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Bridging Identities

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Sociology and psychology are no strangers in the theoretical world of self and identity. Whereas some of the other topics represented in this volume are still in the courting stage and just beginning to find points of similarity and overlap, researchers in the field of self and identity are in many respects long-life companions. Early works by William James (1890), a psychologist, and George Herbert Mead (1934), a sociologist, are often taken as a starting point by investigators in both fields. In more recent years, with the development of a number of identity theories in both fields, several investigators have directly addressed both the areas of overlap and the distinctions between sociologically based and psychologically based theories.

LOOKING BACK

Psychologists Hogg, Terry, and White (1995) were among the first to directly confront the issue in "A Tale of Two Theories," offering a critical comparison between sociology's identity theory and psychology's social identity theory and concluding that it may be "inadvisable to attempt to integrate very different theories" (Hogg et al. 1995:266). Their argument hinged on their view that the two theories fundamentally differed on a number of issues including their levels of analysis (social identity focusing more on sociocognitive processes of individuals and identity theory focusing more on a direct link between the individual and society without much internal processing), their approaches to intergroup behavior (identity theory focusing on roles and social identity theory focusing on group and intergroup processes), their views on the relationship of groups and roles (social identity generally ignoring roles within groups and identity theory viewing roles as a central component of identities), and the salience of social context (social identity paying more attention to the impact of the social context on identities and identity theory viewing identities as more stable across contexts).

Sociologists Stets and Burke (2000) took issue with the analysis of Hogg et al. (1995), arguing that identity theory and social identity theory have far more in common than the latter authors acknowledged and suggesting that fundamental integration, if not yet fully realized, is nonetheless possible and indeed likely and necessary. Among their major arguments were the following: All identities function in a similar manner (the self-verification process), but that depending upon the basis of the identity (role, group/category, or person) the consequences are different. Social identity theory has tended to focus on the group/category basis of identity while identity theory has tended to focus on the role basis of identity (neither has focused very much on the person as a basis of identity). By viewing role, person, and group simply as bases for the development of identities, they argued that a unification of identity

theory and social identity theory is feasible. Second, they suggested that the cognitive and motivational processes underlying the theories are not dissimilar. Self-categorization and the often accompanying *depersonalization* (viewing the self as a group member rather than as a unique individual) are the primary cognitive processes in social identity theory, while *self-verification* (affirming self-meanings in the situation) is the primary cognitive process in identity theory. Categorization and self-verification show us that membership in any social group or role includes two important aspects: one's identification with and commitment to a category, and the behaviors that we associate with the category, both of which have been incorporated in varying degrees by theories in each discipline. More generally, both psychological and sociological theories of identity recognize that the self both exists within and is influenced by society, because socially defined shared meanings are incorporated into one's prototype or identity standard.

In another paper from the 1990s, Thoits and Virshup (1997) appraised the "me's and we's" of social identity. They suggested that the sociological approach tends to stress the structural and functional aspects of identity, and in so doing to focus on the ways in which identity performances are a means to maintain the social order. Psychological models, in contrast, are more likely to emphasize the ways in which people actively negotiate among competing categories and groups in order to achieve psychological satisfaction. Among other observations, Thoits and Virshup pointed to what sometimes appears as a counterintuitive reversal of emphases between sociology and psychology, with psychological theories more concerned with broader intergroup dynamics and sociology giving more attention to within-group and within-person processes.

Comparisons of sociological and psychological approaches to the study of social identities took center stage in the June 2003 issue of *Social Psychology Quarterly* edited by psychologist Michael Hogg and sociologist Cecilia Ridgeway, as the entire issue was devoted to exploring the common ground between the two perspectives on social identity. In that issue, Deaux and Martin (2003) approached the topic as two complementary domains with different emphases. Their analysis rested on a distinction between social contexts defined by categories of group membership, including both ascribed and achieved categories that people can accept, challenge, or change, and social contexts that are defined by specific interpersonal networks in which people play a specified role with another person in that same network.

It is, of course, dangerous to frame this debate as a dichotomy between sociological versus psychological theory. Within each discipline, there are several distinct theories of identity and each has its unique emphases. This within-discipline variation tends to diminish the importance of between-discipline variation as a point of focus. Within sociology, for example, the identity theory of Burke and Stets (2009) is joined by, and in some ways influenced by, the earlier work of Sheldon Stryker (1980) in developing the self-society connection rooted in Mead and the earlier symbolic interaction foundations, and by McCall and Simmons (1978) in their development of the interactionist view of identities. An additional sociological approach is the theoretical research program on Affect Control Theory by Heise, Smith-Lovin, and others (e.g., Heise 1985; Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2006; Smith-Lovin 1990). This theory builds an understanding of identity processes as maintaining cultural definitions of the meanings of identities, behaviors, and situations.

Although the psychologist Erik Erikson (1950) was one of the first to bring the concept of identity into the social and behavioral sciences, his emphasis was primarily on the internal integrity of what we would call a global self-concept rather than on shared meanings and interpersonal connections between self and others. Psychological versions of identity most often point to Henri Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory (SIT) as a key reference. Subsequent developments by John Turner and his colleagues (Turner et

al. 1987) have produced self-categorization theory, which builds on some of the assumptions of SIT but focuses more on internal cognitive processes. Other developments in this general tradition include more detailed investigations of context, commitment, and content as variable features of social identities (Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 1999) and the strategic aspects of social identity performance (Reicher, Spears, and Postmes 1995; Klein, Spears, and Reicher 2007). Outside the framework of social identity theory, there is also the work of William Swann (e.g., 1983, 1990) on the self-verification process. Although this work has not focused specifically on identity, it has been instrumental in the formulation of identity theory from the sociological perspective.

In all of this work by both sociologists and psychologists, we are dealing with characteristics of the self that are held at either a conscious or unconscious level. When an identity is activated, these characteristics are manifest to others and help define the self to the self and to others. In identity theory, these characteristics are meanings in the sense of what it means to be who one is, and they are based on a shared culture that defines possibilities based in groups, or roles, or the biosocial individual. These characteristics are often seen as actively protected or defended in a self-verification process, which gives rise to feelings of self-worth, efficacy, esteem, and authenticity.

LOOKING AHEAD

In the remainder of this paper, we point to three areas that seem to us to be of particular interest when one thinks about the ways in which sociological and psychological perspectives on identity converge. Although these topics vary in the degree to which they have attracted the interest of scholars in the two disciplines, and have been addressed with different emphases and interpretations, we believe that each topic holds promise for future research and development. The three topics that we have selected are (a) motivational bases for identity processes; (b)

integration of the different bases of identity; and (c) multiplicity of identities.

Motivational Bases of Identity

A central question for all identity theories concerns the motivation for having an identity in the first place, and for maintaining that identity across time and place. Identity theorists from both disciplines have addressed these issues, often borrowing from each other's work to buttress their arguments. Within the identity theory of Burke and Stets (2009), the self-verification motive plays a central role and is seen as the source of self-esteem in its various forms of worth, efficacy, and authenticity, each of which is seen as a motive in other theories.

Social identity theory, as originally formulated by Tajfel (1978), put the emphasis on a motive for positive social identity, which was presumed to drive the social comparison process and the search for positive ingroup distinctiveness. Later investigators, operating more or less within the social identity tradition, have posited a variety of other motives for social identification. Hogg and Abrams (1993), for example, suggested that the major motive for categorization of the self is to reduce uncertainty about one's place in the world. Other motives that have been invoked over the years of identity study include needs to increase self-esteem, create meaning, and maintain balance and consistency (Deaux 1996). Typically, within social identity theory and certainly with the subsequent development of self-categorization theory, these motivational processes are viewed as emerging from the cognitive processes of social categorization and social comparison.

More recently, Reicher and his colleagues (Reicher et al. 1995; Klein et al. 2007) have offered theoretical and empirical arguments for a strategically motivated presentation of one's identity. Rather than focusing on those factors that elicit depersonalization, they turn instead to the consequences for behavior once the identity is salient. Critical to the expression of an identity, they argue, are characteristics of the audience that may support or

negate an identity performance. Two key goals of identity performance, according to Klein et al. (2007), are *identity consolidation* (confirming the worth of an identity) and *identity mobilization* (motivating collective action on behalf of one's social group).

The variety of motivations invoked in the discussion of identity attest to the interest of investigators in the reasons why people would define themselves in a particular way and the functions that those identifications might serve. Yet while there is no shortage of motivational possibilities, less work has been done to compare the strength of various motives or to define the boundaries of their operation. Further exploration of these comparative issues might be a useful activity for future research.

Integrating the Different Bases of Identity

One large area of difference that has existed between psychological and sociological approaches to identity is that psychologists have tended to focus their theories on social or group-based identities while sociologists have put the theoretical emphasis on role identities as tied to a complex differentiated social structure. Identity theory (Burke and Stets 2009) has suggested that identity *processes* should be the same whether the identity is based on groups or roles. The outcomes and consequences of these common processes may differ, however, because role identities maintain a complementarity to counter-role identities, while group member identities maintain similarity to others in the group. The third basis of identity, the biosocial individual, has received only scant attention in either sociology or psychology and is in much need of development, though we suggest that the operation of person or personal identities would follow the same principles as social or role identities.

Multiplicity of Identities

The notion that people have multiple identities is one that has permeated the identity literature in both psychology and sociology, finding roots in both William James (1890) and George Herbert Mead (1934). Virtually all contemporary identity theories include an assumption of multiplicity, noting both the seeming inevitability of multiplicity in the postmodern world (Stets and Burke 2009) and the possible psychological benefits of multiplicity for the individual (e.g., Linville 1987; Thoits 1992; although some recent research [Cerven 2010] suggests that these benefits may only accrue if the identities are verified). Theories differ, however, in the amount of attention they pay to the structure and relationship among identities. Tajfel's social identity theory, for example, simply acknowledges that people have more than one identity; J. Turner's self-categorization theory, with its emphasis on situational salience, points to the range of possibilities that the environment presents but gives little attention to dispositional properties of the individual.

Other theorists have focused more intently on the structure of identities within the person. Stryker, for example, used the concept of salience as an organizing principle, theorizing that identities are organized on the basis of their probability of being enacted in a person's social settings (Stryker and Serpe 1982). Burke and Stets (2009) also specifically theorize the relationship between multiple identities in terms of a hierarchical control system, in which the meanings output by higher-level identities form the standards for lower-level identities.

Sociologists frequently use the concept of master identity to refer to overarching demographic categories such as gender and race; this concept is less often found in the psychological literature. One approach to the issue of multiplicity within psychology makes use of statistical procedures called hierarchical class analysis developed by de Boeck and Rosenberg (1988) to empirically derive an ideographic identity structure for each individual. By this analysis, one can empirically determine, for example, whether a person has a single overarching identity and what other identities are subsumed by that identity, or whether a variety of identities coexist at equivalent levels of importance (Deaux 1993).

Multiplicity of identity is a good arena for sociologists and psychologists to meet, particularly when the analysis of these identities

includes consideration of both the social categories and the meanings that are associated with those categories. Some good theoretical and empirical work has been done here (e.g., Crisp and Hewstone 2007), but we believe that opportunities for further development exist.

We have highlighted three areas in which bridges between sociology and psychology might be extended and strengthened. Certainly, in an area as broad as identity, many other candidates for connection could be considered as well. Much is to be gained, we believe, by exploring these possibilities in ways that will strengthen our overall understanding of identity from both sociological and psychological vantage points.

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Bridging Identities through Identity Change

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As indicated by Deaux and Burke (this volume), sociology and psychology have shared a tradition of discourse allowing us to build upon each other's ideas. A conversation between social identity theory and identity theory was initiated fifteen years ago and addressed the similarities and differences between these theories (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995; Stets and Burke 2000). This type of communication between the fields can further define our theories through gaining a new perspective. We may also advance identity research by working together on areas that need development in current theories. Deaux and Burke (this volume) have described three possible areas of focus; we focus on a fourth, identity change.

One way to explore the conditions of identity change is to examine discrepancies or what occurs when one's identity, whether social, role, or biosocial individual, is challenged in a situation. We might think of identity not as a point on a dimension of meaning, such as caring, but as a distribution along the dimension of meaning. A distribution will show how tightly maintained a given identity is; those with lower variance distributions will have less flexibility and will be more vulnerable to identity discrepancies than those with higher variance distributions. This conceptualization demonstrates why a discrepancy

of the same magnitude may have no effect on one person's self-view yet have a devastating effect on another's. This understanding can aid in the exploration of long-term processes including identity change. Perhaps those with more flexibility will experience less change over time, or alternatively, tighten their distribution as their identity becomes more defined.

Within social identity theory, we may use a distributional understanding to account for the way an individual's social identity changes as the ingroup defines itself relative to an outgroup. The distribution of meaning for the social identity may become less dispersed, less flexible, more important, and better defined as the ingroup further distinguishes itself. Research on social identity theory shows different motives can play a crucial role when defining one's identity in intergroup situations. The need for positive social identity and optimal distinctiveness help structure and define a person's social identity within a given context and might help us to understand the amount of change in meaning distributions over time. Some of these ideas are being developed by the first author from a sociological perspective, but it is evident these ideas can expand the understanding of psychological processes as well.

Keeping the lines of communication open between disciplines and reading within our

sister discipline can be the basis for collaboration and joint theory building. Though collaborative theory and research may aid in bridging identity theories by gaining new perspectives, we can also achieve advancement through focusing on common areas in need of development in current theories of identity.

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Transcending Cognitive Individualism

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The inclusion of "cognition" in this issue's discussion of the two social psychologies may seem puzzling: isn't cognition the uncontested territory of psychology? Doesn't this topic demand a narrow individualistic focus that is alien to sociological thinking? Current views both in the field of psychology and in the culture at large answer these questions affirmatively. Advancing knowledge in many areas of psychology and neuroscience, underlined by dazzling images of brain scans, appear to many professionals and to the public to show that we are on the way to explaining cognition purely in terms of processes within the individual's head.

Yet while such cognitive individualism (Downes 1993) still dominates the popular Western vision of cognition, modern scholarship rejects such a personalized view of the mind. Few students of cognition today still envision a solitary thinker (as so evocatively embodied in Rodin's statue "The Thinker") whose thoughts arise solely from his or her own personal experience and idiosyncratic outlook on the world. The rise of the modern study of the mind coincides with the decline of the Romantic vision of the individual thinker and a growing interest in the nonpersonal foundations of our cognition.

To be sure, mental acts such as perceiving, attending, remembering, framing, generalizing, classifying, interpreting, and time reckoning are always performed by specific individuals with certain personal cognitive idiosyncrasies. Yet they are also performed by social beings who are members of specific thought communities (Mannheim [1929]1936; Fleck [1935]1979). In other words, what goes on inside our heads is also affected by the particular thought communities (nations, churches, professions, political movements, generations) to which we belong. We thus think not only as individuals but also as social beings (as a German, a Muslim, a lawyer, a feminist, a baby boomer), products of particular social environments that both affect and constrain the way we mentally interact with the world.

Even psychologists increasingly recognize the limits of cognitive individualism. One driving force is the realization that many phenomena in the social world that we wish to understand, such as intergroup conflict and aggression, market bubbles, fads and fashions, and overuse of public goods, are not the outcome of any one individual's decisions and intentional actions. In fact, these phenomena are often not intended or desired by any of the individuals whose actions cause