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## IDENTITY, SOCIAL STATUS, AND EMOTION

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PETER J. BURKE

*University of California, Riverside, CA, USA*

**ABSTRACT** Identity control theory was formed in the context of structural symbolic interaction, which attends to the different positions in the social structure in which persons with given identities are embedded and to the impact of structural position on identity processes. One of the differences among social positions is the amount of resources the position controls and hence the amount of status accorded to the occupant. I examine the effects of social status on the emotional impacts of the lack of identity verification. Status, conceptualized as a symbolic marker indicating who has control of resources, is hypothesized to have two effects. Status and resources help persons verify their identities, and at the same time, help to buffer the consequences of a lack of verification. Data from the spousal identity of 286 newly married couples are examined and generally support these hypotheses. The implication of these findings for existing theory and future research are discussed.

[AQ1]

### INTRODUCTION

Identity theory has its roots in the structural symbolic interaction framework (Stryker [1980] 2002), which both acknowledges and attends to the fact that identities operate in culturally defined positions (roles and groups) within the social structure. Role identities are defined by the cultural meanings and expectations associated with role positions, and social identities are defined by the cultural meanings and expectations associated with groups and socially defined categories. Groups, social categories, and roles operate to manipulate resources.

At a very abstract level, connected resource flows form the fundamental interaction process of any social system. Indeed, system structures may be viewed as connected resource flows (Freese and Burke 1994). By verifying identities, people act to counteract situational disturbances to bring self-relevant situational meanings into alignment with their identity standards. Changing situational meanings involves the manipulation of active (currently in use) and potential (not currently in use) resources through the control of signs and symbols.<sup>1</sup> Thus, identity verification is the way in which the resources that sustain individuals, interactions, and the social structure are appropriately marshaled, transformed, and transferred to maintain personal and structural integrity. In the process, identity verification also *uses* active resources. Without resources the process of identity verification cannot occur.

Since persons are the agents through which identities operate, and each person is the host to many identities, in terms of the multiple roles, groups, and relationships in which the person is involved (James 1890), some of the resources that are manipulated by these multiple identities (in the verification processes) must be directed toward the maintenance of the person as well.<sup>2</sup> As a biological entity, a person needs sustenance, but also as a social and psychological being, a person needs resources to maintain him or herself as a functioning unit; a unit through which the identities accomplish their goals. The emergence of a person identity with its own identity standard accomplishes this task of maintaining the person through the manipulation of the signs and symbols that control the necessary active and potential resources.

We thus have a picture of role and social identities engaging in identity verification that counteracts disturbances and maintains the social structure through the transfer and transformation of the resources to which the identities are given access, and of person identities engaging in identity verification that maintains the person as an active agent through the control of some subset of these resources. Both of these maintenance functions manipulate active and potential resources, but they also require resources for their accomplishment. Identities control resources through verification and identities use resources to carry out the verification. Adequate resources are thus necessary for verification to occur.

Identity theory suggests, and prior research has found that negative emotional reactions occur to the extent that identities are not verified (Burke 1991; Burke and Harrod 2005; Burke and Stets 1999; Cast and Burke 2002; Stets and Burke 2005). The present research examines the consequences of access to resources through one's position in the social structure for the verification process with a special focus on the emotional consequences of identity verification/non-verification.

<sup>1</sup> Signs are a more general class than symbols, the latter being restricted to those signs that have shared conventional meanings. Non-symbolic signs provide a direct experience of the situation that is not necessarily shared (Lindesmith and Strauss 1956).

<sup>2</sup> This siphoning of resources from the flows for verification of person identities would include both legitimate siphoning that occurs through salary and benefits associated with the role, as well as non-legitimate siphoning such as embezzlement, backshish, bribery, and the like.

THEORY

IDENTITIES AND MEANINGS

An identity contains the set of meanings defining who one is in terms of his or her roles (e.g., truck driver, wife, or professor), group or social category memberships (e.g., American, fraternity member, or female), or personal characteristics (e.g., dominant, sweet, or supportive). These self-meanings compose what are called identity standards (one standard for each identity). In addition to the identity standard (as shown in Figure 5.1), an identity also consists of the set of perceptions of self-relevant meanings in the interactive situation, and a comparator that functions to compare the perceived self-relevant meanings with the corresponding meanings in the identity standard. Any difference or discrepancy signals an error, which is output ultimately in the form of social behaviors that are aimed at altering the meanings in the situation so as to bring perceptions of those altered meanings into alignment with the identity standard and reduce the error or discrepancy to zero.

If there is no discrepancy, people’s behavior reflects in the situation the self-meanings held in their identity standard. When those meanings are disturbed, usually by others interacting in the situation who are also trying to keep their self-relevant meanings in alignment with their identities, people behave in such a way as to counteract the disturbed self-relevant meanings and bring them back into alignment with their identity standards (Burke 1991). This is the process

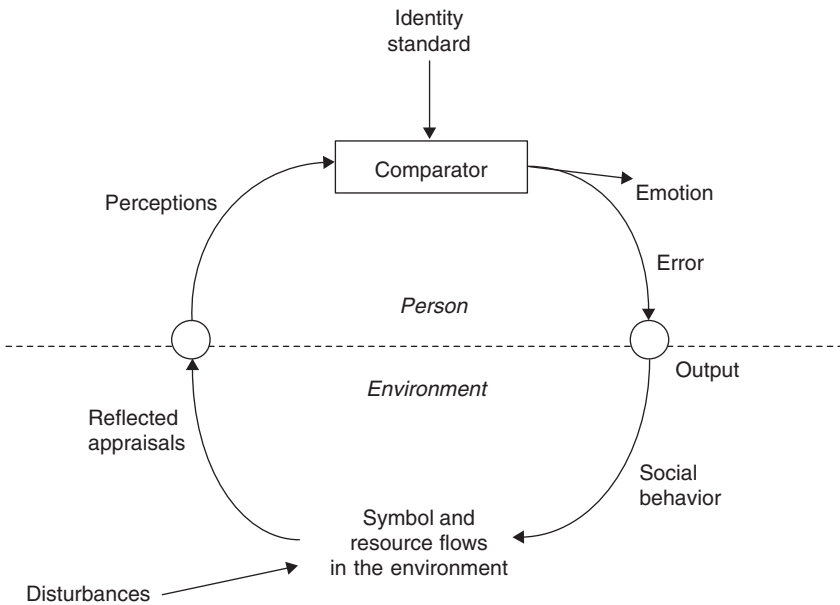


FIGURE 5.1 Basic identity model.

of self-verification: acting to counteract disturbances and adjust the self-relevant meanings in the situation so that the perceptions of them match those in the identity standard (Burke 2004a,b).

Thus, an identity standard serves as a reference against which perceived self-relevant meanings in the interactive situation are compared. When the perceived meanings match the meanings in the identity standard, there is identity verification and people both feel good about that and will continue to act as they have been acting. If the perceived meanings do not match the identity standard because of some disturbance in the situation, a discrepancy exists which is subjectively felt as a negative emotion, and which leads to behavior designed to counteract the discrepancy and restore the situationally self-relevant meanings to match those in the identity standard (Burke 1991; 2004a).

Meaning is defined, following Osgood and his colleagues (Osgood, May, and Miron 1975; Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum 1957) as a mediational response to signs (arising through immediate experience) and symbols (socially shared and consensual). These responses vary across bipolar dimensions of meaning such as those universal dimensions that Osgood and his colleagues discovered: evaluation (good–bad), potency (strong–weak), and activity (active–passive). These universal dimensions are found in most cultures, but together they only account for about 50% of the variance in people’s responses to stimuli – i.e., these three dimensions capture about half the meaning.

The other half of meaning lies in the multitude of socially relevant dimensions we find important for understanding the world: dimensions like moral–immoral, masculine–feminine, empty–full, ordered–disordered, or eager–reticent. For each relevant dimension of meaning, the identity standard sets a level that should be maintained for the person to be who they are. If degree of riskiness is an important dimension of one’s gender identity, each person tries to maintain an impression of riskiness that corresponds to how they define their self. If they are being too risky, they act to become more conservative. If they are too conservative, they increase their risk behavior to the level that satisfies the level set in their gender identity standard.

### **IDENTITIES AND RESOURCES**

Tied to the meanings arising from signs and symbols are resources. By controlling meanings, people control resources. Freese and Burke (1994) distinguished between active resources (those that are functioning in the current situation to sustain persons, groups, and interaction) and potential resources (those that are not currently being used in the situation, but are being readied, transformed, transported, etc. to the time and location where they will be used as active resources).

Examples of active resources are the heat and light that keep us comfortable and allow us to see to interact; the table on which the food we are eating rests; the utensils we are using to eat the food; the love and friendship expressed by those around us; and so on. Examples of potential resources are the car that is in

the garage, food that is in the refrigerator, the friend with whom we are not currently interacting, and oil in the pipeline. Active resource transfers are the objects of immediate experience, indicated by signs. Potential resources are the objects of reflective experience, indicated by symbols. As Freese and Burke (1994) point out, at a very abstract level, connecting resource flows is the fundamental goal of interaction, while system structures are the connected resource flows.

From this perspective, then, identity verification is accomplished by manipulation of meanings in the situation, but as meanings (arising from both signs and symbols) are tied to resource flows, identity verification is accomplished by the manipulation of active and potential resources. Resources are thus central for the maintenance of identities (Stets and Cast 2005).

The manipulation of resources by individual identities in the process of identity-verification brings about the resource flows and transformations that together define the social system (Burke 2004a). As a truck driver, I verify my truck driver role identity by doing the things that define me as a truck driver, and in the process, I have moved (potential) resources between two locations as I haul containers from the Port of Los Angeles to the Inland Empire. I have also used the (actual) resources of my skills and knowledge, as well as the truck, gasoline, oil, tires, roads, etc. to accomplish this.

All of my behaviors as a truck driver serve both to portray my identity (e.g., my uniform, my interactions, and conversations with others) and to counteract unexpected and unpredictable disturbances that arise (a flat tire, engine trouble, speed traps, heavy traffic). These disturbances cause me to engage in unanticipated behaviors to accomplish what I need to accomplish in order to maintain meanings consistent with my role as truck driver. Indeed, without this ability to counteract disturbances, the social system would quickly fall apart.

Being able to accomplish identity goals (i.e., make perceptions of self-relevant meanings match meanings in the identity standard for the way they are supposed to be) in spite of disturbances is the unique viewpoint of identity theory. The goals have to do with keeping (potential) resource levels and flows at the levels set by the identity standard. The means for reaching the goals use (active) resources in the process. Thus, identity verification requires resources, and those persons with more resources should be better able to verify their identities (Stets and Cast 2005; Stets and Harrod 2004).

### **IDENTITIES, RESOURCES, AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE**

Because every position in the social structure is expected (through identity verification) to control relevant resources for the maintenance of the social structure (by controlling sign and symbolic meanings), legitimate access to those resources is built into every position. The nature of the access and the nature of the resources varies by position, as does the amount of resources made available to the position. The role identity of CEO of Microsoft has more resources available for control than does a programmer hired to code a section of a new product.

Control of resources is not the same as status, but status is accorded to persons in part by the amount of resources that are controlled by the person. Indeed, this is the original coding of occupational status in the Duncan SEI scores (1961), using information about the median education and income for persons in any given occupation to predict the level of esteem and respect that people accord persons in that occupation. In this way, occupational category is a status characteristic indicating not only the status rank a person has, but the level of resources someone in that group could be expected to have (on the average).

Status construction theory (Ridgeway 2006) makes this point. Arbitrary social categories can become status indicators when the neutral social categories are seen to be associated with superior material resources. If persons in one category are seen to have more resources, membership in that category can in itself come to signal status. In this way, status characteristics become substitutes for knowledge about real control of resources, but they also become a visible guide to people in society as to where the resources are likely to be found – that is, who has control of the resources. Thus, I expect that those with higher status have more resources and they should, as a consequence, be better able to verify their identities (Cast, Stets, and Burke 1999; Stets and Cast 2005).

Usually, we distinguish between two types of status characteristics, those that are achieved and those that are ascribed. Higher levels of education or occupational position signal higher achieved status, while racial categories signal relative ascribed status with higher status being given to persons classified as white as opposed to non-white. Being in the higher status group opens doors to the control of more resources and the control of more resources brings about higher status. In the present research, I will use a combined index of achieved status based on both education and occupational status, as well as an index of ascribed status consisting of the categories of white and non-white. Based on the above discussion, I hypothesize:

- Hypothesis 1:* Persons with lower education and occupational status will have higher levels of discrepancy between identity meanings and situationally perceived meanings.
- Hypothesis 2:* Persons in the lower status non-white group will have higher levels of discrepancy between identity meanings and situationally perceived meanings.

## IDENTITIES AND EMOTIONS

The identity verification process is guided in part by the emotional responses that people have as a function of the error signal or discrepancy between perceptions and identity standard (Burke 1991). In general, people feel bad when the discrepancy is large or increasing and they feel good if the discrepancy is small or decreasing. More recently Stets and Burke (2005) have made a number of more specific predictions about emotional responses that take into account not

just the size of the discrepancy, but also a number of other situational features that provide additional meanings. For example, they point out that if the self is the source of the discrepancy, people are more likely to feel embarrassment or shame when the identity standard meanings are set by others (oughts) and to feel disappointment and sadness when the identity standard meanings are set by the self (ideals). Similarly, if another is the source of the discrepancy, people are likely to feel annoyance or hostility when the identity standard consists of oughts, but feel anger or rage if the identity standard consists of ideals. Even these emotions may be modified depending upon the relative status of the other involved in the situation. One may feel anger at a subordinate who creates a discrepancy between perceived meanings and the identity standard, and one may feel fear of a superordinate who creates the discrepancy.

The emotions that arise can serve as guides to tell us about the success of our efforts to verify our identity. The good feelings tell us we are doing the right thing. The bad feelings tell us that we need to change our behavior, and the more specific emotions guide us to behavior that is appropriate in the situation for the reduction of the discrepancy. The particular emotions and actions that are generated by a discrepancy are the ones that best serve not only to reduce the discrepancy, but to preserve the social structural relations within which the identity exists.

There is another factor that plays into the emotional responses generated by the discrepancy. As Burke (1966) pointed out with respect to the emergence of authority structures in small groups, there are two levels of problems to be solved by a group that he distinguished as first- and second-order problems. In order for a group to decide who is going to be the leader (the second-order problem), they must first decide on how such a decision is going to be made in the first place (the first-order problem). First-order problems are infrastructure problems – putting things in place that can be used later in solving second-order problems. In that study, Burke found that the emotional reactions to second-order problems were much more severe if first-order problems had not been solved prior to the onset of the second-order problems. The reaction could be described as “we have a problem and we have no way to solve it.” If first-order problems were already solved, then the response could be described as “we have a problem, but we know how to solve it.”

In the present situation dealing with identity verification, recall that resources are needed to accomplish identity verification. The first-order problem is solved if there are sufficient resources present to allow an identity to exert the necessary control over meanings in the situation when disturbances (second-order problems) create discrepancies between perceptions and the identity standard. The parent who is short on cash to buy food for her children (a disturbance to verifying her parent identity through supporting the children) is much more upset when there is no way to get cash (for example, with a debit or credit card). With the backup resources available (first-order problem solved), the disturbance (a second-order problem) is minor and temporary. In this way, the additional resources held by higher status persons can serve to prevent strong negative emotional

reactions to the lack of identity verification that would be felt by lower status persons without those resources.

These points lead to two additional hypotheses, again on the assumption that persons with more status have access to more resources:

*Hypothesis 3:* Persons with lower education and occupational status will feel the emotional impact of a lack of identity verification to a greater extent than those with higher status.

*Hypothesis 4:* Persons in the lower status non-white group will feel the emotional impact of a lack of identity verification to a greater extent than those in the higher status white group.

## PROCEDURES

### SAMPLE

The data for this study come from a longitudinal study investigating marital dynamics in the first 2 years of marriage (Tallman, Burke, and Gecas 1998). Three data collection points, each one year apart, included a 90-minute face-to-face interview, a 15-minute videotaping of a conversation focused on solving an area of disagreement, and four consecutive one-week daily diaries kept by each respondent. The present analyses are based on information gathered during the face-to-face interview at each point in time.

The sample was drawn from marriage registration records in 1991 and 1992 in two mid-size communities in Washington State. Of the 1,295 couples registered to marry, 574 met the criteria for involvement (both were over the age of 18, were marrying for the first time, and had no children). These couples were contacted and asked to participate; 286 completed all data collection processes in the first period. There was a 15% attrition rate from the first data collection period to the second period and an additional 4.2% attrition rate from the second to the third period of data collection.<sup>3</sup>

### MEASURES

Problems with identity verification were indicated by a measure of the discrepancy between the respondent's spousal identity standard and an indicator of their self-relevant perceptions developed following a method used by Swann, De La Ronde, and Hixon (1994) and Swann, Hixon, and De La Ronde (1992). These researchers examined the extent to which an individual's view of their spouse was congruent with the spouse's self-views on attributes relevant to their self-concept.

<sup>3</sup> A more complete description of the sample can be found in Tallman, Burke, and Gecas (1998).



In the present study, the focus is on the spousal role identity and I compare the individual's own meanings and expectations contained in their spousal role identity standard with the expectations held for them by their partner. Self-verification for a respondent exists when the respondent's self-view is confirmed by the view that the respondent's spouse has for the respondent. While it would be theoretically preferable to measure each respondent's actual *perceptions* of the spouse's expectations for him or her, this data was not collected; instead, I use the spouse's actual expectations as a proxy for the respondent's perceptions (cf. Burke and Stets 1999; Cast and Burke 2002).

In the use of the spouse's *expectations* as a proxy for the actor's reflected appraisals several assumptions are made: (1) the meanings in the actor's identity standard generally correspond to the meaning of the actor's role performance; (2) the spouse appraises the meanings of the actor's role performance negatively if they differ from the spouse's expectations as to how the actor *should* behave; (3) the spouse acts so as to convey the meanings of his or her appraisals and expectations to the actor; and (4) the actor perceives the spouse's behavior and infers the spouse's appraisal (reflected appraisals). The proxy measure of the expectations mentioned in the second assumption is two steps away from the desired measure of reflected appraisals mentioned in assumption 4. Among casual acquaintances or in one-time encounters, these would be large steps, where error could enter easily. Kinch (1963), however, suggests that several conditions can reduce the level of error which might affect these assumptions: (1) self's familiarity with the other, (2) the level of familiarity with the situation, and (3) the actor's past experiences in interpersonal situations. All of these conditions should be met among the newly married couples in the present sample. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that a spouse's *expectations* for an actor are correlated highly both with his or her *appraisals* of the actor and with the actor's *perceptions* of those appraisals. Thus, although the measure of identity verification is not exactly what is desired, it is a close approximation and a useful proxy.

[AQ2]

To assess the spousal role identity standard, respondents rated 11 different spousal role activities in terms of the degree to which they felt they themselves should engage in the activity as part of their spousal role. They also rated the activities in terms of the degree to which they felt that their spouse should engage in that activity. Examples of the activities include "being responsible for maintaining contact with parents and in-laws or other members of the family," "being responsible for taking care of bills and accounts," and "being responsible for hard work." It should be noted that it is not the activities themselves that are important, but rather the meanings that are implied by engaging or not engaging in these activities. Response categories ranged across a 5-point scale from doing all of the activity in the relationship (coded 4) to doing none of the activity (coded 0).

While most of these items dealt with household activities, and the spousal role in all of its complexity clearly includes more than this, the meanings controlled by these activities are, nevertheless, important aspects of the spousal role

identity. However, to the extent that the identity is not fully measured with this scale, there will be measurement error and tests of hypotheses will be weakened.

The degree of disagreement or discrepancy is assessed by calculating the average absolute difference between the respondent's self-description scores and the perception of the respondent held by the respondent's spouse. This score could range from 0 indicating perfect agreement to 4 indicating maximum disagreement. The scale was based on the mean of the 11 differences. The resulting identity discrepancy scale scores was standardized and ranged from  $-1.77$  to  $6.61$ . The omega reliability for the scale is  $0.88$ .

Two indicators of status position were used to assess relative relationship to available resources. The first was a combined index of years of education and Duncan's SEI index of occupational prestige, as updated by Stevens and Cho (1985). The combination of education and occupational status was achieved by first standardizing each of the components, adding them together, and then standardizing the resulting Ed/Occ scale. Higher scores represent higher status. The second indicator was race (as white/non-white coded 1 for whites).<sup>4</sup>

In terms of indicators of emotional outcomes, four were used: anger, depression, distress, and love (felt for the spouse). Anger, as one of the primary emotions, is focused outwards and helps orient a person toward removing a perceived external barrier that hinders identity verification (Turner and Stets 2005). Depression, also considered a primary emotion by Kemper (1987) and often linked with sadness, is focused more inwards and helps a person attempt to reintegrate with others in the group (Turner and Stets 2005). Distress or anxiety is viewed as a secondary emotion that combines both fear and expectancy that often arises when important matters are out of our control (Kemper 1991). Finally, love is a socially derived emotion in which one person gives high amounts of sociability, solidarity, and affection to another (Kemper 1989).<sup>5</sup> Because the identity discrepancy directly involved the other spouse, the emotions generated between them are particularly relevant to understanding the emotional consequences of a lack of identity verification.

*Anger* was measured using five items from the hostility subscale of the SCL-90 (Derogatis 1977). Respondents were asked, for example, how many days during the last week they "got angry over things that weren't really too important," "had temper outbursts," or "wanted to hurt or smash something." Response categories range from 0 ("not at all") to 7 ("seven days"). Items were aligned in the same direction and summed. The omega reliability for the scale is  $0.83$  with a high score indicating high levels of anger. The final scale was standardized.

*Depression* was measured using 12 items from the CES-D scale (Radloff 1977). Example items include asking respondents how many days during the last week

<sup>4</sup> Using gender as a status indicator is not feasible in the present sample because of the lack of independence between husbands and wives.

<sup>5</sup> Kemper calls this the "status" dimension of social relationships (in contrast to the power dimension), though his use of the term "status" is quite different from the use of the term status in this paper.

they had experiences such as “feel lonely,” “sleep restlessly,” and “feel you could not get going.” Response categories range from 0 (“not at all”) to 7 (“seven days”). The items form a single factor with an omega reliability of 0.95. Items were aligned to the same direction and summed. Possible scores range from 0 to 84. A high score indicates high levels of depression. The final scale was standardized.

*Distress* was measured using nine items from the anxiety subscale of the SCL-90 scale (Derogatis 1977). Respondents were asked, for example, how many days during the week they had “felt keyed up or excited,” “felt hands trembling,” and “felt nervous or have an upset stomach.” Response categories range from 0 (“not at all”) to 7 (“seven days”). Items were aligned and summed. The omega reliability for the anxiety measure is 0.89. The final scale was standardized, with a high score indicating high distress.

Finally, *love* was measured using the Rubin Love Scale (Rubin 1973). Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each of 13 statements reflecting how they felt about their spouse, such as “I would do almost anything for (spouse),” “If I could never be with (spouse), I would feel miserable,” and “One of my primary concerns is (spouse’s) welfare.” Responses ranged from “not at all true” to “definitely true” (coded 0–8). The items were summed to form a scale in which a high score reflected high levels of love toward the spouse. The scale was standardized and had an omega reliability of 0.88. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all of these variables are given in Tables 5.1 and 5.2.

## ANALYSIS

Because there are three time points in the data, not all the observations are independent. As a consequence, cross-sectional time-series analysis procedures were used to analyze the data (Baltagi 2001; Greene 1990). This procedure allows for correlated errors due to the non-independence of these observations and it combines information about the cross-sectional parts of the data with information on the time-series parts to provide estimates of effects.

TABLE 5.1 Means, standard deviations, minima, and maxima for the variables

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Ed/Occ	0.00	1.00	-2.13	2.98
White	0.92	0.27	0.00	1.00
Discrepancy	0.00	1.00	-1.78	6.61
Anger	0.00	1.00	-0.89	6.50
Depression	0.00	1.00	-1.11	6.69
Distress	0.00	1.00	-1.02	6.84
Love	0.00	1.00	-4.01	1.71

TABLE 5.2 Correlations among the variables

Variables	Variables						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1 Ed/Occ	1.00						
2 White	0.05*	1.00					
3 Discrepancy	-0.16*	-0.09*	1.00				
4 Anger	-0.18*	-0.04	0.14*	1.00			
5 Depression	-0.19*	-0.03	0.13*	0.63*	1.00		
6 Distress	-0.19*	-0.01	0.13*	0.66*	0.69*	1.00	
7 Love	-0.18*	0.04	0.04	-0.04	0.00	-0.01	1.00

\*  $p \leq 0.05$ .

### RESULTS

I begin with an analysis of the impact of the status characteristics on the level of the discrepancy between a person’s spousal identity standard and how he or she appears in the situation. Table 5.3 shows the results of that analysis and it can be seen that white persons have lower spousal identity discrepancies (more spousal identity verification) than do non-whites, and that the higher a person’s education and occupational status the less the spousal identity discrepancy. Both of these effects are in accord with the hypothesis that status groups, reflecting access to resources, have an impact on the ability of persons to verify their identities. Those in the lower status categories, with fewer resources, have more trouble verifying their spousal role identity.

I turn now to look at the consequences of status categories on emotional reactions to identity discrepancy. Table 5.2 shows the zero-order relationships between discrepancy and each of the four emotions of anger, depression, distress, and love. For the negative emotions of anger, depression, and distress, we see that the greater the spousal identity discrepancy, the greater are these negative emotions. This is consistent with our hypotheses and shows the basic relationship between discrepancy and emotion. There is, however, no zero-order relationship between spousal identity discrepancy and love felt for the spousal partner. While we might expect that feelings of love would be decreased toward the spouse with whom one is having problems verifying their spousal role identity, such a zero-order relationship does not exist.

Adding in the potential moderating effects of status categories, as reported in Table 5.4, shows that a number of the interactions are significant. As a consequence, we know that the relationship between identity discrepancy and the emotional outcomes varies among the different status groups. Considering anger first, the table shows that for every increase of one standard deviation in identity

**TABLE 5.3** Standardized regression coefficients for the effects of race and Ed/Occ on identity discrepancy

Status variable	Discrepancy
White	-0.09*
Ed/Occ	-0.12*

\* $p \leq 0.05$ .

**TABLE 5.4** Standardized regression coefficients for the effects of identity discrepancy, race, Ed/Occ, and their interactions on emotions.

Variables	Emotion outcomes				
	Anger	Depression	Distress	Anger depression and distress constrained estimates <sup>1</sup>	Love
Discrepancy	0.09*	0.08*	0.07*	0.10*	-0.05*
White	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.04
Ed/Occ	-0.15*	-0.13*	-0.16*	-0.17*	-0.15*
Discrepancy X White	-0.06*	-0.03	0.01	-0.04*	0.04*
Discrepancy X E/O	-0.04	-0.06*	-0.04*	-0.04*	0.04*
R <sup>2</sup>	0.06	0.06	0.06		0.05

<sup>1</sup>Estimates of coefficients for anger, depression, and distress constrained to be the same across emotions.

\* $p \leq 0.05$ .

discrepancy, the amount of anger increases by 0.09 standard deviations for non-whites with average educational and occupational status. The significant interaction for whites indicates that the relationship for whites is  $-0.06$  weaker than for non-whites. Thus, for whites with average educational and occupational status, the impact of identity discrepancy on anger is reduced to 0.03. The protective cloak of being in the high status group has considerably reduced the amount of impact on anger for identity verification failure. The direct effects of educational and occupational status show that there is less of an anger reaction for persons with higher status overall, independent of other things, however, we do not see any significant moderator effects for this status variable as it might impact the consequences of identity discrepancy.

Considering next the emotion of depression, the results in Table 5.4 show that, again, for non-whites, an increase in discrepancy leads to an increase in depression

( $\beta = 0.08$ ). Also, having higher educational and occupational status reduces the amount of depression overall, but this also interacts with the effects of identity discrepancy so that persons with higher status do not feel the depressive effects of identity discrepancy to the extent that persons with lower status do. For non-whites who are one standard deviation above the mean of educational and occupational status, the effects of identity discrepancy on depression are reduced to almost zero. Conversely, if a person is one standard deviation below the average on educational and occupational status, the impact of identity discrepancy on depression is strongly increased, almost doubling. With respect to the consequences of being non-white, Table 5.4 shows no significant variation in the consequences of identity discrepancy on emotional response that depends upon being white or non-white.

The effects for the emotional response of distress are similar to the effects for depression. The greater the identity discrepancy, the greater is the level of distress reported for non-whites ( $\beta = 0.07$ ), but this basic effect on distress is decreased for persons with higher than average levels of educational and occupational status. Racial category does not significantly moderate the consequences of identity discrepancy on distress.

Because the effects of identity discrepancy for the emotions of anger, depression, and distress are all very similar in magnitude (though not in meaning), I tested the significance of the differences among the different results. The comparable coefficients across the different emotional outcomes are not significantly different ( $F_{12, 1498} = 0.37, p > 0.95$ ). Using constraints to keep the estimates the same across equations provides more powerful estimates of the effects. These are presented in the fourth column in Table 5.4 labeled "constrained estimates." For these estimates, interaction effects for the negative emotions are significant and suggest that the effects of identity discrepancy on these negative emotions are reduced for persons in the higher status group of whites and for the higher levels of educational and occupational status. These results suggest that although the emotions are different and felt to different extents by different people, identity discrepancy has comparable standardized effects on all of these emotions and these effects are moderated by status for all three emotions.

Finally, turning to the emotion of love, Table 5.4 shows that the baseline effect of increasing discrepancy for non-whites with average levels of educational and occupational status is to decrease the level of love felt for the partner, which is consistent with the hypothesis. Like the effects for the negative emotions, Table 5.4 shows that there are also moderating effects for both racial status as well as educational and occupational status on the consequences of identity discrepancy for the emotion of love. Being in the higher status white group reduces the impact of the discrepancy to almost zero, and moving up one standard deviation in educational and occupational status also significantly reduces the negative effects of identity discrepancy. The strongest negative effects are for non-whites with low educational and occupational status.

## DISCUSSION

Emotion is one of the concomitants of the identity verification process. Emotion is not just an outcome, because it also helps serve to motivate and guide the verification process of keeping perceptions of self-relevant meanings in the situation in alignment with the meanings in the identity standard as suggested by Stets and Burke (2005). The stronger the discrepancy between perceptions and identity standard, the more are positive emotions reduced while negative emotions are increased in strength and persistence (Burke 1991; Burke and Harrod 2005) and the more motivated is the person to counteract the disturbance that is the source of the discrepancy. Emotions also vary by the social context and the nature of the discrepancy, with different emotions leading to different restorative behaviors, with anger, for example, focusing one outward and sadness and depression focusing one inward (Stets and Burke 2005).

According to identity theory, resources are intimately tied up in the identity verification process and hence with the emotions that are produced in that process. The self-relevant meanings that are perceived in the situation are directly tied to actual and potential resources through signs and symbols. Controlling the perceived meanings is accomplished by controlling the resources to which the meanings are attached. Bringing the perceived self-relevant meanings into alignment with the meanings in the identity standard brings the resource flows into alignment with the dictates and needs of the role or group attached to the identity, and thereby maintains the connected resource flows of the social structure.

In addition, it takes resources to manipulate the meanings/resources in the situation. With more resources at one's disposal, one has greater control over the resources that are under the jurisdiction of one's identity. And, with greater control over the resources, there is less likely to be any discrepancy between perceived self-relevant meanings and identity standard meanings. The discrepancies that do occur also should be smaller and of shorter duration. Hence, the negative emotions that arise when discrepancies are large or increasing should be less strong for persons who have more resources.

Status is a social marker indicating who has control of resources. With greater access to and control of resources comes greater status and the social marker of status may be more visible to others than the degree of access to resources. We thus often rely on status to tell us who is likely to control important resources. It was in this sense that I examined the relationship between status, the degree of identity verification and the emotions that arise when identities are not verified. What I found was that persons who are in higher status positions, either in terms of education and occupational status or in terms of being a member of the higher status white as opposed to a non-white racial group, had both a greater degree of verification of the spousal identity and were less likely to experience strong negative emotions or a reduction of positive emotions when their spousal identity was not verified.

Three negative emotions were examined: anger, which is focused outward and helps orient a person toward removing a perceived external barrier to identity

verification; depression, which is focused more inwards and helps a person attempt to make internal adjustments to their identity standards with the ultimate consequence of increasing identity verification; and distress, which signals that important matters are out of control. From the results of the present study, each of these emotions arose when the discrepancy between perceived meanings and identity meanings increased, especially among those who had lower status.

The zero-order correlations among these different negative emotions were in the moderate range of 0.6 meaning that there was an overlap of about 40% in terms of persons who felt one emotion more strongly also feeling another emotion more strongly. On the other hand, there is clearly a lot of independence among the three emotions. People who feel one are not necessarily the people who feel another, which suggests that while identity discrepancy is increasing each of these negative emotions, it is not necessarily the case that any person feels all of them as a result. Rather, persons are likely to feel one or another depending upon other circumstances (Stets and Burke 2005). Indeed, classifying people as low or high on each of the three negative emotions (using median splits) shows that about 42% are low on all three negative emotions (primarily the persons whose spousal identities are better verified). Another 19% are high on all three, and the rest feel various one or two-way combinations.

For example, if a person were experiencing a discrepancy in their spousal identity between the meanings in their spousal identity standard and how those meanings were perceived in the situation, and if the person felt that the discrepancy was the result of how another was behaving to disturb the meanings they were trying to control, the person might feel anger. On the other hand, if the person felt that he or she was not able to control the meanings in the manner they desired, then the person may feel depressed. Finally, if the situational meanings were disturbed away from the standard and it was not clear what could be done about it, the person may simply feel distressed. And, of course, combinations of these perceptions and situations may exist resulting combinations of negative feelings. In each case, whatever negative emotion or combination the person felt as a result of the identity discrepancy, he or she would experience less of that emotion or combination to the extent that his or her position in the social structure provided more access to resources, represented in higher status.

The effect of identity discrepancy on the emotion of love operates in a very similar fashion. For lower status persons without resources, spousal identity discrepancy decreases love of the spouse, that is, changes it in the negative direction. As the status of a person increases, the negative impact of identity discrepancy on love is diminished, once again showing the protective character of having resources as indicated by having higher status. For all four emotions, then, an increase in identity discrepancy results in a change in the negative direction of the emotion, and an increase in status reduces this impact of identity discrepancy.

Overall, then, it is clear from the current results that emotional reactions are related to one's position in the social structure. Persons in status positions that



provide access to more resources are better able to verify their identities and with this knowledge of their general ability to verify their identities, they are less likely to have strong emotional reactions in those situations where they have some problems verifying their identities. This was the first- and second-order problem issue. Knowing that you can generally verify your identity (first-order problems solved because you have the resources) prevents you from getting upset when situational disturbances (second-order problems) create temporary discrepancies.<sup>6</sup> Although this effect was present for all four emotions investigated, the lack of a high correlation among the different emotions suggests that different people respond emotionally in different ways to identity discrepancy. Stets and Burke (2005) provide some hypotheses suggesting that it is additional meanings in the situation which cue the different emotions. Unfortunately, the present study does not contain data relevant to such tests. Therefore, it remains to future research to begin to sort out the conditions under which different emotions will be generated in response to identity discrepancy.

Finally, it is of interest to note that those positions with the most resources allowing the greatest verification of identities are likely the positions that are crucial in the social structure in the sense of being at the hub of the transfer of large amount of (potential) resources that ultimately (as active resources) help maintain the social structure itself. The fact that these central identities are better able to verify themselves (than those in lower status position) means that these central identities are better able to counteract disturbances to the general social structure. Key positions are better protected, and the social structure is conserved.

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<sup>6</sup>There may be a limit to the argument that higher status persons, with more resources, can generally verify their identities and therefore react less strongly to disturbances. If the discrepancy caused by a disturbance is larger than normally experienced, or more persistent than normal, higher-status persons may react more strongly than their lower-status counterparts (cf. Cast and Burke 2002).

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