

# Structural Symbolic Interaction and Identity Theory: The Indiana School and Beyond



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**Abstract** This chapter provides an overview of the development of symbolic interaction and identity theory as a prelude to introducing the theoretical and methodological advances to these traditions contributed by authors of subsequent chapters in this book. Built on the pioneering work of George Herbert Mead and others, symbolic interactionism focuses on the reciprocal relationship between self and society, in which shared meanings constructed through interaction with others influence social behavior. Where the paradigm originally centered on analyzing micro-social encounters, highlighting specific characteristics of situations and actors, over time it extended its focus to understanding patterns in interaction across situations and time, suggesting that social structure explained these patterns. In the late 1960s, Sheldon Stryker began to codify the premises of structural symbolic interaction. From this, identity theory developed and, over the next five decades, came to encompass both structural and perceptual research agendas. Where the former elucidates behavioral processes relating hierarchies of identity salience structuring the self to patterns of identity commitments and role behaviors, the situational enactments of which are embedded in networks, groups and social institutions, the latter elucidates perceptual control processes exercised by the mind in response to the feedback that self receives from others in interaction. Over time, identity theory's initial focus on role identities broadened to include group identities and person identities, and bridges developed between identity theory and other theories and paradigms in sociology and the social sciences more generally. These include bridges to theories such as affect control theory and identity accumulation theory, built upon symbolic interactionist premises, and bridges to theories and paradigms beyond symbolic interactionism, including

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exchange theory and social identity theory. The chapter ends with a preview of ideas and findings developed in the rest of the book.

**Keywords** Identity theory · Structural symbolic interactionism · Symbolic interactionism · Identity · Identity salience · Identity prominence · Identity verification · Commitment

## 1 Introduction

Built on the symbolic interaction tradition pioneered by Mead (1934), identity theory is one of the most vibrant theoretical traditions in contemporary sociology. Symbolic interactionism itself is a classical sociological tradition rooted in the United States, in contrast to the European born-traditions associated with Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber. In this book, we bring together both well-known scholars and emerging scholars to exemplify the breadth, depth, and explanatory power of the tradition, while also building bridges to other notable traditions in the social sciences, including social identity and rational choice theories. We focus especially on highlighting and synthesizing theoretical and methodological advances in identity theory and structural symbolic interactionism to assist researchers in situating their work within the present-day scholarly landscape while stimulating yet new theoretical insights and empirical advances.

The structural symbolic interactionist paradigm within sociology focuses on the reciprocal relationship between self and society, in which shared meanings constructed in engagement with others, influence social behavior. Where the “traditional” version of symbolic interactionism enhanced understanding of how social interaction proceeds, the “structural” version of symbolic interactionism helped explain how social structures—from those pertaining to family, to work, and to religious, educational and political institutions—shape interaction. Representing the “Chicago School” of traditional symbolic interaction—so labeled by Blumer (1969)—symbolic interactionism initially focused on qualitative, interpretive analysis of micro-social encounters, emphasizing specific characteristics of actors and situations. In the 1950s, other symbolic interactionists began to extend the traditional focus from micro-interaction to understanding the patterned reproduction of interaction across time and situations, suggesting that social structure explained such patterns (Kuhn and McPartland 1954; Kuhn 1964). This research, now known as the “Iowa School,” used quantitative approaches to investigate the self. In the late 1960s, Stryker (1968, 1977, 1980) began to codify the social structural premises of structural symbolic interaction. Following Stryker’s formulation, identity theory developed.

IT theory and research motivated by Stryker’s structural symbolic interactionism have come to be known as the “Indiana School” (Burke 2004). In this chapter, we elucidate the development of this body of research over the past five decades. These include theory and research about behavioral processes relating hierarchies of identity salience to patterns of identity commitments and role behaviors (Stryker

1980; Stryker and Serpe 1982, 1994), and theory and research about the perceptual control processes exercised by the mind (Burke 1991; Stets and Burke 2014). After briefly outlining the relationship between identity theory and affect control theory (Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988), we discuss identity theory's extension from Stryker's (1968, 1980) initial focus on role identities, to person and group identities, while initiating a bridge to social identity theory. The latter developed from Tajfel's (1982) psychological theory of categorical social identities such as race and gender, and the mechanisms through which such categories may become social groups. We likewise discuss briefly identity accumulation theory (Thoits 1983), developed within structural symbolic interaction, and bridges between identity theory and exchange theory, a major sociological tradition outside of symbolic interactionism (Cook and Rice 2003).

We end this chapter by previewing key ideas and findings developed in the rest of the book. The book as a whole is framed as a response to Stryker's (2000, 2008) and Burke and Stryker's (2016) recent calls for further advancing the theoretical and methodological foundations of identity theory's structural and perceptual paradigms, while working to answer questions of concern to macro-sociologists across many substantive areas, and bridging to other major theoretical traditions in the social sciences.

## 2 Symbolic Interaction

Building on the work of early philosophers asserting that humans are social beings, the symbolic interaction paradigm emerged in the wake of World War I (Blumer 1937, 1969). Mead himself did not use the term symbolic interactionism; Blumer (1937) coined the term. Symbolic interactionists presume that society is based on communicative social action, structured social relationships, and interactions that are motivated by sympathy and the desire to be sociable; society reflects how people see themselves (Bryson 1945; Stryker 1980). However, as Stryker (1997, 315) asserts, the fundamental starting point for symbolic interaction is that "in the beginning, there is society." Though self and society are co-constitutive through organic, reflexive processes, society structures social relationships that, in turn, shape interaction (Stryker and Stryker 2016).

Three scholars, all identified with pragmatism in philosophy, are central to the development of the symbolic interactionist perspective: William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead (Joas 1987). Focusing on self-esteem and consciousness, James (1890), posited that consciousness of human experience is a continuous, reflexive process that provides the foundations for the emergence of the self, consisting of a knower (the "I") and the known (the "Me"). James identified four types of self: material, spiritual, social, and pure ego. For James, the social self, based on recognition of the person by others, is central to understanding the empirical content of the self. This assumption leads to an organized self that is the product of "*as many social*

*selves as there are individuals who recognize him.* But as the individuals who naturally carry the images fall into classes, we may practically say that he has as many different social selves as there are distinct *groups* of persons about whose opinions he cares” (James 1890, 294; italics in original). Thus, for James, the self is a product of a highly differentiated society. This assumption remains central to contemporary symbolic interaction.

Dewey (1930) posited that human evolution involves continual adaptation to contextual interactional conditions and asserts that mind is instrumental and perhaps central to this process. Arguing that persons react to stimuli in the context of problem solving, Dewey presumed that mind—thinking—aligns behavior with problem resolution. For Dewey, the stimuli themselves arise during interaction but do not cause the interaction. For example, Dewey suggests that the mere presence of a needle in a haystack is not a stimulus unless the context of searching for it already is present. Stryker (1980, 26) frames Dewey’s principle in the following manner: “The world that impinges on our senses is a world that ultimately depends on the character of the activity in which we are engaged and changes when that activity is altered.” In short, Dewey develops a pragmatic theory of action in which multiple persons work together to resolve problems by engaging the mind and identifying alternative solutions. Implicit in this view, the social action of problem solving continues until the problem is resolved.

Mead (1934) drew on Dewey’s (1930) pragmatism as well as on Darwin’s (1859) evolutionary ideas, explicitly positing that mind, self, and society all emerge from an on-going social process consisting of conversations of gestures that have become significant symbols expressed through language. Mind emerges when people can point out meanings to themselves and others, that is, when they are capable of reflexivity. Thinking is an internal conversation of gestures, and because mind and thinking develop through gestures and significant symbols, they are social processes, not individual ones. Mead presumed that the mind allows people to incorporate significant symbols with shared meaning to facilitate successful social interaction. Successful interaction in turn requires mutual problem solving. To do so, persons learn to take the role of the other to anticipate the other’s responses, so that understandings and behaviors can align in the ongoing process of social action.

Self emerges through the same reflexive processes that give rise to mind; the definition of self is that which can be an object of itself (Mead 1934). In other words, the essence of self is reflexivity. Language makes possible the development of self because language enables us to take the standpoint or role of others to see ourselves as objects. It is through role-taking, then, that self develops and manifests. Role taking is the act of putting oneself in the position of the other, based on a common communication process, to anticipate the other’s response.

Following James (1890), Mead (1934) identified two parts of the self: the “I” and the “Me.” Anticipated responses of others are incorporated into the self as the “Me.” The “Me” thus represents the organized responses, attitudes, and expectations for our future behavior with respect to others with whom we interact. Through the “Me,” our behavior takes on consistency and predictability, with the expectations

of others—externalized social control—becoming internalized self-control through role-taking.

Indeed, the self is engaged in internal conversation, with persons' behavior the outcome of this internal conversation. In internal conversation with the "Me," the "I" represents self's responses to the organized expectations of others. Mead (1934) often depicts the "I" as a pure impulse, allowing for spontaneity, creativity, and unpredictability. However, the "I" and the spontaneity for which it is responsible is within—not outside—the social process, because the social control exercised by the "Me" is a precondition for them. In short, and in more contemporary parlance, the "I" and the "Me" are Mead's answer to the presumed problem of structure versus agency. For Mead, this "problem" is, in fact, no problem because, just as the "I" requires the "Me," exercising agency requires social structure. The continuous dialectic between "I" and "Me" makes both social order and social change possible. Society is continuously created and recreated.

There are three key implications of Mead's (1934) formulation. First, society emerges as a continuous process in which solutions to problems arising in social action are institutionalized, but not static. Societies evolve and change based on novel problems of social action that arise within diverse social and environmental settings. Second, because both mind and self emerge and are recreated through symbolic communication, producing shared meanings, both mind and self are intrinsically social phenomena. Third, Mead's formulation of problem solving within the social process aligns well with the scientific method, because social actors systematically assess the context of the social interaction, drawing on possible solutions to problems arising in the interaction until they settle on a solution they believe will be successful.

## ***2.1 Additional Foundational Contributors to Symbolic Interaction***

Other scholars of the first part of the 20th century, including notably Charles Horton Cooley, W. I. Thomas, Herbert Blumer, and Manfred Kuhn, also helped shape the development of contemporary symbolic interaction. A contemporary of Mead, Cooley (1902) presumed that sociology would address everyday life issues that are social, mental, and subjective, and that empathy and sympathy are mechanisms through which persons can understand and imagine the lives of others. Cooley's influential formulation of "sympathetic introspection" links to Mead's concept of role-taking, and like Mead's views, presumes that self and society are two sides of the same coin. Indeed, for Cooley, persons exist in the imagination of others and society is the collective imagination of a set of persons. Therefore, the everyday life of the person and society are collective aspects of the same thing. Self does not exist distinct from others but rather is a social product of interaction with others: "We always imagine, and imagining, share the judgments of the other mind" (Cooley 1902, 152–153).

Today, Cooley may be best known for his concept of the “looking glass self” (Cooley 1902), in which the self comes from a three step process in which first, we imagine how we appear to others; second, we imagine how others judge us based on this; and third, we react to our perceived judgment by others, such that we experience feelings of pride or shame deriving from these imaginations.

On the one hand, Mead (1934) criticized Cooley’s (1902) idea that imaginations are the underlying reality, such that society at root is the imagination of others. As well, he pointed out, disapprovingly, that the concept of the looking glass self implicitly presumed the existence of self in order to explain the self’s emergence. As Mead (1934) noted in developing his distinct views of self’s emergence, if there is no self before others respond to it, there would be no basis for having any feelings at all when imagining others’ judgments.

On the other hand, shaped by an intellectual world in which reason and emotion were regarded as separate, antithetical processes (Damasio 1994), Mead (1934), while recognizing the importance of emotion to a full theorization of social life, cast aside a focus on emotion to focus on reflective cognition. In contrast, Cooley (1902) foreshadowed contemporary inclusion of research focused on affect and emotions in conceptualizing the self and explaining how identities emerge and shape behavior. As well, Cooley (1902) emphasized that self-development and relationships with others tie strongly to broader social organization. Social interaction in primary groups based on intimacy, face-to-face relations, and cooperation are foundational to the more complex relationships that define the context of social action.

W. I. Thomas is known best today for his famous aphorism, co-written with his spouse Dorothy: “...if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas and Thomas 1928, 572). That aphorism alone, however, expresses only part of Thomas’ full vision. His sociology focused on how individuals and groups adjust and respond to the behavior of other individuals and groups. Adjustive responses are context-specific; people respond to the objective circumstances in which they are embedded. However, equivalent circumstances often do not produce the same responses because people have different subjective senses of—different definitions of the situation for—the objective conditions they experience. Thus, understanding how individuals and groups adjust their responses requires the researcher to consider the “total situation,” including both its objective, verifiable components, and the definitions attributed to it by the individuals and groups in question (Thomas 1925; Thomas and Thomas 1928).

Herbert Blumer, arguably the leading scholar framing symbolic interactionism as a perspective focusing on micro processes, built on Dewey’s (1930) pragmatism to focus on the centrality of meanings attributed in definitions of the situation. Rooting symbolic interaction’s theoretical and methodological foundations in humanism, Blumer (1969) advocated investigating Mead’s (1934) ideas by researching micro-processes in which each new interaction is viewed as a new event. This approach led Blumer and his adherents to reject the idea that symbolic interactionism should or could study the emergence of shared meanings applicable across a broad range of social action.

In short, for Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism cannot lead to empirically testable and predictive general theoretical propositions. Because persons organically, reciprocally, reflexively, and continuously construct behavior through context-specific meanings that develop through social interactions, social scientists must develop context-specific and after-the-fact-interpretations of social behavior. To do so, they should use “exploration” and “inspection,” observational methods based on data gathered through unstructured interviewing and listening to conversations, and interpretation of letters, diaries, life histories, and public records. Foundational to Blumer’s vision of symbolic interactionism is the strength of direct observation in interpreting the meaning of context-specific social action.

Kuhn (1964; Kuhn and McPartland 1954) differentiated his vision of symbolic interactionism from that of Blumer (1969), using what Kuhn termed “self-theory” to develop and empirically test precise, theory-based generalizations. Kuhn presumed that social action produces social structure reflexively maintained and modified through the development of shared meanings. Resulting social structures both facilitate and constrain further interaction.

Kuhn (1964; Kuhn and McPartland 1954) conceptualized social structure as composed of social roles, reference groups, and networks of organized relationships among persons, with patterned sets of behavioral expectations guiding interactions across persons and contexts. Building on Mead’s (1934) definition of “self as an object,” Kuhn presumed that self conceptualizes plans of action reflecting definitions of the situation invoking shared meanings and relations to arrive at best predictions of future behavior. The concept of “core self” is central to Kuhn’s theorizing; the core self is comprised of a set of stable meanings that constitute a stable self-conception. This lends continuity to interaction across contexts, as well as to substantial predictability in social behavior. At the same time, however, within Kuhn’s formulation, role-taking processes also are role-making processes and allow for creativity in behavior.

For Kuhn (1964), the self is composed of many components, including status identifications, role expectations, preferences and avoidances, personal attributes and traits, and patterns of selection of reference groups. All these shape linkages between social structure and self. However, though the social structure has a profound impact on behavior, people are not automatons, and there is high variability among persons in the content of components of self. It stands to reason that, for Kuhn, unlike for Blumer (1969), the appropriate methodological stance for symbolic interactionism is that of the conventional scientific method, calling for the development of general propositions and empirically testable hypotheses derived from symbolic interactionism’s meta-theoretical foundations. For Kuhn, then, there is no contradiction between SI’s conceptual apparatus and the requirements of a more conventional scientific method.

In sum, the scholarship of James, Dewey, and Mead—in interaction with, and as built upon by that of Cooley, Thomas, Blumer, and Kuhn—provided a rich foundation of complementary and contradictory ideas on which to build more contemporary symbolic interaction. It will come as no surprise, then, that while encompassing multiple methodological traditions, all variants of contemporary symbolic interactionist

theory and research focus on the attribution of meaning as the lynchpin of a correlative relationship between self and society.

### 3 Contemporary Symbolic Interactionism

The two major symbolic interactionist paradigms in today's sociological social psychology—traditional symbolic interactionism and structural symbolic interactionism—are built upon the competing visions offered by Blumer and Kuhn (Stryker and Vryan 2003). However, these traditions also intersect because so-called traditional symbolic interaction based on Blumer's (1937, 1969) work influences structural symbolic interaction, by helping to shape the latter's concepts and its views of the mechanisms that underlie cross-context but always situated social action. Meanwhile, structural symbolic interaction is especially indebted to Kuhn (1964) in its orientation toward developing empirically testable general hypotheses about the development and consequences of self in—and for—social behavior.

Consistent with both Blumer (1969) and Kuhn (1964), both variants of contemporary symbolic interactionism rely on a common foundation: symbolic communication enables meaning attribution that in turn enables social interaction. The reflexive, meaning-suffused nature of social life evolves from multiple persons engaged in context-situated interactions in the normal flow of everyday life. In essence, society is a web of interactions that constructs and defines persons, and persons in interaction with each other, construct and define society.

Both traditional symbolic interactionism and structural symbolic interactionism follow Mead's (1934) view of mind and thinking as an internal conversation of gestures. With 20–20 hindsight, Mead (1934) was in error in failing to recognize that, although the content of mind varies cross-culturally because of culturally variable socialization and learning, the evolution-based structures of the mind that permit humans to think at all are more universal (Stryker and Stryker 2016). Happily, this error does not undermine Mead's (1934) or contemporary symbolic interactionism's perspective on the development, structure, and content of the self (Stryker and Stryker 2016).

Both traditional symbolic interactionism and structural symbolic interactionism likewise follow Mead (1934) in assuming that self develops through the meaning attribution involved in role-taking. When persons think about themselves symbolically, they are interpreting internally and subjectively the flow of social action, to formulate and enact appropriate responses. Thus, any social scientific understanding of human behavior requires attending to the subjective experiences of those who are studied. However, because until recently—and certainly in Mead's time—it was not possible to gaze directly at the workings of the mind through technologies such as contemporary magnetic resonance imagery (MRI), subjective experience had to be gotten at behaviorally. Depending on methodological orientations consistent with either traditional or structural symbolic interaction or both, and depending on how a researcher analyzes data gathered through observation and in-depth



interviews, researchers could use field observations, in-depth interviews and content analyses of diverse documents, or they could use laboratory experiments and surveys.

In their overview of symbolic interactionism and identity theory, Serpe and Stryker (2011, 230) highlight key differences between traditional and structural symbolic interactionism along five dimensions. We reproduce their summary Table 1.

As can be seen, traditional symbolic interactionists presume the emergent character of society as a central premise. Both self and social organization lack the stability and predictability required for the development and refinement of an empirically based general theory based on cumulative analyses across many different situations. Instead, analysts can and should provide careful descriptions of observed micro-social interactions in process, and a post hoc interpretation of the interactional process that will be relevant for that particular interactional process only.

In contrast, structural symbolic interactionists presume that social life is patterned in ways that provide substantial continuities from one interaction to the next. Based on empirical findings demonstrating some level of continuity and predictability in social action, structural symbolic interaction is oriented to developing general theory and seeking empirical generalizations that go beyond descriptions and interpretation of specific, situation-based micro social processes. In short, structural symbolic interactionists assert that concepts useful in understanding one situation can be useful in understanding other situations. Based on this assertion, the goal is to develop and test predictive explanations of social behavior (Heise 1986; Kuhn 1964; Stryker 1980).

Historically, the most cited distinction between traditional and structural approaches to symbolic interactionism has been methodological. Traditional symbolic interactionists gather data to ground their ideas naturalistically through ethnography, participant observation, and intensive unstructured interviewing. In contrast, structural symbolic interactionists use a wide range of data gathering techniques, including surveys, experimentation, simulations, formal modeling, and more recently, techniques from neuroscience. Typically, structural symbolic interactionists prefer quantitative, statistical methods for analyzing the data they gather. However, as some chapters in this book will show, there is no necessary dissociation between interpretive analytic techniques and the goal of developing general theory. Typical differences in methodology notwithstanding, both traditional and structural symbolic interactionist approaches and the research these foster continue to thrive.

We return to the question of the relationship between substance and method in our concluding chapter. To preview, we will argue for the utility of methodological pluralism in contemporary symbolic interactionism and identity theory. Openness to multiple techniques of theorizing and conducting empirical research should increase the capacity of these paradigms to provide interpretive, explanatory and predictive insights in response to questions that have scholarly significance and also practical consequences for individuals, social groups and social institutions.

**Table 1** Comparison of traditional and structural symbolic interactionism

Traditional symbolic interactionism	Structural symbolic interactionism
<p>Traditional interactionist analyses assume the emergent character of society and self and the constructed character of social interaction. These analyses argue that self and social organization lack the constancy required for theory built around them to be useful beyond the singular instance from which they develop. Implied is that social life is unpredictable and that testing theories of social psychological phenomena is not possible. What is possible is to describe interaction as it occurs and to understand that interaction after it occurs</p>	<p>Structural interactionist analysis assumes a sufficient continuity in social life to justify seeking empirical generalizations applying beyond particular interactions. Concepts useful in understanding one situation can be useful in understanding other situations (Heise 1986; Kuhn 1964; Stryker 1980)</p>
<p>Actors' definitions and interpretations change continuously in immediate interactive situations. This fluidity extends to social life in general; thus, interaction may be reasonably described only as it unfolds. Consequently, the relevance of concepts representing social structure (as well as concepts imported from prior analyses of interaction) is dubious</p>	<p>The purposes of sociological social psychology make it essential to include social structure when studying social psychological processes. Conceiving of social structure as relatively stable patterns of social relationships and social interaction, these patterns constrain actors' definitions, providing sufficient stability in definitions to justify using structural concepts in social psychological analyses</p>
<p>Only the perspectives of participants in social interaction are relevant to understanding their interaction. Using the perspectives of sociological observers negates true understanding. Consequently, the voices of observers are to be eliminated in description and analysis</p>	<p>Actors' definitions must be considered in explanations of their behavior, but these alone are insufficient as explanations</p>
<p>Self emerges from society but becomes free of structural constraints over time, acting as an independent source of social behavior (McCall and Simmons 1978). Novelty and creativity are highly probable in social life. Social life is continuously newly constructed</p>	<p>Self is a conduit through which prior social organization and structure reproduce themselves (Goffman 1964; Burawoy 1979). Creativity and novelty are possible but limited by the degree extant social life reproduces existing patterns</p>
<p>The ideas of symbolic interactionism require a commitment to qualitative research methods. The most useful methods of pursuing its ideas are naturalistic; ethnography, participant observation, and intensive unstructured interviewing are strongly preferred. Consequently, the locus of research is generally a small set of interactants</p>	<p>The widest range of social science data gathering methods, including sample surveys, simulations, and experimentation, are available for use, and quantitative methods of analysis are preferred</p>

## 4 Social Structural Symbolic Interactionism

The traditional interactionist frame drew strong critiques, arguing that its premise—that incorporating a role for social structure within symbolic interactionism had little utility—was deeply problematic (Gouldner 1970; Huber 1973). In response, structural symbolic interactionists focus on the concept and role of social structure in theorizing structural symbolic interactionism and conducting empirical research within the paradigm. Starting with Stryker's (1997, 315) aphorism "...in the beginning there is society," structural symbolic interactionists assert that an understanding of and explanation for social psychological processes must root them within structural contexts. If sociological social psychologists do not take social structure seriously, symbolic interactionism can provide little to no purchase in understanding and explaining patterned social action (Stryker 1980) and will remain divorced from macrosociology. In short, although structural symbolic interactionism considers that the symbolic meanings embedded in social action are sufficiently fluid that interaction is substantially self-directed and agentic, symbolic meanings are shared sufficiently to facilitate and constrain agency.

Structural symbolic interactionism starts with the premise that person and society are mutually constitutive, albeit because one must start theorizing somewhere, society is the "pragmatic" causal prior in this formulation. Embedded in social relationships and social networks, we are socialized to recognize and understand the organization of social life and the social relations that pre-existed us. Shared meanings and expectations are not random, but rather socially patterned. Social structure encompasses diverse, differentiated patterns of reciprocal role relationships, as well as organized groups, networks, organizations, and communities that are differentiated according to positions based on social class, gender, race, ethnicity, age, and other markers of social positioning that both facilitate and constrain social action in various ways. Everyday life is shaped by the experience of persons within multiple kinds of social relationships that, in turn, are bound to societal locations; through these, we engage others and participate in social interaction.

Social structures establish interactional contexts that are more open or closed (Stryker 1980). Our location in social structure shapes the likelihood that interaction will include or exclude particular others, the more general options for interaction, and the level and range of resources available for interaction. In contexts that are more open, the person has more choice or agency over the issues and resources that can come into play, while more closed contexts limit the issues and resources available for social action. Social structures shape self-development and motivation, as well as expectations for behavior, resources, and meanings attributed to the interactional context. Overall, most people live their lives in and through relatively small and specialized sets of social relationships and roles.

Where traditional symbolic interactionists view all life as open to reconstruction and radical social change, structural symbolic interactionists instead emphasize that interactions are constrained by stable situational characteristics, past experiences that lead persons to have constructed situation-relevant expectations prior to the

focal interaction, norm-based pressures from interaction partners, and habit (Serpe and Stryker 1987). Recognizing that everyday life interactions more often than not reproduce existing social structures (Burawoy 1979), structural symbolic interactionists expect behavior to incorporate a mix of conformity and creativity, and to lead to both social stability and social change.

A central concept for structural symbolic interactionism is that of the social role. Conceptual identification of roles as both locations within the social structure and imbued with shared expectations and meanings responds to Mead's dictum that self—developed and enacted in diverse role-based relationships, for example, parent-child, teacher-student, pastor-congregant, employer-employee—reflects society. Reciprocal role-based relationships link social structure to persons with selves in social interaction. Complex, differentiated and organized into recurring patterns, roles structure the form and content of self. When persons internalize the role-based meanings and expectations associated with their social relationships, these meanings and expectations become the basis for identities located within the self. As will be developed further below, in society today, self comes to contain a complex, internalized structure of multiple identities reflecting the diversity of roles people play in social life and the networks in which their social roles and relationships are embedded. Identity-based social interaction, then, demonstrates the linkages between persons with selves on the one hand, and society with its differentiated social structures, on the other.

## 5 Structural Symbolic Interaction and Identity Theory

Over fifty years ago, Stryker (1968) developed key premises of identity theory. Since that time, substantial theory and empirical research within sociological social psychology have focused on identity and building identity theory (Burke and Stets 2009; McCall and Simmons 1978; Owens et al. 2010; Serpe and Stryker 2011; Stets 2006; Stets and Serpe 2013; Stryker 1980/2000; Stryker and Burke 2000; Burke and Stryker 2016). As prefigured above, identity theory presumes a fundamental linkage between the development, enactment, and change of identities and the diversity and differentiation characterizing the social structures shaping everyday life.

Identity theorists consistently define identity as an internalized set of shared meanings that provide shared expectations for individuals in social roles (Stets and Serpe 2013). However, identity theorists now presume there are three bases for identity; that is, there are role identities, group identities, and person identities (Burke and Stets 2009; Stets and Serpe 2013). Individuals have role identities based on meanings attributed to locations they occupy in reciprocal relations within social institutions—e.g., parent-child or spouse-spouse within the family, employer-employee within the workplace. Individuals have group identities based on meanings attached to memberships or affiliation with specific groups in society—e.g., a professional association or community group. Individuals have person identities based on the meaning of specific characteristics that constitute them as differentiated, unique individuals—e.g.,

being artistic or musical or a hard worker or kind and compassionate or intellectually aggressive. We discuss the multiple bases of identity further below.

Much research guided by identity theory examines the development of psychological and behavioral consequences of one identity considered in isolation (e.g., identity as a scientist in Brenner et al. 2018; identity as a moral person in Stets and Carter 2012). However, identity theory-guided research also examines the implications of multiple identities experienced in tandem for outcomes such as psychological well-being and mental health (Thoits 1983; Simon 1995).

Identity theory provides a framework to understand how and why meanings and expectations are attached to identities and the mechanisms through which persons negotiate and manage their identities in social interaction. Identity theorists use this framework to ask and answer research questions pertaining to how identities are organized and inter-relate, how identities relate to role performance, and how identities relate to emotion. Scholars also often use identity theory to conduct research on self-concept, including self-esteem, authenticity, and efficacy, on physical and mental health, and on other aspects of how people experience everyday life. Although the structural research agenda of identity theory, deriving from Stryker (1980) and the perceptual research agenda of identity theory, deriving from Burke (1991) pursue different research questions, both research programs are central to identity theory (Burke and Stets 2009; Serpe and Stryker 2011; Stets and Serpe 2013; Stryker and Burke 2000; Burke and Stryker 2016). As Finch and Stryker (this volume) note, this view is fitting because a key concept in Stryker's (1968, 1980) mostly structural formulation involves the organization of identities internal to the person, and Burke's (1991; Stets and Burke 2014) mostly perceptual formulation cannot function without input based on externalized social interaction.

## 5.1 *Conceptual Apparatus of Identity Theory*

Core concepts in identity theory include identity, bases of identity, identity salience, identity prominence, extensive (interactional) and intensive (affective) commitment, and identity verification. We elaborate briefly on each of these core concepts so that it will be easy for all—including those who are first introduced to identity theory by this volume—to understand and appreciate the advances made by contributors in subsequent chapters of this book.

*Identity.* There are two fundamental requirements for the existence of identities. First, persons must place themselves, and others must place them, as social objects with positionality. Second, persons must internalize the meanings of positional designations. Identities are shared meanings and expectations that form part of cognitive schema (Markus 1977) that shape the cognitive and conceptual processes of the self (Stryker and Serpe 1994). The cognitive schema of internalized meanings locates persons within organized social relationships. Identities are not situation specific, but rather are present across multiple situations experienced. Role identity is a set of meanings and expectations attached to relational positions in social structure (Stryker

1989). As previously indicated, identities also can be associated with groups whose shared meanings come to be internalized as an aspect of self (group identities), and with unique ways individuals see themselves as persons (person identities) (Burke and Stets 2009). When people reflect upon their behavior in social roles and groups, and as persons (Burke and Stets 2009), they attribute meanings to the identities formed on each basis. The constellation of identities possessed by an individual organizes how that individual behaves, interacts with others, and develops social relationships.

*Identity Salience.* Identity theory scholars define identity salience as the probability that one will invoke a specific identity across situations (Stryker 1968, 1980). Identities that have higher, relative to lower salience have more, relative to less, likelihood of enactment across situations in social interaction. The salience of a given identity relative to other identities signals its placement in an individual's identity salience hierarchy (Serpe 1987; Stryker 1980), and there is substantial variability in the hierarchical placement of particular identities across the population. For example, the parent identity may—or may not—be more salient than the worker identity for a young working mother relative to an older father who is well established in his employment (Stryker 1968, 1980).

Though identity salience pertains to the probability of enacting the identity, it does not completely determine identity enactment. Explicit in Stryker's formulation is that individuals choose to enact—or refrain from enacting—various identities across situations. Enacting an identity, then, is an agentic aspect of social life (Stryker 1968; Stryker and Serpe 1983; Serpe 1987; Serpe and Stryker 1987, 1993, 2011).

Implicit in the formulation of hierarchies of identity salience is that, to the degree that identities have higher, relative to lower, salience, individuals actively may seek out opportunities to enact them (Serpe 1987; Stryker 1980). For example, a person giving a presentation at a professional meeting not focused on family issues nonetheless may work into the presentation that he/she/they have become a first-time grandparent. Invoking the grandparent identity in a professional setting and while enacting one's professional identity, then, signals that the grandparent identity has high salience.

*Identity Prominence.* Parallel to the development of structural symbolic interaction and building on more traditional symbolic interactionism to emphasize agentic aspects of identity, McCall and Simmons (1978) posited that persons' subjective judgment of the importance of an identity shapes behavior. Thus, McCall and Simmons (1978) theorized that identities are structured into an identity prominence hierarchy paralleling Stryker's (1968, 1980) hierarchy of identity salience. However, McCall and Simmons (1978) also presumed that an individual's identity prominence hierarchy reflects that individual's ideal self.

Rosenberg (1979) developed the idea of psychological centrality, which is very similar to McCall and Simmons' (1978) concept of identity prominence. Centrality to self-concept signals the importance of a component of the self, such as an identity, to a person's general self-concept. The greater the subjective importance of an identity to the person's self-concept, the greater the centrality.

Currently, researchers in the identity theory tradition treat the terms identity prominence, identity centrality, and identity importance as synonyms. Whereas some researchers emphasize the importance of identity salience for shaping behavior (e.g., Stryker 1968, 1980), others emphasize the importance of identity prominence (e.g., McCall and Simmons 1978). However, salience is defined behaviorally, as the probability of enacting the identity, and prominence is defined subjectively, as the internalized importance of the identity for how a person views their general self-concept. This definitional distinction has important implications for the empirical measurement and import of the two concepts. Research suggests that, although salience and prominence typically are positively inter-related and often work in similar ways, they also may work differently (Brenner et al. 2014, 2018; Markowski and Serpe 2018; Stryker and Serpe 1994; Stryker et al. 2019).

*Identity Verification.* Burke's (1991) perceptual control model and research agenda brought the concept of identity verification to identity theory. An identity is verified when individuals perceive that others view them in the same way as they view themselves. Conversely, when individuals perceive that others view them differently than they view themselves, identity non-verification occurs and typically creates distress (Burke and Stets 2009). In the face of identity non-verification, individuals work to resolve the problem of non-verification by either changing their view of themselves or trying to change how others view them (Burke and Stets 2009).

Designed to assess how reflected appraisals shape self-view, the perceptual control model posits a cybernetic process with four steps (Burke 1991). For any given identity, the model presumes that prior to the situational activation of the identity, individuals have an identity standard—a set of self-meanings—associated with the identity. The identity standard is the starting point for a feedback loop that, in step two, involves assessment of some perceptual input pertaining to the identity standard. Perceptions of others' feedback pertaining to the identity standard are reflected appraisals. Third, individuals compare the reflected appraisal to the meanings they associate with their identity standard. If the reflected appraisal and identity standard match, there is identity verification; if the reflected appraisals and identity standard do not match, there is identity non-verification. Fourth, when identity is verified, no further response from the person is required. However, identity non-verification gives rise to attempts to align the identity standard with the reflected appraisal, by changing the identity standard, by changing behavior to conform more to the reflected appraisal, or by trying to change the reflected appraisal so it accords better with the identity standard (Burke 1991; Stets and Burke 2014).

Identity verification produces positive emotions, but identity non-verification leads to negative emotions (Burke and Stryker 2016; Stets and Burke 2005, 2014; Stets and Serpe 2013). Research suggests that negative emotions typically occur especially—but not exclusively—when identity non-verification is in a negative direction (Kalkhoff et al. 2016a, b; Stets and Burke 2014). Identity non-verification also seems to produce more cogitation. Recent research using electroencephalography finds that, while identity verification activates brain structures responsible for unconscious, automatic processing, non-verification activates a region of the brain associated with more effortful, conscious processing (Kalkhoff et al. 2016b).



*Commitment.* Researchers working within structural and perceptual research agendas within identity theory conceive of commitment differently. From the structural perspective, Stryker (1968) defined commitment in terms of two dimensions, extensive, also known as interactional commitment, and intensive, also known as affective commitment. Where extensive commitment pertains especially to the number of direct network ties through which a person enacts an identity, intensive commitment pertains to the affective strength attached to those ties (Serpe 1987; Stryker and Serpe 1994). Extensive commitment to an identity increases as the size of the social network in which that identity is enacted increases, and as the number and types of interactions held with members of that social network increase (Adler and Adler 1991; Stryker 1980).

The concept of extensive (interactional) commitment is tied to that of identity salience in that opportunities to enact identities are linked to the individual's embeddedness in social networks. Access to networks for enacting identities, whether role identities, group identities, or person identities, in turn, reflects placement in the social structure. For example, an individual who has limited education beyond high school is not as likely to have the opportunity to develop strong social relationships with professionally trained persons, as are other individuals who themselves have more professional training. Thus, the less educated individual is not as likely as the more educated individual to enact their various identities within groups with membership based on professional training. Similarly, the individual without opportunities to pursue post-high school education is unlikely to be engaged in community activities more open to those with college educations or advanced degrees. This also restricts the contexts in which the focal individual can enact diverse identities.

At the same time, when an individual's network ties to a set of others—say through a professional association—depend on enacting a particular identity—say a professional identity—and the individual values those ties, professional identity is likely to be salient—that is frequently enacted—by that individual. More generally, when ties to a set of valued, particular others depend upon playing out a particular identity, that identity will be salient to the individual. Thus, extensive commitment and identity salience are positively and reciprocally associated (Serpe 1987; Stryker 1980/2000; Stryker and Serpe 1982, 1994).

Intensive (affective) commitment reflects how people experience their emotional and social response to others with whom they interact within an identity. Intensive commitment reflects the level of closeness a person feels toward others in terms of personal and emotional attachments, the level of distress the person would feel if they were no longer able to interact with persons in the social network associated with the identity, and the need for others to know them with respect to the identity. Whereas extensive (interactional) commitment is measured by the number of direct network ties involved in a focal person's interactions based on the identity, intensive (affective) commitment is measured by the strength of the person's personal and emotional response to social interactions within the identity. The higher the level of intensive commitment to an identity, the higher the likely level of salience of the identity (Serpe 1987, 1991; Serpe and Stryker 1993, 2011; Stryker 1980; Stryker and Serpe 1983).



Burke and Reitzes (1991) define commitment from the perspective of perceptual control theory as the amount a work an individual does to verify their identity. The perceptual control model's conception of commitment focuses on how maintaining an identity is an internal process working to match the person's self-view with their reflected appraisals. The two concepts of commitment are two sides of the same coin, and the common element is the social interaction and relationships with persons in one's network based on reflected appraisals. We return to these various concepts of commitment and how commitment relates to social networks in this volume's concluding chapter.

*Bases of Identities.* As we already have signaled, as identity theory advanced, researchers elaborated and distinguished among multiple structural bases for identities. In identity theory's early stages, the focus was on roles and role identity (Burke 1980; McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 1980; Thoits and Virshup 1997). As the range of substantive issues addressed by identity theory expanded, it became evident that individuals experience the structural locations of identities and the contexts for their enactment in multiple ways. The resulting refinement to aid theory development and empirical research organized identities into three bases, roles, groups, and persons (Burke and Stets 2009; Serpe and Stryker 2011; Stets and Serpe 2013). Identity theory researchers also increasingly are considering how social categories such as race and gender, at the heart of social categorization and social identity theory (Tajfel 1982), relate to identity theory (Stets and Burke 2000).

Attached to social positions in society, roles invoke culturally patterned, shared expectations for behavior. For example, we have shared behavioral expectations for those who occupy the roles of parents, children, teachers, students, clergy, police officers, etc. Individuals occupying specific roles will exhibit variability in role performance. However, shared expectations for behavior in particular roles provide a framework to organize and understand social interaction. For example, we expect that parents will be nurturing and attentive toward their children, teachers will come into the classroom with an organized presentation for their students, and that students will attend class and complete the assignments for the course. When an individual internalizes the shared expectations associated with a particular role, that person by definition holds a role identity. When people claim a role identity, others understand the implications for social interaction and are guided by the shared expectations for behavior associated with the role (Burke and Reitzes 1980; Stryker 1968, 1980).

Social networks bring persons together who share common experiences. When the experiences lead to repeated social interaction with a particular set of persons, reflect shared meanings and behaviors, and persons internalize that shared experience, those persons form a "group" identity. Group identities pertain to family, church affiliations, professions, teams, clubs, gangs, and so forth. They are based on involvement with other group members, shared expectations for the behavior of group members, and active engagement with group activities.

Where social identity scholarship emphasizes that categorical social identities often become the basis for in-group enhancement, out-group derogation and hostile inter-group dynamics (Tajfel 1982; Stryker et al. 2019), identity theorists presume a strict analytic distinction between group identities and social identities (Stets and

Burke 2000). Social identities are based on the meanings associated with the identification of the individual as occupying a social category reflecting societal stratification (Hogg 2006; Hogg and Abrams 1988) and include identities based on the (mostly) ascribed characteristics of race/ethnicity and gender. Social identities locate persons with respect to the status and power accorded to their category of persons—the privileges they enjoy or, conversely, the disadvantages they suffer—because they are members of that category. Those with different social identities differ in their access to both structural and cultural resources, and with respect to societal expectations for appropriate behavior and treatment. Social identities thus reflect attitudes and values attached to the collective category in the broader society, rather than to a group identity as defined in identity theory.

Social action may be based both on category membership—social identity—and on active engagement and shared meanings associated with group membership—group identity. However, group identity by definition involves shared meanings internal to the group, and self-definitions shaped by those meanings (Burke and Stets 2009). Identity theory researchers focus more on group identity than social identity, precisely because group identities are based on shared meanings and expectations for behavior that serve the interests of the group, rather than on the broader cultural meanings attributed to social categories (Burke 2012). However, as illustrated by some of the chapters in this book, research continues to bridge between identity theory and social identity theory, and it includes further consideration of the relationship between social category-based social identities and group identities.

Within identity theory, person identities are distinguished from both role and group identities in that a person identity reflects sets of meanings differentiating the person from other persons as an individual (Burke and Stets 2009). Although each of us has a unique set of person identities, these are based on the internalization of culturally defined meanings. For example, person identities may include seeing oneself as “moral” (Stets and Carter 2011, 2012) or “fair” (Savage et al. 2019), with the sense of what is moral or fair derived from broader cultural patterns of meaning. Internalizing meanings constituting a person identity define the self in distinct ways, with self-expectations and reflected appraisals associated with person identity guiding our behavior.

Activated in social interaction, role, group, and person identities are not mutually exclusive guides for behavior. Multiple and variable constellations of a focal individual’s identities—role, group, and person—may be activated by particular situations. In many situations, it may be difficult to tease out the relative enactment of each type of identity.

## 6 “Foundational” Bridges

Just as is true for most research programs that advance, research programs in identity theory have advanced simultaneously with those of other closely related research

programs. Especially in the short run, research programs may grow in depth by limiting their scope and the breadth of the questions they ask in order to specify better and test core theoretical propositions and accumulate evidence about those propositions. In the longer run, however, maximizing the contribution made by identity theory to understanding and explaining social action requires that identity theory researchers engage with other advancing theories. This in turn should help motivate researchers in other paradigms to engage with identity theory.

First, relating ideas across diverse traditions of theory and empirical research increases clarity by elucidating where the different theories complement or contradict each other, and where each theory operates under specified conditions that themselves can be theorized and examined empirically (Wagner and Berger 1985). Second, bridging across theories and research programs presents an opportunity for innovation that may be less likely if the different research programs remain isolated from each other. Third, bridging requires cross-paradigm communication that, in turn, improves the capacity of specialized researchers to understand and appreciate the research of others whose work is guided by different paradigms. This enhances the likelihood of further cross-fertilization, while also ensuring that researchers in one tradition can better take the role of those in other traditions to appreciate better the contributions of those other traditions. It also ensures that, when researchers criticize traditions outside of their own, those critiques are based on in-depth knowledge and therefore productive, rather than setting up “straw people” just to knock them down.

## 6.1 *Affect Control Theory*

Affect control theory (Heise 1979) and identity accumulation theory (Thoits 1983) both exemplify foundational bridging with identity theory. Developing independently, affect control theory, and identity accumulation theory, like identity theory, have roots in Mead (1934) and structural symbolic interaction. All three traditions focus on the self in interaction with others.

As Robinson et al. (2008) note, Heise (1979) began developing affect control theory in hopes of providing a formal framework that would increase precision in explaining context-situated behavioral processes. These include both behaviors that “people enact under normal circumstances and the creative responses they generate when [they encounter] non-institutionalized or counter-normative situations” (Robinson et al. 2008, 179). Thus, Heise (1979) took as his starting point the same foundational issue as did symbolic interactionism more generally. But he approached this issue by combining insights from a measurement tradition in psycholinguistics (Osgood 1962; Osgood et al. 1957, 1975), empirical studies of impression formation (Gollob 1968; Gollob and Rossman 1973; Heise 1969, 1970), and a cybernetic model of perception (Powers 1973). This last likewise served as inspiration for Burke (1991) in developing identity theory’s perceptual research agenda. In contrast to Stryker’s (1968, 1980) original formulation of identity theory that did not theorize a role for

emotions, Heise (1979) presumed that affective reactions underlie our conscious understandings and definitions of the situation. Indeed, “the core affect control principle is that people act to maintain the affective meanings that are evoked by a definition of the situation” (Robinson et al. 2008, 179). Just as the control of identity is central to perceptual control processes in identity theory, control of affect is central to affect control theory.

As affect control theory developed further (e.g., Heise 1986; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988; Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1992), affect control theorists clarified the relationship between identity and emotion in the theory. “Emotions [are] signals about self-identity meanings within a situation and how well those meanings [are] aligned with stable, fundamental self-conceptions” (Robinson et al. 2008, 180). In short, emotions transmit key information about whether the situation as experienced maintains or fails to maintain meanings attached to self-identity.

Where affect and emotion often are considered synonyms in everyday life, each concept has a specific, analytically distinct definition and role within affect control theory. The former refers to evaluative orientations, both positive and negative, toward objects—what Heise (1979) called affective meanings. There are three key dimensions of affective meaning: “evaluation (good vs. bad), potency (powerful vs. weak), and activity (lively vs. quiet)” (Robinson et al. 2008, 180–181). Affect control researchers conceive of emotion as a subset of affect:

Emotions are the labels (with their associated cultural meanings) that are applied to the ways that we feel after an event has occurred [...] There is a formal, mathematical model that predicts what emotion we will experience after we have participated in a social interaction [...] emotions are culturally given labels that we assign to experiences in the context of social interaction that is self-referential. They are signals about how we feel within a situation and how that feeling compares to the stable affective meanings that are usually associated with our self-identity. (Robinson et al. 2008, 183)

Just as does Burke’s (1991) identity control system, affect control theory’s meaning control system operates according to a feedback model, and the model involves theoretical assumptions about self and meaning that parallel those relied on by most symbolic interaction and identity theory scholars more generally. What is different, as Robinson et al. (2008) emphasize, is that affect control theory provides precise measurement of meaning along the dimensions outlined, and it employs empirically generated, culturally specific dictionaries of meaning for impression formation (MacKinnon 1994; Smith-Lovin 1987; Smith et al. 2001).

Exemplifying the utility of affect control theory for understanding and explaining understudied social phenomena, Bergstrand (2019) used measures and concepts developed by affect control researchers to study grievance formation. She experimentally investigated the consequences of various combinations of good versus bad behaviors, perpetrators, and victims in mobilizing events. Results showed that evaluations of goodness and badness in grievances shape individuals’ inclination to support activism on behalf of specific issues. Bergstrand’s (2019) research provides useful purchase on what types of social movements are more relative to less likely to succeed, and what types of social problems are more relative to less likely to be addressed.

Spurred by the development of affect control theory and by the rise of sociological interest in emotion, identity theory researchers more generally have incorporated emotion into both structural and perceptual research agendas within identity theory (Stets and Turner 2006; Stets and Burke 2014; Stryker 2004; Stryker et al. 2005). Chapters in this book pursue additional linkages between identity and emotion, and between affect control and identity control.

## 6.2 *Identity Accumulation Theory*

Identity accumulation theory (Thoits 1983, 2003), conceives of roles and identities in terms of the resources they provide to negotiate life events and hypothesizes that “the more identities possessed by an actor, the less psychological distress he/she should exhibit” (Thoits 1983, 178). Thoits’ research is one of the earliest empirical tests of the conjoint import of multiple identities. Earlier research, while exploring many identities, examined them one identity at a time. Thoits (1983) found that the number of identities held shaped stress, such that a greater number of identities buffered against stress, while the loss of identities increased stress.

However, Simon (1995) found that holding multiple identities does not necessarily enhance mental health. The same multiple role configuration of parenting and work roles had profoundly different meanings for women relative to men. Simon suggested that these differences in meaning could help account for sex differences in mental health, because women relative to men, experienced work-family conflicts to a greater extent, experienced more guilt, and tended to have less good self-evaluated role performance. In subsequent research, Thoits (2003) revisited her earlier theory, now distinguishing between obligatory and voluntary identities. She found that it is accumulating voluntary identities—involving choice and substantial agency—that increases self-esteem and self-efficacy while reducing stress. Some of the chapters in this book continue the exploration of the combined import of multiple identities, as well as multiple bases of identity, and some chapters advance our understanding of stress processes.

## 7 **Additional Extant Bridges**

Beyond the boundaries of the symbolic interactionist paradigm, identity theory researchers and researchers who situate themselves primarily in other programs of theory and research have engaged in bridge building both within and outside of sociological social psychology. Hogg et al. (1995) offered the first synthetic treatment of identity theory—a product of sociological social psychology—and social identity theory—a product of psychological social psychology; they noted that the two paradigms used a number of the same core concepts, but defined the concepts differently. Stets and Burke (2000) argued that, despite their differences, social identity

theory and identity theory could be combined usefully to move toward a more complete and general theory of self that encompasses both micro and macro processes. Some of the chapters in this book take up this particular challenge.

Stryker (2008) highlighted some mutual influences between identity theory and cognitive social psychology. These are unsurprising given that both traditions focus fundamentally on self. Where identity theory benefitted from Markus' (1977) research on selves as cognitive schema, cognitive psychology benefitted from identity theory's conceptualization of identity salience and multiple identities (Stryker 2008). Stryker (2008, 24) also suggested that, because "behind cognitive organization lies social organization," more could be accomplished by bringing together cognitive theory with identity theory's understanding of the structural and cultural sources of person identity.

Likewise, within sociological social psychology itself, identity theory has cross-fertilized with exchange theory notably in the research of Lawler and his colleagues (Lawler 2001, 2003; Lawler et al. 2000). As exchange theory developed, it expanded its core focus on the structure of exchange networks, power relations, and use of power, to include other social psychological phenomena including trust, emotion, cohesion, commitment, and perceptions of fairness (Cook and Rice 2003). Research on commitment directly bridges to symbolic interactionism and identity theory.

Lawler (2001; Lawler et al. 2000) tackled a puzzle within the exchange paradigm: why do people continue exchanges that, while sustaining the exchange relationship, may not promote their self-interest? Lawler et al. (2000) theorized that exchanges would produce positive emotion solidifying the bond between exchange partners and increasing commitment to the exchange relationship. They found that this posited mechanism did increase commitment. Of course, exchanges do not always elicit positive emotions (Lawler 2001). However, one important implication of Lawler's (2001) research is that, as the commitment of an exchange partner to the exchange relationship increases, the less likely it will be that the exchanges promote that party's material self-interest.

In developing his affect theory of social exchange, Lawler (2003) incorporated a structural symbolic interactionist frame and concepts from identity theory. Laying out both the commonalities and differences between identity theory and exchange theory, Lawler (2003) posited that the contextualized social action essential to exchange theory parallels symbolic interactionism's definition of the situation. In doing so, he argues that exchange theory and identity theory both focus on persons who have an emotional attachment to groups. The strength of emotional attachment impacts the level of commitment to identity(ies) attached to role relationships within the group. Consistent with both exchange theory and the symbolic interaction paradigm, for Lawler (2003), the relationship between persons and groups is reciprocal. Using concepts of role identity and identity salience as aspects of his theory, Lawler (2003) demonstrated that when persons exhibit role identities within a given group, and those role identities are highly salient, the role-based relationships within the group are strong and they strengthen affective ties to the group.

Finally—and although the relationship between scholars who developed identity theory and those who developed status characteristics theory (Berger et al. 1974,

1977) sometimes has been characterized by keeping a friendly, or not so friendly, distance from each other—the two paradigms do share some common premises. The most notable one is the fundamental importance of expectations.

Structural symbolic interactionism and identity theory emphasize the importance of diverse types of expectations for behavior across a wide variety of situations, how such expectations become internalized into role, group, and person identities, and how such internalized expectations shape behavior. Meanwhile, status characteristics theory specifically emphasizes performance expectations based on social categories such as race and gender that likewise operate as diffuse status characteristics. In the absence of other relevant information, such diffuse status characteristics communicate culturally shared expectations for the differential competence of those with the more, relative to less, valued state of the characteristic (Correll and Ridgeway 2003). As well, status characteristics theory specifically emphasizes how differential performance expectations operate in a specific type of social setting—the task-oriented group.

Researchers in the status characteristics tradition have generated fundamentally important and empirically supported predictions about the generation and reproduction of inequalities within task groups (Berger and Webster 2018). Ridgeway (1991, 2011) has used the expectation states assumptions underlying status characteristics theory to develop status construction theory, explaining how social categories such as race and gender come to have diffuse status value in the first place. However, status characteristics theory also can be seen as an especially powerful demonstration of the symbolic interactionist aphorism that “what is perceived as real is real in its consequences” (Thomas and Thomas 1928, 572).

Within symbolic interactionism, all social interaction, whether in task groups or not, requires definitions of self, other, and situation. When persons enter an entirely new situation, they may lack a great deal of relevant information, and so will attach meaning to the information they do have—quickly observed characteristics such as dress, speech patterns, physical appearance, and social category markers such as race and gender. They then behave guided by the meanings they have attributed. “Because meanings of the cues [the actors use to define the situation] tend to be widely shared in a culture, initial behaviors based on the cues also tend to elicit confirming and reinforcing responses, solidifying [social] structures [including inequality structures] implicit in the meanings of the cues” (Stryker 2008, 22). Of course—and as symbolic interactionists would anticipate—there will be some instances in which initial behaviors based on cues with widely shared cultural meaning occasion agentic pushback. Then, all kinds of interesting things may ensue.

## 8 This Volume

Most of the chapters in this volume are revised versions of papers initially presented in April of 2018, at the Indiana University Conference on Identity Theory. The editors solicited the chapters contributed by Merolla and Baker, and by Kalkhoff,



Dippong, Gibson and Gregory, after the conference. The chapters range widely in the substantive topics they explore, from crime and law, to health, to education, to politics and policies, to inequality, to race and ethnicity, to education. That substantive foci are far ranging is intentional, to make clear the broad applicability of structural symbolic interactionism and identity theory across the full breadth of sociology. What unites all the chapters is their goal of adding theoretical depth and breadth of application to symbolic interactionism and identity theory while enhancing bridges to other theories and paradigms.

The research reported here also bridges from symbolic interactionism and/or identity theory to, respectively, affect control theory, rational choice theory, stress process theory, self-esteem theory, ideas from neuropsychology, and social-neuroscience, theories of social solidarity, and social identity theory. Multiple chapters innovate in measurement. Some chapters employ data gathered through observation in natural settings and in-depth interviews, while others employ data gathered through survey research or laboratory experiments. Similarly, chapters employ a wide variety of data analytic strategies, including diverse qualitative-interpretive and quantitative techniques, as well as simulations. Some chapters engage in theory development, others in theory testing and still others in both. Contributors of chapters include researchers who have spent their scholarly careers engaged in research programs within identity theory or closely related research programs likewise within the symbolic interactionist frame, as well as scholars known primarily for their research in psychology or macro sociology. Likewise, contributors include many senior scholars, but also some more junior scholars.

We have divided the book into two parts. Part I contains a set of chapters that primarily contribute theoretical and methodological advances within the foundational core of identity theory. Part II contains a set of chapters that primarily bridge between identity theory and symbolic interactionism on the one hand, and other paradigms in sociology and beyond on the other. However, many chapters in both parts of the book both deepen knowledge within identity theory and/or symbolic interactionism while also building bridges to other theoretical traditions.

In the chapter titled “[The Relationship Between Identity Importance and Identity Salience: Context Matters](#),” Peggy Thoits revisits the ongoing issue of how two fundamental, analytically distinct concepts in structural symbolic interaction and identity theory—identity prominence and identity salience—relate to each other empirically. Thoits addresses the specific question of why the empirical associations between measures of the two concepts found in prior quantitative studies differ substantially from one study to another and from one identity to another. Tackling this issue through qualitative, interpretive analysis of interview data, Thoits finds that context-specific norms of conversation and situational appropriateness shape the likelihood that a subjectively important identity is expressed behaviorally, thus exhibiting identity salience, in diverse situations.

Where Thoits’ chapter contributes to more precise theorization within identity theory’s structural research agenda, the chapter titled “[Cognitive and Behavioral Responses to the Identity Verification Process](#),” by Jan Stets, Scott Savage, Peter Burke and Phoenicia Fares, tests theoretical propositions formulated within identity



theory's perceptual research agenda. Based on a laboratory experiment conducted with participants who occupy structurally powerless positions, and an experimental design contrasting those with dominant versus non-dominant person identities and whose identities are verified versus non-verified, the authors find support for their theorization of a dual response to identity non-verification. Participants push back against non-verifying feedback while also slowly altering their view of self so that it is more aligned with that feedback. The two strategies for aligning identities with reflected appraisals are not an either/or proposition.

Like the chapters by Thoits and by Stets et al., the chapter titled "[Identity Dispersion: Flexibility, Uncertainty, or Inconsistency?](#)," by Peter Burke, contributes to identity theory's capacity to generate understanding and explanation for patterns in situationally rooted social behavior. Burke builds on research that moved from using identity standards measured as point estimates on semantic dimensions that define the identities, to conceptualizing and measuring identity dispersion. Identity dispersion captures the idea that people hold distributions of meanings around a point representing the central tendency of that distribution; people may vary in the dispersion of their meanings around such a central tendency. As Burke notes, where some scholars have presumed that identity dispersion reflects uncertainty in the identity, others have presumed that identity dispersion reflects flexibility in the identity, and the two interpretations have very different implications for emotional and cognitive responses that in turn shape behavior. Burke's findings, from two studies examining survey data on six different identities, suggest that identity dispersion stems from neither uncertainty nor flexibility per se, but rather from inconsistencies in identity meanings. Such inconsistencies lead to negative emotion by causing cognitive dissonance, but also to reductions in negative emotion occasioned by non-verification, because they provide a wider range of available identity meanings.

The chapter titled "[Competing Identity Standards and Managing Identity Verification](#)," by Jessie Finch and Robin Stryker, shifts from quantitative analysis back to qualitative-interpretive analysis, and from laboratory experiments and surveys to in-depth interviews and observational research in a real-world setting. The chapter shows that field research can benefit from the precise conceptual apparatus offered by identity theory, at the same time as field research can ground empirically a set of new theoretical propositions that advance the theory. Finch and Stryker rely on in-depth interviews, courtroom observations, and third party media accounts to examine how defense lawyers participating in a controversial criminal procedure ending in the deportation of undocumented immigrants manage their role and racial/ethnic identities in the face of challenges to identity verification. The authors find that within their sample of defense attorneys, role strain caused by the incapacity to satisfy simultaneously two key role identity related values—formal legality and substantive justice—is almost universal. Yet defense attorneys also viewed these two values as providing positive, culturally available, but competing role identity standards on which they could draw to push back against potential non-verification of their professional role identity. Examining how identities based on race/ethnicity entered into identity verification/non-verification processes in tandem with role based identities, the authors find that Latinx lawyers, relative to white lawyers, faced greater professional

role strain and also experienced conflict between a central role identity standard, on the one hand, and meanings and expectations associated with their racial/ethnic identity. Faced with challenges on both fronts, Latinx lawyers resisted role and racial/ethnic identity standards whose adoption would lead to non-verification and adopted instead available competing standards facilitating verification.

The chapter titled “[Racial Identity Among White Americans: Structure, Antecedents, and Consequences](#),” by Mathew Hunt, continues the focus on racial identity, in this case by using new items in the 2014 General Social Survey to advance empirical knowledge about an underdeveloped research topic—the structure of white racial identity. Employing factor analysis and reliability analysis, Hunt examines five aspects of racial identity—salience, prominence, verification, public self-regard, and private self-regard—and finds enough inter-item consistency to justify creating a five-item “identity intensity” index. He then uses this new measure as an independent and dependent variable in regression analyses to show that sociodemographic factors shape white racial identity intensity, and that variability in white racial identity intensity helps explain variability in racial policy attitudes held by whites.

The chapter titled “[Mathematics Identity, Self-efficacy, and Interest and Their Relationships to Mathematics Achievement: A Longitudinal Analysis](#),” by George Bohrnstedt, Jizhi Zhang, Bitnara Jasmine Park, Sakiko Ikoma, Markus Broer and Burhan Ogut, is the final chapter in Part I of the book. As do other chapters, the Bohrnstedt et al. chapter highlights contributions of identity theory to answering research questions with practical as well as scholarly importance, in this case what accounts for variable mathematics achievement in high school. Using a large sample of students who participated in both of two major studies of mathematics assessment among high school students, Bohrnstedt et al. examine the relationship among mathematics identity, efficacy, interest in mathematics and math achievement in high school. They employ structural equation modeling and find that, controlling for a diverse array of other factors, having a “math person” identity, as well as a self-perception of math efficacy in grades 9 and 11, have positive effects on grade 12 math achievement. However, whereas math identity in grade 11 has a direct net effect on math achievement in grade 12, math self-efficacy and math interest in grade 11 have no such direct effects. Math efficacy in grade 9 has an indirect effect on grade 12 math achievement through math identity in grade 11.

Part II of the book begins with the chapter titled “[The Role of the Other: How Interaction Partners Influence Identity Maintenance in Four Cultures](#),” by Dawn Robinson, Lynn Smith-Lovin and Jun Zhao. This chapter bridges between identity theory and affect control theory by using a series of simulations to illustrate how interaction partners shape identity maintenance in China, Egypt, Morocco and the United States. Explicitly conceptualizing interaction partners to be occupants of counter-roles in reciprocal role relationships as well as a key source of reflected appraisals, identity theorists also implicitly view the actions and identities of others as inputs within identity verification processes. As Robinson, Smith-Lovin and Zhao note, affect control theory provides a more elaborated specification of how interaction partners influence perceptual control processes, in which others provide

a basis for impression-change in situations while also—as objects of new actions by self—provide resources for identity maintenance. Given prior research within the affect control paradigm finding cross-cultural variability in the impact of the other in identity maintenance, Robinson, Smith-Lovin and Zhao use simulations based on the theoretical apparatus of affect control theory to illustrate these variable impacts. This, in turn, allows us to consider how the structure of identity control processes generalizes across cultures, while the influence of key social-environmental inputs within such control processes may be culturally specific.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, identity theory and affect control theory are close cousins within the symbolic interactionist paradigm. The chapter titled “[Embeddedness, Reflected Appraisals, and Deterrence: A Symbolic Interactionist Theory of Adolescent Theft](#),” by Ross Matsueda, Kate O’Neill and Derek Krieger, bridges across paradigms, showing that symbolic interaction can encompass a redefined, social interaction-rooted rational choice concept of decision-making. Matsueda et al. argue that integrating rational choice with a theory of the self requires identifying precisely how the structure of social relations embeds decision-making. Mead’s perspective on self and role-taking provides resources for such a specification, and Matsueda et al. elaborate on Mead’s meta-theoretical framework to conceptualize a pragmatic and relationally embedded process of choice. This choice process incorporates responses to reflected appraisals and situational elements that establish diverse types of imagined consequences for the chosen behavior. Deriving specific, testable hypotheses predicting variability in delinquent behavior and examining these using longitudinal survey data and random-effects negative binomial models predicting self-reported theft behavior, Matsueda, O’Neill and Krieger find that variability in theft is shaped strongly by variability in reflected appraisals of self as a rule violator. Likewise, theft is shaped by various expected costs and benefits of theft, including those that pertain to self-image as well as those that pertain to sanctions. Youth who view themselves as rule violators are deterred less by the threat of arrest than are youth who do not view themselves as rule violators.

In the chapter titled “[Immigration and Identity Theory: What Can They Gain From Each Other?](#),” Kay Deaux argues that identity theory provides substantial purchase on the experiences of immigrants—an issue at the forefront of current scholarly and practical concern—at the same time that empirical research on immigration can inform identity theory. Deaux places identity theory within a more general category of multi-level theorizing about the relationship between person and social structure as mediated by the meso-level phenomenon of network-situated social interaction. Having compared identity theory with social identity theory briefly, Deaux shows how she has used identity concepts to research stability and change in ethnic identification. She then argues that identity theory and empirical research on immigration are maximally mutually informative with respect to (1) relationships among multiple identities; and (2) issues pertaining to identity flexibility and change. In this regard, one specific empirical finding from immigration research for which identity theory provides an explanation is the variable compatibility between the new national identity of immigrants and their ethnic identity of origin.

The chapter titled “[Identity Meaning Discrepancies and Psychological Distress: A Partial Test of Incorporating Identity Theory and Self-definitions into the Stress Process Model](#),” by Richard Adams and Richard Serpe, bridges between symbolic interactionism and the stress process perspective formulated to explain variability in distress. Adams and Serpe build on a theoretical integration offered by McLeod (2012) and add to this integration by comparing stress responses to identity-discrepant meanings that pertain to normative relative to counter-normative role identities. They hypothesize that discrepancies in meanings attributed to parent and work role identities by self and by the public, in general, are more stressful for those with children and people who work outside the home—the normative role identities—than for the childless and unemployed—the counter-normative identities. Using data from a web-based survey and structural equation modeling, they find that identity-discrepant meanings do shape stress differently conditional on whether the identity is normative or counter-normative. Variability in identity-discrepant meanings also helps explain variability in identity-specific self-esteem, sense of mastery, and psychological well-being, but mostly for the normative identities examined, whereas identity-discrepant meanings have minimal influence on these outcomes for the counter-normative identities. Similarly, identity-specific self-esteem and sense of mastery shape psychological well-being, but mostly for those with normative role identities.

The chapter titled “[Society in Peril? How Distance Media Communication Could Be Undermining Symbolic Interaction](#),” by Will Kalkhoff, Joseph Dippong, Adam Gibson and Stanford Gregory, provides new theoretical and empirical insights that bridge from symbolic interactionism to other bodies of theory and research. In this chapter, Kalkhoff et al. ask how electronically mediated communication shapes processes and outcomes of symbolic interaction. Combining understandings of role-taking in the symbolic interactionist tradition with theoretical and empirical work pertaining to interaction ritual chains, bodily co-presence and the emergence and maintenance of social solidarity, Kalkhoff et al. argue that there is good reason to believe electronically mediated communication undermines the development of social solidarity. They test their argument in a laboratory experiment using a new, real-time, and non-consciously controlled measure of interpersonal closeness—vocal convergence. Finding that engaging in face-to-face communication promotes development of greater group solidarity than does interaction through electronically mediated formats, Kalkhoff et al. suggest a further research agenda bridging between symbolic interaction and neurology to develop a neuro-interactionist account of how change in communication media shapes interaction, including opportunities for and constraints on developing social solidarity.

The chapter titled “[University Racial Composition and Self-esteem of Minority Students: Commitment, Self Views and Reflected Appraisals](#),” by David Merolla and Erin Baker, begins with a well-established empirical finding: among minority students, self-esteem is higher for those in schools with more, relative to fewer, other students with whom they share ethnic and racial background. Merolla and Baker use identity theory to advance an explanation for this finding by constructing and testing a serial mediation model of self-esteem. They hypothesize that students in schooling environments with more relative to fewer others who share their ethnic and

racial backgrounds are more likely to be involved in more satisfying relationships with both faculty and other students. More relative to less satisfying relationships, in turn, enhance reflected appraisals of students' capacities as students, and this enhances students' self-evaluations. Enhanced self-evaluations in turn increase self-esteem. Using survey data on a sample of minority students from universities across the United States, Merolla and Baker find substantial support for their hypothesized model.

The chapter titled “[Symbolic Interaction and Identity Theory: Current Achievements and Challenges for the Future](#),” by Robin Stryker, Richard Serpe and Brian Powell concludes this book by circling back to where it started, highlighting both theoretical and methodological advances contributed by the book's various chapters. These advances deepen the foundational core of symbolic interactionism and identity theory and bridge to other theoretical traditions within sociology and the social sciences more generally, integrating these other traditions at least partially with symbolic interactionism.

Based on all these advances, coupled with the material provided in this chapter, the authors suggest priorities for additional theorizing and research within symbolic interactionism and identity theory and point out additional opportunities for, and the importance of, more bridging theory and research. Noting the breadth of substantive topics and research questions on which identity theory can provide leverage, this final chapter argues that research framed by symbolic interaction and identity theory is all the more important because of its relevance to central societal issues, problems, and policies that are the subject of major public controversies today. These include, but are not restricted to, issues of crime, law and social control, immigration, class, racial-ethnic and gender inequalities and conflict, climate change and environmental policy, political polarization and political dysfunction, public health issues, reproductive issues, social protest—or the absence thereof—cultural change, and international relations.

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