IDENTITY THEORY AND SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY [*]

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Abstract

Identity theory and social identity theory have more points of overlap than differences in their understanding of the self. For this reason, we argue that the unification of these two theories is advisable in order to both avoid redundancies in theorizing about the self and to provide a uniform approach to the multifaceted nature of identities in terms of their bases, their processes, and their outcomes. In this paper, we discuss the similarities and differences between the two theories, and then offer a unified identity theory based on 21 theoretical definitions, assumptions, and heuristics. Following this, we demonstrate how the unified theory can be used to explain somewhat anomalous findings in two recent studies, one in the tradition of social identity theory and the other in the tradition of identity theory.

IDENTITY THEORY AND SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Identity theory[1] had its beginnings in structural symbolic interactionism (Stryker 1980) and *social identity theory*[2] began with work on social categorization (Tajfel 1978). Both are theories about the self with many overlapping concepts, but historically each has developed separate foci, agenda, and traditions of work (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995), and each generally has been uninformed by the other. Hogg and his associates' (1995) brief comparison of the two theories led them to suggest that, given their differences, it was inadvisable to attempt to integrate the two theories. They recommended, instead, pitting one theory against the other to establish which was better.

We think that several misconceptions of identity theory held by Hogg and his associates have led them to both exaggerate differences and overlook fundamental similarities between the two theories. Therefore, they miss seeing the benefits of a unified identity theory. Further, to suggest that one theory can be pitted against the other to determine empirically which is better assumes that each is trying to account for the same range of phenomena. As we will show, this historically has not been entirely the case; there are important differences. However, we think that when the two theories are carefully set side by side, the deficits of each are complemented by the features of the other in such a way that together a more general theory emerges.

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[1] Several different versions of identity theory have developed (Burke 1991a; McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 1980) but all of them will be incorporated into our discussion on identity theory.

[2] An extension of social identity theory is *self-categorization theory* (Turner 1985, 1987). In this paper, we will treat them as a single theory that we will refer to under the older name of social identity theory.

Are there Differences?

We begin with the caveat that both theories are actively developing, growing and changing, and that any differences we identify are subject to change. Further, as we will point out, many of the differences are matters of emphasis and degree rather than categorical. We first address four areas of difference that Hogg et al. (1995) identified. Essentially, compared to identity theory, they saw social identity theory as having a greater emphasis on sociocognitive processes, contextual responsiveness, group behavior and intergroup relations, and a clearer distinction between role and group.

In the above distinctions, we think that Hogg et al. (1995) overstated their case. For example, social identity theory does feature the sociocognitive processes of self-categorization and depersonalization. Although identity theory does focus more on behavior, it also draws upon underlying sociocognitive processes such as reflected appraisals (McCall and Simmons 1978), role taking (Stryker 1980), the definition of the situation (McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 1980), and self-verification and dissonance reduction (Burke 1991a). Therefore, identity theory and social identity theory are not that distinct in the elaboration of the sociocognitive though each theory does focus on different sociocognitive processes.

Hogg and his colleagues further indicate that because identity theory places less emphasis on the sociocognitive, it therefore is less attentive to the resulting responsiveness of the self to immediate contextual cues. However, each of the sociocognitive processes within identity theory (e.g. reflected appraisals, role taking, and self-verification) heavily depend upon social events and processes that are ongoing in the interaction. It is the hallmark of the symbolic interactionist framework within which identity theory grew that the immediate situation plays a paramount role (McCall and

Simmons 1978). Thus, we do not agree with Hogg and his colleagues that there is much difference between the two theories in the importance of the immediate situation.

Hogg et al.'s (1995) assessment that social identity theory has provided a clearer distinction between role and group is also not well grounded in empirical fact. Identity theory has neglected the group *qua* group but there are exceptions to this. For example, identity theory has been used to examine group phenomena in terms of the attitudes and values held by members of a racial group or age group (Mutran and Burke 1979a, 1979b; White and Burke 1987). And, identity theory has been used to examine intergroup phenomena in terms of gender (Stets 1997; Stets and Burke 1996). If identity theory has neglected the group, social identity theory has not seriously addressed roles, again with some exceptions (Deaux 1992, 1993; Deaux et al. 1995). Social identity theory has focused more on group behavior and intergroup relations while identity theory has focused more on role performance and role relationships within groups. However, we think this is more a matter of emphasis than clear differences. And, both theories are equipped to distinguish between role and group.

We turn to clearer differences that we see between the two theories. We begin with the *content of an identity* in terms of membership meanings and role meanings. Social identity theory has concentrated on the causes and consequences of identifying with a social group or category. Identity theory has focused on the causes and consequences of identifying with a particular role. Membership meanings primarily have implications for *who you are*; role meanings primarily have implications for *what you do*. For example, social identity theory would emphasize one's *identification* or *association* with a particular racial group, while identity theory would examine the *roles* or *behaviors* persons enact as members of a racial group. Identity theory emphasizes *doing*, social

identity theory emphasizes *being*. Thus, our first contrast, represented as *C*, between the two theories is:

C1: *Social identity theory has focused more on the meanings associated with being a member of a social category; identity theory has focused more on the meanings associated with performing a role.*

Social identity theorists have argued that because people define themselves in terms of their social group membership and enact roles as part of their acceptance of the normative expectations of ingroup members, the concept of role is subsumed under the concept of group (Turner et al. 1994). However, social identity theorists have generally not focused on these roles. Given their greater emphasis on group identification, they have concentrated more on *cognitive outcomes* such as ethnocentrism (Grant and Brown 1995), group polarization (Wetherell 1987), and group cohesiveness (Hogg 1987). Identity theorists have focused more on the *behaviors* made by persons as a function of their role identities. Behaviors that have been studied include school performance (Burke 1989a), going to college (Burke 1989b; Burke and Hoelter 1988), physical and sexual abuse (Burke, Stets, and Pirog-Good 1988), conversational behavior (Drass 1986; Stets and Burke 1996), and joining organizations (Serpe and Stryker 1987).[3] Therefore, our second contrast is:

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[3] Once again, we view the cognitive-behavior difference as a matter of emphasis rather than clear distinction. Social identity theory has examined such behavioral phenomena as crowd behavior (Richer 1987, 1996), discrimination (Gagnon and Bourhis 1996), and group conformity (Turner 1987). Similarly, identity theory has studied such cognitive phenomena as attitudes (Burke 1991b), commitment and group orientation (Burke and Stets 1997), and salience (viewed as the cognitive accessibility of an identity) (Stryker 1991; Stryker and Serpe 1982, 1994).

C2: Social identity theory has focused more on cognitive outcomes; identity theory has focused more on behavioral outcomes.

Social identity theory has also strongly incorporated self-esteem as a motivator for outcomes. While it has not always been empirically clear that self-esteem is important, it has been shown that group memberships are often a source of self-esteem. This is particularly true for those who not only classify themselves as members, but who are also accepted by others as members (Brown and Lohr 1987; Ellison 1993). Identity theory has implications not only for self-esteem but also for self-efficacy. To the extent that one has a salient role identity, the evaluation of her role performance will influence feelings of self-esteem (Stryker 1980). If one evaluates her role positively, her self-esteem will be higher (Hoelter 1986), and if she performs well in a role, she will feel good given the appraisals of others and their approval (Franks and Marolla 1976). However, there are also efficacy implications for role performance. When we perform well in a role, this provides us with a sense of control over our environment (Franks and Marolla 1976; Gecas and Schwalbe 1983). Recent research in identity theory shows that self-verification which occurs through performing a role well makes one feel efficacious (Burke and Stets 1997). Given the above distinction, we note a third contrast.

C3: Category membership in social identity theory has consequences for self-esteem; role membership and performance in identity theory has consequences for self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Another difference between membership-based identities and role-based identities is that in the former, only the actor's perceptions are directly involved, while in the latter, other individuals in the group in counter-roles are directly involved in the role performance (Burke 1980; Burke and Reitzes 1981). In membership-based identities, it is

not necessary that the actor interact with group members. Indeed, the minimal group experiments in social identity theory precluded any interaction (Turner 1987).[4] When most of the actors in a category share the same perceptions, a mutual reinforcement of those perceptions occurs with the consequences of group formation (Turner 1987), but the behavioral consequences for individual members are to act in concert or unison, because they all have the same perceptions. In role-based identities, some form of interaction and negotiation is almost always involved (McCall and Simmons 1978). Relations are reciprocal rather than parallel. Different perspectives are involved among the persons in the group as they negotiate and perform their respective roles creating micro social structures within the group (Riley and Burke 1995; Stets 1997; Stets and Burke 1996).

A recent statement on the self-categorization process in social identity theory reaffirms the idea that the self is not seen as emerging from the reactions and expectations of others in the situation but from the cognitive process of social comparison (Turner et al. 1994). Categorization comes from the social perceiver appraising herself in relation to others rather than from the perspective of the other. In this way, the reflected appraisal process and taking the role of the other is not operative. Therefore, our fourth contrast is:

C4: *Social identity theory has focused more on common or shared outcomes for group members; identity theory has focused more on reciprocal, negotiated, structuring outcomes for group members.*

As a corollary to the above, the uniformity of responses of members of a social category that are the focus of social identity theory are uniform only in contrast to

[4] It may be the case that when others affirm a social identity, additional consequences may ensue.

perceived differences from the outgroup. For this reason, social identity theory tends to focus on the structures that differentiate one group from another: the ingroup from the outgroup. Thus, the elements of social structure to which social identity theory attends are more macro in nature than the elements of structure to which identity theory has attended with its focus on role relationships. Thus, a fifth contrast is:

C5: Social identity theory has focused more on intergroup structures; identity theory has focused more on intragroup structures.

There is one other consequential difference between the two theories. Social identity theory discusses *salience* as the activation of an identity in a situation. In identity theory, salience is the probability of activating an identity in a situation. Thinking of both definitions in probability terms suggests that social identity theory uses only the probabilities of zero and one, while identity theory uses the full range of probabilities – a seemingly minor difference.

By separating the concept of activation from the concept of salience, identity theory allows investigation of the factors that activate the identity in the immediate situation separately from the factors that influence the longer-term accessibility of an identity (Stryker 1980; Stryker and Serpe 1982). In social identity theory, Abrams (1994) has begun to distinguish between the situational activation of the identity and the likelihood of activation of the identity. He has introduced concepts such as the degree of salience, degree of attention, and chronic accessibility of the identity. In this way, the accessibility and fit components of the older *accessibility x fit interaction hypothesis* are separated (Turner 1987). Thus, our last contrast between the two theories is:

C6: *Social identity theory has been less likely to distinguish between the salience and activation of an identity; identity theory has tended to keep the distinction between the salience and activation of an identity.*

Although we have identified differences between social identity theory and identity theory, these are generally differences in emphasis and historical development rather than differences in fundamental aspects of the theories. For each of the contrasts identified, there are instances in which each of the theories incorporates aspects traditionally emphasized by the other. Many of these instances are of more recent origin, and we see the trends in development of the two theories, each moving toward attending to the concepts and processes previously featured by the other. We turn now to consider the parallel structure of the two theories which highlights their similarities.

What Are the Similarities?

We see identity theory and social identity theory as special cases of a single unified identity theory. We think it will benefit researchers in each line of work to recognize this by taking into account aspects of the self that the other has deemed important. To the extent that commonalties exist between the theories, and commonalties are often hidden by differences in language (Stryker 1977), we should unify the theories to bridge the conceptualizations and establish a general theory of the self. To argue for this unification, we begin with a comparison of the two theories in terms of their concepts and assumptions, identifying their parallel structures and points of similarity. For this, our focus is on the main tenets of each theory. We start with three concepts that are central to each theory: self-categorization, identity, and the self-concept.

The Concepts

In social identity theory and identity theory, the self is reflexive in that it looks back on itself as an object and categorizes, classifies, or names itself in particular ways that contrasts itself with other social categories or classifications. This is the process of *self-categorization*. For social identity theory (Turner 1985), self-categorizations are cognitive groupings of oneself and an aggregate of stimuli as identical, in contrast to another group of stimuli. Persons who are similar to the self with respect to these stimuli are grouped with the self (the ingroup); persons who differ from the self are classified as the outgroup.

For identity theory (Stryker 1980), the self-categorizations depend upon a named and classified world. Among the class terms learned within a culture are symbols that are used to designate "positions," the relatively stable, morphological components of social structure that are termed roles. Persons acting in the context of social structure name one another and themselves in the sense of recognizing one another as occupants of positions. This naming invokes expectations with regard to each other's and one's own behaviors (McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 1980). Thus, both theories share a definition, designated as *D,* of self-categorization where*:*

D1: *Self-categorization is a cognitive association of the self with a social category in contrast to other categories.*

The self-views that emerge from the reflexive activity of self-categorization in terms of membership in certain groups or particular roles comprise one's *identities*. Thus, while the question of *how* one classifies oneself is different depending upon the theory that is used (group or role), both theories recognize that individuals view themselves in terms of

shared social categories (McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 1980; Turner 1987).[5] Therefore, in the second definition, the two theories differ slightly in their views of the content of an identity.

D2a (social identity theory): an identity is a self-categorization in terms of a group or social category.

D2b (identity theory): an identity is a self-categorization in terms of a role.

Finally, each theory also holds that an individual has as many different identities as self-categorizations and that as a set they make up the *self-concept*. For social identity theory, the multiple identities are the different social categories to which the self belongs. For identity theory, they are the different roles that one occupies in the social structure. Thus another shared definition of the two theories is:

D3: The self-concept is the set of all of a person's identities.

An elaboration of the concept of identity that figures centrally into these theories is a *cognitive abstraction* of the social category. In social identity theory, the *prototype* is a cognitive abstraction of the central features of the membership category. It is an exemplar of the category to which individuals compare themselves (Hogg et al. 1995; Turner 1987). In identity theory, the *role identity* (McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 1980) or *identity standard* (Burke 1991a) is a cognitive abstraction of the central features,

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[5] A careful reading of each theory shows no preclusion of labeling the self in terms of the categories that are central to the other theory. For example, although social identity theory has not traditionally focused on role categories does not preclude such a focus (Deaux 1992, 1993). Similarly, identity theory does not preclude a focus on group based identities (Mutran and Burke 1979a; Stets and Burke 1996; White and Burke 1987). Although each theory has historically focused on groups or roles, nothing in either theory indicates this is necessary.

meanings and expectations of the role. In both theories, the self in the situation is compared to the abstract prototype or identity standard with outcomes of each theory a function of this comparison. There are thus two parts to the identity: 1) the set of self-categorizations that provide the identity and 2) the content of that identity in terms of the meanings and expectations held in the prototype or standard to which the self in the situation is compared. Therefore:

D4a (social identity theory): The prototype is a cognitive representation of a social category containing the meanings and norms the person associates with the social category.

D4b (identity theory): The identity standard is a cognitive representation of a role containing the meanings and norms the person associates with the role.

With the addition of a cognitive abstraction, we modify our original definitions of identity as given in the two theories to the following.

D2a (social identity theory, modified): an identity is a cognitive association of the self with a social category as represented by the prototype.

D2b (identity theory, modified): an identity is a cognitive association of the self with a role as represented by the identity standard.

Given multiple identities, each theory also considers the relationships among the different identities and which identities will be activated in a situation. In social identity theory, the different identities are organized into a hierarchy of inclusiveness. Three levels are generically attended to: a superordinate level such as "human," an intermediate level such as an "American," and a subordinate level such as a "Southerner." The levels are floating and contextual, depending upon the salience of the different classifications (Turner 1987). For example, at one level, an individual may see herself as a member of a

sorority executive board, in contrast to other members within the sorority. At the next level up, the person may see herself as a sorority member, in contrast to other sororities within the university. At a still higher level, the self may be seen as a University of X student, in contrast to students from another university within a particular community or state. Different identities become active as the situation changes and relevant self-categorization stimuli change.

For social identity theory, salience has to do with the situational activation of an identity at a particular level. A particular identity becomes activated/salient as a function of the interaction between the characteristics of the perceiver and the situation (Turner 1987). The individual perceives herself as like one set of persons and different from another set of persons in the situation. This is the perception of intra-class similarities and inter-class differences.

Identity theory also sees the different identities a person holds as organized into a hierarchy. However, the hierarchy is not one of inclusiveness but one of salience (McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 1980) or prominence (McCall and Simmons 1978). Like salience in social identity theory, salience in identity theory refers to the activation of an identity, though not in an all or nothing way. In identity theory, salience refers not to the *actual* activation, but to the *probability* of identity activation in a situation (McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 1980). Thus, we have a fourth definition the two theories share although its details are slightly different.

D5a: (social identity theory) A situationally salient identity is an identity that has been activated in the situation.

D5b: (identity theory) A situationally salient identity is an identity that has a high probability of being activated in the situation.

Having reviewed the major concepts of the two theories, we find that there are many similarities between them. The differences seem to have emerged from the historical focusing on categorization of the self into groups or into role positions in the social structure. The importance and implications of this difference we will discuss later. We now turn to a consideration of the processes and outcomes addressed by each of the theories.

The Processes

The central process in social identity theory is *depersonalization* or seeing the self as an embodiment of the ingroup prototype rather than as a unique individual (Turner, 1985, 1987). This is a cognitive process. Therefore, we write:

D6a (social identity theory): Depersonalization is the process of seeing the self in terms of the social category embodied in the prototype.

Similar to social identity theory's process of depersonalization, *self-verification* in identity theory is the cognitive process in which the self is seen in terms of the social category (role), becoming a representative of the category (Burke 1991a; McCall and Simmons 1978). Thus, we write:

D6b (identity theory): Self-verification is the process of seeing the self in terms of the role embodied in the identity standard.

Activation of a social identity is sufficient to result in depersonalization. And, depersonalization is the basic process underlying group phenomena such as social stereotyping, group cohesiveness, ethnocentrism, cooperation and altruism, emotional contagion, and collective action (Turner 1985, 1987). In identity theory, activation of an identity leads to the self-verification process which underlies such behavioral

consequences as role-taking, role-making, conflict and group formation as the person acts to portray the identity (Burke and Cast 1997; Burke and Stets 1997; Turner 1962). We therefore have the following very similar assumptions, labeled *A*.

A1a (social identity theory): When an identity is activated, the process of depersonalization occurs.

A1b (identity theory): When an identity is activated, the process of self-verification occurs.

As mentioned earlier, much of social identity theory, especially its elaboration in self-categorization theory, addresses cognitive outcomes such as stereotyping and ethnocentrism. In those instances where social identity theory has been concerned with processes leading to behavioral outcomes, two different sources of the behavior have been discussed. In one, behavior depends upon persons perceiving normative aspects of group membership in the prototype and then acting in accordance with these norms (Reicher 1987, 1996; Terry and Hogg 1996). This is similar to identity theory (Stryker 1980) in which persons act in accordance with the norms and expectations for the role held in the identity standard. This leads to our next set of assumptions.

A2a (social identity theory): When depersonalization occurs, the person behaves in ways that are consistent with prototype.

A2b (identity theory): When self-verification occurs, the person behaves in ways that are consistent with identity standard.[6]

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[6] As suggested above, the ideas expressed in assumption *A2b* could be viewed as part of the definition of self-verification. We have separated them here to make the parallel structures of the two theories more apparent.

A second source of behavior in social identity theory is self-esteem maintenance and enhancement. When a social identity is activated, people act to enhance the evaluation of the ingroup relative to the outgroup and thereby enhance their own evaluation as a group member (Turner 1987). Although this idea was central to the initial formulation and development of social identity theory (Abrams 1992), it has not received much empirical support and thus has been downplayed in more recent work (Abrams 1992; Abrams and Hogg 1990). As a substitute for the self-esteem motive, other motives have been suggested including a collective self-esteem motive (Crocker and Luhtanen 1990), a self-knowledge motive, a self-consistency motive, a self-efficacy motive (Abrams and Hogg 1990), and a self-regulation motive (Abrams 1992, 1994). Any of these motives are brought into play when the identity is activated. For example, with respect to the self-regulation motive, Abrams argues that when a social identity is salient (activated) and attended to, responses are deliberate and self-regulated. Group members act to match their behavior to the standards relevant to the social identity to confirm and enhance their social identification with the group. More research is needed to examine these motives within the context of social identity theory.

Like social identity theory, recent extensions of identity theory have added the motivational elements of self-consistency and self-regulation (e.g. Burke 1991a; Burke and Stets 1997; Stets 1997). Similar to perceptual control theory (Powers 1973), which has also been encompassed by affect control theory (Heise 1979), is the idea that people act to keep perceptions of themselves in the situation consistent with their identity standard. Actions are taken to modify the situation so that perceptions of the self are consistent with the standard in spite of situational disturbances caused by others, prior actions of the self, or general situational influences.

The above process is constant and ongoing, linking the individual to the situation, and it has been viewed as part of the self-verification process (Burke and Stets 1997; Swann 1983). Two different manifestations of self-verification exist. When disturbances change the situation such that individuals perceive expectations of themselves as different from their identity standard, they act to counteract the disturbance. When there are no disturbances, individuals act consistently with their standards as in Assumption *A2b*. Therefore, we more fully develop our previous set of assumptions with the following.

A3a (social identity theory): When depersonalization occurs, the person behaves to maintain her situationally manifest identity close to the expectations given in the prototype.

A3b (identity theory): When self-verification occurs, the person behaves to maintain her situationally manifest identity close to the expectations given in the standard.[7]

In sum, social identity theory and identity theory share some fundamental similarities with respect to their basic concepts and processes. We turn now to some of the outcomes to which identity theory and social identity theory have been applied.

The Outcomes

Many of the outcomes in social identity theory are cognitive and are a consequence of the *depersonalization* process (also a cognitive process) that occurs when an identity is activated. For example, to the extent that the ingroup category is positively valued, depersonalization will increase *mutual attraction* between members and enhance *self-*

[7] Again, this assumption could be viewed as part of the definition of self-verification.

esteem for the members as group members (Turner 1987). This occurs because each is seen as similar to the self in sharing prototypical characteristics, and people *like* those who are similar to them, an *intragroup* rather than *interpersonal* phenomenon. This mutual attraction and liking is termed *group cohesion* (Hogg 1987).

Ethnocentrism also follows from the depersonalization process where the individual sees herself as similar to others in the ingroup and different from others in the outgroup (Turner 1987). *Social cooperation* is also an outcome of the depersonalization process because, as the self is depersonalized, so too is self-interest. As persons see an identity between themselves and other ingroup members, they will also see an identity of interests in terms of needs, goals and motives associated with ingroup membership (Turner 1987).

Recent work in identity theory shows that the central process of *self-verification* has effects similar to the outcomes of depersonalization in social identity theory. Burke and Stets (1997) drawing upon earlier work in structural symbolic interaction theory (McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 1980) and identity theory (Burke 1991a, 1996), show a number of similar outcomes. They reveal that when two or more persons develop a mutual self-verification context through establishing mutually supportive role relationships, *emotional attraction, cognitive group formation* in which the self is a depersonalized part of the group, and *cohesion* or *commitment* result. In addition, they show that the persons develop higher *self-esteem* and feelings of *self-efficacy*. Understanding that depersonalization and self-verification both involve taking on and maintaining the prototype or identity standard of the self-category, thus we see additional assumptions shared by the two theories that can be summarized in the following.

Taking on and maintaining the characteristics of the prototype (social identity theory) or identity standard (identity theory) (Assumptions 2-3) results in

A4a (social identity theory): cohesion among those linked by the categorization,

A4b (identity theory): commitment among those linked by the categorization,

A5: a perception of shared membership in a group,[8]

A6: a positive emotional attachment to the others, and

A7: increased feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Although we have seen differences between social identity theory and identity theory, the parallel structures of the core features of each theory suggests that these differences are not fundamental aspects of the theories. As suggested above we see the trends in development of the two theories, each moving toward attending to the concepts and processes previously featured by the other. The result is likely to be a single more encompassing theory of identity whether based on group membership or role. We turn now to consider what a unified identity theory might look like.

Theoretical Unification

We began by suggesting that social identity theory and identity theory are contrasting sides of a single theory that have grown up independently and somewhat autonomously. Each has attended to different features of the self-concept that have been labeled identities (social or role), but because each has dealt with many of the same concepts and processes, they have never been far apart. As we have shown, in discussing the parallels

[8] There is a difference in the conceptualization of a "group" that each considers. For social identity theory, the group is the ingroup of all persons who share the depersonalizing categorization stimuli. For identity theory, the group is the set of persons who share the structural arrangement of acting to mutually enhance self-verification, and, although they have different (mutually supportive) roles, they come to be seen as a collective "we."

and similarities between the two theories, each theory shares a number of fundamental definitions. These include the ideas that: 1) self-categorization is a cognitive association of the self with a social category in contrast to other categories, 2) identities are self-categorizations in terms of roles or groups; 3) the self-concept is the set of all a person's identities, and 4) identities are situationally activated. These shared definitions provide a foundation for the unification of the two theories through mutual incorporation. The appendix contains a listing of the definitions, assumptions and heuristics of a first formulation of such a unified identity theory. In the present section we highlight aspects of the unified theory.

As we have already noted, social identity theory defined identity in terms of social category meanings while identity theory defined identity in terms of role meanings. In the unified theory, designated by *U*, identities are self-categorizations based on a cognitive representation of the meanings, norms, and expectations relevant to all social categories including abstract classes such as social class, ethnicity, and gender groupings, group memberships, and social roles. The prototype in social identity theory and the identity standard in identity theory are cognitive abstractions of the central features of social categories. In the second definition, we treat the prototype and the identity standard as equivalent cognitive representations.

UD1: *Self-categorization is a cognitive association of the self with one social category in contrast to other categories.*

UD2: *The prototype (a.k.a. identity standard) is a cognitive representation of a social category containing the meanings and norms the person associates with the social category.*

In our third unified definition, we define an identity.

UD3: *An identity is a self-categorization in terms of a social category referring to a class, group, or role as represented in the prototype or identity standard.*

The unified theory retains the original definition (*D3*) shared by both theories thus:

UD4: *The self-concept is the set of all of a person's identities.*

For an identity to have any effect, it must be activated in a situation. The unified theory distinguishes between the salience of an identity and the activation of an identity. It separates the probability of the activation of an identity (its salience) from the factors that influence that probability. The unified theory incorporates factors such as the fit of the identity to the situation that has been emphasized in social identity theory,[9] the structural embeddedness or commitment of the individual as emphasized by identity theory, and the accessibility of the identity, all of which influence the likelihood that an identity will be activated across many situations. For this, we present the following definitions and assumptions that explicitly recognize these factors.

UD5: *An activated identity is one that is currently guiding behavior, perceptions, and emotional responses in a situation.*

UD6: *The salience of an identity is the probability that the identity will be activated in a situation.*

Salience is a function of

UA1: *embeddedness of the individual in the social structure (commitment),*

UA2: *the fit of the identity with situational stimuli, and*

UA3: *characteristics of the identity such as its accessibility.*

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[9] The stimuli present in the situation fit the characteristics of the identity.

The unified identity theory emphasizes two important aspects of membership in any social category (group or role): one's *identification with a category (being)* that we associate with the process of *depersonalization,* and the *behaviors* (*doing*) that we associate with the process of *self-verification.* In the process of self-verification, persons act as members of the social category to maintain the norms and expectations in the standard.[10] The unified theory incorporates both the being (depersonalization) and doing (self-verification) that stem from depersonalization. In the unified theory, both who one is and what one does are important sources of self-meaning.

UD7: *Depersonalization is the process of seeing the self in terms of the social category embodied in the prototype or standard.*

UD8: *Self-verification is the process of behaving to maintain one's situationally manifest identity close to the meanings and expectations given in the prototype or standard.*

We note that both social category association and role behavior refer to and reaffirm social structural arrangements. When we identify with the social categories that structure society and when we behave according to the expectations tied to our identification, we are acting in the context of, referring to, and reaffirming social structure. In this way, the unified theory recognizes that the self exists within and is influenced by society, since socially defined shared meanings are incorporated into one's identity standard. And, it

[10] This formulation only emphasizes the conformity aspects. It is recognized, however, that the meanings and expectations an individual holds are those that the individual has interpreted and understood. It is also recognized that much of the meaning content of the identity is created (group and role making) by the individual acting in the situation.

recognizes that the self influences society, since individual agents act by changing social arrangements to bring the self into line with the abstract prototype or identity standard (Freese and Burke 1994; Hogg et al. 1995; Stryker 1980).

The unified theory includes three additional assumptions. First, the activation of an identity results in depersonalization. In turn, depersonalization leads to self-verification. Finally, depersonalization and self-verification result in increased cohesion, commitment, emotional attachment, a group orientation, and increased feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy. Therefore:

UA4: When an identity is activated, depersonalization occurs.

UA5: When depersonalization occurs, self-verification occurs.

Depersonalization and self-verification results in

UA6: cohesion and commitment among those linked by the categorization,

UA7: a perception of shared membership in a group,

UA8: a positive emotional attachment to the others, and

UA9: increased feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy.

The remaining assumptions are broadly based and serve a more heuristic function to refocus attention. Earlier, we discussed the cognitive outcomes in social identity theory and behavioral outcomes in identity theory that result from the activation of an identity in a given social context (Contrast *C2*). The unified theory addresses both outcomes, and given recent work, incorporates emotional outcomes (Burke and Stets 1997; Carver and Scheier 1990; Ellestad and Stets 1998; Heise and Thomas 1989; Mackie and Hamilton 1993; Smith 1993). Because researchers in both theoretical traditions have begun to examine the outcomes previously addressed by the other theory, we are making explicit that which has already been happening implicitly. However, it is worth emphasizing that

there are cognitive consequences for role membership and behavioral consequences for group membership, as well as emotional consequences for role and group memberships that have not been systematically explored in the past. Thus, our first heuristic, *H*, is:

UH1: Identities referring to groups or roles have cognitive, behavioral, and emotional outcomes.

To be useful, this heuristic would need to be broken into many assumptions detailing the specific cognitive, behavioral, and emotional outcomes, and the conditions and process that lead to them. In our earlier discussion we have presented some of these specifics, but much work needs to be done.

We also earlier discussed how category membership in social identity theory had consequences for self-esteem while role membership had consequences for both self-esteem and self-efficacy. In the unified theory, we point out that there are a number of self-processes that are involved in identity formation and maintenance, and that *all* of them need to be examined. Some processes may be tied more to membership and some may be tied more to role performance. However, since *all* social categories have *both* membership and performance characteristics, it is an empirical question as to what is relevant and when. Therefore, we have the next unified heuristic that serves to broaden UH1.

UH2: Identities referring to groups or roles have consequences for self-esteem and self-efficacy.

If we were to spell out the above heuristic more, we might suggest that successful performances would likely result in increased feelings of efficacy, which in turn would yield increased feelings of self-esteem. On the other hand, we would suggest that

acceptance as a member of a valued group or category would directly enhance self-esteem.

Recall that social identity theory has focused more on common or shared outcomes such as ethnocentrism for group members while identity theory has focused more on reciprocal, negotiated outcomes for group members. The unified theory incorporates the actor's perceptions and behaviors as well as other group members' perceptions and behaviors since both are important in identity activation and maintenance. Consequently:

UH3: When an identity is activated in a situation, the outcomes for persons include common or shared group outcomes and reciprocal role outcomes.

The unified theory also incorporates the emergence of macro social structures that develop between groups (ingroup and outgroup) in the form of boundary maintenance, conflict, and exchange, as well as the micro or meso social structures that develop within groups in the form of role relationships and lower level categorizations. Therefore:

UH4: When an identity is activated in a situation, macro and micro social structures develop within and between groups.

Exemplifying the Unified Identity Theory

To show how the unified theory may be advantageously exemplified in research, we draw upon two studies: one in the tradition of social identity theory (Ethier and Deaux 1994) and the other in the tradition of identity theory (Stets and Burke 1996). We demonstrate how the findings in each study can be more broadly understood within this unified framework.

Ethier and Deaux (1994) examined the maintenance of an ethnic identity and feelings of esteem when individuals were faced with a threat to that identity. They studied

Hispanic students during the first year in two predominately Anglo universities and analyzed how they adjusted to the new environment. Assuming that membership in a group that has a minority status would heighten salience for the members (see Assumption *UA2*) (McGuire et al. 1978), they hypothesized an increased ethnic group identification for these students. Ethier and Deaux expected to see their respondents report feelings of increased importance and involvement in their ethnicity.

The results showed that feeling the increased importance and involvement in one's ethnicity did not occur for all students. It happened only for those respondents who were already more involved in their ethnicity. Those Hispanics who initially had a strong identification to the Hispanic identity responded to their new environment by becoming involved in Hispanic cultural activities, thereby maintaining and even increasing the strength of their identification, a process they call *remooring*. In contrast, those Hispanics who initially had a weak Hispanic identity demonstrated a decrease in identification with being Hispanic in the new environment.

Because the results did not hold for those who initially had a weak Hispanic identity, this study challenges the assumption in social identity theory that an identity becomes salient relative to its context, the distinctiveness hypothesis. The results indicate that prior ethnic involvement influences the degree to which individuals make an effort to maintain their group membership. Looked at through the lens of the unified theory, this is a question of commitment and the long-term salience of an identity (Assumption *UA1*). The results of Ethier and Deaux parallel the results of another study using identity theory (Serpe and Stryker 1987).

Serpe and Stryker found that freshmen students with more commitment to established identities, and hence more salience for those identities,[11] instituted identity support systems or identity verification contexts in their new environment that were, in many ways, similar to the verification contexts from which they came. Through this, they maintained or strengthened their commitment to their identity. Entering students with less commitment to their identities failed to reestablish their identity support system and eventually changed their identity.

The general principle in identity theory is that commitment represents the strength of the forces operating on a person to verify their identity and it influences the likelihood that the identity will be activated across situations (Assumption *UA1*). Verification includes establishing new identity verification contexts in the new environment. The students with low commitment would be less likely to activate their Hispanic identity to establish new identity verification contexts. While social identity theory has not yet concerned itself with commitment or the long-term likelihood of an identity being activated, the new, unified theory can explain Ethier and Deaux's somewhat anomalous finding.

We turn now to a study in the tradition of identity theory. Stets and Burke (1996) examined the effects of gender on emotion-based behavior, specifically negative and positive verbal behavior for married couples who were brought together as part of a study examining the processes involved in resolving disagreements in their marriage. The results revealed that persons with a more feminine than masculine gender role identity

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[11] One basic premise of identity theory is that commitment increases the salience of an identity (see *UA1*) (Stryker and Serpe 1982).

produced *less* negative talk. However, the findings also revealed that wives produced *more* negative behavior in conversations than husbands. Definition *UD2* of the unified theory helps us understand these seemingly contradictory findings. This assumption leads us to think about the meanings of gender as a status category as well as the meanings of gender as a role identity in interaction.

Considering gender as a role identity in terms of being more masculine or feminine, the unified theory suggests that people with particular identities act in ways that confirm and maintain those identities (Definition *UD7*). Persons with more masculine or more feminine identities will attempt to verify and maintain their particular identity. In general, and without considering any disturbances to perceptions, men and women with a more masculine gender identity standard with its more powerful and aggressive connotations will, on average, engage in more negative or powerful behavior to keep their self-perceptions in alignment with their identity standards (Definition *UD7*). Similarly, men and women with more feminine gender identities will engage in more positive and accepting behavior consistent with their gender identity self-conceptions. But, if being more masculine is being more powerful as identity theory suggests, why are the wives, who are much more feminine, engaging in more powerful negative behavior?

In the unified identity theory, we also need to consider gender as a status category. Being male or female signals to others one's position in the social structure. Since females are viewed as having less power than males, they will be treated as such. For example, they will be seen as unable to perform as well as powerful people (males) in interaction (Foschi 1989; Foschi and Foddy 1988). If females are discounted in interaction but do not see themselves as powerless, though others see and treat them as such, they will engage in compensation behavior to bring their perceptions of self-

relevant meanings into line with their identity standard and enhance their self-esteem (Assumption *UA9*). Since negative behaviors have been traditionally associated with meanings of power and control, wives will use these behaviors more than husbands as a compensatory strategy to be seen as credible and capable. In this way wives use more negative behavior in marital conversations.

Examining these findings through the lens of the unified identity theory, gender as status directs our attention to one's identification or association within a particular social group or category, as emphasized in social identity theory. Gender as a role identity reminds us of the expected ways of behaving that are tied to our identification, as addressed in identity theory. As we indicated earlier, both are important sources of meaning for the self and both operate in interaction. What this study reveals is that sometimes the actions that follow from each may be contradictory.

Summary and Conclusions

We began with an assertion that identity theory, beginning in structural symbolic interactionism, and social identity theory, beginning in ideas about social categorization, have similarities that make it worth considering a unified identity theory. Such unification would avoid redundancies and establish a general theory of the self. To demonstrate the broad similarities between the theories, we presented a number of basic definitions and assumptions that are shared by the two theories. These assumptions cover basic concepts, processes, and outcomes.

Not everything has been shared by the two theories, however. Because of their different origins, they have grown up with different foci, different scopes, and different emphases. We reviewed these differences and pointed out that in most instances the

differences were ones of emphasis rather than ones of kind. Indeed, we showed that in many instances continuing research already has been moving the theories closer together over time. For the most part, the differences originated in a view of the group as the basis for identity (who one is) held by social identity theory and a view of the role as a basis for identity (what one does) held by identity theory. We suggested that being and doing are both central features of one's identity and a complete theory would merge these two, different, historical emphases. To accomplish this, we outlined a new set of definitions and assumptions to accomplish this unification. These were incorporated into the slightly modified original, shared assumptions resulting in a unified theoretical framework.

In applying the unified identity theory, we examined two recent studies, one based upon social identity theory and one based upon identity theory. In both instances, the new, unified theory was able to overcome problems and issues with which the individual theories had trouble. We are thus led to believe that this new framework for a unified identity theory will yield a stronger social psychology that can attend to both macro and micro, as well as, perhaps, meso social processes in the form of *inter*- and *intra*group relations. Such a theory attends to both agency and reflection, doing and being, as central aspects of the self, and it encourages extending the outcomes to be considered to include the whole range of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional consequences. We also think it should provide a stronger integration of the concepts of group and role.

APPENDIX

DEFINITIONS, ASSUMPTIONS, AND HEURISTICS OF THE UNIFIED IDENTITY THEORY

Definitions

UD1: *Self-categorization is a cognitive association of the self with one social category in contrast to other categories.*

UD2: *The prototype (a.k.a. identity standard) is a cognitive representation of a social category containing the meanings and norms the person associates with the social category.*

UD3: *An identity is a self-categorization in terms of a social category referring to a class, group, or role as represented in the prototype or identity standard.*

UD4: *The self-concept is the set of all of a person's identities.*

UD5: *An activated identity is one that is currently guiding behavior, perceptions, and emotional responses in a situation.*

UD6: *The salience of an identity is the probability that the identity will be activated in a situation.*

UD7: *Depersonalization is the process of seeing the self in terms of the social category embodied in the prototype or standard.*

UD8: *Self-verification is the process of behaving to maintain one's situationally manifest identity close to the meanings and expectations given in the prototype or standard.*

Assumptions:

Salience is a function of

UA1: embeddedness of the individual in the social structure (commitment),

UA2: the fit of the identity with situational stimuli, and

UA3: characteristics of the identity such as its accessibility.

UA4: When an identity is activated, depersonalization occurs.

UA5: When depersonalization occurs, self-verification occurs.

Depersonalization and self-verification results in

UA6: cohesion and commitment among those linked by the categorization,

UA7: a perception of shared membership in a group,

UA8: a positive emotional attachment to the others, and

UA9: increased feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Heuristics:

UH1: Identities referring to groups or roles have cognitive, behavioral, and emotional outcomes.

UH2: Identities referring to groups or roles have consequences for self-esteem and self-efficacy.

UH3: When an identity is activated in a situation, the outcomes for persons include common or shared group outcomes and reciprocal role outcomes.

UH4: When an identity is activated in a situation, macro and micro social structures develop within and between groups.

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