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RELATIONAL IDENTITY AND IDENTIFICATION: DEFINING OURSELVES THROUGH WORK RELATIONSHIPS

DAVID M. SLUSS
University of South Carolina

BLAKE E. ASHFORTH
Arizona State University

We explore the meaning and significance of relational identity and relational identification, predicated on the role-relationship between two individuals. We argue that relational identity integrates person- and role-based identities and thereby the individual, interpersonal, and collective levels of self; contrast relational identity and relational identification with social identity and social identification; contend that relational identity and relational identification are each arranged in a cognitive hierarchy ranging from generalized to particularized schemas; and contrast relational identification with relational disidentification and ambivalent relational identification.

> Identity is at its core psychosocial: self and other; inner and outer; being and doing; expression of self for, with, against, or despite; but certainly in response to others. It is both those for whom one works and the work of loving (Josselson, 1994: 82).

The study of identity and identification in organizations has focused almost entirely on the individual vis-à-vis a collective, such as a workgroup, department, and the organization itself. This research has yielded a wealth of insights on how individuals define and locate themselves within organizational contexts (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Ashforth & Mael, 1996; Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Elsbach, 1999; Haslam, van Knippenberg, Platow, & Ellemers, 2003; Hogg & Terry, 2001; Pratt, 1998; van Dick, 2004; van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000). However, this focus on the individual vis-à-vis a collective has largely ignored the *interpersonal* level and its influence on one's identity and identification in the workplace.

To be sure, management scholars in areas such as career development, leadership, social networks, and positive organizational scholarship have provided valuable insights on the impact of relationships on one's development, performance, and well-being (e.g., Baker, Cross, & Wooten, 2003; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Flum, 2001b; Gibbons, 2004; Hall & Kahn, 2002; Kahn, 1998; Lord & Brown, 2001; Morrison, 2002; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000; Sherony & Green, 2002; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). What has been missing, though, is a specific focus on how one's definition of self might be influenced by interpersonal relationships and the consequent interplay of three "levels" of identity: individual (or personal), interpersonal, and collective (or group, social). A major breakthrough occurred with Brewer and Gardner's (1996) article, "Who Is This 'We'?" in which they contrasted the three levels of self (see also Brickson, 2000; Brickson & Brewer, 2001; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). According to these and other scholars (e.g., Kashima & Hardie, 2000; Lord, Brown, & Freiberg, 1999), the individual level focuses on oneself as a unique being, and self-esteem derives from interpersonal comparisons of traits, abilities, goals, performance, and the like. The basic motivation is self-interest, and the individual is essentially independent and autonomous.

The interpersonal level focuses on one's role-related relationships (henceforth "role-relationships"), such as supervisor-subordinate and coworker-coworker. Individuals are therefore interdependent, placing a premium on the na-

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ture of interaction and the potential for personal connection and intimacy. As Andersen and Chen put it, the "self is relational—or even entangled—with significant others" (2002: 619). The basic motivation is the dyad's welfare, and self-esteem derives from fulfilling one's role-relationship obligations.

Finally, the collective level is the province of social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). At this level, the focus is on oneself as a prototypical member of a group, such as an organization, or a social category, such as gender. Self-esteem derives from intergroup comparisons, and the basic motivation is the welfare of the collective, placing a premium on common fate, cohesion, and group norms. (As an anonymous reviewer noted, a second, "macro" perspective on the collective level of identity focuses on the social entity per se, independent of individuals. For example, Albert and Whetten [1985] conceptualize organizational identity as the central, distinctive, and enduring attributes of an organization qua organization. These attributes may or may not correspond to the social identity of the individual as a member of the organization. Given our interest in the individual, our focus will be restricted to the SIT conception of the collective level.)

Thus, as Brewer and Gardner argue, "Changes in levels of self-categorization reflect not only differences in views of the self but also different *worldviews*" (1996: 91), including values, goals, and norms. It should be noted that individuals retain a sense of self from all three levels, albeit in somewhat compartmentalized form (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991), but that cognitive shifts between the levels are easily primed by various situational cues, such as names, rewards, uniforms, and saying "we" rather than "you" or "I" (Baldwin, 1994; Gaertner, Sedikides, Vevea, & Iuzzini, 2002; Gardner, Gabriel, & Hochschild, 2002; Kark & Shamir, 2002; Pratt & Rafaeli, 2001).

Research on self-conceptions born of role-relationships is particularly important for at least two reasons. First, according to the structural functionalist wing of role theory (Merton, 1957; see also Stryker & Statham, 1985), roles are "sets of behavioral expectations associated with given positions in the social structure" (Ebaugh, 1988: 18). As such, roles are a basic building block of organizations, and the purpose and meaning of a given role depends on the network of complementary roles within which it is embedded (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978). The role of supervisor is meaningless without the complementary role of subordinate; the role of team member requires at least one other team member. As Stryker and Statham state, "To use the term role is necessarily to refer to interaction" (1985: 323). Thus, self-definition in organizational contexts is predicated at least partly on one's network of interdependent roles. For example, Pratt and Rafaeli (1997) discovered that nurses choose their type of dress (an identity marker) partially based on the type of patient served (role-relationship). Moreover, because roles tend to be differentiated by function, hierarchy, and status, the nature of the complementarity between any two roles (and how role incumbents choose to enact them) tends to be more or less unique (Ashforth, 2001). Group-level analyses tend to overlook differences between specific role-relationships such as coworker-coworker.

Second, the interpersonal perspective on role-*relationships* and, thus, interdependence and interaction is very timely. In the face of environmental turbulence, the emphasis on traditional bureaucratic structures and control systems is shifting toward more fluid team- and project-based work, where interaction and personal connection provide relatively informal social controls. In Flum's words, "To work is to relate" (2001a: 262), and the identities and identifications flowing from role-relationships may provide a much-needed cognitive and affective glue for organic organizations.

In this article we build on Brewer and Gardner's (1996) notion of a relational self. First, we define the concepts of relational identity and relational identification and discuss how each is arranged in a cognitive hierarchy ranging from generalized to particularized schemas (i.e., systems of beliefs). Second, we demonstrate how our conception of relational identity and identification converges and diverges with formulations derived from SIT—the predominant theory of identity and identification in organizational contexts. Third, we develop a typology involving relational identification, relational disidentification, and ambivalent relational identification, and we discuss the functions and dysfunctions of each type. Finally, we close with suggestions for future research.

The topics of roles, identities, and relationships have been studied extensively in various social domains, including organizations. What the present paper adds to such models as role theory, SIT, and identity theory, and to research on personal relationships—all four of which are touched on at various points—is a focus on how the interpersonal level draws on and helps integrate the personal and collective levels such that interpersonal relationships are simultaneously informed by person- and role-based identities. Additionally, organizational scholars have generally sidestepped discussing *personalized* relationships—with few exceptions (e.g., Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Gersick, Bartunek, & Dutton, 2000). In this paper we integrate insights from the personal relationship literature within the broader conceptual landscape of roles and identity to provide a more personalized and holistic understanding of one's work experience.

DEFINING RELATIONAL IDENTITY AND RELATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

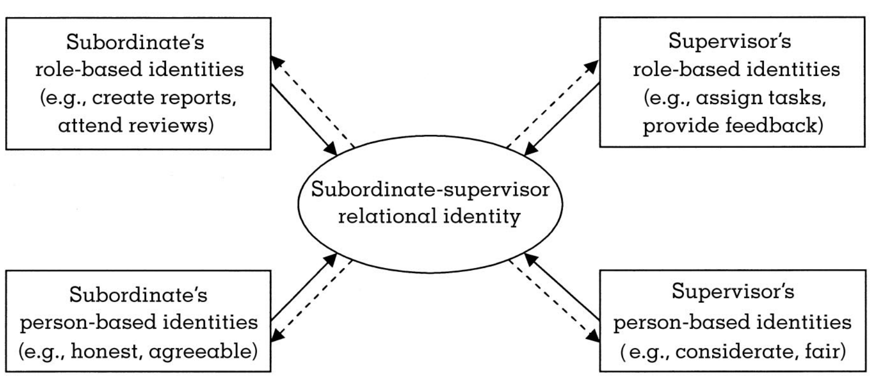
Relational Identity

Brewer and Gardner (1996), like many identity theorists, conflate the terms *identity* and *identification,* implicitly treating them as synonyms for one's sense of self (who I am). However, there is value in differentiating the terms. We define a *relational identity* as the nature of one's role-relationship, such as manager-subordinate and coworker-coworker. It is how role occupants enact their respective roles vis-à-vis each other. As noted above, a role is fundamentally relational and is largely understood with reference to the network of interdependent roles. Indeed, it is relational identities that knit the network of roles and role incumbents together into a social *system*.

We define *relational identification* as the extent to which one defines oneself in terms of a given role-relationship. Thus, one may have a clear sense of what it means to be a subordinate vis-à-vis one's manager (i.e., a perceived relational identity) but resist viewing that relational identity as self-defining (i.e., low relational identification). Note that both relational identity ("What is the nature of our relationship?") and relational identification ("How much do I internalize that identity as a partial definition of self?") implicate the individual. We expand on the concept of relational identity in this section and on relational identification in the next section.

As shown in Figure 1, we argue that a relational identity consists of four parts: one individual's role- and person-based identities as they bear on the role-relationship, and another individual's role- and person-based identities as they bear on the role-relationship. A role-based identity is the goals, values, beliefs, norms, interaction styles, and time horizons typically associated with the role (Ashforth, 2001)—independent of who (what kind of person) may be enacting the role. For example, the role-based identity of a manager may include assigning tasks, monitoring performance, offering feedback, liaising with other departments, and doing strategic planning. A *relational* identity,

FIGURE 1
Relational Identity



Note: The dotted lines represent feedback loops.

however, focuses on that portion of the role-based identity that is more or less directly relevant to one's role-relationship. Thus, liaising and strategic planning may not be directly relevant to the manager's relationship with a subordinate and would therefore be excluded from the manager-subordinate relational identity.

A person-based identity is the personal qualities of the role occupant that bear on the enactment of the role-based identity. Roles are essentially abstractions until brought to life by flesh-and-blood individuals. Thus, barring very strong situations, individuals have some latitude or personal space in enacting the role-based identity according to their own needs and preferences. It is the individual who must decide how to delegate an assignment or how to present negative feedback to a coworker. Because no two individuals are identical, no two role enactments are identical, except in extremely strong situations (Ashforth, 2001). Thus, the person-based identity shapes the enactment of the role-based identity (and vice versa; cf. Stets, 1995). For instance, Witt, Burke, Barrick, and Mount (2002) found that conscientiousness, coupled with agreeableness, predicted higher job performance in jobs requiring cooperative interactions than jobs requiring little to no cooperation.

Our model suggests that relational identities involve all three levels of self articulated by Brewer and Gardner (1996). The role-based component draws on the collective level, focusing on prototypical role occupants. The person-based component draws on the individual level, focusing on the more or less unique ways an individual may enact a given role-relationship. And the relational identity, of course, draws on the interpersonal level.

However, we contend that these role- and person-based identities interact such that a relational identity is not simply an additive function of the role- and person-based identities. The second wing of role theory, symbolic interactionism, holds that the meaning(s) of roles—and therefore role-relationships—and how they are enacted are socially constructed through interaction, observation, negotiation, feedback, and other well-known social processes (Blumer, 1969; Stryker & Statham, 1985; e.g., Hosking, Dachler, & Gergen, 1995; cf. Emirbayer, 1997; cf. Weick, 1979). Symbolic interactionism also informs identity theory (Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker, 1980), which adds that roles are a central anchor for the social construction of self. Individuals are typically hired into organizations to occupy and enact certain roles, and so social constructions of identities tend to crystallize around roles.

Although the structural functionalist and symbolic interactionist wings of role theory are often viewed as independent and even antithetical, following Sarbin (1954), Stryker and Statham (1985), and others, we view them as quite complementary. Briefly, structural functionalism emphasizes how roles are created to fulfill institutional needs, whereas symbolic interactionism emphasizes the agency of individuals in socially (re)constructing the meaning and enactment of those roles. These processes result in an ongoing, reciprocal interaction between system and individual, structure and process, context and interaction, and macro and micro (cf. Giddens, 1984). For example, although the term *supervisor* can be found in the dictionary, its lived meaning emerges from the shared experiences and sensemaking of unique but situated and interdependent individuals. Thus, the literature on leader-member exchange theory suggests that managers tend to modify the way they conceptualize their supervisory role as a function of how they view a given subordinate and enact the role-relationship (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). Similarly, research on upward influence indicates that subordinates' personal characteristics and perceptions of their manager and their relationship with him or her affect these subordinates' choice of influence tactics (Farmer & Maslyn, 1999).

Moreover, as the individuals in a dyad gain experience in their respective roles and with each other, the nature of their relationship is likely to change. The literature on trust, for instance, suggests that as coworkers' mutual expectations are met over time, familiarity and empathy tend to develop, leading to a more nuanced and trusting relationship (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). A coworker may become less inclined to monitor another's behavior and more inclined to give him or her the benefit of the doubt if problems arise. Similarly, situational leadership theory argues that as subordinates mature in their roles and become more capable, managers should become less directive and more participative (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

This notion of interaction among role- and person-based identities in the service of an emergent relational identity is *not* to say that the individuals who constitute the dyad will necessarily agree on the nature of their relational identity. However, research in a variety of social settings indicates that individuals generally strive for agreement, enact their agreed-upon selves, and attempt to have those selves socially validated through interaction (Ashforth, 2001; Hinde, 1997; Swann, 1999). Moreover, research on personal relationships suggests that complementary perceptions tend to emerge and predict relationship satisfaction and stability (Hardin & Conley, 2001; Holmes, 2000). Thus, the parties in a role-relationship tend to come to a mutual understanding of their relational identity, and this shared meaning facilitates the coordinated interaction that is the hallmark of effective role-relationships.

Finally, Figure 1 also indicates that a relational identity may, in turn, affect its constituent role- and person-based identities. For instance, research suggests that transformational leaders may enhance the self-efficacy of their followers and cause followers to see their roles in more value-laden terms (e.g., Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002).

In sum, the power of the relational identity construct is that it offers a conceptual tool for integrating the individual (person-based), interpersonal, and collective (role-based) levels of self. As such, relational identity may help answer calls for integrative constructs that can bridge multiple levels and, thus, more richly and holistically describe one's work experience within the organization. (As a reviewer noted, it is not accurate to use the term *levels of analysis,* because the interpersonal and collective levels refer here to an *individual's* conception of his or her relational and role-based identities rather than to identities apart from the individual. Thus, we use the term *levels of self*.) For example, the integration of person- and role-based identities may help explain how individuals are able to cognitively maintain and actively enact a seeming welter of identities. In enacting the role-relationship of, say, an employee vis-à-vis a manager, one simultaneously enacts person- and role-based identities in an interpersonal context: the relational identity is essentially holistic (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Thoits & Virshup, 1997). Further, the cognitive associations between the nested levels of self likely make it easier to seamlessly shift between the identities associated with the levels.

Finally, the notion of integration may help explain a theoretical controversy in the literature on relational identity. Whereas Brewer and her colleagues (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Brickson & Brewer, 2001) argue that the dyad constitutes a unique "stand-alone" level of self, Hogg (2001b) considers the dyad to be an epiphenomenon of the individual and collective levels, where complementary individuals link up against the backdrop of their collective identity(ies). The notion of integration suggests that individual and collective levels of self interact such that the resulting relational identity is more than the sum of its parts.

This discussion suggests the following summary proposition.

> *Proposition 1: The respective role-based and person-based identities of two individuals in a role-relationship will interactively influence the relational identity such that the relational identity is more than the sum of its parts.*

Relational Identity Hierarchy

Thus far, we have discussed relational identity in the context of a relationship between two specific individuals. That is, the relational identity is highly *particularistic* (e.g., Susan the manager vis-à-vis Bob the subordinate). In addition to having one or more particularistic relational identities regarding a given role (Susan vis-à-vis each of her six subordinates), an individual may abstract a more global or *generalized* relational identity (how Susan sees herself as a supervisor of subordinates).

The generalized relational identity is both informed by and informs the particularized relational identities. Based on research on intimate relationships (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999; Hassebrauck, 1997), we speculate that when a person is initially placed within an organizational role, he or she has or soon forms a (possibly crude) prototype or generalized perspective of a given relational identity. For example, Susan, a neophyte manager, may have some expectations about what it means to supervise others, but little practical experience. As she enters into *specific* role-relationships with others, her generalized relational identity informs these particularized relational identities (e.g., what to expect, what to do). The abstract knowledge is translated into grounded action. As Susan gains experience with specific subordinates in specific contexts and learns the art of supervision, the particularized qualities of these relationships may, in turn, inform the more generalized relational identity (Pierce & Lydon, 2001; Shaver, Collins, & Clark, 1996). As a result of this fleshing out process, the generalized relational identity tends to become richer and more nuanced with experience, and Susan will likely approach subsequent particularized role-relationships with more skill and confidence.

This discussion suggests the following summary proposition.

> *Proposition 2: The generalized relational identity and particularized relational identity (or identities) concerning a given role-relationship (e.g., manager-subordinate) will reciprocally influence each other.*

Of course, the fewer one's particularized relationships, the greater the impact a given particularized relationship will likely have on the generalized relationship. However, even if an individual has had only one particularized relationship, the generalized relational identity is unlikely to be identical to the particularized relational identity, because the latter is partly based on information that may be seen as idiosyncratic to the relevant individual.

Accordingly, individuals are usually able to articulate not only a generalized relational identity (e.g., how Susan sees herself as a manager of subordinates) but also particularized relational identities at various levels of aggregation (e.g., how Susan sees herself as a manager of first-shift subordinates or as a manager of Bob the subordinate). For example, research on personal relationships indicates that individuals possess relational schemas that range from general beliefs concerning a role-relationship to detailed beliefs for specific relationships and interactions (Baldwin, 1992; Fletcher & Fitness, 1993; Hinde, 1997). Further, as the generalized relational identity becomes grounded in myriad particularized experiences, it tends to become more stable and resistant to disconfirmation (Ashforth, 2001; Epstein, 1980). Although inconsistencies among the particularized role-relationships may reduce the stability of the generalized relational identity, individuals tend to strive for coherence in their generalized views—even when particularized experiences vary greatly (for a review, see Van Rooy, Overwalle, Vanhoomisen, Labiouse, & French, 2003). For instance, self-defense mechanisms often ameliorate the threat of disconfirming information to generalized identities (Breakwell, 1986; Sedikides & Strube, 1997). A line worker who acts contrary to her manager's stereotype of line workers as lazy may be labeled an exception to the rule.

> *Proposition 3: The greater the number of particularized relational identities involving a given role-relationship, the more stable and resistant to disconfirmation the generalized relational identity will tend to be.*

It should be noted that a generalized relational identity is not the same as a collective-level (social) identity. Recall that the focus of the collective level is on the individual as a prototypical member of a social category, such as *manager*. As discussed later when we compare relational identity to social identity, the latter involves a depersonalized sense of self: when the social identity is salient—that is, situationally relevant and/or subjectively important (Ashforth, 2001)—one sees the individual as an interchangeable exemplar of the group. In contrast, a generalized relational identity remains informed by the individual's person-based identities and so is necessarily personalized (Susan as a manager), and it focuses on a role-relationship (manager-subordinate) rather than on the entire social category of manager.

It should also be noted that a generalized relational identity differs from the concept of role as defined by the structural functionalist wing of role theory. Recall that structural functionalists define roles as the expectations associated with a position. These expectations are determined by the functional requirements of the system and, thus, have an institutionalized quality that transcends individual role occupants (Merton, 1957; Sarbin & Allen, 1967). Conversely, again, a generalized relational identity is personalized (and focuses on a role-relationship rather than on the entire role). A generalized relational identity is more similar to the concept of role as defined by the symbolic interactionist view of role theory, in that roles are said to be socially constructed, implicitly implicating individuals in the process. However, symbolic interactionism focuses on social processes and does not explicitly examine the personal qualities of the individuals (Stryker & Statham, 1985). Further, a generalized relational identity, once again, focuses on a given role-relationship rather than on the entire role.

Finally, in theory, one can have a particularized relational identity with every person with whom one interacts. However, such a large number of identities may become cognitively overwhelming. As a result, individuals are more likely to maintain a moderate, and thus tenable, number of identities (e.g., Thoits, 1986). Therefore, we speculate that, in practice, one tends to develop particularized relational identities where a given role-relationship is salient. For example, a software developer is most likely to develop particularized relational identities with his supervisor, project members, and clients. For a role-relationship that is not salient, one's perception of the other is likely to default to the other's *collective-level* identities (as per SIT)—that is, to stereotypical impressions of the other based on his or her group memberships and social categories. This argument suggests the following proposition.

> *Proposition 4: The more salient a specific role-relationship is to an individual, the more likely the individual will develop a particularized relational identity.*

Relational Identification

The literature on social identification in organizations focuses on how individuals partly define themselves in terms of a collective, such as an occupation, workgroup, or organization (Haslam, 2001; Pratt, 1998). Similarly, as noted, we define *relational identification* as a (partial) definition of oneself in terms of a given role-relationship—what the relationship means to the individual. For instance, an individual may identify with his or her role-relationship with a coworker because of the appealing role-based identity of mutual support and the coworker's display of empathy and humor (person-based identity).

Note that relational identification differs from what Kelman terms *classical identification,* where one identifies with another *individual*—attempting "to be like or actually to *be* the other person" (1961: 63). The focus of classical identification is the other person and, thus, involves a suppression of one's own individuality in favor of the other person *when that person is salient*. For example, Stone (1990) describes the cult of personality that arose around Michael Milken at Drexel Burnham Lambert that enabled him to assemble a force of like-minded disciples and to engage in various unethical practices. As Kelman himself notes, identification with an individual differs from identification with a "reciprocal role relationship . . . in which the roles of the two parties are defined with reference to one another" (1961: 63–64). The focus of relational identification is the *relationship*—specifically, the relational identity and the role- and person-based identities that inform it.

Relational identification involves what Aron and Aron (2000; see also Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2001) refer to as *self-expansion*—an inclusion of the relationship in one's definition of self and, thus, an *extension* of self. When the relationship is salient, the individual's sense of self transcends his or her personal qualities to include another and what their association is thought to mean. Thus, rather than replacing his or her extant identities, the individual broadens his or her repertoire of identities to include the relationship. Psychologists generally regard this extension of self as psychologically healthy (Aron & Aron, 2000; Josselson, 1992). However, as we discuss later regarding "overidentification," relational identification can be taken to an unhealthy extreme. Additionally, this extension of self may quickly become unhealthy if it includes an inherently negative role-relationship, such as an abusive supervisor-employee relationship (e.g., Tepper, 2000).

Finally, just as relational identities can be arrayed in a hierarchy from generalized to particularized, so, too, can relational identifications. A person may experience relational identification as a generalized perceived oneness with the role-relationship (e.g., with the coworker relationship apart from any specific coworker) and as a particularized perceived oneness with a specific role-relationship (e.g., Peter the coworker). And just as generalized and particularized relational identities are mutually reinforcing, so, too, are relational identifications. An initial affinity for one's generalized notion of coworker (e.g., someone who is supportive) may render one amenable to identifying with a specific role-relationship, and specific experiences with particularized role-relationships may reinforce the generalized identification (assuming the experiences are reasonably consistent with the expectations; again, although inconsistencies may exist at the particularized level, individuals will commonly seek and even impose coherence at the generalized level).

We can summarize this discussion with two propositions that parallel our earlier discussion of the relational identity hierarchy.

> *Proposition 5: The magnitude of generalized relational identification with a given role-relationship will reciprocally influence the magnitude of particularized relational identification(s) with that role-relationship.*

> *Proposition 6: For a given role-relationship, the greater the number of particularized role-relationships with which one identifies, the more stable and resistant to disconfirmation will the magnitude of identification with the generalized role-relationship tend to be.*

In summary, a relational identity is one's definition of a role-relationship, whereas relational identification is the perceived oneness with the role-relationship. Relational identification involves a (usually) psychologically healthy extension of self, resulting in a partial definition of oneself in terms of the role-relationship. Both relational identity and relational identification can be generalized at the overall role-relationship level or particularized at the specific role-relationship level.

RELATIONAL IDENTITY AND IDENTIFICATION VERSUS SOCIAL IDENTITY AND IDENTIFICATION

Because much of the literature on identity and identification in organizations is predicated on SIT (or its derivative, self-categorization theory), it is important to articulate the points of convergence and divergence between relational identity and identification and social identity and identification. Of course, the obvious difference is that the target of relational identity and identification is a role-relationship, whereas the target of social identity and identification is a collective, such as an organization, or a social category, such as gender. In this section we discuss four social psychological concepts that follow from this distinction: personalization, interpersonal attraction, role transcendence, and generalization.

Personalization

SIT suggests that individuals interact based on group prototypes rather than personal characteristics (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Hogg and Terry define a group prototype as the "cognitive representation of features that describe and prescribe attributes of the group" (2000: 123). A group prototype includes a perception of the group and how members should act. Two individuals will tend to interact based on the prototype of the most salient grouping, where salience is influenced by contextual cues, historical precedent, purpose of the interaction, and so on (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Hogg & Terry, 2000). In interacting based on a grouping, individuals *depersonalize* each other—that is, they view the other as an "interchangeable exemplar of [the] social category" rather than as "a unique person" (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987: 50).

In contrast, our discussion of role-relationships indicates that interactions between two individuals become personalized over time. Pettigrew (1986), commenting on the intergroup conflict literature, argues that role-relationships requiring frequent contact become progressively personalized, reducing stereotype-based interactions. Further, research, reviewed by Miller (2002), indicates that personalization tends to increase perceived similarity, interpersonal attraction, and positive affect. As a result, personalization enhances the impact of the person-based identities on the nature of the role-relationship and, subsequently, on relational identity and identification. To be sure, group prototypes are highly relevant to relational identities as they initially inform the participants' expectations of each other's role-based identities. An engineer encountering a production supervisor for the first time will likely rely on prototypic expectations of production supervisors—what we referred to above as a generalized role-based identity—to inform his or her initial behavior. However, these generalized expectations will quickly give way to the particularized role- and person-based identities enacted by the production supervisor.

As this example indicates, the other's role-based identity provides the initial context for interpreting his or her person-based identity. Organizations tend to be structured around differentiated roles, which are organized to accommodate task interdependencies, and individuals are assigned to these roles. Accordingly, individuals interact with one another *in their capacity as role occupants* (e.g., as coworkers, as manager and subordinate). Thus, an individual's perception of another's person-based identity (how that person enacts the role-relationship) is heavily filtered through or conditioned by the role expectations on which the interaction is predicated. For example, research on labeling processes in organizations suggests that a role stereotype may continue to color interaction long after a person's actual behavior should have refuted the stereotype (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

In sum, what the notion of a relational identity adds to the literature on social identity is an understanding of what happens between two individuals once interaction commences and the group prototypes become softened by personalization. SIT speaks only to interaction between depersonalized and therefore relatively static entities—entities that lack the color, nuances, and vagaries that define individuals and shape their interactions.

Interpersonal Attraction

Interpersonal attraction is the second element that distinguishes relational identity/identification from social identity/identification. Hogg (1992) has distinguished between being attracted to the qualities of the individual (interpersonal attraction) and the qualities of the collective of which the individual is a member (social attraction), and Markus and Kitayama (1991) have found that an "interdependent view of the self"—which Brewer and Gardner (1996) suggest is analogous to the relational self—leads individuals to become interpersonally attracted to significant others. As one enacts the role-relationship, one becomes familiar with specific role-relationship incumbents. Thus, as noted, the generalized perspective of the role-relationship becomes particularized: one can "put a face to the role." Given that most interdependent organizational roles require some cooperation (Katz & Kahn, 1978), and given that humans are social creatures and generally strive to be liked and to like others (Aronson, 1995), interpersonal attraction tends to occur. Additionally, the value of resources generated from the role-relationship tends to influence one's evaluation of the relational identity (cf. Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), predisposing one to feel an affinity for one's partner. For instance, a mentor-protégé role-relationship may produce valued resources for the protégé, in the form of psychosocial support and career advice, promoting a positive evaluation of the relational identity and liking for the mentor.

Thus, interpersonal attraction tends to occur as the relational identity becomes particularized and/or one associates one's partner with valued resources. In sum, interpersonal attraction is most closely related with relational identity/identification, whereas social attraction is most closely related with social identity/identification.

Role Transcendence

Because SIT focuses on depersonalized social attraction, it provides no mechanism for friendships born of interpersonal attraction. Thus, if one of the two individuals in a role-relationship exits his or her role, the two will have no need or desire for further interaction unless required by their new role-relationship. In short, the relationship will not transcend their roles.

Conversely, from the relational identity perspective, as a role-relationship becomes personalized, interpersonal attraction tends to occur: the particularized role-relationship may become a friendship such that the relationship can be said to be *multiplex* (i.e., based on more than one set of roles; e.g., Ashforth & Sluss, 2006; Valcour, 2002). Thus, the interpersonal relationship itself may create enough value for the individuals to warrant continuance, even after one of the individuals moves into another role or even another organization (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For example, ex-coworkers may continue to interact (e.g., catching up over lunch, inviting each other to parties), even when one has moved to another organization. Additionally, the friendship ties may result, via job referrals, in a new coworker-coworker role-relationship (in a new organization) or a client-consultant role-relationship. In other words, although the relational identity is *situated within* the respective roles, the relationship may transcend the bounds of the roles. To be sure, a *social* identity such as organizational membership or gender can also provide a basis for developing a friendship, but the processes of personalization and interpersonal attraction that friendship entails are beyond the purview of SIT.

Generalization

Ashforth and Johnson (2001) argue that social identification with lower-order collectives (e.g., work unit) may generalize to higher-order collectives (e.g., organization) because the latter are seen as vehicles for the former. By extension, we speculate that relational identification may generalize to identification with the salient groups and social categories that the individual and the significant other share.

How might this happen? First, in identifying with a role-relationship, one may come to identify with the collective that embodies and sustains the role-relationship. In effect, one sees the collective as an extension of the role-relationship. For instance, Pratt (2000) describes how Amway distributors are encouraged to identify with their "sponsors" (nominal supervisors) as a means of identifying with the organization itself. Additionally, in extending the self to include the relationship and the other's role, one is likely to develop a broader understanding of the wider organization (cf. Aron & Aron, 2000). Thus, relational identification may enhance one's understanding and appreciation of the collective.

Second, generalization occurs when one perceives the other individual as representing or exemplifying the group or social category such that the relational identity and identification "spill over" (Shamir, Zakay, Brainin, & Popper, 2000: 615) onto the social identity and identification. For example, relational identification with a leader may strengthen one's identification with the relevant subunit and organization.

Third, generalization may occur through interpersonal attraction and personalization. As one comes to know and value another individual, one is more likely to be influenced by the other's opinions. Thus, if the other person values the group or social category, one may also come to value it. Pratt (2000) also describes how Amway distributors are encouraged to socialize with their sponsors and often come to think of them as parents, faithfully replicating the sponsors' positive attitudes toward Amway.

In sum, the process of generalization appears to be common to both relational identity/identification and social identity/identification, whereas the processes of personalization, interpersonal attraction, and role transcendence distinguish between the two.

> *Proposition 7: Relational identities and identifications are likely to be associated with the processes of personalization, interpersonal attraction, and role transcendence, whereas social identities and identifications are likely to be associated with the processes of depersonalization, social attraction, and nontranscendence.*

> *Proposition 8: Relational identification will tend to generalize to identification with the salient collectives that are shared by the individual and his or her partner.*

RELATIONAL IDENTIFICATION: A TYPOLOGY

In this section we develop a 2×2 typology of relational identification based on the earlier distinction between role- and person-based identities, complemented with the distinction discussed below between positive and negative valence. We also delineate functions and dysfunctions of each type of relational identification.

Positive and Negative Valence

The valence of a role-based, person-based, or relational identity is its perceived attractiveness or desirability, where *positive valence* reflects desirability and *negative valence* reflects undesirability. Valence results from an individual's evaluation of an identity. As the individual enters a role-relationship, he or she is likely to evaluate the way in which the other person enacts—or is expected to enact—the relationship. This evaluation is not performed in the abstract, with the other as the sole referent; rather, it is done with regard to how the other meshes with oneself. The focus, in other words, is on how the other's role and personal qualities bearing on the role-relationship affect the nature of the relationship.

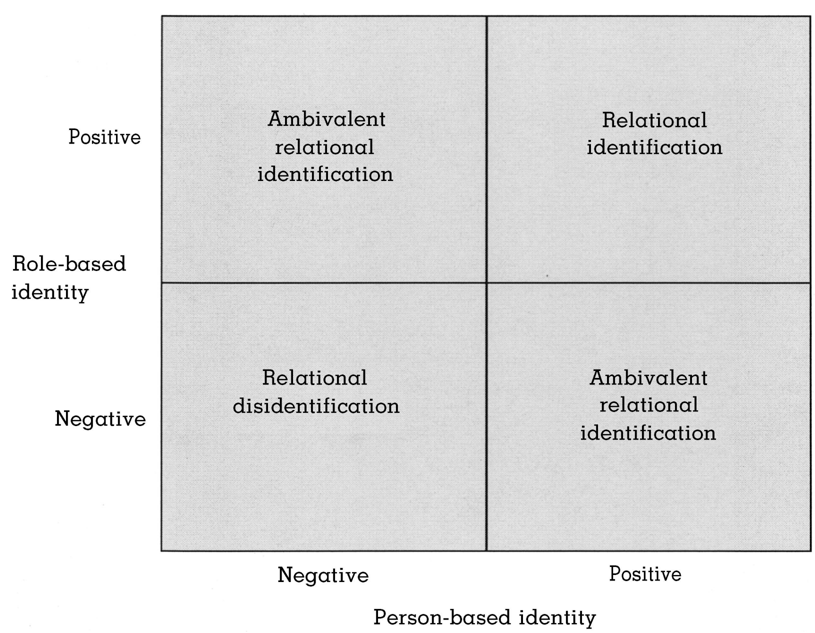
The initial evaluation is likely to be influenced by expectations stemming from the generalized and particularized perspectives held by the individual. For instance, based on stereotypic (generalized) beliefs about coworkers, one may expect to like another as yet unmet coworker and, therefore, approach the relationship with a positive frame of mind. Research on labeling theory and the Pygmalion effect suggests that such expectations may prove self-fulfilling as one's frame of mind influences one's initial behavior toward the other and, thus, the other's reciprocal behavior (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Eden, 1990). Additionally, as noted, the value of resources accruing from the role-relationship tends to affect one's evaluation of the relational identity (cf. Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978).

The more positive the evaluation of the role-relationship, the more likely one will identify with it (Aron & Aron, 2000). As relational identification grows, one tends to monitor the costs of social exchanges less closely and to take pleasure in contributing to the welfare of the role-relationship because of the inclusion of the relationship in one's own self-concept (Blau, 1964; Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

Complicating the issue, however, is the distinction between role- and person-based identities: one may view the valence of the other's role-based identity differently than his or her person-based identity. (For the sake of simplicity, we assume that one views one's *own* role- and person-based identities bearing on the role-relationship in positive terms.) For instance, a subordinate may evaluate his or her manager's role-based identity positively ("the manager provides important resources for doing my job") but the person-based identity negatively ("this manager is verbally abusive"). Evaluating the valence of both the role- and person-based identities results in qualitatively different types of relational identification.

As shown in Figure 2, the type of the other's identity (role-based, person-based) and identity valence (positive, negative) combine to form a 2×2 typology of relational identification. As discussed below, the typology indicates that individuals tend to fall into one of three types of identification: relational identification, relational disidentification, or ambivalent relational identification. This typology is loosely based on the "expanded model of organizational identifi-

FIGURE 2
A Typology of Relational Identification



cation" (Dukerich, Kramer, & McLean Parks, 1998; Elsbach, 1999; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; cf. Pratt, 2000), except that (1) the drivers of the typology are not high and low magnitude of identification and disidentification but the positive and negative valences of role- and person-based identities, and (2) the referent is relational rather than organizational identification. The typology facilitates predictions regarding the nature and outcomes of various forms of role-relationships, a topic not broached by the expanded model of organizational identification.

It should be noted that an individual will tend to have multiple and more or less separate evaluations of relational identification at the particularized level (i.e., a different assessment for each specific incumbent in a given role-relationship), as well as a global evaluation of relational identification at the generalized level (i.e., an assessment of the role-relationship apart from specific individuals). As noted, because the latter is often abstracted from many specific role-relationships, it tends to be more stable.

It should also be noted that we present the two dimensions (i.e., valence of role-based identity, valence of person-based identity) as dichotomous for pedagogical purposes, allowing us to describe each type of relational identification discreetly (i.e., relational identification, relational disidentification, and ambivalent relational identification). However, we recognize that these two dimensions are actually continua such that there are fine gradations among the three types of relational identification.

Relational Identification

As Figure 2 shows, we argue that relational identification occurs when the other's role- and person-based identities have positive valence. As defined above, relational identification is the perceived oneness with the role-relationship, and it can be either generalized or particularized.

Functions. Social identity theorists have argued that identification with a group or social category serves various functions, particularly (1) uncertainty reduction, by situating oneself in social space, and (2) self-enhancement (among other self-related motives), by becoming one with a larger and perhaps distinctive and prestigious social entity (e.g., Dutton et al., 1994; Hogg, 2001a). It seems likely that relational identification similarly provides uncertainty reduction via internalizing a role-relationship with its attendant goals, norms, and so on, as well as self-enhancement insofar as the role-relationship is regarded as distinctive and prestigious.

A key additional function of relational identification that has been largely overlooked by social identity scholars (see Cheney, 1983, and Pratt, 1998, for exceptions) is interpersonal connection and belongingness. Scholars have proposed that individuals have a fundamental need to identify with other individuals or social entities, variously termed a need for identification (Glynn, 1998), self-expansion motive (Aron & Aron, 2000), need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), desire for intimacy and interdependence (Brewer & Roccas, 2001), need for relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1991), and so forth. What these needs suggest is that individuals are motivated to identify with others as a means of attaining a human connection (in addition to the uncertainty reduction and self-enhancement lauded by SIT).

In relational identification, as noted, the self is expanded to include those facets of the complementary role and its incumbent(s) that bear on the role-relationship. Aron and McLaughlin-Volpe (2001; see also Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002; Fiske & Haslam, 1996; Gardner et al., 2002) document associations between self-expansion and tendencies to discriminate less between oneself and one's relationship partner when allocating resources, to adopt the perspective of one's partner, to confuse what one thought or did with what one's partner thought or did, to confuse one's traits with one's partner's traits, and to feel badly when one's partner does poorly (conversely, one may "bask in their reflected glory" [Cialdini et al., 1976], feeling pride in a partner's accomplishments). Such tendencies, in turn, may increase the likelihood the relational identification will be reciprocated. Moreover, the closer the relationship, the stronger these tendencies tend to be (Aron & Fraley, 1999). Indeed, given the expansion of self, helping one's relational partner is tantamount to helping oneself; as Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, and Neuberg's research demonstrates, "It is the commonality, not the compassion, that generates helping" (1997: 491).

The upshot of these tendencies is that relational identification is likely to foster an array of more distal interpersonal benefits, including empathy, mutual understanding, loyalty, cooperation, social support, altruism, and inrole performance (i.e., "work behaviors that are prescribed by formal job roles"; Hui, Law, & Chen, 1999: 4). However, at extremely high degrees of relational identification—termed *overidentification* below—inrole performance *beyond* the dyad may suffer if other important role-relationships are thereby starved of support.

Kahn (1998) and Flum (2001b) add that, in the context of organizational life, the interpersonal benefits noted above are essential for psychological growth. Relationships anchor the individual and help provide the confidence for exploration (cf. Bowlby, 1969). Kark and Shamir note that "it is commonly believed that follower growth and empowerment imply a greater follower independence" (2002: 84) from the leader, when, in fact, empowerment may flow from *tighter* supportive and developmental relational ties with the leader. For example, the number of individuals managed by Southwest Airlines' frontline supervisors is less than at other major carriers precisely because Southwest seeks to foster positive subordinate-supervisor relationships and a sense of empowerment through active and ongoing coaching (Gittell, 2003). In short, autonomy and individuality, far from being antagonistic to personal connections, actually *grow* from them; as Ryan puts it, "Individuation is . . . [not] something that happens *from* others but rather *with* them" (1991: 223; see also Fletcher, 1999, and Josselson, 1992).

Dysfunctions. Conversely, as some scholars have noted in the case of social identification (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1992; Dukerich et al., 1998), relational identification carries the risk of overidentification. That is, one may identify so strongly with the role-relationship that either (1) the relational identity remains chronically activated, even when it is not appropriate (e.g., a coworker who talks shop incessantly during a baseball game), or (2) when the relational identity *is* relevant, other relevant aspects of one's role(s) or individuality are suppressed (e.g., Katz & Genevay, 2002). In a real sense, one may lose oneself in the relationship, elevating it above other important considerations. For instance, Sias, Heath, Perry, Silva, and Fix (2004) describe a supervisor who, to maintain a friendship with a subordinate, offered to change the subordinate's performance evaluation.

We speculate that overidentification is more likely in role-relationships of unequal power, such as supplier-client and manager-subordinate, given the propensity of those with less power to defer to those with more power. Note that overidentification within relationships of unequal power may be problematic for *both* parties. For example, those with less power may be more susceptible to maltreatment (e.g., Tepper, 2000), whereas those with more power may receive less critical evaluation from others, resulting in lower-quality decisions (e.g., Jehn & Shah, 1997). Further, overidentification is more likely where one is less certain (than one's partner) about role expectations and one's own role capabilities. For example, newcomers to a role often defer to their more experienced peers and supervisors for cues about not only what to do but what to think and even feel (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 1999).

Overidentification with a particularized role-relationship may also be harmful to other role-relationships within the individual's network. Research on personal relationships shows that individuals in close relationships tend to exaggerate the person-based differences between their current partner and alternative partners (e.g., Buunk & Van Yperen, 1991; Johnson & Rusbult, 1989). Hinde argues that this devaluing of alternative partners helps "to develop and enhance positive views of oneself, one's partner, and one's relationship" (1997: 466), thus bolstering relational identification. Although bolstering certainly has its benefits, devaluing alternative partners may undermine other important role-relationships, given that organizations are built on networks of interdependent roles.

Finally, although not addressed by social identity theorists (to our knowledge), overidentification—in the relational sense—may tip into "codependency." Springer, Britt, and Schlenker have defined codependency as "a dependence on another's approval . . . designed to find a sense of safety, identity, and self-worth" (1998: 141; see also Allcorn, 1992). The notion of codependency assumes that the partner exhibits chronic and harmful behaviors toward the individual. Paradoxically, codependency involves a need to control the partner to ensure that self-worth continues to be derived from the relationship (Le Poire, Hallett, & Giles, 1998).

One's desire for approval leads to the subjugation of one's other identities to the relational identity. In other words, the relational identity becomes a surrogate for "who one is," at least in that setting. As a result, (1) one's other role- and person-based identities become suppressed or "forgotten," and (2) one internalizes portions of the other's role- and person-based identities that are not relevant to the role-relationship (e.g., an engineer internalizes a manager's disdain for the marketing department, biasing the engineer's own interactions with marketing).

Because those involved in a particularized role-relationship socially construct its lived meaning, the resulting relational identity can be viewed as a shared reality (Hardin & Conley, 2001). And because this shared reality is localized (i.e., specific to the partners), it may be only loosely coupled with the broader social constructions that typify the organization. Thus, codependency may result in a pathological relationship where role-relevant information is construed in a way contrary to organizational or social norms. Examples of codependency in organizational contexts include forms of abusive supervision where the targets essentially collude in their victimization (Burris, 1999; Tepper, 2000) and forms of corruption where individuals become willing accomplices and view corrupt practices as normal and acceptable (Ashforth & Anand, 2003).

Our discussion can be summarized as follows.

> *Proposition 9: The greater one's relational identification, (a) the more empathy, understanding, and loyalty one will have regarding one's partner and the more cooperation, support, and altruism one will display toward one's partner, and (b) the greater one's in-role performance will be, provided other important role-relationships are not denied support.*

However:

> *Proposition 10: The less power one has vis-à-vis one's partner and/or the more uncertain one is (relative to one's partner) about role expectations and one's own capabilities, the greater the likelihood one will overidentify with the role-relationship and become codependent.*

We should note, however, two countervailing tendencies to overidentification and codependence. First, optimal distinctiveness theory holds that individuals strive to balance the tension between assimilation in and separation from a relationship or group such that strong assimilation—overidentification—fosters a competing desire for separation (Brewer, 1991; Brewer & Roccas, 2001; see also Mashek & Sherman, 2004). Thus, for most individuals and situations, there are natural checks and balances on the magnitude of identification. Second, our earlier discussion of personalization suggests that, unlike social identification, relational identification is a meld of role- and person-based identities. It is the resonance between one's self-in-role and other-in-role that fosters identification such that the suppression of oneself or one's role apart from the relationship is not likely—although nonetheless possible.

Relational Disidentification

Just as positive valence encourages one to identify with a role-relationship, negative valence encourages one to *dis*identify with a relationship (cf. Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001), and just as identification facilitates self-definition ("I am"), so, too, does disidentification ("I'm not"). For example, Levy (1996, in Elsbach, 1999) reports how Scott McNealy, CEO of Sun Microsystems, described his very existence as an "Anti-Bill" (Bill Gates, then-CEO of Microsoft). This strong relational disidentification likely impassioned McNealy to continue in an aggressive and fiercely competitive battle for market share.

Relational disidentification occurs when the other's role- and person-based identities have negative valence. For instance, a manager may relationally disidentify with an internal auditor because of a negative role-based identity ("auditing slows down my work") and a negative person-based identity ("this auditor is rude").

Given the desire for cognitive consistency or balance (Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958), a negatively valent role-based identity may bias perceptions of the person. Because role-relationships are so consequential for individuals and organizations alike, individuals often perceive others through the prism of their role-relationships. As Holmes states, "Mental representations of *others* are not simply organized around person constructs, as has traditionally been assumed [in social cognition research], but instead, may reflect the type of *relationship* that exists with the perceiver" (2000: 473; see also Fiske & Haslam, 1996). The nature of the role-relationship may be projected onto the individual (e.g., a drill sergeant is seen as a nasty *person;* Ashforth, 2001; Humphrey, 1985). Thus, individuals are predisposed to dislike—as *people*—those who occupy roles that are perceived as oppositional in some way to their own.

Similarly, the valence of the person-based identity may color the valence of the role-based identity. Kahn (1998) describes a social service agency where the director was perceived by the social workers as cold and manipulative such that an otherwise positive role-based identity ("directors are supportive") came to be seen in negative terms ("directors are unsupportive"). However, given the greater stability of generalized relational identities, an individual may perceive a particularized relational identity in negative terms and yet retain a positive perception at the generalized level.

Functions. Although the literature on *social* disidentification in organizational contexts (primarily organizational disidentification) is sparse, it does imply that disidentification may also address needs for uncertainty reduction ("I am not like X") and self-enhancement ("I am better than X"; Elsbach, 1999; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). These functions similarly apply to relational disidentification. (However, we do not see a clear analog to the third key function of relational identification noted above, interpersonal connection; as discussed below, "disconnection" is likely to be quite dysfunctional in most organizational contexts.) In disidentifying with the other's negatively valent role- and person-based identities, one effectively states, "I'm not she" or "I'm not he," and, possibly, "I'm better than she/he." Thus, relational disidentification provides a valuable foil for clarifying the boundaries between who or what one is (or would like to be) and who or what one is not (or would not like to be). These functions are particularly important for newcomers, who often find it easier to articulate what they do not like than what they do like (Elsbach, 1999). Indeed, as Ibarra (1999) found for neophyte consultants and investment bankers, newcomers may test various role- and person-based identities and decide, via relational identification and disidentification, which ones best suit them.

Moving beyond the literature on social disidentification, relational disidentification may also be more or less functional for roles that are structured to be adversarial, akin to the courtroom roles of prosecutor and defense attorney. Examples include groups that institute a gadfly role to prevent groupthink (Janis, 1983) and managers who are encouraged to compete on behalf of their subunits for scarce resources. Individuals may be encouraged to disidentify, at least temporarily, to sharpen the differences between the adversaries, thereby allowing for a full (if polar) airing of the issues.

Dysfunctions. That said, just as organizational disidentification has been argued to be highly divisive (Dukerich et al., 1998), relational disidentification is likely to be very dysfunctional in role-relationships predicated on ongoing cooperation—the vast majority of relationships in organizations. If relational identification facilitates mutual understanding, loyalty, cooperation, and altruism, disidentification facilitates the opposite. Moreover, negative expectations may prove self-fulfilling, giving rise to negative behaviors that are likely to be reciprocated. Kahn (1998) describes the self-fulfilling prophecies that occurred in a social service agency when the director and social workers formed pejorative perceptions of each other's role- and person-based identities and, subsequently, withdrew from each other. The outcome of such processes is often a downward spiral, where the unpleasant experience of conflict may soon overshadow the initial reasons for the conflict, inhibiting resolution (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Dukerich et al., 1998). Disidentification is not a viable basis for a cooperative relationship and, thus, is likely to provoke the exit of at least one party.

The discussion can be summarized in the following propositions.

> *Proposition 11: The greater one's relational disidentification, the less empathy, understanding, and loyalty one will tend to have regarding one's partner and the less cooperation, support, and altruism one will tend to display toward one's partner.*

> *Proposition 12: Valence tends to be self-fulfilling; that is, the valence of a person-based, role-based, or relational identity may influence (a) the valence of the other two and (b) subsequent behavior vis-à-vis one's part-*

ner such that (c) the partner reciprocates both the valence and behavior.

Note that inrole performance is not included in Proposition 11. The impact of disidentification on inrole performance depends on the purpose of the role-relationship. For example, for roles predicated on adversarial relationships, disidentification may at times actually promote inrole performance.

Ambivalent Relational Identification

The remaining two cells of Figure 2 are termed *ambivalent relational identification*. According to the expanded model of organizational identification (Dukerich et al., 1998; Elsbach, 1999; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004), ambivalent identification refers to simultaneously identifying and disidentifying with a target. Ambivalent *relational* identification thus refers to the state in which the valences of the other's role- and person-based identities are mixed, whether at the generalized (e.g., clients) or particularized (e.g., Ms. Smith) levels of the relational hierarchy. For example, a subordinate may ambivalently identify with the manager-subordinate role-relationship because of (1) evaluating the manager's person-based identity as positive (e.g., "this manager is respectful of who I am as an engineer") and the role-based identity as negative (e.g., "I don't like having a nontechnical manager evaluate my contributions"), (2) evaluating the person-based identity as negative (e.g., "this manager is belittling") and the role-based identity as positive (e.g., "I like having a manager buffer client complaints, allowing me to focus on being an analyst"), or (3) evaluating certain elements of the person- and/or role-based identities as positive and others as negative (not shown in Figure 2).

Ambivalent relational identification is likely a common form of relational identification. Role- and person-based identities are multifaceted, and an individual is unlikely to perceive all of these facets as either positive or negative. Thus, "mixed feelings" may characterize many role-relationships. Research on personal relationships (Thompson & Holmes, 1996) and organization-based relationships (Kondo, 1990) suggests that individuals can indefinitely maintain a state of (moderate) ambivalence: "Indeed, a moderate level of ambivalence may actually indicate a balanced, realistic assessment of a partner" (Thompson & Holmes, 1996: 502).

However, the more salient a role-relationship is to the individual, and the more pronounced the differences in valence between important identity facets, the greater the dissonance that will be aroused—and the greater the dissonance, the greater the motivation to resolve the ambivalence (Festinger, 1957). Following Lazarus and Folkman (1984), resolution efforts may vary from problem focused to emotion or symptom focused. For example, problem-focused efforts may involve realigning the identities, such as through the renegotiation of role expectations (Schlenker, Britt, & Pennington, 1996; Swann, 1999), whereas symptom-focused efforts may involve deferring to the role- or person-based identity that is most salient, vacillating between the identities if they are equally salient, avoiding problematic issues, and "embellish[ing] a partner's virtues and minimiz[ing] faults" (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996: 80; Pratt & Doucet, 2000). In the absence of effective coping, it may become very difficult to endure a relationship marked by strong dissonance.

Functions. Because ambivalence represents mixed valences regarding a given role-relationship, its impact on uncertainty reduction, self-enhancement, and interpersonal connection are likely to be muted. For example, the "mixed message" of ambivalence creates uncertainty about whether to approach or avoid the relationship. However, ambivalence may nonetheless serve an important function. Given the potential for overidentification and the damage that disidentification can do to a relationship, ambivalent relational identification may at times be healthy for the individual—and the relationship. Ambivalence may hold at bay an overwhelming relational identity, thereby allowing cognitive and emotional space for one's personal- and role-based identities to survive (Ashforth & Mael, 1998; Fleming & Spicer, 2003). For instance, the head physician–medical intern relationship may be very important to an intern because of its impact on her medical career. Ambivalence may enable the intern to maintain perspective—"a certain ironic distance" (Ashforth, 2001: 81)—when subjected to strong feedback, whether positive or negative. Moreover, much as conflict may promote constructive change, ambivalence might signal divisive issues and trigger a constructive renegotiation of the role-relationship (Thompson & Holmes, 1996); while the negatively viewed aspects motivate change of some kind, the positively viewed aspects motivate the parties to make changes that ultimately support the role-relationship.

Dysfunctions. Conversely, based on our earlier discussion, we speculate that ambivalence is likely to be dysfunctional if it provokes strong dissonance that inhibits individuals from fully partaking in important role-relationships. For example, an individual may wish to be fully engaged with his or her coworker but may be put off by a personality clash. We suspect that such dysfunctional effects will be more pronounced when the ambivalence is fueled by negative person-based rather than role-based identities. When the negativity is attributed to the character or intent of the person, one becomes less inclined to display empathy, mutual support, loyalty, and other behaviors that suggest positive regard for the person in question (cf. Feather, 1999). Conversely, when the negativity is attributed to impersonal role demands that impel the person to act as he or she does, one may continue to feel some personalized resonance if not sympathy for the role incumbent.

An experiment by Shaban and Welling (in Glass & Singer, 1972) provides an illustration. Subjects were required to redo a long form, ostensibly before engaging in the actual experiment. Subjects were induced to blame the redo on either the fastidiousness of the clerk (person-based identity) or on strict regulations that the clerk was required to enforce (role-based identity). Subjects in the former condition were more likely to cheat on a subsequent laboratory task and to be less acquiescing in a bargaining game. It should be remembered, however, that because of the earlier-noted tendency to project a person's role onto the person (and vice versa), the valences of role- and person-based identities may blur somewhat.

This discussion suggests our final set of propositions.

> *Proposition 13: The more salient a role-relationship is, and the stronger the differences in valence between important identity facets, the more likely ambivalent relational identification will foster problem-focused and/or symptom-focused coping tactics.*

> *Proposition 14: Ambivalent relational identification is more likely to impair a role-relationship if the ambivalence is attributed to a negative person-based identity rather than to a negative role-based identity.*

> *Proposition 15: Ambivalent relational identification (a) reduces the likelihood of overidentification and (b) may trigger constructive conflict resolution.*

In summary, relational identification occurs if the valence of the partner's role- and person-based identities is positive, relational disidentification occurs if the valence is negative, and ambivalent relational identification occurs if the valence is mixed. The form of identification has profound consequences for the nature of the relationship.

DISCUSSION

We have argued that a focus on the role-relationship between two individuals (e.g., coworkers, manager-subordinate) provides unique insights into workplace identity and identification, beyond the conventional focus on individuals and collectives, that relational identities integrate person-based (individual) and role-based (collective) identities, and that integrating the personal relationship literature with the identity literature provides a holistic understanding of how one experiences work. Whereas the dominant perspective on identity and identification in organizations—SIT—suggests that relationships are depersonalized and based on mutual attraction to the collective, a relational perspective suggests that relationships are often personalized and based on interpersonal attraction. We have argued that relational identities and identifications exist in a cognitive hierarchy ranging from generalized schemas (e.g., manager-subordinate) to particularized schemas (e.g., Susan the manager–Bob the subordinate). We also have argued that role-relationships can spawn not only relational identification but relational disidentification and ambivalent relational identification, and we have discussed the functions and dysfunctions of each for the individual and organization.

Our analysis suggests at least four directions for future research. First, our contention that relational identities integrate the relevant person- and role-based identities of self and other warrants examination. While measures of role expectations can approximate the construct of role-based identity, a variety of individual-difference measures should be considered as proxies for person-based identity (e.g., self-monitoring, agreeableness, conscientiousness, gender). However, the construct of relational identity presents a measurement challenge because it implicates the individual and, thus, is idiosyncratic, whether generalized (Susan vis-à-vis her subordinates) or particularized (Susan vis-à-vis Bob).

There are at least three increasingly complex possibilities for measurement (with the last being most consistent with the construct): (1) treat relational identity as an unmeasured "black box" variable, and examine how role- and person-based identities interact to affect various outcomes (such as relational identification and performance); (2) treat relational identity as a nomothetic or etic construct, and examine common ways in which a given role-relationship (e.g., manager-subordinate) is enacted across dyads; and (3) treat relational identity as an ideographic or emic construct, and examine how individuals uniquely enact their respective role-relationships. In any event, given our related contention that role- and person-based identities interact over time in possibly unpredictable ways, it is important that researchers use methodologies that allow for *dynamic interactionism* (Hattrup & Jackson, 1996)—that is, that allow the variables to mutually influence one another (both within-self and between partners) as well as the unfolding relational identity (see also the social relations model; Kenny, Mohr, & Levesque, 2001). An example would be a longitudinal study of mentor-protégé relationships using data collection methods that provide thick descriptions (e.g., surveys, interviews, observations, diaries).

A second direction for research is the typology of relational identification shown in Figure 2. The types of identification can be measured by changing the referent of existing measures of social/organizational identification (see Haslam, 2001, for a review) and of organizational disidentification and ambivalent identification (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004) to the role-relationship. To what extent do the valences of role- and person-based identities predict the type of identification? What are the individual, relational, and organizational antecedents and consequences of each type of identification?

An example of a promising antecedent that researchers might study are traitlike predispositions to define oneself at least partly through close relationships, as measured by the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), the Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000), or the Relational, Individual, and Collective Self-Aspects Scale (Kashima & Hardie, 2000). Examples of promising consequences of relational identification are motivation, self-regulation, and self-evaluation. For instance, in identifying with a role-relationship, one will internalize the performance standards (whether high or low) and norms that define that relationship and evaluate oneself accordingly (cf. relational schemas; Baldwin, 1992, 1994); a perfectionist mentor may impart unrealistic standards that become entrenched in one's generalized manager-subordinate relational identity, leading to a career of personal frustration. Also, we did not consider shifts between the types of relational identification. Researchers should examine factors that may tip, say, relational identification into ambivalence or even disidentification (e.g., poor performance, trust violations).

Third, the concept of a cognitive hierarchy raises intriguing research issues. How exactly do hierarchies form as individuals enter new roles and role-relationships? Under what circumstances do generalized relational identities/identifications have a strong influence on particularized relational identities/identifications—and vice versa? How are particularized relational identities/identifications aggregated to influence generalized identities/identifications? For example, perhaps highly salient particularized relational identities exercise disproportionate influence (e.g., allowing one's protégé to strongly shape expectations of all subordinates). To what extent are relational identities/identifications compartmentalized both within levels (e.g., particularized) and between levels (generalized-particularized)? How do particularization and generalization influence the newcomer adjustment process? For instance, particularization may facilitate adjustment by providing diverse relational models for emulation (e.g., Ibarra, 1999), and generalization may facilitate adjustment by enabling a newcomer to place a particularized relationship in perspective (e.g., realizing that a partner's authoritarianism is not typical of partners).

Fourth, given that organizations are networks of complementary roles, individuals usually have multiple relational identities (e.g., with coworkers, subordinates, clients). Are there limits to how many role-relationships individuals can identify with? Are there synergies among the role-relationships? For example, perhaps a problematic relationship with a coworker may sensitize one to subordinates experiencing similar problems. Social network theory (e.g., Granovetter, 1985) may shed light on the dynamics of multiple relational identities and identifications. For instance, network centrality may help delineate how central role-relationships influence the initiation and maintenance of peripheral role-relationships within the individual's social network. And based on the concept of transference, Andersen and her colleagues (Andersen & Berenson, 2001; Andersen & Chen, 2002) argue that role-relationships with significant others create expectations that strongly influence new relationships, adding a dynamic element to multiple role-relationships. To what extent do individuals transfer relational identities inappropriately (e.g., treating subordinates as if they are one's children), and how might individuals balance the benefits of transference with those of openness to learning (Ashforth & Sluss, 2006)?

In conclusion, the constructs of relational identity and relational identification offer insights into generalized and particularized role-relationships that are largely overlooked by extant notions of individual identity and collective identity and identification. As such, relational identity and relational identification offer a fruitful perspective for understanding how individuals define themselves within organizational contexts.

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David M. Sluss (dmsluss@moore.sc.edu) is an assistant professor of management in the Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina. He received his Ph.D. in business administration from Arizona State University. His research explores how individuals find meaning in work through relationships, occupations, and organizations.

Blake E. Ashforth is the Russ Lyon Chair at Arizona State University. He received his Ph.D. in organizational behavior from the University of Toronto. His research concerns the ongoing dance between individuals and organizations, including identity and identification, socialization and newcomer work adjustment, and the dysfunctions of organizational structures and processes.