

Identity Verification and the Social Order

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Abstract

We outline how identity verification has consequences for the construction and reconstruction of the social order. Identity verification occurs when individuals *perceive self-relevant meanings in the situation* that match who they are in that situation (their identity). Verification of an identity feels good. This generates solidarity (when facilitated by others) and adherence to norms. Identities are verified by individuals controlling the flow of *resources* in interaction, and it is this flow that maintains the social structure. Resources either can be ready to be consumed (*active* resources) such as food for nourishment, or they can have some future use (*potential* resources) such as education for adaptation. We discuss how identity verification is accomplished by using *symbols* and *signs* attached to potential and actual resources in situations. The control of resources helps verify not only one's own identity but also others' identities. Since the process of identity verification produces positive feelings and stronger social bonds, this should facilitate maintenance of the social order. Identity nonverification will have the reverse effect on the social order, generating negative emotions, conflict, and chaos.

In identity theory, identity verification means changing the world (as we perceive it) to be the way it is supposed to be (according to our identity standards). Our perceptions are the meanings that we control to accomplish this. Perceptually, meanings are conveyed through signs and symbols emanating from the situation. Much of the research and theory within the identity theory framework has focused on symbols, whose arbitrary meanings, learned from the common culture, are shared with others. In this chapter, we emphasize this but also bring more attention to the other source of meaning noted by Mead (1934): *signs*, whose meaning is not arbitrary but is learned by direct experience in the situation. In this way, we begin to delineate more clearly the

connection of identities to the material world and the social structure that surrounds and sustains us. We also point to the role of resource flows including actual and potential resources in verifying people's identities and in maintaining the social structure.

IDENTITIES AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Identity theory grows out of the ideas and postulates of structural symbolic interaction as formulated by Stryker ([1980] 2002). These postulates frame our conception of both social structure and identities as well as the relation between them. To understand how identities create, recreate, maintain, and change the order of social structure, we begin with a review of Stryker's views on identity and social structure within the structural symbolic interaction framework. Stryker's ([1980] 2002: 33–34) first postulate is:

[People's] behavior is premised on a named or classified world. The names or class terms attached to aspects of the environment, both physical and social, carry meaning in the form of shared behavioral expectations that grow out of social interaction. From interaction with others, one learns how to classify objects one comes into contact with, and in that process also learns how one is expected to behave with reference to those objects.

This postulate makes clear both the symbolic character of the world as well as the physical existence of objects in the world to which we respond in the context of a shared culture. Our responses, which are learned and shared with others in the culture, give those objects meaning, and it is those meanings on which further behavior is based.

Stryker's ([1980] 2002: 54) second postulate makes clear the way in which social structure fits into the paradigm:

Among the class terms learned in interaction are the symbols that are used to designate 'positions,' which are the relatively stable, morphological components of social structure. These positions carry the shared behavioral expectations that are conventionally labeled 'roles'.

Thus roles like CEO, professor, or truck driver are not just constructed or created, but they exist as objects to be seen, reacted to, and labeled within society. Once created, these labels/categories are shared and understood by all in the culture.

Stryker's third and fourth postulates show how actors' identities fit into the scheme. The third postulate indicates that people in society are named or labeled in terms of the structural positions (roles) they occupy such as professor or truck driver. The fourth postulate indicates that people also name themselves with respect to these positional designations ("I am a professor" or "I am a truck driver"). Further, these labels and the expectations and meanings attached to them become internalized and form part of person's selves. These internalized labels are attached to positions, and the expectations and meanings attached

to them are our identities. As individuals, we thus become a part of the social structure that is named in postulate two. In short, within the context of structural symbolic interaction, identity theory is really a theory about the relationship between the individual and society, identity and social structure.

Identities as Positions within Groups

Since this early statement by Stryker, the concept of an identity has developed and broadened in several ways, although the fundamental postulates remain intact. Identities are now understood as having two structural bases (Burke and Stets 2009). The first basis is the roles in the social structure that are mentioned above and about which we will have most to say. The second basis is the groups to which individuals belong and that are of two types: those based on category membership such as gender, social class or being in a particular racial or ethnic group, and those based on choice behavior such as being a member of a particular political party, company, professional organization, or local church. Thus, we have both role identities and social identities. Social categories and groups, like roles, are part of the “relatively stable, morphological components of social structure” mentioned in the second postulate.¹

The meanings and expectations associated with the first basis – roles – are understood in relation to other roles, termed counter roles, in the social structure. For example, the meanings and expectations for the role of husband are understood in relationship to the meanings and expectations of the (counter) role of wife. The role of teacher is understood relative to the (counter) role of student. Further, roles are understood in the context of the social groups, organizations, or larger structures in which they are embedded. A teacher at the junior high school is different from a trained instructor at a yoga studio, or a leader of a church Bible class. The expectations and meanings of being a teacher in each of these different groups can vary around a central shared core of “teacher.”

Figure 8.1 depicts several role identities that are connected to counter role identities embedded within each of two different groups or organizations: a UPS office and a bakery. Each of the small circles represents a specific role in each of the organizations. For example, at the UPS office, the different roles may include a manager, secretary, dispatcher, and delivery truck driver. One role in each organization also is connected with a counter role in the other organization that allows transactions between the two groups/organizations. The occupant of each role or position within and across organizations internalizes the meanings and expectations associated with the position. This internalized set of meanings (understandings, descriptions, or characterizations) and

¹ A third basis of identities, the person as a biosocial individual, that has come to be recognized in identity theory, is omitted in the present context of relating identities to elements of the social structure. We consider this basis later to understand the flows of persons through the social structure.

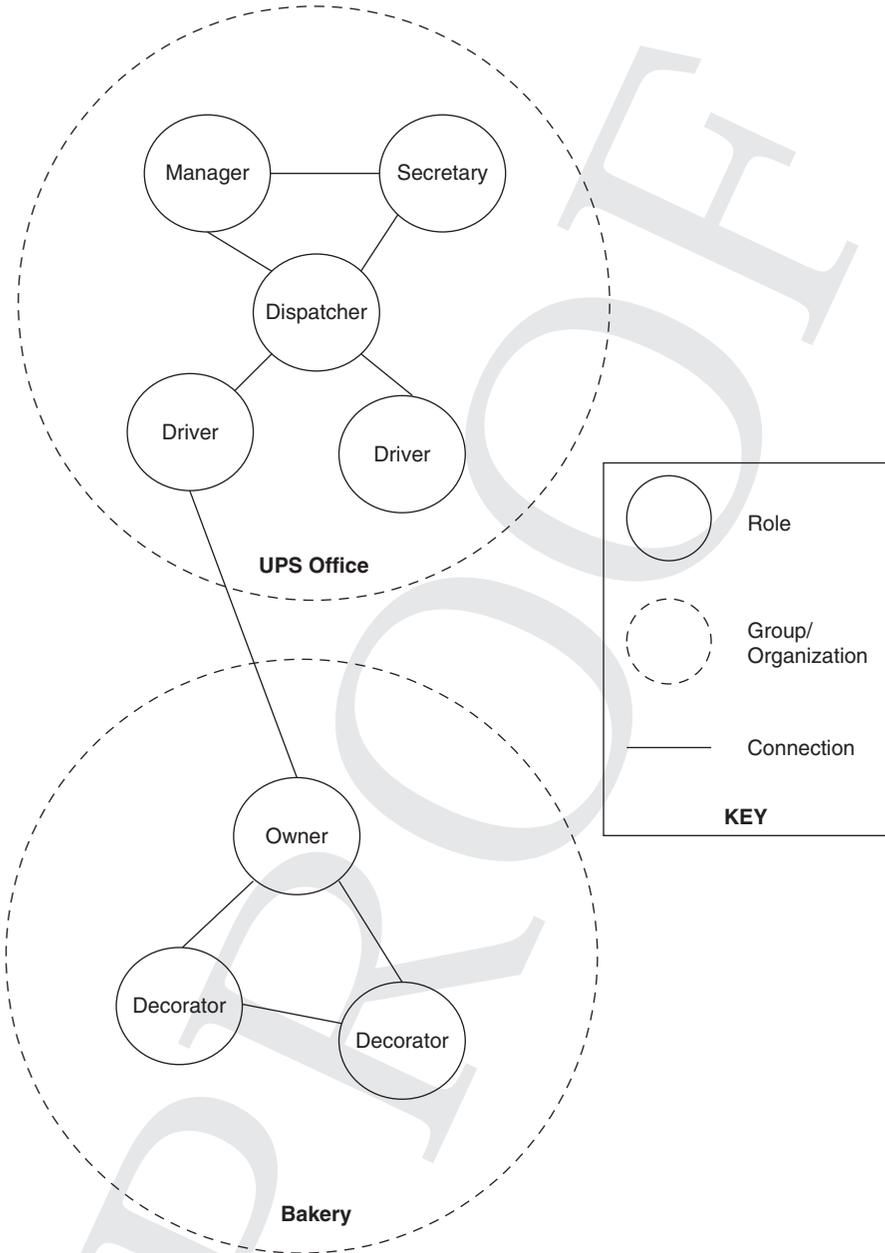


FIGURE 8.1. Example roles within groups/organizations.

expectations defines the identity of the occupant. Thus, each role has a role identity with which it is associated.

For example, in the role of a delivery truck driver, I have both the name (delivery truck driver) as well as the understanding and expectations (identity) of the things I should do and be as a delivery truck driver (loading packages for delivery, keeping gas in the truck, driving my route, delivering packages, getting receipts as necessary, as well as being prompt and courteous). The name (delivery truck driver) and expectations (with standards that must be met) are understood both by myself and others. As a delivery truck driver, I have relationships to other counter roles within the organization including the manager, secretary, dispatcher, and other delivery truck drivers as well as relationships to counter roles in other organizations such as the owner of the bakery when delivering office supplies or new equipment to the bakery. Thus, we begin to see positions and the connections between them within and across groups/organizations. This first view of social structure, then, is the set of connected roles embedded within groups as illustrated in Figure 8.1.

Identities and Resource Transfers

A second view of the social structure focuses on what happens when the expectations associated with each of the roles are fulfilled and the organization both accomplishes its tasks and helps other organizations fulfill their tasks. For the UPS office, task accomplishment includes the pickup and delivery of packages, the creation of routes for efficient delivery, the maintenance of the trucks, the keeping of records, the transfer of information to the central office and the coordination of other offices, the payment of wages and salaries, the management of promotions, and many other things. All of these tasks are accomplished by persons whose identities tell them what to do in their specific roles.

As each role/identity plays itself out in relation to other role identities both within and between organizations, much is accomplished: the flow of packages, the flow of trucks, the flow of gasoline into the storage tanks and into the trucks, the flow of information within and between associated companies, the flow of people being hired, fired, or retiring and so on. These flows of resources (both material and nonmaterial) constitutes a second view of the social structure beyond the first view of roles being embedded within groups/organizations. Identity theory combines these two views of social structure: the interconnections among the roles (role identities) and groups/organizations (social identities), as well as the accomplishments of identities in terms of the transfer and transformation of resources.

Identities as Controlling Meaning

Along with identifying additional bases of identities, another major development in identity theory is an understanding of the primary identity process,

that is, identity verification. While role and social identities are based on named categories in the social structure, the identities themselves consist of culturally shared meanings that define who one is as an occupant of a role or a member of a social category or group. These meanings from the shared culture have been internalized by the identity holder, and perhaps modified some to fit with other identities that may be held, but they are understood to apply to the self. Thus, a professor may say to himself, "I am a professor, and that means I must do the things I understand professors do," "I must be the way I understand professors are," and "I must appear as I understand professors appear."

These ways of acting, being, and appearing are understood by the person as well as by other professors, students, deans, and administrative staff as indications of being a professor. To act and appear as a professor is to convey meanings in the situation so that both the self and others see and understand these accomplishments. Behavior controls the meanings so that "professor" is accomplished in the situation, and everyone in the situation shares this understanding because the meanings are shared. Thus, identities are attached to positions in the social structure and identities control meanings.

Meaning, as understood in identity theory, is a mediation response to a stimulus (Burke and Stets 2009; Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum 1957). Meanings or mediation responses are internal responses (in the form of ideas or feelings) to some stimulus. The internal responses (meaning) act as a stimulus for an outward behavioral response. In this way, the meaning or internal response mediates between the external stimulus and the behavioral response to it. Thus, meaning is the response to the stimulus and not in the stimulus itself.

For example, the word "professor" itself has no inherent meaning. It is an arbitrary word/label applied to certain individuals and what they do. The internal response to this stimulus, our images and thoughts about professors, is the meaning that mediates between the stimulus of the word "professor" and our response to such a person. Identity theory distinguishes two types of stimuli which Mead (1934) labeled conventional signs or symbols and natural signs or simply signs. Symbols are arbitrary in terms of what they represent, but their representation is agreed on by individuals in a culture, although the symbols may differ from culture to culture. Because the culture is shared, symbolic meanings of particular stimuli are shared. People have a similar response to a symbol (for example, the word "professor"), thus symbols can be used to communicate, reason, and plan.

Sign meanings, by contrast, are not shared. They are gained by direct experience with objects, patterns, and events in a situation. For example, people learn what their car sounds like when it is running well, and they can tell that it is making strange noises when it is not running well. The strange noise is the stimulus, and our response of anxiety and confusion is the meaning, which has been gained by prior experience with the noise. Because that knowledge and understanding is gained by direct experience, it is difficult to communicate it symbolically to the mechanic who must experience the sound

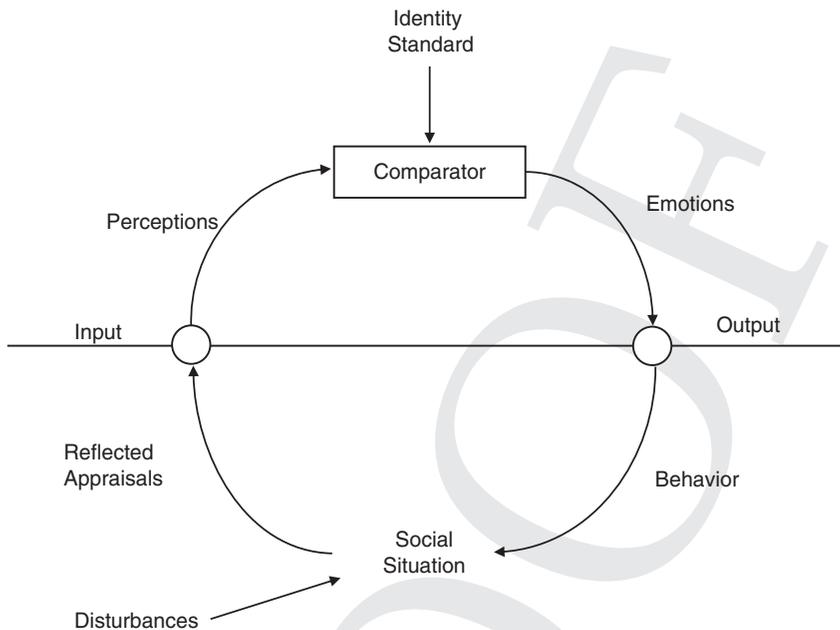


FIGURE 8.2. Identity Model within Identity Theory.

to understand it. That sound is a sign of a potential problem to the car owner, and it may be a sign of a broken water-pump to the mechanic. Talking about the problem with the mechanic would be symbolic interaction with shared understanding of the meanings of the symbols (words) used. The mechanic and his assistant replacing the water-pump would be sign interaction, accomplished by direct experience and control of the objects in the situation.

By incorporating both symbols and signs into identity theory, we can understand identity processes as controlling both symbolic and sign meanings, the latter of which is directly tied to the experience of objects and resources in the situation. In this way, role identities can control the shared symbolic aspects of the role in communicating with others (our UPS driver can communicate with the dispatcher), but identities also can control the unshared, sign experiential meanings associated with managing resources and resource flows in the situation (driving the truck, getting caught in traffic, delivering packages and so on). The role identity of a UPS driver includes all of these aspects.

We turn now to see how the main identity processes accomplish this. Within identity theory, each identity, whether a role or social identity (and even a person identity) contains the same parts and functions. These are shown in Figure 8.2. First is the identity standard that contains all of the sign and symbol meanings that define the identity. Second is the input or perceptions of these same meanings in the situation based on one's own assessment (direct

appraisals), and how one thinks others see oneself (reflected appraisals). Third is the comparator, which functions to compare the input meanings with the identity standard meanings and outputs the difference or error, sometimes called the discrepancy. If there is no difference, the error or discrepancy is zero. Fourth and fifth are the consequences of the error: emotion, and the output behavior. Negative emotion and distress generated by a nonzero error serve to motivate the behavior to restore the meanings in the situation to the levels indicated in the identity standard should there be any discrepancy. The output behavior, which influences the meanings in the situation that are perceived so that the perceptions match the meanings in the identity standard, reduces or eliminates any error or discrepancy, if it is present. Because it is the perceptions that are controlled to match the identity standard, this has been called a perceptual control system (Powers 1973).

When an identity is activated in a situation, it begins processing perceptions. What is the current state of the situation with respect to the self-relevant symbol and sign meanings that are being monitored and controlled? This is done by comparing the perceived meanings in the situation with the reference meanings in the identity standard. This is the role of the comparator. If there is no difference, no adjustment in output behavior is needed. The perceived meanings in the situation are what they should be according to the standard. For example, if my role identity standard meanings define me as being “reliable” and “supportive” to certain degrees in my parent role, and I think this is how my children see me (reflected appraisals), my perceptions match the standard and my identity is verified. If I think my daughters see me as less supportive than is given in my standard, the comparator registers a difference or error of a certain magnitude. For example, if my standard for being supportive is set at eight (on some scale from zero to ten), and because of a comment one of my daughters made, I think she has come to see me as a six, the comparator sends an error of six minus eight, or negative two. The comment, which led to this change of meanings in the situation, is a disturbance to the current meanings in the situation.

As mentioned above, an error or discrepancy has two immediate consequences. First, it modifies emotions. In identity theory, any discrepancy (other than zero) increases the level of distress and negative feelings. It will bother me if my daughter sees me as less supportive as a parent than I am. It also will bother me if she sees me as more reliable than I am, perhaps setting up expectations that I cannot meet. Thus, negative emotion in identity theory is a function of the square of the error or discrepancy between reflected appraisals and the identity standard with positive and negative discrepancies both increasing negative emotions.

The second effect of the error or discrepancy (combined with the negative emotion) is to induce me to adjust my behavior so that perceived situational meanings are the way they should be, according to my identity standard. In the example above, if I am perceived as less supportive than my identity standard

meaning (the discrepancy is negative), I adjust my behavior in the opposite direction to increase the perceived level of support. Thus, I behave in a more “supportive” manner. If I am perceived as more supportive than my identity standard meaning, the error is positive, and I adjust my behavior to reduce the level of perceived support. This is a negative feedback process which counteracts the effects of the disturbance to the meanings in the situation. My behavior changes as a direct function of the discrepancy, but in the opposite direction in order to reduce and eliminate the discrepancy.

When the disturbance in the situation is counteracted and the meanings restored to reflect those in the identity standard, identity verification has occurred and my emotions change from being negative to being neutral or positive. Identity verification thus has the dual effect of making my feelings more positive and making the self-relevant meanings in the situation match those in the standard.²

When we combine the view of identities as structural positions with the view of identities as processes controlling meanings, we can begin to see how the multitude of identities across positions in the social structure operate to create, maintain, and repair that structure. Each identity, through the process of verification, is responsible to maintain both symbol and sign meanings, and through that, maintain the cultural meanings and the flow of resources that sustain individuals, roles, social categories, groups and organizations that define society. Most of the time, this verification process is automatic and habitual. It becomes more deliberate and thoughtful as the magnitude of the discrepancy between the situational meanings and the identity standard meanings increases.

RESOURCES

In identity theory, resources are defined functionally as anything that supports and sustains individuals, groups, or interactions (Freese and Burke 1994). Examples might be air, clothing, and interaction skills that support individuals; buildings, uniforms, and territorial markers that support groups; and conference tables and overhead projectors that support interactions. It does not matter whether the resources are valued, scarce, consumable, or negotiable. This is different than most conceptions of resources in sociology because they are not necessarily scarce or zero-sum. This view permits possessed entities of any sort, valuable or not, to be counted among the resources insofar as they function to sustain individuals and interaction. Also counted among resources are various conditions that are not entities at all – for example, conditions of sequencing,

² A third, less immediate, consequence of the discrepancy or error is to slowly begin to change the identity standard in the direction of the appraisals. This is a source of identity change (Burke 2004, 2006). Because it is slow, this source of identity change has consequences only if the discrepancy is persistent (Cast and Burke 2002). For a fuller discussion of the conditions under which identity change occurs see earlier work (Burke 2006).

or of structuring, or of sentiment, or of opportunity. This generalized conception of resources enables us to better link identities to the social structure.

We distinguish between two types of resources: *active* and *potential* resources (Freese and Burke 1994). Active resources are those resources that are currently functioning in the situation to sustain persons or the interaction, and in which individuals have direct experiential contact. These include, for example, the chair in which I am currently sitting, the water I am drinking, the glass that holds the water I am drinking, the computer I am using, the keyboard on which I am typing, the smiling look my spouse gives me, and so on. Potential resources are resources that are not currently functioning to sustain persons or an interaction, but that have some future use. These include, for example, the table in the other room on which I will have dinner; the food in the refrigerator for that dinner; the car parked in the garage that will transport me somewhere; the gasoline in the tank that will provide the fuel for my transportation; the answers to my, as yet unasked, questions of a colleague and so on.

Because signs are indicators of resources currently experienced in the situation, the control of sign meanings is the control of these resources in a situation, whether actual or potential. Symbols are indicators of potential resources that are not currently functioning to support an interaction, and in which individuals do not have direct experiential contact in the situation. Symbols allow people to manipulate potential resources including the transformations and transfers that are needed before they later will be used as active resources. However, we point out that symbols also can be used to control actual resources in a situation such as the information being verbally communicated to another or the emotional support given by words of encouragement to another.

Because identity standards contain the sign and symbolic meanings that define an identity, that is, the meanings that serve as a reference for the way the situation is supposed to be, making the situation meanings match the identity standard meanings is the same as making active and potential resources in the situation correspond to the identity meanings. Therefore, identity verification is the process of making sign and symbolic meanings (perceptions) or active and potential resources conform to the pattern of meanings in the identity standard.

To see this more concretely, let us imagine a steel mill and the kinds of resource flows in and through it that define it. We can imagine the flow of iron ore to the mill; the flow of coal and coke to the mill; the flow of water to the mill; the flow of electricity to the mill; the flow of heat, slag, and contaminated water out of the mill; the flow of steel out of the mill; the flow of people into the mill on a work day and home again in the evening; the flow of cranes, trucks, equipment, supplies, order forms, and computers through the mill; the flow of purchase orders, money, credit, and debt through the mill; the flow of information and skills through the mill; the flow of labor; the flow of organizational activities that enable the flows of physical resources and processes to

be managed and utilized; and the flow of esteem, respect, and power to various managers and workers.

All of these objects, flows, and transformations in the steel mill are initiated and enabled by the actions of persons on the basis of their identities: railway engineers, crane operators, truck drivers, electricians, secretaries, accountants, managers, and workers. Further the resources themselves, material or intangible, have no function until they are in motion, that is, until they are flowing in a connected manner. What we suggest from this example is that the flows and organized transformations of resources at a very abstract level is the social system in the sense that they constitute it. It is the resource interactions of identities that guide, connect, and control those flows through the verification process, always making the perceived situation (meanings) be the way it is supposed to be. Identity verification produces, controls, and guides the social system.

It should be noted that resources can also be used to facilitate the verification process itself, which maintains identities and counteridentities. For example, Stets and Cast (2007) have shown how different resources such as personal resources (self-worth and self-efficacy), interpersonal resources (role-taking ability, being trusted, and being liked), and structural resources (level of education, occupational status, and income) all facilitate the verification of the spouse role identity and a sociable person identity. Looking at the effects over three time-points, each a year apart, higher levels of these resources at one time brought about higher levels of verification at a later time, thus helping to sustain these identities and counteridentities. They also found that higher levels of identity verification led to having higher levels of resources at a later time.

IDENTITY VERIFICATION AND CHANGE IN THE SOCIAL SYSTEM

The picture in the preceding section shows how the normal operation of the basic identity process of verification uses and produces the resource flows, transformations, and transfers that are associated with some position in the social structure. Because all of the positions or roles in the social structure are connected to and coordinated with other positions, or counterroles, the resource flows are also connected and coordinated, whether in dyads, groups, organizations, or larger structures. Our picture is one of existing roles and identities in a static structure and a constant flow of resources. However, in the identity model, there is room for change and development of both identities and the structures in which they are embedded.

We discuss two ways that a change in the social system could occur within the scope of identity theory. First, whereas the identity standard indicates the way that symbolic and sign meanings in the situation should be configured, and the perceptual control system indicates, through the comparator, when actions have the effect of bringing about the desired configuration of meanings, nothing in the identity indicates the exact way in which this is supposed to

happen. People learn the behaviors that influence the situation through socialization and direct and indirect learning processes. For every desired configuration of meanings in the situation, there are many ways to accomplish it. New ways may emerge in response to discrepancies between situational meanings and identity standard meanings when the identity is not being verified. If these new ways become incorporated into the identity standard, the identity changes and possibly the structural connections between roles and counter roles.

For example, my professor identity includes symbol and sign meanings in its reference/standard for accomplishing lectures to a class: expressing my ideas clearly and holding the attention of the class. This is part of the set of standards about how to be a professor held in my professor identity standard. I may over time perceive that some ideas are difficult to express in words, the attention of my class may be wavering, and student evaluations may be going down because they feel the class is boring. This would constitute a discrepancy with the meanings in my standard. By exploring the situation, I may discover, for example, that the use of PowerPoint slides allows me to express my ideas more clearly and hold the attention of the class better. By incorporating these into a slightly modified professor identity standard, I change my professor identity. Being a professor now has new meanings (resources) and new perceptions (related to those actual and potential resources) to control. I no longer rely on my yellowing old lecture notes, but on computer files and programs as well as projectors and connectors and new levels of lighting in the lecture room. I may develop new relationships with the technology people to make sure everything is ready for my use of the PowerPoint projection system in the classroom. I may liaison with persons who know better all the features of the presentation software such as how to capture pictures, videos, and other media forms into my lecture. And, my student evaluations may return to levels suggested by my professor identity standard.

In this way, while the overall goals of being a professor have remained the same, how to accomplish being a professor has changed. New resource configuration and flows need to be maintained, and new connections to other roles and positions need to be made and maintained. Thus, both the identity and the structure of role and counter roles have changed. The identity standard has new meanings, the structure of connections among the positions in the organization has changed, and the resource flows have changed. The extent of such changes in the identity or in the organization may be rather small, as in the earlier example, or very large as in the following example.

For the professor role, a large change occurred with the introduction and adoption of desktop computers which had the effect of eliminating secretarial positions in the university, thus changing resource flows away from personnel to equipment. Initially resisted by many because of the identity discrepancy induced by the disturbance, slow changes in the standards of professors were made in the way in which research and writing were done and this raised the expected number of publications that professors should have, again changing

resource flows. Not only did the introduction of desktop computer change the way in which things got done, they also found new things that could be done as new software was developed. With the introduction of the Internet, communication and collaboration possibilities changed the connections between role positions across universities as researchers began to work with more and different other researchers across the country. Identities changed to incorporate new resource manipulations (sign and symbolic meanings) involving ways in which research could be accomplished as the Internet facilitated the sharing of data and the learning of new data analytic techniques.

These examples are of change that is introduced as identities find new and better resources and connections (thus adding to the standards) to accomplish verification of existing standards. Finding new ways can also have the effect of creating new positions with new identity standards emerging as the positions are filled. For example, a CEO may verify his identity by creating West Coast and East Coast divisions of a company with new managerial positions. Each of these newly established managerial positions and corresponding identities will control vast flows of resources including buildings, information, and people through the verification process. In this way, identities may create other identities to be used as resources for identity verification.

In sum, identity change and structural change as well as changes in resource flows are built into the way in which identities operate to make the meanings in the situation be the same as those in the identity standard, that is, to achieve identity verification. This occurs because identities control perceptions by modifying behavior to find alternative ways in which those perceptions can best match the symbolic and sign meanings in the identity standard.

SYSTEM STABILITY THROUGH REPAIR

Returning to the identity model in Figure 8.2, there is a neglected process at the bottom of the figure, which plays a prominent role in identity verification: *disturbances*. As discussed earlier, when the perceived sign and symbolic meanings in the situation match those of the identity standard, the comparator emits an error signal of zero, which might be taken as the goal of the system. With an output of zero, emotions are neutral or positive and the behavioral output remains as it has been.³ Because the value of the error signal indicates an increasing or decreasing amount by which to change existing output meanings, an error of zero indicates that no increase or decrease in any meanings needs to occur.

³ We agree with Carver and Scheier (1998) who suggest that positive feelings arise during the process of reducing the error toward zero, but that at zero feelings are neutral. Thus, the process of verification produces positive feelings and the process of nonverification produces negative feelings.

The disturbances, however, consist of anything that changes the perceived situational meanings to be different than the meanings in the identity standard. Disturbances to the existing symbol and sign meanings may be the result of the actions of other people in the situation pursuing the verification of their own identities. In doing this, they may alter the level of resources, or change symbols that define the nature of the situation in competition with other identities. Disturbances may also occur as the result of various physical processes that occur as parts wear out or accidents happen such as floods, droughts, or other natural disasters. Any of these things can change meanings in the situation away from where they “should be” according to the identity standard. The verification process for the identity will result in the reestablishment of meanings in the situation to be in accord with the meanings in the identity standard once again. This may be accomplished through altering the levels and flows of resources, changing the interaction patterns, or even changing the structure of groups and organizations to reestablish meanings in accord with the identity standard.

Thus, the verification process can be thought of as a situational repair process, a process that repairs the situation from the damage or change that has occurred as a result of the disturbance. When a department in a company loses people who take jobs elsewhere, the director, whose director identity includes maintaining work flows at certain levels experiences identity nonverification. By hiring and training new employees, the director verifies his director identity and helps to maintain the department.

At the organizational level, revenues may fall below a level set in the CEO's corporate identity standard due to mismanagement on the part of an officer of the company. To bring her perceptions of revenue up to the standard set in the identity, the CEO may take some form of restorative action such as firing the officer, ordering the officer to receive extra training, or working more closely with the officer to ensure that such mismanagement does not continue. It may also involve bringing in a team to undo the bad decisions or find ways to counter the effects of those decisions. These repairs to the organization that result from identity verification on the part of the CEO thus returns the organization to the way it is supposed to be. Without this repair process in which identities normally engage, the resources that support any society would degenerate to the point they are no longer useful, that is, they can no longer sustain individuals, groups, or interaction.

Note that there really is no difference between identity verification and repair of the situational resources and meanings. Verification and repair are made necessary because the sign and symbol meanings, that is, active and potential resources and resource flows are disturbed, modified, or changed from what they “ought” to be. Verification and repair is what identities do. Social structure as organized resource flows is the result of the normal identity verification processes, but built into that process is the repair of the process when it is needed by simply making the situation be the way it is supposed to

be. That means bringing all of the sign and symbol meanings in the situation into alignment with those of the identity standard.

SYSTEM STABILITY AND EMOTION

We mentioned the role of emotion in the identity verification process as helping to motivate the behavior that results in perceived situational meanings matching the identity standard meanings. In this process, it is the people who hold the identities that feel the emotion, not the identity itself. And, it is the behavior of the people who hold the identities that serves to modify situational meanings to bring them into congruence with the identity standard meanings. When an identity is not verified, when there is a discrepancy between the identity standard meanings and the perceived situational meanings, the discrepancy increases negative emotions.

Research has shown that the direction of the discrepancy does not matter with respect to the emotional consequences (Burke and Harrod 2005). Whether there is too much or too little of some meaning relative to the standard, negative emotions are increased. In the Burke and Harrod study, the identity standards were the way husbands and wives thought of themselves in terms of such characteristics as intelligence, friendliness, and likability. Each rated himself or herself on a scale from 0 to 100 reflecting degrees from “not at all” to “extremely.” This represented their identity standard. If the perceived meanings in the situation given off by the spouse of the respondent differed from the identity standard ratings, the respondent felt more anger and more distress. It did not matter if the perceived meanings from the spouse were higher than the person’s identity standard (for example, more intelligent than the self-rating), or if the perceived meanings from the spouse were lower (less intelligent than the self-rating). Either case increased distress and anger. These negative feelings helped motivate the person to reduce the discrepancy and increase the level of verification, thus making the situation be the way it is supposed to be.

Although negative emotions have the motivational effect of reducing identity discrepancy and increasing verification, positive emotions can help create a mutual verification context through role and counter role identities working together to verify each other as well as themselves. Burke and Stets (1999) examined the spousal identity of husbands and wives, and the degree to which mutual verification emerged in a marriage.

The emotions they investigated included positive emotions such as feelings of love for the spouse, trust in the spouse, commitment to the spouse, and the feeling of togetherness or “we-ness” as opposed to the separateness of a “you” or “I.” These positive emotions were shown to be outcomes of spousal identity verification, and they motivated strong ties to the marriage partner. For example, the more one’s spousal identity was verified, the stronger the love for the partner; the more the partner was trusted; the higher the commitment to the partner; and the more the spouses thought of themselves as a “we” rather

than a “you” or “I.” These increased positive emotions strengthened the bonds between the husband and wife and created a sense of “us” as a group. In such a context, love, commitment, and trust between the spouses were increased and a sense of the group or family as a social unit increased. Structurally, this has the effect of keeping the spousal identities connected to each other by keeping the individuals together with emotional bonds that also form part of the social structure. Thus, not only is the structure maintained in terms of the connection of roles with counter roles within the organization as well as the transformation and flows of resources, but the persons who hold the identities become attached to each other with trust, liking, and commitment, thus assuring that the identities stay together and are connected.

While most of the work done on the emotional consequences of identity verification and nonverification has considered generic positive and negative emotions, some theoretical work suggests that specific emotions including shame, embarrassment, fear, disappointment, and sadness, arise from the nonverification of identities in specific contexts (Stets and Burke 2005). For this, Stets and Burke considered the source of the nonverification, that is, whether it was due to something the individual had done through neglect or error, or whether it was due to something that another has done to bring about the nonverification. They also considered the relative status and power of the other in the situation who either caused the nonverification or witnessed it.

For example, if a higher status person such as an esteemed colleague changes meanings in the situation that results in an identity not to be verified, one may feel anxiety. But, if the status of the other is equal, one simply may feel annoyance. If the status of the other is lower than the person, the person may feel hostility. Each of these feelings may suggest different courses of action that might be taken to rectify the situation and counteract the discrepancy. By contrast, if the other differs in power rather than status, Stets and Burke hypothesized the self will feel fear toward a higher power other such as one’s boss, anger at an equal power other, and rage at a lower power other.

The idea behind these hypotheses about specific emotions is that the source of the discrepancy and the relative status or power of the other within the group or organizational context provides additional meaning for the actor in the situation. These additional meanings must also be maintained. Stets and Burke suggest that these additional meanings arising from the source of the discrepancy and the relative status and power of the other yield particular emotions suggesting different courses of action that might be taken to reduce the present discrepancy and attempt to keep intact the self-other relationship. These specific emotions thus guide the kinds of repair work that gets done to maintain the person to person relationships as well as the role identity to role identity relationships. However, expressing rage at one’s boss is not likely to do this, or alternatively, expressing annoyance to an underling, which may not assure proper behavior by the underling to maintain the role relationship.

Overall, then, emotion plays an important role in the relationship between identities and the social structure in which they are embedded. The distress and negative emotions that occur when identities are not verified motivates the person to increase his/her efforts and focus on counteracting the disturbance that is causing the nonverification. The positive feelings, attachments, trust, and group identity that arise when roles and counter roles are each verified in a mutual verification context establishes and maintains the person to person links between the persons occupying the structural positions. Finally, the varied and specific emotions that arise in the verification process, both positive and negative, bring about specific behaviors that are appropriate for the context in the sense of both counteracting the disturbance, but also of maintaining the person to person connection that is necessary for identities to operate to maintain the resource flows that both define and support the social structure in which the identities are embedded. It is not enough to repair the resource flows, it is also important to keep people in relationships that allow this.

PERSON IDENTITIES AND THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Thus far, we have talked mostly about identities based on roles, with some attention to identities based on social categories or groups, and the way in which the verification process creates, repairs, and maintains the social structure in terms of both the relationship among positions as well as the flows of resources that support those positions and relationships. In this section we examine the third basis of identities, the person as a biosocial entity, to understand the role of verification of these identities for the maintenance of structure.

Like role and social identities, person identities are defined by the meanings in the identity standard, and the verification process is the same. However, the meanings and expectations in the person identity standard are not attached to roles or groups. Rather, they are attached to the individual and define the person as a distinct and different from others. These meanings are based on culturally recognized characteristics that individuals internalize as their own and that serve to define and characterize them as unique. These meanings serve as identity standards guiding the identity verification process (Burke 2004). They may include such characteristics as how masterful, dominant and controlling is the person (Stets 1995a; Stets and Burke 1994), how moral is the person (Stets and Carter 2011; Stets and Carter 2012), or what the person values (Hitlin 2003). Because the person identity meanings of being controlling or moral are culturally shared, others will draw upon these same meanings to identify the individual and thus facilitate the verification process.

Role identities are activated primarily when the person is in the appropriate role. Social identities are activated primarily when the person is in a situation relevant to the social category or group. Person identities are activated across roles, categories, groups, and situations because the person is always present. Because person identities are likely to be activated at any time, even when other

identities, including role and social identities are activated, and because identities reside in individuals whose behavior must serve to verify all the identities that are activated in a situation, the standards of these multiple identities cannot be incompatible. A control system like the identity control system cannot have a standard that is set at two different levels.

A person cannot verify a “gentle” standard in his husband identity, and at the same time verify a “rough” standard in his gender (masculine) identity. If the person were to act in a gentle manner to verify the husband identity, he would have a discrepancy for the masculine identity that would generate distress. If a person were, in fact, caught in such a situation and could not easily leave, the meanings in the two standards would slowly shift to a compromise level between the two conflicting levels (Burke 2003; Stets 1995b). To avoid this stressful situation, people tend to take on identities that are compatible and to enter interactions that provide symbol and sign meanings that verify existing identities (Swann 1987; Swann, Pelham, and Krull 1989). This mechanism of (self-) selected interaction thus guides the movement and flow of persons into and through the social structure insofar as people have choices. It also assures that the identity verification process does not tear the social structure apart in conflicting actions.

As we indicated, the meanings and expectations in the identity standards of person identities come from the meanings available in the cultures and subcultures of society. These subcultures reflect the structural divisions of society that serve to allocate resources to positions, groups, and categories of individuals. We suggest that the meanings vary by subculture so that the person identities of individuals in those subcultures are conducive to the positions that such people may come to occupy. Because there is no hard line between the different cultures and subcultures, the meanings that are taken on in the person identities of individuals serve more to provide inclinations toward (or away from) various kinds of roles and group memberships where the role or group meanings will be more likely to be consistent (or inconsistent) with the person identity standard meanings. Thus, person identities may be thought to provide a mechanism for sorting people across roles and groups, bringing some persons together and keeping others apart, to limit the potential conflict and competition that may arise if everyone had the same values and inclinations.

CONCLUSION

Verifying role identities by controlling perceived signs and symbols maintains their connections to counter role identities and achieves the resource transformations and transfers in accordance with the meanings and expectations of the roles. Whether social structure is viewed as the set of interconnected roles or the transformation and flow of resources, both are the result of role identity verification. When those structures are disrupted by disturbances, identity verification repairs them. Verifying a social identity, based on a social category or

group membership has similar consequences. Though not discussed extensively in this chapter, verification of social identities maintain the boundaries between groups, and the divisions among people in a complex society, thus facilitating the flow of various resources to some and not to others.

Verifying a person identity, based on the individual as a unique biosocial entity, moves people toward some situations, groups, and organizations where meanings are more consistent with their identity standard, and away from other parts of the social structure where meanings are less consistent with their identity standard. In this way, roles and groups or organizations tend to be filled by people who are more likely to be able to verify their identities. The consequence of this greater likelihood of verification is that such people will feel good and become attached to others in the situation, group or organization and work to maintain those connections and repair any disturbances. From all of this, it is easy to conclude that the process of identity verification is the process and structure of society.

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