

Examining Emotions in Identity Theory*

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In this study I develop theoretically the role of emotions in identity theory by examining individuals' emotional reactions to identity nonverification (in a positive and a negative direction) and identity verification, which occurs once versus repeatedly, and which is perpetrated by a familiar other compared with an unfamiliar other. Predictions from identity control theory (ICT) are used to guide the analysis. An experiment simulates a work situation and invokes the worker role identity. Workers either receive feedback that is expected, given their worker identity standard (identity verification); feedback that is more positive than they would expect (a lack of identity verification in a positive direction); or feedback that is more negative than they would expect (a lack of identity verification in a negative direction). The workers' emotional reactions' to each situation are investigated. Contrary to ICT, identity nonverification in a positive direction results in positive (not negative) emotions; the persistence of verifying and nonverifying feedback decreases (rather than increases) the affective response to the feedback; and feedback from a familiar other does not significantly influence actors' emotional reactions. The findings raise some questions about current thinking in ICT and suggest important extensions for emotions in identity theory.

In its current form, identity theory has two slightly different emphases and thus generates two somewhat different programs of research (Stryker and Burke 2000). Stryker and his colleagues (Serpe and Stryker 1987; Stryker 1980; Stryker and Serpe 1982, 1994) focus on how social structure influences one's identity and, in turn, behavior. Burke and his associates (Burke 1991, 1996; Burke and Cast 1997; Burke and Stets 1999; Cast and Burke 2002; Stets and Burke 1996, 2000; Tsushima and Burke 1999) emphasize the internal dynamics of the self that influence behavior. There is an important similarity in Stryker's and Burke's views of the role of emotion in the identity process, and I develop this aspect of identity theory in the present research.

The role of emotion is somewhat more fully developed in Burke's version of identity theory (identity control theory, or ICT) than in Stryker's. According to Burke (1991, 1996), emotion reflects the degree of congruence between the meanings of one's identity in the situation and the meanings held in the identi-

ty standard. Continuous congruence (identity verification) registers positive emotion; incongruence, or a lack of identity verification (in either a positive or a negative direction) that cannot be handled automatically within the self-regulatory system, registers negative emotion (Burke and Stets 1999; Cast and Burke 2002).

According to Stryker (1987), identities that generate positive feelings will be played out more often and will move up in the salience hierarchy, while identities that repeatedly cause negative feelings are less likely to be played out and will move down. In addition, identities that are played out inadequately will generate negative feelings, thereby signaling that the meanings of the self in the situation are not supported by others.¹ Thus the lack of support from others as to who one is registers negative feelings for Stryker in the same way as a lack of identity

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¹ Similarly, McCall and Simmons (1978) argue that if a prominent identity has been threatened (by others who do not support one's role performance), an individual should experience a negative emotional response. In line with this view, Ellestad and Stets (1998) found that when nurturing behavior was linked to fathering rather than to mothering, women whose mother identity was prominent were more likely to report jealousy.

verification registers negative feelings for Burke.²

Of theoretical concern in this research is (1) whether the lack of verification produces negative emotion despite its direction; (2) whether a *recurrent* lack of verification generates more intense emotions than that which occurs once; and (3) whether lack of verification in which the source is a *familiar other* affects individuals more strongly than that in which the source is an *unfamiliar other*. These theoretical ideas have been outlined previously (Burke 1991); they are tested here for the first time. In general, the *direction* of identity nonverification, *how often* an actor receives identity discrepant feedback, and *who* is giving the discrepant feedback, are thought to influence one's emotional reactions.

I conduct an experiment that simulates a work situation and invokes the worker identity. Participants (workers) perform some simple tasks, and they learn that another subject (the manager) in the situation will give them points/feedback following their task performance. Participants receive points that reflect either (1) what they would expect to receive in the worker role (verification), (2) more than they would expect to receive (lack of verification in a positive direction), or (3) less than they would expect (lack of verification in a negative direction). The points are administered at prearranged intervals throughout participants' task performance (persistent identity verification) or only once, after task completion (nonpersistent identity verification). Before participants begin their work, they either are given the opportunity to get to know the other person who will be involved in the study with them (familiarity condition), or they are not given this opportunity (unfamiliar condition). Self-reports on participants' feelings are obtained throughout the study.

² The terms *lack of verification*, *identity incongruence*, *identity disconfirmation*, and *identity discrepancy* are used interchangeably throughout to refer to a lack of correspondence between persons' identity meanings in a situation and the identity meanings in their standard.

Theoretical frameworks other than identity theory could be used in the current study, given its design. For example, various theories and empirical programs in justice research (see review by Hegtvedt and Markovsky 1995) have an affinity with identity control theory: They entail a justice standard (an identity standard in ICT terms), rewards in a situation (feedback of identity verification or the lack thereof in ICT), a cognitive evaluation of congruence/incongruence (justice/injustice; the evaluation of identity verification/nonverification in ICT), and positive emotions such as satisfaction for an overreward and negative emotions such as anger for an underreward (slightly different for ICT because identity nonverification in either a positive or a negative direction registers negative emotions, as discussed below). Points received in this study could simulate a state of justice/injustice (expected reward, overreward, and underreward), and the emotional reactions to these different states could be examined. In general, the process by which justice is attained in a situation is similar to that by which one's identity is verified in a situation. Given the resemblance of identity control theory to distributive justice theories, the findings in this research could inform studies using distributive justice theories. I address this point below when I discuss the import of this research for theory development.

THEORY

At the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role: a person incorporates into the self all the meanings and expectations associated with the role and its performance (Stets and Burke 2000). Persons always act within the context of social structure in which they and others are labeled, such that each recognizes the other as an occupant of positions or roles in society (Stryker 1980). Thus actors assume role identities in society. Emotion in identity theory is related to how effectively one's role identity is played out.

Stryker (1987) indicates that inadequate role performance leads to negative emotion and adequate role performance produces

positive emotion.³ For example, an individual may see herself as “academically inclined” in the student identity but may fail on an important test. If others in the situation have difficulty supporting her as “academically inclined,” she may feel angry and may be less likely to play out the student identity in the future. On the other hand, if she reaches her goal of performing well on the test, thus confirming her identity, others may praise her, she will be happy, and she will be more likely to invoke the student identity in the future. In a similar fashion, Burke (1991, 1996) argues that when one cannot maintain self-relevant meanings in the situation, which are congruent with one’s identity standard (identity incongruence), negative emotions will emerge. When self-relevant meanings in the situation match the meanings held in the identity standard, the result is positive emotion. Therefore Stryker and Burke agree that (1) negative emotion results when identity meanings in the situation “fall below” the evaluative meanings held in the identity standard, and (2) positive emotion results when one’s identity is confirmed. Burke (1991) claims further that when identity meanings in the situation exceed the identity standard, negative emotions also will be felt. Stryker does not discuss this issue.

Directionality of Nonverification and Emotions

Identity control theorists only recently have begun to test the directionality of an identity discrepancy and the corresponding emotions that result (Burke and Harrod 2002). Not all theorists share Burke’s assumption that negative emotions will emerge regardless of the direction of the discrepancy. Although theorists from other research traditions agree that negative emotions result from receiving identity meanings that are more negative than one’s identity standard, they do not agree that negative

emotions will emerge from obtaining identity meanings more positive than one’s own identity standard.

Like identity control theorists, for example, affect control theorists assert that emotion signals whether events confirm or disconfirm one’s identity in a situation (Heise 1979; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988). When an event in a situation disconfirms one’s identity by creating transient impressions that differ from the fundamental sentiments associated with the identity, one will feel negative emotions if the transient impressions fall below the fundamental sentiments. Affect control theorists, however, maintain that when transient impressions are more *positive* than the fundamental sentiments of the identity, one will feel *positive*, not *negative*, emotion, as in identity control theory (Averett and Heise 1987).

Carver and Scheier (1990, 1998) reach a conclusion similar to affect control theorists in their theory of self-regulated behavior. In their views, self-regulated behavior is a process in which actors *monitor* the results of their actions in situations in relation to their salient reference values. Emotion emerges from a second monitoring process that occurs in tandem with the first, which they label *meta-monitoring*. Here, emotion cues actors as to whether their *rate of progress* toward their goal (i.e., reducing a discrepancy between their outcomes in a situation and their goal or standard) is higher than the standard, lower, or at the expected pace. If progress toward a goal is made at a pace equal to that set by the standard, no emotion is felt. If progress is made at a lower rate, negative emotion is the result. When progress is made at a rate higher than that set by the standard, however, positive emotion is experienced.

Negative emotions may not emerge when persons’ identity standards are exceeded because individuals are receiving *self-enhancing* information. Also, people’s pursuit of positive evaluations is considered one of the most powerful motives underlying their quest for self-understanding, followed closely by self-verification or the pursuit of evaluations that confirm their existing self-view (Baumeister 1998; Sedikides 1993). In keep-

³ This idea is consistent with the work of Cooley ([1909] 1962) and Shott (1979): they view negative emotion as emerging when others do not accept the self-image that one has built up, and positive emotion as emerging when normative, moral conduct receives approval from others.

ing with this view, Gecas (2001) argues that the self-concept is a motivational system; and individuals are motivated to evaluate themselves favorably (the *self-esteem motive*) and to view themselves as consistent entities (the *self-consistency motive*). Gecas goes on to identify the self-esteem motive as the more prominent motive.

One might argue that although positive feedback might provide inconsistent information for people who do not hold positive self-views, it is gratifying rather than distressing and generating negative emotions. Indeed, this argument is consistent with self-verification theory (Swann 1990; Swann, Rentfrow, and Guinn 2003). Swann points out, however, that this positive emotional reaction is conditional on at least two principles: the *accessibility principle* and the *investment principle* (Swann et al. 2003).⁴

According to the accessibility principle, self-verification strivings will operate if actors have the mental resources to access their self-view. If they are deprived of this self-view, strivings toward positivity will emerge. Thus, if individuals receive positive feedback and then are asked immediately how this makes them feel, they will have no reason to consider their self-views and will report positive emotions, even if these feelings conflict with their negative self-view. They are simply *categorizing* the feedback as good or bad, and providing a reaction that is consistent with that feedback. Yet if actors are given the opportunity to compare the feedback with the way they see themselves, this *comparison* process might elicit negative emotions because they are rating the accuracy of the feedback in relation to their own self-views. In this way, self-verification strivings emerge from a relatively complex process whereby representations of the self that are stored in memory are compared with feedback in the situation. In other words, the self-enhancement process depends on imme-

diately affective reactions to social feedback, while the self-verification process depends on less immediate cognitive reactions to such feedback.

In the investment principle, strivings toward self-verification will emerge if individuals are invested in the self-views: that is, if they are highly certain of their self-views, and if these self-views are important to them. When self-views are uncertain, held less firmly, or unimportant, individuals are more inclined toward positivity strivings. In a related argument, Swann and his colleagues maintain that people are more likely to access their self-views and seek self-verification when their behavior is highly consequential. When the stakes are not high, they prefer more favorable information.

Given that identity control theory is at odds with existing theories and research on the emotional reaction to positive nonverification of an identity, I test competing hypotheses on this relationship. The results enable me to determine which prediction is supported most strongly. According to ICT, the first hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 1a: The lack of identity verification in a positive direction will produce more negative emotions than will identity verification.

According to affect control theory and other theories such as the theory of self-regulated behavior,

Hypothesis 1b: The lack of identity verification in a positive direction will produce more positive emotions than will identity verification.

We know from ICT that identity verification should lead to positive arousal. Indeed, research is consistent with this point (Burke and Stets 1999). The above hypothesis indicates that the positive emotions which stem from positive nonverification will be stronger than the positive emotions resulting from identity verification.

Finally, because identity theorists agree with theorists from other traditions that negative emotions result from an identity discrepancy in a negative direction,

Hypothesis 2: The lack of identity verification in a negative direction will produce more

⁴ According to a third principle, the *idiosyncratic-worlds principle* (which I lack the space to discuss and which is less relevant to this study), individuals use their idiosyncratic self-definitions to simultaneously sustain positivity and strivings toward verification (Swann et al. 2003). Essentially, individuals assign more importance to what they are good at; when they achieve success, they feel good and are verified.

negative emotions than will identity verification.

Persistence of Nonverification and Emotions

Emotions vary in strength or intensity. Stryker (1987) argues that the strength of an emotion is a function of an identity's importance in one's salience hierarchy: more important identities produce a stronger emotion. Burke (1991) similarly argues that stronger emotions result from the disruption of more salient and more strongly committed identities. He outlines two additional factors, however, that would influence the strength of an emotion and that are tested formally here: how *often* an identity is disrupted and *who* is the source of the identity disruption.

According to Burke (1991), *frequent* interruptions in the identity verification process, or what I label *persistent* interruptions, should lead to more *intense negative arousal* than infrequent or occasional interruptions. The more intense negative reaction occurs regardless of the direction of the nonverification. This idea of the more negative response is borrowed from Mandler's (1982) interruption theory of stress. According to Mandler, distress is felt when organized action is interrupted; viewed in another way, an expectancy is not confirmed. The distress that is instigated by the interruption signals that something is wrong, and an actor responds by attempting to adapt to the interruption. The more repeated the interruption, the more the actor is unable to initiate and sustain organized activity, and the more distress will occur.

In ICT terms, an interruption constitutes a break in the smooth-flowing cybernetic feedback loop that characterizes the identity process. The hallmark of the identity process is that the meanings held in one's identity standard are congruent with the ongoing meanings of the self in the situation. When an interruption occurs, identity standard meanings become discrepant with self-in-situation meanings, and negative emotion is the result. The interruption may be a function of the feedback loop breaking on the *output* side of the identity model: there, one's *behavior* does not generate feedback from others, indicating

that who one is in the situation approximates one's identity standard meanings (Burke 1991, 1996). Alternatively, the interruption may be a function of the feedback loop breaking on the *input* side of the identity model: there, self-in-situation meanings are not *perceived* as congruent with identity standard meanings, no matter what behavior is enacted (Burke 1991, 1996). In general, the more frequent the interruptions, the more the continuously operating identity processes is prevented, and the more negative the emotions that ensue.⁵

Thus, according to ICT,

Hypothesis 3a: A persistent lack of identity verification will strengthen negative emotions more than a nonpersistent lack of identity verification.

An alternative to the above hypothesis is that negative emotions may *weaken* because the identity standard has changed rather than that negative emotions are *strengthened* by persistent nonverification. This phenomenon is identity change. In recent developments of ICT, it is argued that while changes in behavior occur (in response to an interruption) to bring self-relevant meanings in the situation into congruence with the identity standard, identity change is also occurring because the identity standard is simultaneously moving toward self-relevant meanings in the situation (Burke 2002, 2003, 2004). Burke argues that identity changes occur more slowly than changes in behavior. He points out, however, that when behavior does not reduce the discrepancy (for whatever reason), the identity standard will continue to change toward the perceptions until the discrepancy no longer exists. A strong, negative emotional response would signal a discrepancy between self-in-situation meanings and the meanings in the standard. Therefore, a weaker negative emotional response would signal an increasing correspondence between self-relevant meanings in the situation and identity standard meanings—thus identity change.

⁵ In an indirect test of this idea, Cast and Burke (2002) found that the persistent lack of self-verification over time leads to an increasing loss of self-esteem, a self-feeling.

Identity change may be more likely to occur if individuals are less strongly invested or committed to an identity (Burke 2003). The greater one's commitment to an identity, the more others expect the meanings of an identity to be enacted continually; thus the greater the costs of changing the identity. Identity change also may occur if someone in the situation has the power to redefine the meanings of an identity for a person (Burke 2004). For example, an employer may redefine the expectations (thus the meanings) tied to an employee's work role. Alternatively, a lower-status person simply may adjust to a higher-status person's views even if the higher-status person does not overtly redefine the meanings and expectations for an identity.⁶ In line with this idea, research on newly married couples revealed that lower-status spouses, over time, were more likely to adopt the meanings of the spousal identity provided by the higher-status spouse than the reverse (Cast, Stets, and Burke 1999).

The processes described above may operate in the current study. Participants may be less strongly committed to the worker identity in the laboratory than in the corporate world. Alternatively, they may adjust to the feedback that they receive from the "manager" in this study, and thereby, may change their identity standard because the manager has more power and status than they possess. Given recent theorizing on identity change, I test rival predictions on the relationship between a persistent discrepancy and the strength of the emotional reactions. Once again, the findings will help determine which prediction enjoys more support. Therefore I propose an alternative to ICT:

Hypothesis 3b: A persistent lack of identity verification will weaken negative emotions more than a nonpersistent lack of identity verification.

⁶ Identity change may have other sources as well, but space limitations do not permit me to discuss all of these. Such sources may include changes in resources available for use, or changes in the groups to which identities are tied (Burke 2004). A change of meanings in the environment that persists and that cannot be countered easily is an additional source of identity change (Burke 2004).

Familiarity and Emotions

Burke (1991) hypothesizes further that an interruption in the identity verification process, either from a significant other or from what I identify as a *familiar other*, also should lead to more *intense negative arousal* than an interruption from an unfamiliar other. According to Burke, significant others are those with whom one has built up a set of mutually verified expectations. Through patterns of interaction, the parties support each other's identity in situations. The meanings that have been developed form a tightly organized process. If this process is interrupted, it should produce more distress than the interactive patterns that emerge (and that are unlikely to be so supportive or so highly patterned) with nonsignificant others. This point is consistent with Mandler's (1982) assumption that the interruption of more highly organized processes will lead to higher levels of autonomic arousal.

To extrapolate from this idea, a familiar other is likely to be perceived as someone who will verify one's expectations. Consistent with this is the assumption that a familiar other is safe and less likely to harm one than is an unfamiliar other (Berscheid and Reis 1998). Indeed, evidence on the "mere exposure" effect reveals that simply providing another with some exposure to a stimulus is enough to generate liking for that stimulus (Zajonc 2000). Thus, negative arousal should be more likely to occur when a familiar other violates the implicit expectation of security, predictability, and verification of expectations than when an unfamiliar other does so. Therefore, following ICT,

Hypothesis 4: The lack of identity verification in which the source is a familiar other will produce more negative emotions than when the source is not a familiar other.

METHOD

Subjects and Design

This study took place in a laboratory that simulated a work situation. Participants were volunteers recruited from classes at a large northwestern university; they were paid \$10 for participating. During the study, partici-

pants performed three simple clerical tasks. Before they began the tasks, they either were given the opportunity to get to know another person who would be involved in the study with them (familiarity condition), or they did not receive this opportunity (unfamiliarity condition).

After each task, the participants either were given points/feedback for their work (more points than expected, the expected number of points, or fewer points than expected) after each task (persistence), or they received points after they completed all three tasks (nonpersistence). After each task or at the end of all three tasks, participants were asked a series of questions, including their emotional reactions to the points/feedback they received after their performance. This is a 3 x 2 x 2 experimental design (feedback, persistence, familiarity).⁷ Each condition included 23 persons; six cells each contained an extra person. I obtained data from a total of 282 participants.

Procedure

Two persons (a participant and a confederate) were ushered into a room by a supervisor. The participant did not know that the other was a confederate. The supervisor told them that an advertising agency, Highlights, had been asked by one of the major automobile manufacturing companies to run an ad campaign for a new car that would soon enter the market. The agency was seeking feedback to assess its campaign strategies. The individuals were to perform three clerical tasks, which were the tasks that Highlights employees would perform for the campaign. After this introduction, they were administered a brief background survey.

After filling out this questionnaire, the individuals either got acquainted with each other for 10 minutes or were not given this opportunity.⁸ If they received the opportuni-

ty to get acquainted, the supervisor left the room, and the 10-minute conversation was videotaped. After 10 minutes, the supervisor reentered the room and administered a survey to each person regarding his or her reactions to the other. Among other features, the survey contained a liking scale (Rubin 1973) and a trust scale (Larzelere and Huston 1980). If participants did not receive the opportunity to get to know the other, the survey was administered after they filled out the background questionnaire. They were asked to fill out the survey on the basis of their first impression of the other.

Next, the supervisor "randomly" assigned the participant to be the worker for the study and the other (the confederate) to be the manager.⁹ The participant then was taken to a second room to watch a five-minute instructional video, which demonstrated the three clerical tasks that he or she would perform.¹⁰ The participant in the video received 100 points after the manager's evaluation that he or she did "average" work. This set the worker identity standard or expectation that average work was worth 100 points. The participant was told that while he or she was watching the video, the supervisor would instruct the other, in another room, on how to be a manager for the study. Because the other was the confederate, however, no instruction was given. After the participant finished viewing the video, work on the tasks began.

you feel very happy; what was so special about that experience?"

⁹ Participants picked a number between 1 and 10. The confederate always chose first and chose 3. After the participant selected a number, the supervisor told the two that the folded papers in the box in front of them contained numbers ranging from 1 to 10. In reality, however, all of the papers carried the number 7. Then, according to the number the participant chose, the supervisor did a quick calculation in his head. The supervisor explained that whoever chose furthest from the number that was picked in the box (if the participant chose 1 or 2) or closest to that number (if the participant chose 4 through 10) would be the worker; the other would be the manager. Thus the participant was always the worker and the confederate was always the manager.

¹⁰ Two different "instructional" videos were made to allow the participant in the video to perform the tasks under the condition of nonpersistence or persistence.

⁷ Another condition, sex, had no effect in the analyses; thus it is not discussed.

⁸ A sheet of 12 questions was provided as a guide for getting to know each other. Questions included "What is your favorite activity?" "What qualities do you think are most important for a good friendship?" and "Describe an experience from your life that made

The manager started by reviewing with the participant the three simple clerical tasks that Highlights employees would perform.¹¹ The manager stated that after completion, he or she would give the participant 100 points for average work, 150 points for above-average work, and 50 points for below-average work. To ensure that the participant understood this, the participant was asked to fill out a brief survey after the manager's explanation.¹² This procedure set the worker identity standard/expectation of 100 points for average work, consistent with what is seen in the video; it also reiterated that the manager would determine how many points the participant received.

In all conditions, the participants received feedback indicating that they had done average work; thus they should expect 100 points. In the positive lack of verification, participants received feedback that they had earned 150 points for their work. In the negative lack of verification, participants received feedback that they had earned 50 points.

Depending on whether one was assigned to the nonpersistent or the persistent condition, the feedback/point tally was administered either at the end of all three tasks or after each task. Performance in each condition was evaluated by weighing the participant's work (in ounces) on a scale, and then comparing this with a bogus evaluation sheet

posted on a wall, which identified (in ounces) what constituted below-average, average, and above-average work.¹³ If one was assigned to the nonpersistent condition, one's emotional reactions to the manager's feedback were obtained at the end of the three tasks; otherwise they were obtained after each task (persistent condition). Then the participants were debriefed. In total, each person spent about an hour in the experiment.

Manipulation Checks

After receiving their points, participants were asked a series of questions. To determine whether the worker identity standard of "100 points means average work" had been adopted, participants were asked, "After the manager told you how you performed on these tasks, how many points did you expect the manager to give you?" Response categories included 50 points, 100 points, or 150 points. Because the managers always told the participants that they had done average work, participants should have responded that they expected 100 points. The mean response for this question was 100.89, not significantly different from the mean value of 100 ($t = .71, p = .48$).

To determine whether participants gave the manager responsibility for the rewards they received, participants were asked, "Who determined how many points you got for these tasks?" Almost all of the participants (96%) said the manager was responsible for the reward(s) they received.

Measures

Identity nonverification in the worker role is coded 1 if participants received feedback of 150 points when they expected 100 points (nonverification in a positive direction), 0 if participants received 100 points (identity verification), and -1 if participants

¹¹ The three tasks were as follows: (1) alphabetizing promotional letters on the new car by the selected family's last name (listed at the top of the promotional letter); (2) copying each family's name and address from the top of the promotional letter onto a Highlights mailing envelope and clipping a return envelope addressed to Highlights to the promotional letter and mailing envelope; and (3) taking a new stack of promotional letters and doing task 2 again, but keeping the promotional packets in alphabetical order as one proceeded. Each task was performed for six minutes, and participants were videotaped throughout their participation. Extensive pretesting revealed that six minutes was long enough for participants to develop an attitude toward the tasks.

¹² If the manager saw that the participant was answering incorrectly on the survey, he or she reviewed the reward schedule with the participant. In addition, if the participant did not identify the manager as the person who would determine how many points she or he received after task completion, the manager reviewed the administration of points, emphasizing that the manager would determine the number of points.

¹³ When the manager placed the participant's completed work on the scale, the participant could see only the back of the scale; thus he or she could not learn how much the work weighed. In addition, the bogus evaluation sheet was not posted directly in the participant's field of vision. Both the position of the scale and the strategic posting of the evaluation sheet prevented a participant's attempt to evaluate his or her work in relation to the sheet.

received feedback of 50 points when they expected 100 points (nonverification in a negative direction). *Persistence* is coded 0 for nonpersistence and 1 for persistence. *Familiarity* is coded 0 for unfamiliar (no opportunity to get to know the other) and 1 for familiar (opportunity to get to know the other).

For the *negative* and *positive emotions*, participants were asked to circle a number corresponding to the various ways they felt after receiving the points for their tasks. For the negative emotions, participants were asked to rate on a scale from 0 to 10 (“Didn’t feel the emotion at all” to “Intensely felt the emotion”), how much they felt anger, fear, sadness, and disgust.¹⁴ Many scholars agree that these are primary or fundamental emotions, which serve as the foundation for all other emotions (Kemper 1987). Some believe that they are basic because they evoke a distinctive facial expression across cultures (Ekman and Friesen 1975). Others maintain that they are primary because they function as reactions to the environment (Plutchik 1980). For example, anger and the desire to attack *destroy* a barrier to the fulfillment of one’s needs, while fear and the associated act of running away *protect* the organism. Given that emotions may be understood along three dimensions of meaning (evaluation, potency, and activity), these four emotions have in common a negative evaluative orientation or hedonic tone, although they differ in potency and activity. This is supported by their evaluative ratings in the affect control theory (ACT) dictionary: anger = -1.45 (males), -1.77 (females); fear = -1.64 (males), -1.63 (females); sadness = -1.88 (males), -2.22 (females); disgust = -1.81 (males), -2.18 (females) (Heise 2004).¹⁵

For the positive emotions, participants were asked to rate on a scale from 0 to 10

(“Didn’t feel the emotion at all” to “Intensely felt the emotion”), how strongly they felt satisfied and grateful after receiving the points for their tasks. Like the negative emotions listed above, satisfaction is regarded as a primary emotion (Kemper 1987). Gratitude is considered a secondary emotion (Kemper 1987; Turner 1999). Kemper (1987) argues that secondary emotions, unlike primary emotions, are socially constructed and emerge when one is experiencing one or more of the primary emotions. Kemper holds that gratitude stems from the primary emotion of satisfaction, when a person acknowledges that another has acted benevolently. Turner (1999) maintains that the mixing of primary emotions to produce secondary emotions involves the dominance of one primary emotion, with a lesser amount of another. According to Turner, gratitude emerges from a combination of the dominant primary emotions of satisfaction/happiness and a smaller portion of aversion/fear. Satisfaction and gratitude are positive on the evaluative dimension. Again, this point is supported by their evaluative ratings in the affect control theory dictionary: gratitude = 1.09 (males), 1.66 (females); satisfaction = 2.51 (males), 2.93 (females) (Heise 2004).¹⁶ In this study, the correlation between these two items is .78, $p < .01$.

Identity theory does not make predictions about specific emotions; it predicts only whether actors will experience negative emotions (given identity nonverification) or positive emotions (for identity verification). Therefore I first factor analyzed the items for positive and negative emotions. As shown in Table 1, they formed a single underlying dimension with an eigenvalue of 2.89 on the first factor. All other eigenvalues were less than 1. The items were standardized (mean = 0; variance = 1) and

¹⁴ Previous researchers have measured emotions using a one-item scale (Driskell and Webster 1997; Hegtvædt 1990; Lovaglia 1997; Lovaglia and Houser 1996; Ridgeway and Diekema 1989; Shelly 2001; Sprecher 1986).

¹⁵ These evaluation ratings are based on the most recent ACT dictionary, from more than 1,000 male and female undergraduate students attending Indiana University in 2003 (Heise 2004).

¹⁶ The evaluation ratings of satisfaction are taken from the most recent ACT dictionary, based on male and female students at Indiana University. Because ratings of gratitude are not available in this most recent dictionary, I used the evaluation ratings that were obtained from more than 1,200 male and female students at the University of North Carolina in 1978 and from undergraduates at Indiana University in 1985 (Heise 2004).

Table 1. Principal Components Factor Analysis of Emotions

Items	
Sad	.64
Fearful	.37
Angry	.84
Disgusted	.83
Satisfied	-.75
Grateful	-.62
Eigenvalue	2.89
Ω	.92

then summed; a high score represented positive emotions.¹⁷ The omega reliability for this scale is .92.

Analysis

I conducted *t*-tests for Hypothesis 1 (1a and 1b) and Hypothesis 2. I divided the sample into those whose identity was disconfirmed in a positive direction, those whose identity was disconfirmed in a negative direction, and those whose identity was confirmed. I then examined their emotional reactions to the disconfirming as well as the confirming feedback. For Hypothesis 3 (3a and 3b) and Hypothesis 4, I examined the mean differences of persistence (presence or absence) and familiarity (presence or absence) on participants' emotional reactions to nonverifying feedback. I used two-way ANOVA tests of significance to see which of the hypotheses received the most support.¹⁸

¹⁷ In this procedure, the values on the scale will range from negative to positive.

¹⁸ An alternative method of estimating the emotions associated with each of the identity conditions is to use the entire sample and include the identity conditions as dummy variables. This is inappropriate, however, because participants were included in the analysis for which there are no theoretical predictions as to how they would feel, given the emotion under examination. For example, in estimating the effects of persistence and familiarity on negative emotions for those whose identity was disconfirmed, the analysis would include individuals whose identities were confirmed. Further, there are no predictions indicating how persistence and familiarity would be related to negative emotions when persons' identities were confirmed. Thus the results would be contaminated by including these individuals in the equation for negative emotions.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents a *t*-test of the means for negative emotions when participants receive feedback that is more positive than their identity standard, compared with feedback that is consistent with what they expect. The results show that the lack of positive verification does not produce more *negative* emotions than does identity verification; rather, it produces more *positive* emotions. Thus the prediction from ICT (Hypothesis 1a) is not supported, and the prediction that follows from other theories supports Hypothesis 1b. When individuals receive feedback that exceeds their identity standard, they immediately feel good rather than bad, even though the feedback is inconsistent with their identity standard. Therefore the ICT prediction that identity nonverification generates distress may be overstated or conditional.

To further examine people's pursuit of feedback that is reinforcing or gratifying, I examined the means for emotions when persons receive feedback that is consistent with their worker identity standard. The results are presented in Table 3. Not surprisingly, identity verification produces more positive emotions than identity nonverification. The results displayed in Table 2, however, show that identity nonverification in a positive direction produces *more* positive emotions than identity verification. Thus individuals in this study are clearly showing reactions to positivity.

Table 2. T-Test of Means of Emotions for Identity Nonverification in a Positive Direction

Condition	Emotions			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>P</i> -Value
Identity Nonverification	.48	.50	94	.05
Identity Verification	.16	.62	94	

Table 3. T-Test of Means of Emotions for Identity Verification

Condition	Emotions			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>P</i> -Value
Identity Nonverification ^a	-.08	.76	188	.05
Identity Verification	.16	.62	94	

^a Identity nonverification includes a positive and a negative direction.

Table 4 presents the differences in means for negative emotions when participants obtain feedback that is more negative than their identity standard. These results show that negative emotions are significantly more likely to be associated with identity disconfirmation in a negative direction than with identity confirmation. This finding supports Hypothesis 2. Almost all theorists, including ICT theorists, maintain that we will feel bad when meanings in the situation fall below our standard. In turn, these negative feelings will motivate us to do something differently in the situation in order to minimize, if not eliminate, the negative feelings.

The results reported in Table 5 show the difference in means of the emotions when participants receive nonverifying feedback (in both a positive and a negative direction) that is persistent (coded 1) or not persistent (coded 0), and in which the source is a familiar other (coded 1) or an unfamiliar other (coded 0). Persistence tends to influence participants' emotional reactions, but not in the manner predicted in ICT. A persistent lack of identity verification does not strengthen participants' negative emotions (Hypothesis 3a); rather, it tends to *weaken* those emotions (Hypothesis 3b). This is revealed in the direction of the mean values from a negative emotional state, given nonpersistent, nonverifying feedback (mean = $-.17$), to a more neutral (or less negative) emotional

state (mean = $.01$), given persistent, nonverifying feedback.

To further investigate the effect of persistence, once again I divided the sample into those whose identity was disconfirmed in a positive direction and those whose identity was disconfirmed in a negative direction. The results are presented in Table 6 (nonverification in a positive direction) and Table 7 (nonverification in a negative direction). The findings reveal that people's negative emotional state is reduced significantly by persistent, nonverifying feedback in a negative direction. When participants receive nonverifying feedback once, their emotional reaction is more negative (mean = $-.78$) than when they receive such feedback more than once (mean = $-.50$). Thus Hypothesis 3b is supported only partially because it does not apply to nonverifying positive feedback.

If negative emotions reflect a discrepancy between self-in-situation meanings and meanings held in the identity standard, when the emotions become *less* negative, it suggests an increasing correspondence between self-in-situation and identity standard meanings. This may reflect identity change. In view of the findings shown in Tables 2 and 3, participants appear to be responding positively (and rather immediately) to nonverifying positive feedback. In reacting thus, they may already have shifted their standard upward,

Table 4. T-Test of Means of Emotions for Identity Nonverification in a Negative Direction

Condition	Emotions			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>P</i> -Value
Identity Nonverification	-.64	.54	94	.05
Identity Verification	.16	.62	94	

Table 5. Marginal Means and Standard Deviations of Emotions by Persistence and Familiarity for Identity Nonverification ($N = 188$)

	Persistence		Familiarity	
	0	1	0	1
Mean	-.17	.01	-.09	-.06
<i>SD</i>	(.80)	(.71)	(.76)	(.77)
$F_{1,185}$	2.73		.09	
<i>P</i> -Value	.10		ns	

Table 6. Marginal Means and Standard Deviations of Emotions by Persistence and Familiarity for Identity Nonverification in a Positive Direction ($N = 94$)

	Persistence		Familiarity	
	0	1	0	1
Mean	.41	.55	.49	.47
<i>SD</i>	(.53)	(.44)	(.41)	(.57)
$F_{1,91}$	1.77		.04	
<i>P</i> -Value	ns		ns	

Table 7. Marginal Means and Standard Deviations of Emotions by Persistence and Familiarity for Identity Nonverification in a Negative Direction ($N = 94$)

	Persistence		Familiarity	
	0	1	0	1
Mean	-.78	-.50	-.68	-.59
<i>SD</i>	(.54)	(.51)	(.54)	(.54)
$F_{1,91}$	6.61		.63	
<i>P</i> -Value	.01		ns	

and may have done so rather quickly. Participants may be more resistant to changing their identity when feedback is negative. Consequently they may need persistent nonverifying feedback before they gradually begin to change their identity standard in a more negative direction. This may explain why we see the significant effects of persistence on nonverifying feedback in a negative direction but not in a positive direction.

The effect of familiarity is not significant. Therefore I find no support for the ICT prediction that the lack of identity verification from a familiar source produces more negative emotions (Hypothesis 4). In this study, familiarity is a proxy for the significance of the relationship between actors. A random half of the participants were given the opportunity to get acquainted with the other (the confederate) for a brief period. In comparison with the unfamiliar condition, participants in the familiar condition reported more liking for the other ($t = -8.96, p < .01$), and saw the other as a potential friend ($t = -4.65, p < .01$), as a person to invite to a party ($t = -5.39, p < .01$), as someone they would be happy to introduce to their friends ($t = -6.06, p < .05$), and as a person they would be happy to work with on a job ($t = -5.70, p < .01$).¹⁹ The effect of familiarity may be nonsignificant because getting to know another for a short period in the laboratory may be very different from a history of interaction, in which mutually verified expectations have been built up. Getting to know another briefly may have been insufficient for developing the expectation that the other would verify one's expectations.

Overall, I find support for the ICT prediction that negative emotions emerge from a lack of identity verification, but only for identity nonverification in a negative direction. For identity nonverification in a positive direction, positive rather than negative emotions surfaced. Furthermore, these positive emotions are significantly stronger than those which stem from identity verification. This indicates that the self-enhancement

process needs to be incorporated more fully into the ICT model.

How often one receives nonverifying feedback is important, but not in the manner predicted by identity control theory. Persistence does not strengthen one's affective response; it diminishes that response, and this effect occurs largely for negative nonverification. Individuals are likely to resist meanings which require that they lower their identity standard, and they may do so only after repeated exposure to such meanings. Once again, we see that the ICT model requires more consideration of the direction of the nonverification because direction appears to produce different outcomes for actors.

DISCUSSION

Positive and Negative Nonverifying Contexts

In this study I operationalized identity nonverification by administering (or taking away) rewards/goods (in the form of points). Goods are inherently positive and gratifying: when individuals receive feedback that signals more of a "good," it implies that the recipient is "good." In other words, "good people get good things." When people's identity standards are somewhat exceeded, given an unexpected good, they may quickly adjust their standard to the new level: first they may feel *self-enhancement*, and then self-verification of the new standard. This would be the case particularly, as some theorists have argued, if self-enhancement is the more powerful motive underlying the self-concept. The findings presented here are consistent with strivings toward self-enhancement (rather than self-verification) because an unexpected good led to positive feelings. Furthermore, these positive feelings were even stronger than the positive feelings that resulted from identity verification; this finding suggests that positive nonverifying feedback is especially affirming for actors.

Although feedback that is more positive than one's standard is enhancing, it is still nonverifying because it is not consistent with the identity standard. Thus the two meanings associated with the nonverifying feedback are *inconsistent* with each other. Why did individuals in this study not respond nega-

¹⁹ Participants in the familiar condition were not more trusting of the other than in the unfamiliar condition. This finding is not surprising because trust takes time to develop in a relationship.

tively to the nonverifying meaning of the feedback? I propose at least two explanations.

First, the participants may have been responding rather immediately to the positive feedback, without considering whether it was consistent with their own standard. Had participants been given more time to think about the meaning of their feedback, negative emotions that one would anticipate from a nonverifying context might have emerged more strongly. This is the *accessibility principle* of Swann and his colleagues (2003).

Second, participants may not have been strongly committed to the worker identity in the laboratory. In other words, asking participants to put themselves in a role does not ensure that they will invest in that role and in the corresponding meanings associated with that role. Under such conditions, individuals are inclined more toward positivity strivings than self-verification strivings. This is the *investment principle* of Swann and his associates (2003). If either or both principles were operating in this study, the more positive emotions resulting from positive, nonverifying feedback could be explained.

The meaning of negative nonverification is very different from the meaning of positive nonverification. When individuals receive feedback that signals less of a good, not only are they not being verified; the meaning of such feedback also implies that the individual is “not a good person.” In other words, “bad things happen to bad people.” The lack of verification, coupled with the message that lies behind it (one may be “not good”), leads individuals to report only negative feelings. The two meanings of the negative disconfirmation are *consistent* with each other: the disconfirmation is both nonverifying and nonenhancing.

Given the above discussion, what are we to make of the ICT prediction that nonverification leads to negative feelings? ICT may not be wrong in explaining how individuals respond to nonverifying feedback. Rather, the prediction of feeling negative emotions may be conditioned on the presence of certain elements in the situation: for example, relative commitment to the role identities and having the time and opportunity to compare the accuracy of feedback with the self-

views. In addition, self-enhancement strivings may need to be incorporated into ICT. When people obtain an unexpected “good,” they may quickly adjust their standard to that “good,” given the desire to feel favorably about themselves. Therefore, both the self-verification motive and the self-enhancement motive may be operating in the ICT model. We would merely need to outline the conditions under which each operates.

Persistence

The results of this study not only challenge the ICT assumption about the relationship between identity nonverification and negative emotions. They also challenge the ICT prediction that more frequent nonverification of identity will produce more intense negative emotions. The findings show that persistent identity nonverification dampened rather than strengthened participants’ negative affective state, although further investigation revealed that this occurred primarily for negative nonverification.

According to ICT, a strong negative affective response signals a discrepancy between meanings of the self in the situation and meanings held in the identity standard, while a weaker negative response (or a more positive response) signals greater correspondence between the two. In general, the results of this study suggest that when persons repeatedly receive nonverifying feedback, they adjust their standards to the feedback. This suggests identity change. It may be the case regardless of the direction of such feedback, although it is clearly the case for negative nonverifying feedback.²⁰ Participants may be changing their identity standards and thus evidencing identity change for several reasons: (1) they may lack commitment to their identity; (2) they may be responding to status/power differences; (3) they may be unable to take corrective action to alter the feedback received or (4) the disconfirming feedback may lack stability.

Laboratory studies have succeeded in changing a person’s self-concept; nonlabora-

²⁰ This is not unlike the movement of one’s comparison level toward repeatedly experiencing outcomes of bad fate (Thibaut and Kelley 1959).

tory studies have enjoyed less success in doing so, as in the case of clinicians working with their clients for years in intensive therapy (Swann and Hill 1982). This may be the case because individuals are less strongly committed to identities created in the laboratory. Greater commitment to an identity increases one's strength to maintain correspondence between self-in-situation meanings and identity standard meanings (Burke and Reitzes 1991). Rather than shifting one's standard toward the feedback one is receiving, as revealed in the weakening of emotions over time, one will continue to feel strong negative emotions and act to reduce the discrepancy when one's commitment is greater. Even so, the fact that participants may be less fully committed to an identity in the laboratory does not make the self that is enacted there any less important or less relevant for theory construction or theory testing. People often enact identities to which they are not committed; the findings of this research suggest that these identities may be subject to greater change.

A second reason for identity change may be the power differences in the situation, and who has the power to define identity meanings. In this study, the manager/confederate (high-status) was providing nonverifying feedback to the worker/participant (low-status). The participant could have been adjusting his or her view to that of the manager, thereby adopting the view of the more powerful person in the situation. Indeed, other research has shown that weaker persons in a situation are more likely to take on the views of the more powerful (Cast et al. 1999).

With respect to the inability to take corrective action, Swann and Hill (1982) argue that the important element in self-concept change is what individuals are able to do after they receive social feedback which tends to disconfirm their self-view. Swann and Hill found empirical support for their argument, that if individuals received feedback which was inconsistent with the way they saw themselves and if they received no opportunity to refute this feedback, they were more likely to align their subsequent view of themselves to the feedback. Alternatively, if people received feedback that was inconsistent with the way they saw

themselves and if they *did* receive an opportunity to refute the feedback through interaction with the other who provided the feedback, their self-concept did not change much. Essentially, by challenging the feedback and defending their self-view, people were more likely to ward off the influence of the feedback on their self-view (identity standards).

In this study, subjects did not receive the opportunity to refute the feedback they received from the manager. If they had been given the opportunity to interact with the manager and to express how they felt about the feedback, they might not have adjusted their standard, and their emotional responses might not have weakened. Thus the effect of persistence as outlined in identity control theory may depend on the extent of one's opportunity to refute feedback about the self in the situation.

In connection with the above, an actor's standard also may shift when he or she sees that the disconfirming feedback is stable and cannot do anything to change it. The design of this study did not include changes in the feedback (amount of points) for each task. For example, when participants were assigned to the disconfirming conditions (either negative or positive), the feedback they received after each task was respectively 50 points or 150 points, no matter what they did. In acclimating to the feedback they received, participants may have been reacting in the same manner as those in a state of "learned helplessness." Learned helplessness is the psychological reaction of passive resignation that occurs when individuals are exposed to stable, uncontrollable events that block their goals (Peterson, Maier, and Seligman 1993).

Individuals do experience routine, seemingly uncontrollable conditions in which they are not verified. They may find themselves underpaid or regularly passed over for a promotion, though their worker identity carries the meaning of competence. Also, they may experience identity disconfirmation across settings such as the home (Steil 1994) or close relationships (Sprecher 1992). Arrangements that initially are nonverifying come to be perceived over time as verifying, or at least as less nonverifying. Unless actors remove

themselves from the nonverifying feedback, they may resign themselves to it.

In view of the effects of persistence, future research must test the effects of the processes described above. We can identify whether an emotional response intensifies when individuals are strongly committed to the identity, when the intense response occurs among status equals, when people receive the opportunity to challenge the nonverifying treatment they receive from another, or when the feedback from another changes over time, particularly toward verification.

CONCLUSION

Not all nonverifying situations carry the same meanings; in this study I have begun to outline how ICT hypotheses may need to be modified to take this variability into account. Given the affinity of identity control theory with distributive justice theories, one could argue equally that actors do not interpret all situations of injustice in the same way. Thus, regardless of the theories tested, we must examine contextual factors surrounding actors' affective experiences in situations. In ICT, positive nonverification may produce negative emotions, but only conditionally, as when people have the opportunity to think about the nonverifying information (and thus to be prone to self-verification strivings) rather than being asked to evaluate it immediately (and thus to be inclined toward positivity strivings). Similarly, in distributive justice research, it has been argued that more of an overreward is needed to generate a negative state of a magnitude equal to that of an underreward; that emotional responses to an overreward are positive unless the departure from the standard is large (Hegtvedt 1990; Jasso 1980).²¹ The positive emotions resulting from an overreward may ensue because actors are guided by the self-enhancement motive—the desire to feel good, given an unexpected reward. By examining contextual factors such as the availabil-

ity of persons' self-views in the situation (with which they can compare their actual outcomes), we may develop more precise theoretical predictions.

The ICT prediction that people should feel stronger negative emotions with recurrent nonverification also may be conditional, as when individuals are committed to the identity that is being challenged, or when they lack the opportunity to alter the nonverifying feedback. If such conditions are absent, individuals may adjust their identity standard in the direction of the nonverifying feedback. For this reason, the aspect of identity change must be incorporated into the relationship between verification and emotion. Correspondingly, in distributive justice research, theorists may wish to consider whether people's investment in a justice standard in a situation influences their emotional responses. In addition, if individuals are unable to engage in justice-restoring activities in a situation, they may wish to examine how cognitive adjustments produce particular emotional reactions.

In this study, familiarity with the source of the nonverifying feedback was not significant in producing stronger negative feelings, as ICT would predict. Getting to know another for only a brief time, however, might not have been sufficient to approximate a more significant relationship. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to bring together friends, dating partners, or even spouses in the laboratory and then compare their emotional reactions with strangers' responses. ICT and distributive justice research also might develop theoretically by examining relationships in terms of status differences, and how different standards based on one's structural position may be applied in the same situation to produce different emotional responses.

Overall, in light of ICT, the nonverification process produced unexpected emotional reactions in this research. This finding suggests that the role of emotions in ICT is more complex and more contextual than originally thought. As an important form for future development, ICT will create scope conditions for identity processes and the ensuing emotions. Such a process can only strengthen the predictive power of the theory.

²¹ Homans (1961) maintained that an overreward leads to feelings of guilt, but research casts doubt on this prediction (Hegtvedt and Markovsky 1995). It may be that guilt arises if the outcome occurs at another person's expense (Hegtvedt 1990).

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