; at the same time, she may become less likely to let her husband always take the lead in family matters. In this case, the meanings in both identity standards have shifted. The extent to which each of the standards changes depends upon other factors such as the degree of commitment to each of the identities (Burke and Reitzes 1991; Burke and Stets 1999; Stryker and Serpe 1982), the degree of salience of each of the identities (Callero 1985; Stryker and Serpe

1982, 1994), and the degree to which each identity is tied to other identities in the full set of identities held by this individual (Burke 2003; Smith-Lovin 2003; Thoits 1986).

If commitment to one identity is stronger than to another, the more highly committed identity may change less than that to which the commitment is smaller. That is, if one identity entails more ties to others, more others will expect to see the meanings of that identity expressed continually, and the costs of changing that identity will be greater. Similarly, if one identity is more salient than another—that is, more likely to be activated in a situation—more occasions exist to make demands for portrayal of particular meanings; thus it is more difficult to change that identity standard.

Thus we identify two general sources of systematic identity change in ICT: persistent problems with the verification of a particular identity, and multiple identities activated together, whose verifications require opposing meanings to be manifested in the individual's behavior. The difference between these sources of change lies in the source of the conflict of meanings. In the first case, the source is a disturbance to the meanings in the external situation, causing them to be perceived as discrepant from the meanings of the identity standard. In the second case, it is an internal conflict manifested when two identities, each controlling the same dimension of meaning, but to different levels, are activated at the same time.[6] In view of each of these sources, the meanings in the identity standard(s) are likely to change in the service of making identity verification possible. What it means to be who one is will change.

To make this explanation more concrete, I consider a discrepancy[7] or difference along

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[5] Role conflict and status inconsistency are examples of situations that may be interpreted as identity conflicts of this type.

[6] This might happen when an identity developed in one context becomes activated in another context: for example, trying to talk on the phone to one's boyfriend while one's husband is in the same room.

[7] I use the term *discrepancy* here as a shorthand for the difference along some dimension of meaning between the meanings in an identity standard and the meanings one perceives about who one is in a situation. This difference sometimes is called an error because the self-meanings in the situation are not the same as the reference of the self-meanings in the standard.

the dimension of traditional femininity between the meanings in an identity standard and the identity-relevant meanings perceived in a situation. Let us say that a woman in her spouse identity sees herself in the situation as acting more traditionally feminine than she defines herself in her identity standard: that is, she is coming across as too traditionally feminine in her spouse role. This discrepancy will have two effects. First, it will cause her to change her behavior so as to change the situational meanings (how she is coming across) to be less traditionally feminine. Second, at the same time, the discrepancy will act slowly to change the meanings held in her identity standard so as to be more traditionally feminine, moving them closer to a match with the way she is coming across in the situation.

In additional, other identities that share dimensions of meaning (for example, a gender identity) will cause a change in the meanings in the spousal identity standard. For example, if the person sees herself in her gender identity as very feminine, this will influence the degree of femininity of her spousal identity, and the degree of femininity of her spousal identity in turn will influence the degree of femininity of her gender identity. These ideas are formalized in the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The discrepancy between perceptions and identity standard on a particular dimension of meaning will negatively influence the meanings of the role performance on the same dimension.

With respect to the spousal identity, for example, this hypothesis suggests a negative feedback loop such that when self-meanings in the situation are more "traditionally feminine" than the self-meanings in the identity, the person will decrease the degree of femininity in her role performance until the self-meaning in the situation matches the self-meaning in the identity standard and the discrepancy is reduced to zero. This hypothesis pertains to changing meanings in the situation, not in the identity; the latter is the topic of the next two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2: The discrepancy between perceptions and standard on a particular dimension of meaning will positively influence the

meanings of the identity standard on the same dimension.

Again, with respect to the spousal identity, this hypothesis suggests a negative feedback loop such that when self-meanings in the situation are more "traditionally feminine" than the self-meanings in the identity standard, the person will increase the degree of femininity in her identity standard. As suggested above, however, this change is slow, and the discrepancy therefore must persist long enough to allow small changes to accumulate. Such changes might be expected to occur over time. This feedback also is negative because the effect of the discrepancy is to reduce the discrepancy over time.

The second source of identity change, other identities, is the subject of the last hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: A focal identity that shares a dimension of meaning with a second identity will change in a positive direction the meanings of the second identity on the same dimension to be consistent with the focal identity (and vice versa).

Again, this feedback may be regarded as negative because the discrepancy between the degrees of meaning on some dimension held by two identities is reduced by changes in each of the identities. When two identities are trying to control the same dimension of meaning to exist at different levels, they are in conflict. The conflict is resolved when the two identity standards come to agree on the level at which the dimension of meaning should be set. These changes in identity standards would be expected to occur slowly over time. If the two identities do not share any dimensions of meaning, neither will influence the other because they operate independently.

METHOD

To test these hypotheses, I investigate two identities that share dimensions of meaning. As suggested above, the focal identity is the spouse identity; gender identity is the second identity, which shares meanings with the first. The behavior that is involved pertains to the spousal role.

The data for this research come from a longitudinal study of marital roles that investigated marital dynamics in the first two years of marriage (Tallman, Burke, and Gecas 1998). The sample for this study was drawn from marriage registration records in 1991 and 1992 in two midsized communities in Washington State. Of those couples recorded in the marriage registry during this period, about 45 percent (574 couples) met the criteria for involvement: both spouses were over age 18, were involved in their first marriage, and had no children living with them.

Of the couples meeting the criteria for involvement in the longitudinal study, 286 couples completed all the data collection in the first year. The couples do not differ significantly from couples throughout the United States who marry for the first time. For example, their mean age is similar to the national mean age of people marrying for the first time (about 25), and their mean educational levels resemble the national level of persons marrying for the first time ("some college") (Vital Statistics of the United States 1987). In the United States, first-married persons typically are white (86%) (Vital Statistics of the United States 1987). In the present sample, 89 percent are white, 3 percent are black (underrepresenting blacks nationally), and 9 percent are other minorities (overrepresenting Asians and Hispanics nationwide). This sample reflects the racial distribution in Washington State (World Almanac and Book of Facts 1992).

Attrition was 15 percent from year 1 to year 2, and 4 percent from year 2 to year 3. These figures do not include the 13 couples who were separated or divorced after year 1 nor the 16 couples who were separated or divorced after year 2, who were no longer included in the sample. Couples who dropped out of the study after the first or second year were more likely to be young ($p < .01$), less highly educated ($p < .01$), and of a lower socioeconomic status ($p < .01$).

Each data-collection period included a 90-minute face-to-face interview, four one-week daily diaries kept by respondents at 10-week intervals, and a 15-minute videotaping of couples' conversations as they worked to solve areas of disagreement that they had identified previously. The data for the current analysis are based on information from the interviews and on the daily diaries in all three data collection points over the two-year span.

Measures

The spousal role identity (standard) was measured by asking respondents to rate each of eight spousal role activities by how much they felt that they *should* engage in that activity. It is not the role activities themselves that are important, however, but what it means to engage in those activities. Thus the sampling of role activities should capture important underlying dimensions of the spousal identity of meaning. Response categories for all the included items ranged from "not doing that activity in the household" (coded 0) to "doing all of that activity in the household" (coded 4). These items were factored and displayed a single underlying dimension of meaning with an omega reliability of .90. Four items were reverse coded, as indicated in Table 1; the standardized items then were added to form a scale.[8] We did this for each of the three time points.[9] High scores on the underlying dimension of meaning represent a more (traditionally) feminine definition of the spouse identity. The items are presented in Table 1.

The measure of the meanings of the perceived spousal role performance was derived from items in the daily diaries that each respondent kept. Respondents indicated the extent (in time) to which each of eight activities was undertaken on each of the 28 days of responses recorded in the daily diaries. These activities included a variety of spousal activities: cooking, cleaning, earning an income, talking and sharing with the family. Again, the actual items are less important than the

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[8] In this and the other scales, the meanings of the items emerge from the pattern of the participants' responses rather than from any arbitrary assignment of particular meanings to particular items.

[9] We find some indication that in the third year, the items relating to cleaning, meal preparation, and laundry became slightly more important in defining the dimension of meaning measured here (indicating a possible shift in the underlying dimension of meaning). To make the meanings we measured the same over the three time periods, however, we used the same (equal) weights in all the periods.

Table 1. Items for the Spouse Identity Scale and the Spouse Role Performance Scale

A. Spouse Identity Scale:

To what extent should you be responsible for. . .?
   Providing for my family before children are born (R)
   Providing for my family after children are born (R)
   Preparing and serving meals
   Cleaning the house
   Shopping and groceries
   Washing and ironing
   Home repair (R)
   Yard work (R)
     Omega reliability (.90)

B. Spouse Role Performance Scale:

How much did you do this today?
   Providing for my family by working at a job or profession (R)
   Cooking and food preparation for my family
   Cleaning and housekeeping for my family
   Shopping for my family
   Recreational activities with my family
   Talking and sharing with my family
   Talking or visiting with my spouse's family and relatives
   Talking or visiting with my own family and relatives
     Omega reliability (.83)

fact that they all tap into the same underlying dimension of meaning for the behavior in question.[10] We factored the items to show a single dimension of underlying meaning; the item "providing for my family" was reverse coded as shown in Table 1. The standardized items were summed to form a scale on which a high score represented the more (traditionally) feminine activities for each of the three time points.[11] The overall omega reliability for the scale was .83. The items also are listed in Table 1.

Following the procedures outlined by Burke and Cast (1997), we measured gender identity using the Burke and Tully (1977) method on items taken from the Spence and Helmreich (1978) Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ). We selected 15 items

that distinguished significantly between masculine and feminine meanings across the three time points, using a discriminant function. Applying this function to the self-ratings yielded a gender identity scale on which high scores indicated more feminine meanings.[12] The omega reliability for the scale was .83. The items are shown in Table 2.

To be sure that the same dimension of meaning was captured by the measures for the spousal role identity, the spousal role performance, and the gender identity, we conducted a factor analysis of the nine scales (three measures by three time points). The results show a strong single factor with high loadings on all measures (mean loading was .75). We take this as confirmation of the common underlying dimension of meaning captured by these measures.

The Model

The structural equation model used to test the hypotheses is presented in Figure 2. Here we see the three concepts—the meanings of the spouse identity standard, the

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[10] Coltrane (2000) labels this dimension as representing gender in its symbolic and performance aspects.

[11] As with the measure of the spousal identity, we find some indication that over time the items relating to cleaning and meal preparation became slightly more important in defining the dimension of meaning measured here (again, indicating a possible shift in the underlying dimension of meaning). To make the meanings we measured the same over the three periods, however, we used the same (equal) weights in all the periods.

[12] We find no indication of any shift in the gender meanings measured over time for the present sample. We used the same weights in all three time periods.

Table 2. Gender Identity Items

1. Very aggressive—Not at all aggressive
2. Very independent—Not at all independent
3. Not at all excitable in a major crisis—Very excitable in a major crisis
4. Very active—Very passive
5. Very rough—Very gentle
6. Not at all helpful to others—Very helpful to others
7. Very competitive—Not at all competitive
8. Not at all kind—Very kind
9. Feelings not easily hurt—Feelings easily hurt
10. Not at all aware of the feelings of others—Very aware of the feelings of others
11. Never gives up easily—Gives up easily
12. Never cry—Cries very easily
13. Feel very superior—Feel very inferior
14. Very cold in relations with others—Very warm in relations with others
15. Very little need for security—Very strong need for security
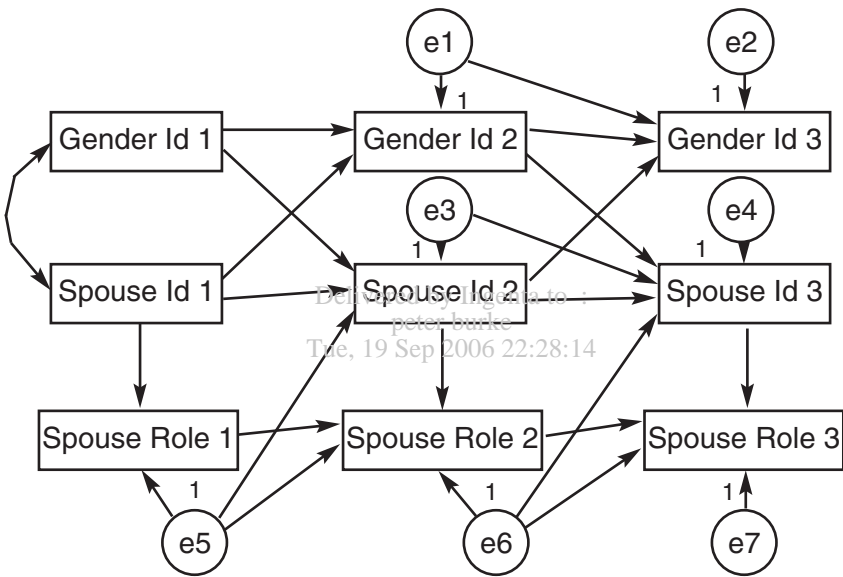   Omega reliability .83

Figure 2. Model of Spousal Identity Change

meanings of the spouse role performance, and the meanings of the gender identity standard—as they relate to each other over time. Meanings of the spousal role performance are an immediate function of the meanings of the spousal identity. Meanings in the gender identity standard and the spousal identity standard influence each other over time (in accordance with Hypotheses 2 and 3). No direct connection is present between meanings of the gender identity standard and meanings of the spousal role performance, though an indirect path exists through the meanings of the spousal identity standard.

Central to this analysis is the representation of the discrepancy or difference between the perceived spousal identity meanings in the situation (represented in the meanings of the spousal role performance) and the meanings in the spousal identity standard. This discrepancy is represented by the error term in the structural equation model for the measure of the role performance meanings, as predicted by the meanings of the spouse identity standard (e5, e6, and e7). Because the meanings in one's own role performance as reported in the diaries are perceived performances, they represent the situational perceptions in the model. The difference

between perceptions and the identity standard is the error term representing the extent to which the meanings of the spousal role performance are *not* predicted by the meanings of the spousal identity. Insofar as situational disturbances cause the perceived meanings of the role performance to deviate from the performance predicted by the meanings in the identity standard, an error or discrepancy exists. The direction and magnitude of this discrepancy along the measured dimension of meaning have consequences, as predicted in Hypotheses 1 and 2.

Thus, for example, in Figure 2, error e5 represents that part of the perceived meanings of the spousal role performance in year 1 which is not in line with (predicted by) the spouse identity meanings. It may be a performance that contains more or less traditionally feminine meanings than expected. According to Hypothesis 1, this discrepancy (being more or less than expected) will negatively influence the level of spousal role performance in year 2. If the role performance is more traditionally feminine than expected in year 1, Hypothesis 1 suggests that it will become less so in year 2. This is the normal move toward counteracting the disturbance (or reducing the discrepancy) by bringing the role performance more into line with the performance predicted in the meanings of the identity standard (Burke 1991; Burke and Reitzes 1981; Burke and Stets 1999).

At the same time, according to Hypothesis 2, the discrepancy (error e5) will act over time to change the meanings held in the identity standard itself (in year 2), so as to bring it more into line with the perceived spousal role performance. Thus, if the perceived meanings of the spousal role performance are more traditionally feminine than expected, they will act over time to increase the traditionally feminine meanings of the spouse identity standard (Burke and Cast 1997).

Hypothesis 3 relates to the impact of the meanings of one identity standard on the meanings of another when that they share a dimension of meaning. In this case, the spouse identity and the gender identity share meanings on a masculine/feminine dimen-

sion; the average correlation between these identities over the three time periods is .56. As the model in Figure 2 shows, each identity influences the other with a lag of one time period to reflect the time such change takes.[13] According to the hypothesis, if one identity is more traditionally feminine at one time period, it should increase the traditionally feminine meanings of the other identity.

One way to think about all of these effects is to consider that we are modeling a dynamic process in which each part is influencing the others through time. Disturbances cause the perceived self-relevant meanings in the situation to become discrepant from the identity standard. These disturbances simultaneously begin to bring about changes in the role performance and, more slowly, in the meanings in the identity standard. The rates of change in the two outcomes are quite different. Identities change slowly; behavior in the situation is expected to change more rapidly.

In addition, effects at one time period theoretically should be identical to the same effects at another time period (invariance over time). Thus the effect of gender identity on the spouse identity between years 1 and 2 should be the same as the effect of gender identity on spouse identity between years 2 and 3. Also, the effect of gender identity at year 1 on itself at year 2 should be the same as the effect from year 2 to year 3. These restrictions were added to the model for all effects. Insofar as this assumption is not true, the model will fail to fit the data.

RESULTS

Before the model is estimated, Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables without comment. I estimated the model using full-information maximum-likelihood procedures; the results are presented in Table 4. The chi-square test for goodness of fit is $\chi^2_{(24)} = 34.7$ ($p = .07$). This indicates a good fit of

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[13] Alternative modeling with simultaneous influences between the two identities, or with combinations of simultaneous and instantaneous influences, leaves the results almost unchanged, but these models do not fit the overall data. These analyses are available on request.

Table 3. Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations Among the Variables

Variables		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	Mean	SD
Gender Id 1	(1)	1.00									.46	.31
Gender Id 2	(2)	.79	1.00								.52	.32
Gender Id 3	(3)	.78	.80	1.00							.55	.33
Spouse Id 1	(4)	.57	.54	.59	1.00						.00	.69
Spouse Id 2	(5)	.55	.53	.57	.87	1.00					.00	.69
Spouse Id 3	(6)	.57	.55	.59	.84	.90	1.00				−.01	.72
Housework 1	(7)	.30	.25	.30	.39	.38	.38	1.00			−.03	.49
Housework 2	(8)	.31	.29	.32	.38	.41	.41	.65	1.00		−.01	.53
Housework 3	(9)	.27	.25	.29	.34	.36	.40	.56	.71	1.00	−.01	.56

Table 4. Standardized Structural Equation Coefficients for Model Shown in Figure 3.

	Gender Identity		Spouse Identity		Housework		
	Year 2	Year 3	Year 2	Year 3	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Gender Identity 1	.82*	—	.07*	—	—	—	—
Gender Identity 2	—	.82*	—	.07*	—	—	—
Gender Discrepancy 2 (e1)	—	−.37*	—	—	—	—	—
Spouse Identity 1	.12*	—	.83*	—	.29*	—	—
Spouse Identity 2	—	.12*	—	.92*	—	.08*	—
Spouse Identity 3	—	—	—	—	—	—	.08*
Spouse Discrepancy 2 (e3)	—	—	—	−.24*	—	—	—
Housework 1	—	—	—	—	—	.82*	—
Housework 2	—	—	—	—	—	—	.82*
Housework 3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Housework Discrepancy 1 (e5)	—	—	.06*	—	1.00	−.19*	—
Housework Discrepancy 2 (e6)	—	—	—	.06*	—	1.00	−.19*
R^2	.59	.71	.77	.83	—	.54	.52

Note: Chi-square goodness of fit: 26.1, df = 23, p = .30
*p < .01

the data to the model, including the assumption of equal effects over time.[14]

With respect to Hypothesis 1 pertaining to counteracting the disturbances, Table 4 shows that when a discrepancy exists between the meaning of the spousal identity standard and the meanings of the spousal role performance, that discrepancy (e5 or e6 in Figure 2) has a negative effect (beta = −.19, $p \le .01$) on the meanings of the spousal role performance in the following year so as to reduce the discrepancy. If the individual engages in more than the amount of (traditionally feminine) housework predicted by the meanings of the spousal identity standard in one year, he or she reduces the amount in the next year. If the individual engages in less than the predicted amount, he or she increases the traditionally feminine spousal role behavior in the subsequent year.

In regard to identity change, we see that identities in fact change slowly as the result of disturbances in the situation. In the present study the persistence of the spousal identity over the three time periods (two years) is .81 (= .90 × .90) including direct and indirect effects. This means that the weekly persistence would be estimated (assuming 100 weeks) as $.81^{\frac{1}{100}}$ or .998; when squared this translates to 99.6 percent of the variance in

[14] Although the model fit the data, a significantly better fit can be obtained by allowing the stability coefficient for the spousal identity measure to increase over time from .83 to .92. With this change, none of the other parameters change, and the overall fit of the model is $\chi^2_{(23)}$ = 26.1 (p = .30). Allowing such a change might reflect early adjustments in the identity, which begins to stabilize over time.

common for this identity from one week to the next. Over the course of two years (100 weeks), however, only $.81^2 = 66$ percent of the variance is in common with the beginning point. Very small effects cumulate over time.

In the present research, the gender identity changes somewhat more; perhaps marriage has caused larger changes to this identity. The persistence of this identity over the two years is $.672$. The estimated weekly persistence is $.996$, hardly less stable than the spousal identity. Yet the long-term effects show that the cumulative change is larger, with only 45 percent of the variance in common between year 1 and year 3.

Hypothesis 2 concerns the first source of identity change and suggests that a discrepancy not only leads to behavior counteracting a disturbance to meanings in the situation, as in Hypothesis 1. It also causes the meanings in the standard to shift slowly over time in the direction of the behavioral meanings in the situation, thus reducing the discrepancy by identity change. As shown in Table 4, the discrepancy between perceived spousal performance meanings and spousal identity meanings (e5 or e6 in Figure 2) exerts a positive effect (beta = $.06, p \le .01$) on subsequent levels of meaning in the spouse identity standard. This finding confirms Hypothesis 2, concerning the first source of identity change. Persons who, because of situational constraints and disturbances, enact the spouse role in a more traditionally feminine manner than is consistent with their spouse role identity will find that their spouse role identity becomes somewhat more traditionally feminine over time. The identity changes over time to become more consistent with the role performance. This finding is consistent with Peterson and Gerson (1992), who show that situational constraints often determine the amount of household labor in which husbands and wives engage. I find here that these constraints are translated into self-meanings as they persist over time.

Hypothesis 3 addresses a second mechanism of identity change, which suggests that when activated identities share dimensions of meaning, each will influence the other to keep the levels on the shared dimension of meaning the same. The results displayed in Table 4 also are consistent with this hypothe-sis. We see that the spousal identity is influenced positively (beta = $.07, p \le .01$) by the gender identity in the prior year, and that the gender identity is influenced positively (beta = $.12, p \le .01$) by the spousal identity in the prior year as well. Because the prior level of each identity is controlled in the model, we are dealing, in effect, with changes over time. The more traditionally feminine one's gender identity is in one year, the more one's spousal identity becomes traditionally feminine in the next year, and the more traditionally feminine or masculine one's spouse identity in one year, the more one's gender identity becomes feminine or masculine to match.

Finally, the model suggested that spousal role performance is a function of the spousal identity (this was the case: beta = $.08, p \le .01$). It also suggested, however, that spousal role performance was not a direct effect of gender identity, though an indirect effect was included in the model through the spousal role identity. Similarly, the implication of a discrepancy between the spousal identity standard and role performance exerts direct effects only on the spousal identity (and on future role performance), but through its effects on the spousal identity, it also exerts an indirect effect on gender identity. Because the overall model fits the data very well, no direct connection between gender identity and the spousal role performance is needed.

DISCUSSION

The fact that identities act so as to resist change does not mean that they do not change over time. Identity change involves changes in the meaning of the self: changes in what it means to be who one is as a member of a group, who one is in a role, or who one is as a person. These meanings are held in the identity standard, the part of the identity that serves as a reference for judging self-in-situation meanings. Identities' resistance to change gives them some stability; thus change occurs only slowly in response to persistent pressure.

In the present paper I suggest two mechanisms whereby identities change over time. The first is the slow change that occurs as the meanings in the identity standard shift to be more like the self-relevant meanings that are

perceived in the situation. This is an adaptive response that allows individuals to fit into new situations and cultures where the meanings are different. It can be viewed as a socialization effect that might occur as individuals take on new roles and memberships. Because this process is slow, it is unlikely to result in much change unless the perceptions are persistently different from the standard. Also, because the output behavior tends to change the situation more quickly so as to bring perceptions into alignment with the identity standard, such persistence in the discrepancy is unusual unless the person is in a new situation. The present results, however, show that this does happen.

The second mechanism is also an adaptive response, in which two identities that share some common dimension(s) of meaning in their standards become more like each other in their settings on that dimension when they are activated together. In the present study, each of the identities (gender identity and spouse identity) shares a masculine/feminine dimension. If the standards for the amount of masculinity/femininity differ for the two identities, a discrepancy will exist for one of the identities when the other shows no discrepancy. Whatever the behavior in the situation, persistent discrepancies still will be present. Consequently we expect that the standards (with respect to masculinity/femininity) for the two identities will shift so that they are the same. Being more feminine on one standard will bring about more femininity on the other. Conversely, being more masculine on the latter will bring about more masculinity on the former. This process is also confirmed in the present data. Which identity changes more will depend on other factors: for example, if the individual is more strongly committed to the spouse identity or if that identity is more salient, it should change less.

The confirmation of each of these processes within identities begins to move identity theory from the more static view of identities that characterizes much of the prior work to a more dynamic view of identities as always changing (though slowly) in response to the exigencies of the situation. Insofar as an identity cannot change the situation (and the meanings contained therein), it adapts slowly, gaining control where it can, and adapting where it must. This point is consistent with the traditional symbolic interaction understanding of self as process. At the same time, however, it acknowledges the structural symbolic interaction view that identities exist within the structural framework of society and are influenced by their position in that framework. As Coltrane and Ishii-Kuntz (1992) point out, men's participation in household labor is influenced by a number of structural factors including income, occupation, and urban residence; these tend to shape ideology and, I would add, self-meanings.

IMPLICATIONS

A number of implications can be drawn from the present research results pertaining to identity change. Consider first the effect of other identities. In this paper I investigate the relationship between two identities. I show that when each identity tries to confirm a different level on some dimension of meaning (for example, one identity wanting to be more masculine than the other), each identity standard adjusts slowly toward the level of the other: in effect, a compromise. If this is to happen, both identities must be activated in the situation, each trying to verify itself from a common pool of meanings in the situation. For example, the identities of friend and son might be enacted in a situation that involves both parents and friends. The individual may be embarrassed by the way his parents treat him in front of his friends, and embarrassed by the way the friends act toward him in front of his parents. This is the traditional notion of role conflict. One avoids such a conflict by not entering situations in which parents and friends are together (thus activating both identities simultaneously). On the other hand, if one encounters this situation frequently, the meanings of both identities— son and friend—shift slowly toward commonality, and the conflict again is avoided.

In this way, every new identity one takes on, through role acquisition or membership in new groups, creates potential changes in other identities that may share dimensions of meaning. If I take a job, join a club, or become friends with a new person, each of these identities ultimately must "fit in" with

my other identities insofar as they are activated simultaneously in situations. As I have shown, however, it is not merely that one identity changes to "fit in" with existing identities; all identities must adjust to fit together so as to bring shared meanings to a common level. In this way, then, identities are always shifting, although generally in small amounts, because we resist situations that may require large changes.

To avoid situations that require large identity changes, we engage in strategies that act to confirm our existing identities (Swann 1990). These strategies include selective interaction, in which we choose the persons and situations with which we engage ourselves so as to confirm our current identities and avoid those which are likely to disconfirm them. In addition, we display identity cues to let others know who we are, and therefore how we should be treated. By looking the part, we convey those meanings which define us for others as we wish to be defined and understood. Finally, we use interpersonal prompts or other altercasting procedures (Weinstein and Deutschberger 1963) to cause others to treat us in a manner consistent with our identities.

The present research has other implications for identity change as well. As Burke and Cast (1997) have shown, identities change when self-relevant meanings in the situation alter irrevocably. Such a change would be manifested in the model depicted in Figure 2 as an increase in the discrepancy represented (for example) by e5 or e6. In that research the birth of a baby resulted in husbands' becoming more masculine and wives' becoming more feminine. This change was rather dramatic. From the cognitive dissonance literature, however, we know that every decision leads to postdecision dissonance because it creates self-relevant meanings that are at odds with the identity we possess. This is the case because there are always some undesirable elements in the alternative that was chosen, and some elements in the alternative that was rejected which are nevertheless desirable.

Although a situation may contain only a few such discrepant elements (otherwise we probably would have chosen the other alternative), they persist after the decision is made. As a result of the presence of such elements that have meanings discrepant with our identities, some self-meanings change in a way that reduces the dissonance or discrepancy. We change the importance or prominence of certain elements, and we shift our self-conceptions on dimensions of meaning so as to reduce the dissonance. The changes in identities resulting from most decisions would be quite small; for very important or large decisions, however, fairly large changes can ensue. Nevertheless, as we have seen, small changes occurring from everyday decisions can cumulate.

A final source of identity change that should be recognized is what I have called disturbances in the situation: events that are beyond the control of individuals which change the self-relevant meanings in the situation. Burke and Cast (1997) discussed this the type of event; it is also the type that makes the news, such as a house fire, an airplane crash, or winning the lottery. Such events also include experiences such as bullying on the playground or the deterioration of a friendship, as far as these are relevant to our identities. Finally, they include everyday activities, both our own and those of people around us that change meanings in the situation in unanticipated ways. Insofar as these meanings have self-relevance and cannot be fully countered or controlled, they will result in some degree of change in our identities, as shown in the present research on the normal daily performance of the spousal role.

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