

Identity Theory and Personality Theory: Mutual Relevance

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Prologue and Introduction

My work beginning in graduate school 58 years ago drew its motivation from the writings of the philosopher and psychologist George Herbert Mead (especially Mead 1934). In the course of that work I developed a social psychological framework termed structural symbolic interactionism (Stryker, 2002b [1980]). This framework differs both in important respects and in nuance from the then-dominant version of symbolic interactionism that has been called “traditional” (Stryker and Vryan, 2003). A most important respect in which the two differ is in the attention paid to the social structural settings, small and large, within which social interaction takes place. In particular, structural symbolic interactionism focuses on linking social interaction to roles and elaborating the ways in which large(r) social structures on the levels of societies and institutions both facilitate and constrain entry into positions linked to roles and so impact social interaction and the potential consequences of interaction. An important reason for attending to social structure was my aspiration to develop from the frame testable

theories serving to explain specific social psychological outcomes. Identity Theory¹ derives from a structural symbolic interactionist frame, offering an explanation of the choices persons make in situations in which they have the possibility of enacting alternative role-related actions.

The heart of the present essay provides reviews of Identity Theory and the structural symbolic interactionist frame from which Identity Theory derives. Taken together, these have had some relevance to contemporary work in personality psychology (see, e.g., Donahue, Robins, Roberts, and John 1993; Roberts and Donahue 1994; Wood and Roberts,). The essay closes with a brief discussion of the mutual relevance of the structural symbolic interactionist frame/Identity Theory and personality theory that might lead to extensions of the current literature on the topic.

Writing such an essay comes as something of a surprise to me. As a sociologist whose interests lay in social psychological issues sixty years ago when an undergraduate and later graduate student at the University of Minnesota, I minored in psychology. The offerings at the time in psychology directly relevant to social psychology were limited—although I did take two courses with Theodore Newcomb during his visit to Minnesota one summer session somewhere in the late 1940's. Consequently, I chose for my minors courses I thought most appropriate to a sociologist, and these largely had to do in one way or another with the concept of personality (as did the text: Bird 1940) in the one available course labeled social psychology.

My memories of these experiences may well be skewed, but these memories have been highly consistent over the intervening years. What struck me then was the degree to

¹ I sometimes regret using this label given the wide contemporary usage attached to the term “identity” covering a wide range of very different meanings (see Stryker, 2002a).

which the understanding of personality had little if anything to do with the roles that organized persons' social life. Rather, the understanding of personality emphasized individual traits, defined either as consistent behavioral tendencies that resulted from innate, presumably genetic, features, or as the generalized result of learning processes. Either way, it seemed to me, the emphasis was on individual differences. And, either way, the motivations underlying psychological work on personality appeared to be "clinical" or therapeutic rather than "scientific," and ideographic rather than nomothetic.²

Somewhat later, I became aware of the countervailing work of Mischel (1968) emphasizing situational determinants of personality. However, the early work in that vein seemed to me be curiously innocent (even for the time) of a sophisticated awareness of the ways in which the structures that organize social life impact persons' experiences. Indeed, the early work allowed the concept of situations to remain an amorphous catch-all incapable of a coherent research attack on how memberships in organized social life affect persons' behaviors and their personalities.

Whatever the validity of the recounted perceptions, I was a nascent sociologist impressed with the then-"young" concept of role for understanding social behavior. Because I hoped to contribute to a budding science in the form of generalized theoretical accounts capable of empirical verification, my perceptions of the literature on personality suggested the irrelevance of the concept of personality for my developing interests. I abandoned reading the personality literature. But I did not abandon my reading of the psychological literature, which channeled into the literature of an emerging cognitive social psychology. Two ideas motivated my reading, one primary and the second

² A recent endorsement of these tendencies appears in Smith (2005).

derivative. Reinforced by unusually long tenure on NIMH grant committees that brought me into contact with a large number of brilliant psychologists from whom I learned how much I did not know and needed to know, I was primarily motivated to learn more pertaining to my own growing interest in the relations of self and society by reading Newcomb, Festinger, Kelley, Schacter, Thibaut, Jones, Zajonc, et al, and then a host of younger psychologists including Higgins, Snyder, Linville, Markus, Swann, and Deaux. The second, and derivative, motivation was that I could in some part reciprocate by relating through my own work a lesson sociology holds for cognitive social psychology, namely, that the experiences persons have through their years are not distributed randomly but are channeled through the social structures that organize social life. Consequently, a full account of persons' social behavior required locating cognitions in the structures that impact (from forbid to discourage to allow to encourage to require) those cognitions.³

A reader of the cognitive social psychological literature will know that the latter motivation has remained largely unfulfilled, and perhaps it was misplaced effort. What suggests this last comment brings me to the task at hand. Having been invited to prepare a paper presenting Identity Theory for this special issue and agreeing to do so, I have learned that at least a few personality psychologists have found that theory and the frame from which it emerged useful in their own work. Through trying to understand why such persons have seen my work as useful to them, I have learned as well how

³ The intent was never to bring psychologists to do the work of sociologists; I knew better! (Indeed, were that to occur, it is not clear what contribution sociologists could make to social psychology. Rather, the intent was to ask psychologists to recognize that explanations of social psychological events or processes couched only in terms of cognitions were incomplete. Consequently, more modest claims regarding explanatory powers and "practical" applications of cognitive social psychological research than are often made were required.

much of the work they have done could teach me things that would have benefited what I have done in the sociology and social psychology of self and identity. While I may not be able to take further advantage of what I am now learning, I have the opportunity to satisfy in another arena of psychology the motivations that underlay my earlier long-term contact with cognitive social psychology. As they say, better late than never!

Identity Theory and its Parent Structural Symbolic Interactionism

Conventional usage attaches the term theory to “symbolic interactionism” as a label for ideas stemming importantly from the writings of the Scottish moral philosophers (Bryson 1945) and pragmatic philosophy (Maines 2000) as represented in William James (1890), John Dewey (1930), as well as Mead. These ideas that provide the imagery, assumptions, and conceptions underpinning major contributions of sociology to social psychology. As such, these ideas constitute a perspective or theoretical framework necessary to the development of particular social psychological theories, rather than a theory *per se* (if this latter term is used to denote provisional testable explanations of social psychological phenomena--Stryker, 2002b [1980]; Stryker and Vryan, 2003). The following discussion focuses on Identity Theory and sufficient of the structural symbolic interaction frame to motivate the statement of the theory.⁴

⁴ There are a number of variants of the general interactionist frame, all building on a common basis. The variations develop from alternative stances taken with regard to a set of issues important to how the frame can be and is used in applications. These include the goal of interactionist analyses (from understandings of particular interactions to general, theory-based explanations); whether the focus is on social process itself or on social structure and the extent to which one focus can accommodate the other; whether the definitions of the situation or interpretations of subjects studied are necessary and sufficient elements in studying interaction and its consequences; whether the perspective of the research analyst can or cannot, should or should not, enter; whether, or the degree to which, self is free of structurally-induced constraints and is an “uncaused cause” of novelty and creativity in social life; and whether self is continuously constructed anew or simply reproduces previously existing patterns. [See Stryker and Vryan 2003, on which the present discussion draws heavily, for a more complete statement of the symbolic interactionist frame and its variants; see also, Stryker 2002 (1980) and Stryker 1981.]

Identity Theory, as that term is being used here,⁵ has its referent in a literature that seeks to develop and examine empirically a theoretical explanation of role choice behavior.⁶ The prototypical question addressed is why one person takes his/her children to the zoo on a free weekend afternoon, while another person chooses to spend that time on the golf course with friends? A scope condition of the theory is implied by this question: it applies to situations in which alternative courses of action are reasonably open to an actor. The symbolic interactionist frame assumes that human beings are actors and not simply reactors. Identity Theory shares the assumption that the possibility of choice is a ubiquitous feature of human existence. However, the structural interactionist frame also holds that social structure and social interaction are equivalently ubiquitous in constraining (not strictly determining) human action. Constraint is variable. Persons held in prisons may in a philosophical sense still be said to be “free” to choose to behave in any way, including to endure severe punishment or death rather than to meet societal demands. It is nevertheless true that prisoners do not have viable options with respect to many aspects of their lives. Identity theory has more to say about those who have reasonable alternative ways of acting in situations they face than it has to say about those who have no or few options.

³The term identity is currently used in social scientific, therapeutic, and humanistic literatures of a range of disciplines, including philosophy, political science, psychology, social psychology, and sociology, with denotations and connotations specific to those literatures and disciplines. This situation makes for considerable confusion if care is not taken in understanding its meaning in specific contexts.

⁶The underlying ideas of this theory can be used in constructing explanations of other dependent variables, e.g., identity competition as manifested in social movement behavior (Stryker, 2002), the expansion/contraction of behavioral alternatives (Stryker, 1994; 1997), and—hopefully—issues relevant to personality psychologists. I choose to focus here on role choice behavior because Identity Theory developed around and has been best researched for this dependent variable.

Derived from the symbolic interactionist frame, Identity Theory shares assumptions or premises of interactionism thought in general, that human action and interaction are critically shaped by interpretations or definitions of the situations of action and interaction; and that interpretations and definitions are based upon shared meanings developing out of interactions with others. A further premise (for which there is considerable evidence) is that meanings persons attribute to themselves, that is, their self-conceptions or, more simply, their selves, are particularly important to the process producing actions and interactions. Still another premise is that, just as other meanings, persons' selves are shaped in interaction with others. At least initially and at least largely, selves are built upon responses to them made by others.

Given that early interactionists understood by society complex patterns of interaction, this last premise restates Mead's argument that self reflects society. Together with the premise that selves are important in producing action and interaction, these two premises provide the fundamental theoretical proposition or formula of symbolic interactionism: society shapes self, and self shapes social behavior. The proposition not only admits of but insists upon the possible reciprocity of its components: social behavior can impact self and society and self can impact society.⁷

Identity Theory, as noted, derives from a structural symbolic interactionism; the latter builds upon refinements of the basic symbolic interactionist framework as it evolved from Mead (1934), Cooley (1902) Blumer (1969) and others, as well as upon specifications of the formula that expresses the basic frame. The refinements essentially concern four matters: the conceptualization of society; the conceptualization of self; the

⁷ These premises do not imply that the strength of the impact of self on society is equivalent to the strength of the impact of society on self. Instead, priority is given society in the formula (see Stryker, 1997).

relative weight to be accorded social structure versus interpretive processes in accounts of human social behavior; and, relatedly, the manner in which the processes of social interaction relate to the larger social structures within which these processes take place.

To elaborate, the “traditional” symbolic interactionist framework as viewed by Mead, Cooley, Blumer, et al tends to view “society” as a rather singular unity, as relatively undifferentiated and unorganized, with few internal barriers to the evolution of universally shared meanings within a given society, and ultimately between societies as well. Too, it tends to view society as unstable, as an ephemeral reflection of transient and ever-shifting patterns of interaction, and as a reification of those shifting lines of interaction. Given this view of society, relatively stable social structures as these are generally conceived by sociologists do not enter importantly into accounts of persons’ behavior. Such accounts tend to be empty of a coherent sense of social constraints external to immediate relationships and interaction. There are few means of linking dynamics of social interaction in precise ways to the broader social settings that are contexts for persons’ interactions.

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that this view of society dissolves social structure in a universal solvent of subjective definitions and interpretations. This misses the stubborn reality of a variety of kinds of social forms, including stratification and institutions, that clearly impact social behavior. The importance for social life of interpretive and definitional processes, so central to interactionists’ thinking and explanation, is not thereby denied. It is, however, to say that to see these processes as largely unanchored and without bounds, open to whatever possibility, and the related failure to see that some undeniable possibilities are much more probable than others, is to

see social life as less a product of external constraints and more a consequence of persons' phenomenology than is warranted. Not incidentally, this view of society—on the basis of the premise that self reflects society—leads directly to a view of self as unitary and as equivalently undifferentiated, unorganized, unstable, and ephemeral.

The image of society held by contemporary sociology generally is quite different from that of traditional symbolic interactionism, and it is the contemporary imagery that plays a significant role in the structural symbolic frame from which identity theory derives. This imagery stresses the durability of the patterned interactions and relationships that are the foundation of sociology's sense of social structure. It stresses social structures' resistance to change and tendency to reproduce itself. In the current imagery, further, societies are seen as highly differentiated yet organized systems of interactions relationships; as complex mosaics of groups, communities, organizations, institutions, and strata—the last incorporating a great variety of crosscutting lines based on social class, age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and more. The diversity of parts is seen as organized in multiple and overlapping ways, interactionally, functionally and hierarchically. The parts of society, nevertheless, are taken to be sometimes relatively independent of each other and sometimes highly interdependent, as sometimes conflicting and sometimes close and cooperative.

The premise that self reflects society now calls for a different conceptualization of self. Self must be seen as multi-faceted, comprised of diverse parts that sometimes are independent of one another and sometimes interdependent, sometimes mutually

reinforcing and sometimes conflicting, as well as being organized in many ways.⁸ It calls for a sense of self in accord with James' (1890) assertion that persons have as many selves as they have other persons who react to them, or at the least, as many as there are groups of others who react to them.

Viewing society and self as complex and multi-faceted as well as organized opens the way to go beyond the overly general, indeed banal and untestable, character of the basic symbolic interactionists formula. It does so by allowing theorization of the relations between particular parts of society and particular parts of self, as well as by permitting reasonable operationalizations of those parts.

This theorization begins by specifying individual terms of the basic symbolic interactionist formula, focusing on particulars especially likely to be important to role choice. First, the general category of social behavior is specified by taking role choice—choosing to undertake action meeting the expectations contained in one role rather than another—as that which the theory seeks to explain. Role choice is then hypothesized to be a consequence of identity salience and psychological centrality,⁹ both specifications of the general category of self. Identity salience and psychological centrality are hypothesized to be consequences of society, specified as commitment. Identity Theory's fundamental proposition results from this specification, becoming: Commitment impacts identity salience and psychological centrality, and these impact role choice behavior.

⁸ The conception of selves as multiple and diverse has often been seen as running counter to a conception of self as singular and unified. For an attempt to reconcile these apparently oppositional views from the standpoint of Identity Theory, see Stryker (1989).

⁹ Psychological centrality (Rosenberg 1979), the subjective importance of identities relative to other identities, entered identity theory when research purportedly examining identity theory's concept of identity salience used subjects' rankings of the importance of their identities to measure salience. Research incorporating both concepts with appropriate measures of each (Stryker and Serpe, 1994) showed that while the two were moderately correlated, each was predicted by commitment and each independently predicted role choice. At least in that study, identity salience had the greater impact.

The concept of identity salience is elaborated from the multifaceted view of self. Drawing on James, persons are seen as having multiple selves, with that term now understood as implying multiple identities. That is, self is conceptualized as comprised of a set of discrete identities, with persons having, potentially, as many identities as there are organized systems of roles relationships in which they participate. In Identity Theory, identities require both that persons be placed as social objects by having others assign a positional designation to them and that the persons accept or internalize the designation (Stone 1962; Stryker 1968). Identities are then self-cognitions tied to roles, and through roles, to positions in organized social relationships. Examples are the familial roles of wife, husband, child, grandparent; the occupational roles of doctor, employer, salesperson; farmer; the political roles of candidate, senator; the religious roles of minister, congregation member, the recreational roles of tennis player, bridge competitor; stamp collector; etc. By this usage, identities are cognitive schema (Markus 1977), structures of cognitive associations, with the capacity of schema to affect cognitive and perceptual processes (Stryker & Serpe 1994).

Not only multifaceted, self is also postulated to be organized. Identity Theory has taken hierarchy as a principal mode of the organization of identities, again mirroring society. That is, self is a structure of identities, and identities—given their properties as cognitive schema—vary in their salience and centrality. Identity salience is defined as the likelihood that a given identity will be invoked or called into play in a variety of situations; alternatively, it can be defined as the differential likelihood across persons that a given identity will be invoked in a given situation. Psychological centrality is defined simply as the perceived importance to the person of an identity she/he holds. Identity

theory's fundamental proposition hypothesizes that the choice between or among behaviors expressive of particular roles will reflect the relative locations of the identities in the identity hierarchies.¹⁰ It is important to note that identities, as cognitive schema, are not situation specific; they can be carried by the person into the manifold situations they experience and impact the course of conduct in a wide range of those situations.

The concept of commitment has its referent in the networks of social relationships in which persons participate. Commitment is conceived as ties to social networks—the term is intended to refer to both what the sociologist calls groups¹¹ as well what have been termed social networks. Commitment is a social structural term, a “small” unit of structure and a specification of “society.” It develops through a recognition that persons conduct most of their lives not in the context of society as a whole but rather in the many contexts of relatively small and specialized social networks, networks composed of persons to whom they relate by virtue of occupancy of particular social positions and the playing out of associated roles. To say that persons are committed to a social network is to say that their relationships to the other members of that network are dependent on their playing out particular roles and having particular identities. To the degree that one's relationships to specific others depends on being a particular kind of person, one is committed to being that kind of person.

Commitment is measured by the costs of giving up meaningful relationships with others should persons pursue an alternative course of action in situations in which they are expected to play out a role in a given network. So conceived and measured,

¹⁰ These concepts do not demand a strict hierarchical ordering of identities; more than one identity can share a position on scales measuring either salience or centrality. Current procedures allow no statement of the distances between rankings.

¹¹ For a sociologist, a group is a unit of social interaction, not simply a set of persons who identify themselves with a social category as is true for social identity theorists in psychology (see Hogg, forthcoming).

commitment is hypothesized by identity theory to be the source of the salience and the importance attached to given identities (Stryker 1968; 1980; 1987). Two analytically distinct dimensions or forms of commitment have been recognized in the theory, forced to this distinction via factor analyses of early measures (Serpe 1987). The first, interactional commitment, refers to the number of relationships entailed in having a given identity and by the ties among networks of relationships. For example: one can relate as husband not only to one's spouse, her friends, and her relatives, but also to members of a couple's bridge club, "gourmet"-group and other such groups. The second, affective commitment, refers to the depth of emotional attachment to particular sets of others in networks of relationships.

As suggested earlier, the theory admits of reciprocity among the terms of the basic identity theory formula, but the dominant thrust of the process is hypothesized as given by the proposition that commitment affects identity hierarchies and these in turn affect role choice behavior. The rationale involved here is that identity, as a strictly cognitive phenomenon, will change more readily than will commitment, whose conceptual core is interaction and not cognition.

One further concept and its relation to the basic identity theory formula are needed to complete this tour of the structural symbolic interactionist frame and its derivative identity theory. Relatively early in the development of theory, a conception emerged of the "larger" social structures that are part of societies as boundaries, operating to facilitate or constrain persons' access to particular kinds of interactional units that are the focus of commitments (Stryker, 1980). Thus, for example, social class represents one such boundary, with a variety of circumstances making it more likely that, at this point in

history, it is higher class rather than lower class persons in American society who will access the Ivy league schools which traditionally channel persons into higher status positions in government and business. In turn, this means that persons so channeled are more likely than those whose class locations are lower to access occupational and interpersonal skills, cultural capital, attitudes and other cognitions of interest to the social psychologist, both sociological and psychological. Recent research by Stryker, Serpe and Hunt (2005) examines these ideas empirically. It finds that commitments of persons to family, work, and voluntary associational units are shaped importantly in a process in which social structures at the broadest societal level—in the research age, gender, ethnicity, income, educational status—impact entry into more intermediate social structures impact structures proximate to the level of commitment impact commitments themselves.

Identity Theory and Personality Theory: Musings¹²

Stating the obvious: the major point of differentiation between the literatures of structural symbolic interaction/Identity Theory and personality theory is that each follows its separate disciplinary heritage in its understanding of the meaning of the term identity. For Identity Theory, identity and its parent term self refer to internalized meanings of social roles through which persons relate to others. For personality theory, identity and self are dispositional structures of traits. Overstating the case somewhat, until relatively recently, and with comparatively rare exception, personality theory and Identity Theory have been seen as mutually exclusive bases for theorizing about and researching human

¹² Given the state of my current knowledge of the personality literature, I cannot claim that what follows are more than musings. My hope is that at least some of what is said will prove useful to the reader

beings. Proponents of one or the other conception have essentially ignored the other in pursuing topics in which they are interested. This state of affairs is not terribly problematic so long as the topics of interest have to do with roles or traits for their own sake. However, when interest turns to accounting for the social behavior of humans, the isolation of traits and roles from one another becomes less than benign. It then becomes clear that, as in so many cases of conceptual and theoretical antitheses,¹³ to ignore either is to limit the potential for understanding and explaining human behavior. If this assertion is valid, developing the relationships between identity-as-internalized-role and identity-as-traits is an absolute requirement.

That truth seems to have been more thoroughly and earlier recognized by personality psychologists than by sociologists who share my theoretical predilections (Roberts & Donahue 1994; Donahue et al 1993). I have come only recently to appreciate what should have been obvious to me long ago, namely, that persons can and do organize their self concepts around traits and these too can be internalized and guide social cognitions and interpersonal behaviors That is, traits can serve to define identities. Certainly, the sociological literature contains strong suggestions to that effect. Early on, the Twenty Statements Test provided evidence that persons asked to describe themselves used both traits and roles to do so, often focusing primarily on the former (Kuhn & McPartland 1954). Kohn, Schooler and associates (Kohn & Schooler 1969; 1983) have on strong evidential bases argued that class-based occupational conditions generate psychological dispositions that are generalized to non-occupational activities that in turn can lead to subsequent occupational mobility. Heise's (1979) work on affect control theory presents empirically-derived equations based on semantic differential scores that

¹³ The structure versus process issue is a case in point, as is the heredity versus environment debate.

combine role, affect and trait labels to predict interpersonal behavioral outcomes. My attempts to expand the scope of Identity Theory contain hints that personality traits can impact role-identities: Stryker (1987) suggests that traits can be assimilated to role-identities as modifiers of more traditionally defined identities, while Erwin and Stryker (2001) develop a theoretically-based model of the interdependency of Identity Theory and self-esteem using recent conceptual developments in each as the springboard for doing so. And the social constructionists of emotion tie roles to traits in such research as Hochschild's (1983) work on airline stewardesses that notes their trained personality adaptations to exigencies of work roles. Yet neither the personality theorists nor the sociologists who have undertaken to examine connections between role based identities and trait based identities have taken full advantage of the theoretical resources available in the structural symbolic interactionist frame and Identity Theory.

I am persuaded that traits as well as roles can serve to define and organize identities, can override role expectations, can be more salient than specific role-identities, and can underwrite multiple identities. At the same time, it is clear that traits per se cannot explain behavioral variability and that some concept of role differentiation is required to do so. In these terms, the key issue becomes the circumstances under which one or the other possibility exists and occurs. When trait identities prevail vis-à-vis role identities or vice versa? It is around this issue that those interested can further theorize and research the interrelationships of traits and role-identities.

My reading of contemporary personality literature suggests that there are two major points of current contact between that literature and the literature of structural symbolic interactionism/Identity Theory. The first is the multiple self conception of the

person, further specified as a multiple identity conception of self; the second is the conception of identity salience as a significant characteristic of the organization of self. So, for example, the development of the PRISM model uses these ideas, attaching them to traits (Wood & Roberts).

One can have no argument with this as a strategy of characterizing and investigating the structure of trait-based identities. When interest extends to using personality theory to predict social behavior, it has limits that might be modified by making use of other ideas of structural symbolic interactionism/Identity Theory. These include the following ideas: that contemporary societies are congeries of sometimes interdependent and sometimes independent, sometimes conflicting and sometimes cooperative social units from large-scale strata to small social networks and groups; that larger social structures are in effect boundaries that facilitate/constrain persons' access to smaller interpersonal structures in which persons actually live out most of their lives; that persons typically hold identities attached to roles in multiple networks of social relationships; that alternative identities attached to various networks can be carried across situations; and that when they are, they can either reinforce or compete with one another (or be neutral in this respect), simultaneously impacting social behavior in any situation into which they enter.

It seems reasonable to expect that something quite similar to competition among role-based identities occurs with respect to trait-based identities. Suppose one holds an identity as an honest person as well as an identity as a loyal person and these identities are of roughly equivalent salience and centrality. Suppose as well that a person—say, a politician—finds him- or herself in a setting in which that person must interact with both

members of the persons' own party and members of an opposition party. The potential for trait-identity competition, perhaps conflict, in the person's behavior is manifest. My guess is that competition between trait and role identities arises under similar circumstances. Whether or not this guess is accurate, questions like which type of identity is most likely to prevail when they compete for expression are open to investigation even though strong theoretical grounds for anticipating answers are not in hand.

Under what circumstances is trait-identity competition likely? If the role-identity literature is taken as a guide, the expectation is that the greater the structural overlap i.e., the more persons' varying kinds of social relationships (in family, work, recreational relationships, etc.) are with the same persons, the more likely common or compatible role-expectations are to develop and the less likely trait-identity competition (Stryker, Serpe and Hunt, 2005). Conversely, trait-identity competition is more likely the less the structural overlap in persons' various networks of social relationships. When, however, social structural devices such as calendars, schedules and timetables isolate those with different role-expectations from one another, potential competition between or among trait-identities is less likely to be activated. These hypotheses, developed from Identity Theory premises, may well be important in work that seeks to investigate emotional stress as a consequence of self-concept differentiation (Sheldon et al 1993; Donahue et al 1993). Again, these ideas seem to me a reasonable point from which to initiate work on trait versus role identity competition.

Showers and Zeigler-Hill () note that cognitive organizational factors make specific items of knowledge about self more accessible. They are undoubtedly correct. However, from the standpoint of Identity Theory, they are incomplete in not observing

that behind cognitive organization lies social organization. As many have said, Items of knowledge about self are the outcome of persons' experiences, but experiences are not distributed randomly through a society. Rather, the content of persons' experiences and the meanings derived from those experiences are shaped by where the persons are located in the social structures of class, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, etc., These large-scale structures channel persons into social structures on a more intermediate level such as neighborhoods, schools, churches, and clubs. The latter then channel persons into interpersonal networks.¹⁴ What kinds of relationships people enter will importantly impact their behaviors, attitudes, and traits. Consider the difficulty young black males living in an urban ghetto have in developing other than a hard, macho, "respect"-driven persona. While perhaps an extreme example, it makes the point: Understanding persons' trait-identities can be furthered given recognition of the social settings and relationships within which those identities develop.¹⁵

In noting that trait theories of personality have been criticized for an inability to deal with various issues, including failure to describe mechanisms that promote stability and change in personality traits, Sheldon et al (1997) suggest that a turn to the more dynamic views of organismic and existential psychology can provide necessary correctives.¹⁶ I do not wish to quarrel with this assertion. I do wish to observe that there is another approach to matters of stability and change, potentially useful for personality

¹⁴ These, obviously, are probability assertions.

¹⁵ I repeat an earlier observation: I do not ask psychologists to become sociologists. I only think their psychology will be better if they understand the point being made here.

¹⁶ Sheldon et al (1997) invoke a concept authenticity drawn from these sources as a major part of these correctives. An identity theoretic hypothesis links feelings of authenticity-inauthenticity to levels of commitment to roles and the salience of identities attached to those roles (see Stryker 1994, p. 136, note 10).

theory, that might be considered. The approach¹⁷ sees stability in identities as the consequence of continuity in persons' relationships to social networks, with change in identities traced to either endogenously or exogenously induced changing relationships to social networks. Examples of such sources of identity change include movement across age categories, social mobility, marriage or divorce, having children, natural disaster, geographic mobility, training resulting in changing jobs, and so on.

In short, and once again, it may be that fundamental ideas of structural symbolic interactionism/identity theory have something to say about a fundamental issue of personality theory. This last sentence serves both as a summary of the basic message of this paper and as a good place to end. It is my hope that the dialogue between Identity Theory and personality theory implicit in this essay's argument will continue and will bear fruit.

¹⁷ Stryker (1994) uses the approach to develop a theory accounting for the expansion or contraction of alternative courses of action. The presumption here is that the argument of that theory can deal with stability and change in identities as well.

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