

---

## **Identities and Social Structure: The 2003 Cooley-Mead Award Address\***

PETER J. BURKE

*University of California, Riverside*

---

*The present paper examines existing links between identities and the social structure in the context of identity control theory. I point out that, whether social structure is conceived as positions (roles and group memberships) to which identities are tied, or as the human organization of resource flows and transfers that are controlled by the identity verification process, identities and social structure are two sides of the same coin. Building on this theme, I develop hypotheses that explore some of the implications of this identity—social structure link. Some hypotheses suggest contexts in which identity change is likely; others explore the various consequences of identity verification, which depend on the different ways in which identities are tied to the social structure.*

It is an exciting time in social psychology. In the past decade or two we have witnessed the growth and development of several lines of theory building in that “middle range” proposed by Merton (1957). These theories have developed through cumulative testing and building in systematic programs of research: expectation states theory, status characteristics theory, legitimation theory, affect control theory, comparison theory, power dependence theory, network exchange theory, social identity theory, affect theory of social exchange, and others. Theory has been tied too long to particular people such as Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Mead, or Parsons. Now we can point to theoretical ideas that are being developed and tested by many investigators, where the focus is on the ideas and not on the people, where change and development of theory are taken for granted, and where arguments are not about what so-and-so really said or meant—and, most important, where the ideas are subject to continuous testing through research.

Today I want to talk about one of those theories: identity control theory, of course. My general focus will be on the links between identities and social structure. First, I want to point out some of the connections between

identities and the social structure that already exist within the theory, which make the theory sociological rather than psychological: how the self must be understood as bound to the larger social arena as opposed to being an isolated set of identities. Then I want to begin exploring some hypotheses for further developing the links between identities and social structure. To start, let me briefly identify the core of the theory.

### IDENTITY CONTROL THEORY

Identities are the sets of meanings people hold for themselves that define “what it means” to be who they are as persons, as role occupants, and as group members. These meanings constitute what is called an identity standard. The identity standard serves as a reference with which persons compare their perceptions of self-relevant meanings in the interactive situation. When the perceptions match the meanings in the standard, people are doing “just fine.” Their identities are being confirmed or verified, and they will continue to act as they are; no changes are required. When, however, there is a disturbance that changes the interactive situation and thus the perceived situational meanings so that they no longer match the standards, people will act so as to counteract the disturbance and restore the match in meanings between perceptions and standard. This is the self-verification process; it

---

\* This paper was prepared for presentation at the 2003 Cooley-Mead Award Ceremony of the Social Psychology Section of the American Sociological Association Meetings, held in Atlanta. I wish to thank Jan E. Stets for comments on an earlier draft.

lies at the heart of identity control theory, hereafter called ICT.<sup>1</sup>

Neither we nor others know in advance exactly what behavior will bring about this state of a match between perceptions and identity standard. Because the disturbances are not predictable, the behaviors that counteract them cannot be known in advance. In light of this, it seems to make little sense to speak of “rational *action*” or “planned *behavior*.” Instead we need to talk about the goal states that our behavior accomplishes in spite of disturbances, disruptions, interruptions, accidents, and the contrivances of others.

Driving to work, for example, is not a particular set of actions but a series of accomplishments of intermediate goals. I get in the car (even though I have to move a bicycle out of the way first), I start the car (even though the steering wheel lock initially prevents me from turning the key), I drive out of the cul-de-sac (even though a construction firm’s trucks are blocking the street as they pour cement for a neighbor’s patio), and so on. If we think of these simply as behaviors in which we engage, we neglect the important fact that driving to work, for example, is accomplished in various ways in spite of unpredictable disturbances such as closed roads, excessive traffic, or high winds and dust storms. We cannot know in advance the exact behaviors that will accomplish the goal. As in the TOTE model of Miller, Galanter, and Pribram (1965), we can only observe our progress and note when the goal is accomplished.

For this reason we need to focus on the goals and how they are set or changed. We must ask not “*How* do people accomplish some goal?” but “*What* goals are people trying to accomplish?” The focus must be on the goals, not on the means. A variety of means is always available to accomplish some goal, and if one doesn’t work, we try another. These goals are the meanings and expectations that are held in the identity standard.

---

<sup>1</sup> This idea that people control their perceptions and not their behavior is the central thesis of perceptual control theory (Powers 1973) and is part of affect control theory (Heise 1979; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988), and self-verification theory (Swann 1983; Swann and Read 1981).

These meanings constitute the state of affairs that we strive to obtain and maintain as role occupants and group members. We know that we have accomplished the goals when we make our perceptions match the standards—in whatever manner we can.

## TIES TO THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

### *Cultural Naming*

ICT is very individualistic in its formulation: individual actions to change individual perceptions to match individual standards. What makes ICT sociological is that identities are tied to positions in the social structure; these positions in turn are defined by our culture. Culture makes available the categories that name the various roles and groups which, from one point of view, make up the social structure. People, as occupants of these positions, apply to themselves (as well as to others) these names as well as the meanings and expectations associated with them, as identities. These meanings (as identity standards) define the identities, as well as constituting the goals that someone located in a particular position obtains and maintains through the mechanism of identity verification.

Thus we are intimately tied to, and become a part of, the social structure that is named in the cultural categories. These are the “collective and distributive aspects of the same thing” that Cooley (1902:2) discussed when referring to the individual and society. These named categories, as identities, thus define us in terms of positions in society, and these positions in society are relational in the sense that they tie individuals together. For example, father is tied to son or daughter, and Rotary Club member is tied to Rotary Club member. Identity verification becomes the variable means through which the social structure is maintained as role links to role and group member links to group member. Therefore an inherent link exists between identity and social structure. The nature of that link, however, varies across identities and exerts an influence on both the identity and the structure.

### Meaning

To further discuss the link between identity and social structure, we must examine the thing that is controlled by identities—self-relevant meaning. Meaning is at the core of both ICT and the symbolic interaction framework out of which ICT has grown. The content of an identity, in the context of ICT, is a set of meanings held by an individual that constitutes “what it means” to be who one is. Indeed, the beginning of my work in identities was centered on the measurement of self-meaning and the incorporation of such measurement into an empirical research program (Burke and Tully 1977).

What an object or process means lies in our response to that object or process. Drawing on the work of Osgood and his colleagues (Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum 1957), ICT understands these responses to be bipolar, each response lying along a relevant dimension such as good and bad, dominant and submissive, or party going and studious. Yet because our responses are not only cognitive, meaning is not only cognitive; it is also affective. Future research must strive to more fully capture what it means to be who one is by expanding the areas of measured meaning to include both the cognitive and the more affective or emotional dimensions of responses.

Some of the dimensions of meaning along which we respond may be wired into us as biological organisms, but most are learned through shared experience, observation, and instruction. We learn the categories, as well as the meanings and expectations associated with those categories, from others around us and from the culture in which we are embedded (Stryker 1980). To this extent, the meanings are shared, and we can speak of symbolic meaning. Meanings are the responses to perceptions, and perceptions are tuned to the dimensions of meaning made available in our culture to all the roles, positions, and groups that exist within it. Meanings therefore are tied to the social structure and to the culture in which identities are embedded. The self-relevant meanings held in the identity standard are those made available by the culture to define the social structure itself.

To a certain extent, however, meanings are very often local. They are shared only within local settings of the social structure, and allow coordinated interaction, communication, and control of resources within the setting. As we move into roles and join groups, we learn the specifics of the shared meanings that allow us to interact in that local setting, but we find that these meanings often are shared less or not at all beyond the local interaction network.

Further, although some dominant dimensions of meaning exist across situations and even across cultures such as evaluation, potency, and activity (Osgood, May, and Miron 1975), studies of particular identities such as *student* (Reitzes and Burke 1980), *gender* (Burke and Cast 1997; Burke and Tully 1977), *old age* (Mutran and Burke 1979a; 1979b), and *spouse* (Burke and Stets 1999), have confirmed that relevant dimensions of meaning vary greatly across different roles. Also, because it is the specific meanings within the interactive context that persons control, these specific meanings must be measured if we are to understand the connection between identity and behavior (Burke and Reitzes 1981).

### Resources

Identities are tied to social structure in another way that can be seen when we take a different view of the nature of social structure. This other view is more ecologically oriented, and focuses on the flow and transformation of the resources that sustain us. It suggests that social structure itself may be conceived as the human organization of resource flows and transformations (Freese 1988).

We are familiar with the idea that people in some positions in the social structure have more access to resources, or to different resources, than persons located in other positions. This is part of our view of the stratification system. It is not always recognized, however, that this is the nature of the social system: the allocation of rights and responsibilities for controlling resources. From this view, to repeat myself, social structure *is* the human organization of resource flows and

transformations; social structure is the control of resources.

A key idea allowed ICT to go beyond the traditional limits of symbolic interactionist's concern with symbolic meanings: the idea that meanings pertain to resources, and that controlling meanings results in the control of resources. The concept of resources that Lee Freese and I (Freese and Burke 1994) developed, however, was not the usual notion of resources as consumable, valued, scarce commodities. Rather, we took the view (briefly) that resources are anything which functions to sustain persons, groups, or interaction, whether or not they are socially valued, scarce, or even an entity. We included as resources not only food, air, social support, and information, for example, but also abstract processes such as conditions of sequencing, of structuring, or of opportunity, *if those function to sustain us*. The focus is on the conditions and processes that sustain persons and interactions.

We also distinguished between active and potential resources. Active resources are active in the sense of currently supporting persons, groups, or interaction in the immediate situation—for example, chairs in which to sit, light by which to see, air to breathe, and comfort from others to feel. Potential resources are not functioning actively; they may not be present in the situation, or may not be in a form or position to function as active resources providing current support: these would include, for example, the car that is in the driveway, the clothes that are in the closet, and the hugs we are not receiving at the moment.

To active resources we tied the notion of signs; to potential resources we tied the idea of symbols (Freese and Burke 1994). Signs are a more general class than symbols: the latter are restricted to those signs which possess shared conventional meanings. Nonsymbolic signs provide a direct experience of the situation that is not necessarily shared (Lindesmith and Strauss 1956).

By responding to and controlling signs, we control active resources in the situation. By responding to and controlling symbols, however, we control potential resources that may become active in some future situation. Symbols thus allow planning, coordination,

and communication about things not present in the immediate situation. Recognizing that levels of reference exist for both sign and symbolic meanings in our identity standards helps ICT to explain the actions and behaviors that control these perceived meanings and, through them, control the active and potential resources that sustain us. We do this in the context of the positions in the social structure to which our identities are tied. Again, by verifying our identities, we obtain and maintain the goals that sustain the social structure through the distribution of resources.

This augmentation of the theory to tie meaning to resources also helps us to move beyond the problem of a theory of value (or utilitarian value). People act to verify identities, which means that signs and symbols are brought to configurations provided by identity standards. In this manner, resources are brought to levels set in the identity standards. The utility of a resource is the difference between the perceived level of the resource (what we have) and the level set in the standard (what we need). Negative utility is simply a perceived level of a resource in the situation which is higher than the level set in the standard. As a general rule, people simply attempt to counteract disturbances to their self-relevant perceptions and bring them into alignment with their identity standard; they act to increase perceptions that are too low and to decrease perceptions that are too high. If the perception is at the appropriate level, no further action is necessary.

Viewing resources in this manner provides additional insight because many of the goals we obtain involve controlling both the active and the potential resources that sustain us. The manipulation of actual and potential resources to achieve that sustenance is the key. People act to verify their identities; in doing so, in the face of distractions and disruptions, they enact the processes that define the social system.

Tying meanings to resources makes ICT relevant for issues pertaining to the political, economic, and social structures that evolve in a world of resources. Tying meanings to resources also makes ecological and evolutionary approaches relevant to the study of identities.

### *The Multiple Bases of Identity*

Another link between identities and social structure is revealed when we consider the nature of the ties between identities in different positions within the social structure. Because this is a developing area, I will say more about it and will offer some hypotheses that suggest future research issues. As mentioned already, many identities are based on people's locations within the overall social structure (Stryker 1980). ICT often has focused on people's role identities, such as student, worker, or spouse. These roles are defined within the culture and are part of the set of named categories that people in the culture learn to apply to themselves and to others. The meanings and expectations attached to these roles become part of the occupants' role identity and serve as standards guiding the verification process. These are the meanings that are perceived and controlled in the situation.

In a similar fashion, ICT, and to a greater extent social identity theory, have addressed group or category identities such as American, female, or club member. Again, these groups and categories are defined within the culture; the meanings and expectations associated with the categories become part of the members' social identity and serve as standards guiding the verification process. These two bases of identity (that is, group and role), being defined in the culture, serve the culture's purposes.

In recent years, ICT has begun to recognize a third basis on which identities are constructed, called person identities (Stets and Burke 1994; 1996). Person identities are based on culturally recognized qualities, traits, and expectations for an individual that are internalized, become part of the individual's person identity, and serve as standards guiding the verification process. A person identity therefore consists of the meanings and expectations that constitute not only the person's essence or core, but also all meanings that define who the person is as a person; such meanings are controlled and verified through interaction with others. For example, my person identity may include the level of dominance or submissiveness that represents me. It also may include levels of honesty, risk

taking, or a variety of other personal characteristics, which I maintain at levels that reflect who I am as a person independent of my roles or group memberships. Although these meanings define who I am as a person, they are made available by the culture in which I am embedded, and therefore are understood, communicated, and shared with others in the culture. Indeed, identity verification could not occur without this.

These three different bases for identities all operate in much the same way, with the same perceptual control processes and the same verification processes. They are distinguished from each other by the way in which each of the identities is tied into the social structure, and consequently by the way in which the verification process works.

A social identity based on membership in a group or category gives one self-meanings that are shared with others in the group (Stets and Burke 2000). One is tied to many similar others; in verifying the self as a group member, one receives recognition, approval, and acceptance from those others. One's ties to the others are like their ties among themselves.<sup>2</sup> One is verified as a member by being like the other members. Being verified in terms of a social identity reinforces group—nongroup distinctions, thus maintaining boundaries and supporting the continued differentiations and cleavages in the social structure.

In contrast, a role identity is tied to other members of the role set; verification comes by what one does, not who one is (Stets and Burke 2000). Verification is tied up in mutual, complementary, and reciprocal processes. The output of each role is the input to its counterrole. The verification of each identity depends upon the mutual verification of the counteridentity in a reciprocal process. One is verified not by being like the other, but by performing in a way that confirms and verifies the other's role identity and is matched

---

<sup>2</sup> There may be some differences based on the degree of prototypicality of the different members, which may form an emergent stratification system within an otherwise homogeneous group. This differentiation, however, borders on the emergence of roles within the group. I focus on the uniformity of being a group member and, through the verification process, on being accepted as such by others.

by the other's performance in a fashion that verifies one's own role identity. In contrast to the social identity, in which one is linked to many similar others, with the role identity one is linked to a few different others. Being verified in a role identity reinforces the importance of a role within a set of role relationships. Each role becomes necessary to sustain its counterroles and thereby sustains itself.

If verification of a social identity manipulates meanings and resources that sustain the group or social category on which it is based, and if the verification of a role identity manipulates meanings and resources that sustain the role, we may ask what the verification of a person identity sustains. The answer must be that it sustains the individual as a biosocial being. By acting, controlling, and verifying the meanings of who one is as a person, the person distinguishes himself or herself as a unique, identifiable individual<sup>3</sup> with qualities that other individuals can count on and use to verify their own person identities (or group or role identities). Individual names may set each of us apart and identify us in relatively unique fashion, but our meaningful traits and characteristics make us who we are: levels of dominance or submissiveness, levels of energy, being tense or easygoing, emotional or stoic, and so on.<sup>4</sup>

Let me recapitulate the different processes involved in the verification of identities according to the different bases, because hypotheses can be drawn from that recapitulation. I suggested that verifying the self as a group member involves being like the others and receiving recognition, approval, and acceptance from those others. I suggested that verifying a role identity involves not being like the other, but performing in a way that confirms and verifies the other's role identity, and is matched by

the other's performance in a fashion that verifies one's own role identity. Verifying a person identity, on the other hand, entails confirming highly salient personal characteristics.

We can hypothesize that because of these differences, the verification of each of these types of identities has different consequences: verification of social identities leads to increased feelings of self-worth, verification of role identities leads to increased feelings of self-competence, while verification of person identities leads to increased feelings of authenticity—being who we really are.

Other characteristics of the person identity also deserve comment. Unlike the role or social identity, the person identity is relevant across groups, roles, and situations. Person identities figure into all of our interactions and social behaviors because they are always on display and always under perceptual control. As a result of this constant activation, they are generally very high in the salience hierarchy. Furthermore, because of the constant relevance of these identities across relationships and memberships, the number of people who know us in terms of these characteristics is very high, indicating a high level of commitment to the person identity.

Because high salience and strong commitment characterize the person identity, I also suggest that it may operate like a master identity and that it may be higher in the control hierarchy than social or role identities. This would suggest that the meanings contained in our role and social identities tend to become consistent with those contained in our person identities. As we know, when the meanings contained in two identities are antithetical, conflict arises whenever the two identities are activated together. For example, if being masculine involves higher levels of dominance and if being a minister involves lower levels of dominance, then a male minister may experience conflict when one identity is trying to be more dominant and the other is trying to be less so. Both identities cannot be verified at the same time. Under these conditions we expect that the identity standards will shift to a "compromise" position so that both can be verified at the same time and the conflict can be removed.

<sup>3</sup> I am not suggesting that this is a form of individualism as opposed to communalism. An individual's unique aspects may include being group-oriented and staying in the background in a supportive manner.

<sup>4</sup> I reiterate that although these are person characteristics, the relevant dimensions of meaning upon which we as individuals draw are dictated by the culture in which we live. To be verified in interaction with others, those others must share the dimensions of meaning and must respond similarly to the symbols and signs that underlie the communication.

This may happen in different ways, which depend on the openness of society—that is, the degree to which people can choose their groups and roles (Serpe 1987; Thoits 2003).<sup>5</sup> Insofar as choice is possible, I suggest that the person identity is influential in a person's selections of role and social identities. One selects those role or social identities which share meanings with the person identity. In this way, with the corresponding meanings, the person identity may use role and social identities to achieve its own verification. From a societal point of view, the person identity is a sorting mechanism that operates to allocate persons to roles and groups in keeping with their skills and inclinations.

In a less open society, in which people have little choice in their roles and groups, the person identity will be shaped over time by the meanings in the group and role identities that they come to possess. When the meanings in one's person identity are not initially congruent with the meanings of the groups or roles in which one finds oneself, the person identity cannot be verified, and the person identity standards will undergo dynamic adjustment over time so that they come to match the existing meanings of the role or group (Burke and Cast 1997).

In a mixed society, these same dynamics also should hold true. When choice is possible, people choose roles and groups that provide opportunities to verify their person identity. When choice is not possible, as when one is born into a particular family structure, goes to school, or is drafted into the army, we can hypothesize that person identities will change to be more consistent with the meanings provided in the particular role or group.

Thus I hypothesize that there is a greater initial correspondence between the role or group identity meanings and the person identity meanings for these roles and groups we join by choice than for those groups or roles we are obliged to adopt.

I also hypothesize that the meanings of the person identity will undergo greater change over time (measured from the time at which they take on the position) for persons who were obliged to take on a role or group membership than for persons who chose their role or group.

Furthermore, to facilitate the verification of our person identities while in groups or roles, we may become personally involved with others with whom we have role or group relationships in order to engage our person identities. For example, when we become friends with others in counterrole relationships, person characteristics also become involved in interaction and in the verification process.

Thus I hypothesize that personal relationships between coworkers, for example, will be more likely to develop when there are fewer shared meanings between one's person identity and a role or group identity.

When the person identity is confirmed by verification of the social or role identity itself because of shared meanings, there is less need to find mechanisms such as the establishment of personal relationships for the confirmation of person identities in that context.

### *Networks, Identities, and Identity Change*

I focus now on group and role identities, which are directly linked to the social structure. Roles relate to counterroles within a role set (Merton 1957). Groups distinguish members from nonmembers. One important implication of these facts is that the definitions and meanings of these role and group categories must be shared among members of the (local) culture. Because of this sharing, as I noted earlier, communication, coordination, and mutual verification are possible. Role performance requires appropriate counterrole performance. Further, the more connections a person with a particular role identity has with others because of that role—that is, the greater the person's commitment to the role identity—the greater the number of people who must agree on the meanings involved if communication and coordination are to take place. A similar

---

<sup>5</sup> We may wish to distinguish between two types of openness. On the one hand, we can distinguish people's levels of freedom (vs. constraint) to choose their roles or group memberships (Serpe 1987); this is the focus in the present discussion. On the other hand, we can distinguish people's levels of freedom to leave roles or group memberships, once they have adopted them (Thoits 2003).

argument can be made for group identities: the greater a person's commitment to a group identity, the greater the number of people who must agree on the meanings involved.

This agreement among members of a culture about the meanings involved in a role or group constrains a person from using idiosyncratic meanings or trying to reshape the meanings of his or her role or group identity. As more people come to share those meanings, even pairs of individuals cannot readily negotiate new meanings for the role (or group) identities in question.

Thus I hypothesize that the greater the commitment to an identity, the more stable the meanings attached to the identity.

This does not mean that the meanings of such identities cannot or do not change. Our experience tells us otherwise. Yet, in view of the conservative inertia on such change, because of the number of people who must change their expectations and responses to the identity when meanings change, we must ascertain the conditions under which such change becomes possible or perhaps even likely.

The most obvious condition under which identity meanings may change, even when commitment is high, occurs when someone has the power to define or redefine the meanings and expectations associated with a particular role or group. A manager may redefine the meanings and expectations for a particular worker role (though unions may intervene in some cases). When this occurs, the worker must reshape the standards that are used to control his or her self-relevant perceptions as a worker.<sup>6</sup>

Another possibility is that the lower-status person simply adjusts to what the higher-status person says without any coercion, threat, or formal change in the definition. This latter possibility was observed by Cast, Stets, and Burke (1999) in the adjustment over time in the spousal identity of a lower-status spouse to the identity definitions provided by the higher-status spouse.

Therefore I hypothesize that identity change is more likely for persons who are low in status or power than for those who are high.

Innovation is a second source of change in identities, even when others are depending on a particular set of meanings. For example, finding a new, resourceful way to accomplish an important part of a role (thus verifying one's own role identity more easily) may change the expectations associated with the role. Such an innovation may spread and become part of the meanings and expectations for that role, especially if it also helps to verify the counterrole identity involved. In that case, the role partner also may endorse the change in the role expectations (meanings). This would have been the case, for example, for the first accountants who discovered the use of accounting software to facilitate their role. The subsequent change in the requirements for the position required knowledge of the use of such software, thus altering the meanings and expectations for the identity. In general, such innovation is more likely when a company or organization is starting up than later on, when its ways have become established.

I hypothesize that identity change due to innovation within a role is more likely to occur in new organizations (or organizations undergoing restructuring) than in established organizations.

A third basis for change in role identities would be a change in the context in which role relationships exist, such as shifts or changes in resources. A small company that suddenly is flooded with new orders is likely to find it necessary to change the expectations associated with many of the roles involved; people will adopt new identities as these new meanings become apparent.

I hypothesize that in organizations where there are substantial changes in resource levels, role identities are more likely to change than in organizations that have relatively constant resource levels.

A fourth basis for change in role identities lies in situations in which relationships are gained or lost as groups grow or shrink. As additional counterroles are created, expectations are changed or added for the

<sup>6</sup> It is possible, of course, that the worker will quit, and that a new worker will come in and take on the newly defined role identity.

new relationships. Further, expectations are changed as relationships are lost through attrition as the existing roles are restructured to take up the slack.

Thus I hypothesize that in organizations or groups that change substantially in size, role or group identities are more likely to change than in organizations or groups that are relatively stable in size.

In three of these hypotheses about identity change, the source of the change is exogenous, resulting from the location of the identities in the larger social structure and from changes in the flows of resources through that structure. Thus stability and change in identities are often a consequence of the connectedness of identities within the social structure and the distribution of resources (power) across the structure. Where the connections are many and stable, the identities are stable; where the connections are few or changing, or where the resource levels are unequal or changing, the identities are likely to change.

In the past I have also discussed identity change that is endogenous, indicating how identities that lack verification are subject to change. ICT suggests that if perceptions cannot be controlled to match the identity standard, the identity standard will change (slowly) to match the perceptions. This is accomplished through higher-level control systems' alteration of their outputs; these outputs are the standards for the lower-level control systems (identities). To this endogenous source of identity change, we should now add innovation that can arise from exploring the many ways in which goals can be reached.

These two sources of identity change, exogenous and endogenous, are related. One reason for the lack of verification (which is a source of endogenous change) may exist in the structural position or in changes in the structural position of the identity in question. Losing an assistant because of budgetary cutbacks, for example, makes the current identity difficult or impossible to verify. A higher-level standard concerning management of the overall workflow may bring about changes in the lower-level identity standard in question. In this way we see that

what happens at all levels in regard to identities is tied intimately to the social structure and to what happens there.

## CONCLUSION

In this brief presentation I have tried to outline some of the ways in which ICT is and should be a theory about the links between identity and social structure, and not simply a theory about the psychology of individuals. Granted that all of the mechanisms and processes of identity verification take place within the individual, the content of the identities that are being verified is most often provided by the culture in the context of the individual's social structural positions. Further, the resources and means for verifying identities are provided by one's location in the social structure. And finally, identity verification is the process by which the social structure itself is produced and reproduced (Serpe and Stryker 1987). Verifying a role identity helps to sustain the role and the counterroles to which it is attached. Verifying a group identity helps to sustain the group and to maintain the division between in-group and out-group.

Two factors are very strong stabilizers for the social structure. First, identity standards can be viewed as goals that are obtained by manipulating meanings and resources, in spite of the unpredictable disturbances that inevitably arise. This is especially true when we observe that these goals are set by the local culture for persons in specific roles or groups. Second, identity verification requires the cooperation and coordination of other persons—role partners or other group members—who share the same symbols and meanings. Because of this sharing among a number of persons, it is difficult for any one of them to change the meanings without a breakdown in the process.

Nevertheless, change can and does happen—to identities as well as to the social structure built on those identities. By studying where and how these changes occur, we will gain a fuller understanding of the "coin" that Cooley (1902) suggests is faced by identities on one side and by the social structure on the other. The hypotheses set forth here

will move us further along the road to that understanding.

## REFERENCES

- Burke, Peter J. and Alicia D. Cast. 1997. "Stability and Change in the Gender Identities of Newly Married Couples." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 60:277-90.
- Burke, Peter J. and Donald C. Reitzes. 1981. "The Link Between Identity and Role Performance." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 44:83-92.
- Burke, Peter J. and Jan E. Stets. 1999. "Trust and Commitment Through Self-Verification." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 62:347-66.
- Burke, Peter J. and Judy Tully. 1977. "The Measurement of Role/Identity." *Social Forces* 55:881-97.
- Cast, Alicia D., Jan E. Stets, and Peter J. Burke. 1999. "Does the Self Conform to the Views of Others?" *Social Psychology Quarterly* 62:68-82.
- Cooley, Charles H. 1902. *Human Nature and Social Order*. New York: Scribner's.
- Freese, Lee. 1988. "The Very Thought of Resources." Presented at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association, August, Atlanta, GA.
- Freese, Lee and Peter J. Burke. 1994. "Persons, Identities, and Social Interaction." Pp. 1-24 in *Advances in Group Processes*, vol. 11, edited by Barry Markovsky, Karen Heimer, and Jodi O'Brien. Greenwich, CT: JAI.
- Heise, David R. 1979. *Understanding Events: Affect and the Construction of Social Action*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lindesmith, Alfred R. and Anselm L. Strauss. 1956. *Social Psychology*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.
- Merton, Robert K. 1957. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Miller, George A., Eugene Galanter, and Karl H. Pribram. 1965. *Plans and the Structure of Behavior*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.
- Mutran, Elizabeth and Peter J. Burke. 1979a. "Feeling 'Useless': A Common Component of Young and Old Adult Identities." *Research on Aging* 1:188-212.
- . 1979b. "Personalism As a Component of Old Age Identity." *Research on Aging* 1:37-64.
- Osgood, Charles E., William H. May, and Murray S. Miron. 1975. *Cross-Cultural Universals of Affective Meaning*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Osgood, Charles E., George J. Suci, and Percy H. Tannenbaum. 1957. *The Measurement of Meaning*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Powers, William T. 1973. *Behavior: The Control of Perception*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Reitzes, Donald C. and Peter J. Burke. 1980. "College Student Identity Measurement and Implications." *Pacific Sociological Review* 23:46-66.
- Serpe, Richard T. 1987. "Stability and Change in Self: A Structural Symbolic Interactionist Explanation." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 50:44-55.
- Serpe, Richard T. and Sheldon Stryker. 1987. "The Construction of Self and Reconstruction of Social Relationships." Pp. 41-66 in *Advances in Group Processes*, vol. 4, edited by Edward Lawler and Barry Markovsky. Greenwich, CT: JAI.
- Smith-Lovin, Lynn and David R. Heise. 1988. "Analyzing Social Interaction: Advances in Affect Control Theory." New York: Gordon and Breach.
- Stets, Jan E. and Peter J. Burke. 1994. "Inconsistent Self-Views in the Control Identity Model." *Social Science Research* 23:236-62.
- . 1996. "Gender, Control, and Interaction." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 59:193-220.
- . 2000. "Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63:224-37.
- Stryker, Sheldon. 1980. *Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Version*. Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin Cummings.
- Swann, William B., Jr. 1983. "Self-Verification: Bringing Social Reality into Harmony with the Self." Pp. 33-66 in *Psychological Perspectives on the Self*, edited by Jerry Suls and Anthony Greenwald. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Swann, William B., Jr. and Stephen J. Read. 1981. "Self-Verification Processes: How We Sustain Our Self Conceptions." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 17:351-72.
- Thoits, Peggy A. 2003. "Personal Agency in the Accumulation of Role-Identities." Pp. 179-94 in *Advances in Identity Theory and Research*, edited by Peter J. Burke, Timothy J. Owens, Peggy A. Thoits, and Richard T. Serpe. New York: Kluwer/Plenum.

**Peter J. Burke** is a professor and the chair of sociology at the University of California, Riverside, and a former chair of the ASA Social Psychology Section. His current work extends identity theory into areas of emotion, group relations, and social learning. Recent publications include

Advances in Identity Theory and Research, with *Timothy Owens, Peggy Thoits, and Richard Serpe* (Kluwer/Plenum, 2003), "Interaction in Small Groups," in *Handbook of Social Psychology*, (Kluwer/Plenum, 2003), and "A Theory of Self-Esteem," with *Alicia Cast* in *Social Forces*, 80.

Delivered by Ingenta to  
peter burke  
Date: 2006..10..03..20..56..

