CHAPTER 11

Traditional Symbolic Interactionism, Role Theory, and Structural Symbolic Interactionism

The Road to Identity Theory

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The major claim of this chapter is that a social structural version of symbolic interactionism is a potentially fruitful source of empirically testable theories of social behavior important to the discipline of sociology. The chapter focuses on identity theory, a theory of role-choice behavior, and related ideas to illustrate this potential. The structural symbolic interactionist frame incorporates in modified form ideas that on the one hand stress the possibility for openness and fluidity of social interaction, self-direction, and human agency inherent in the symbolic capabilities of human beings and on the other hand stress constraints on that openness, fluidity, self-direction, and agency inherent in the fact that persons are members of society (Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Statham, 1985). For purposes relating to the first emphasis, it makes use of symbolic interactionism as it developed from the 18th to mid-20th century and carried into the present with little change. For purposes relating to the second, it turns to role theory. While this presentation of the frame draws on prior writings of the author (especially Stryker, 1980, 1988, 1994, 1996; Stryker & Statham, 1985), it incorporates ideas from the literature of sociology and social psychology over (roughly) the past 50 years, perhaps especially the writings of Ralph Turner (1962, 1978), George McCall and J. T. Simmons (1966), Peter Burke (Burke, 1980; Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Stryker & Burke, 2000), and Morris Rosenberg (1979).

Implied in the foregoing are several considerations important to this chapter:

1. There is no symbolic interactionist orthodoxy. Those working with that frame agree that an adequate account of social behavior must incorporate the perspectives of participants in

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interaction; both self- and social organization emerge from social interaction; and self mediates the relations of social structure and interaction (Stryker, 1988). They disagree, however, on a variety of issues of objectives, contents, and methods of analyses (Stryker, 2000). Most disagreements relate to the possibility of achieving the aspiration of a structural symbolic interactionism, namely, incorporating the conceptual and methodological insights of traditional symbolic interactionism and role theory's sense that persons' locations in social structures constrain their behavior in a frame that produces theories of social behavior subject to rigorous test within the conventions of science as commonly understood.

2. For some (e.g., Blumer, 1969), symbolic interactionism is an approach to sociology. As seen here, symbolic interactionism is one of three major approaches to sociological social psychology (the others are a group processes and a social structure–personality approach; see Stryker, 2001). The responsibility of sociological social psychology is to contribute to sociology by examining ways in which social structures impact persons and interaction and the reciprocal impact of persons and interaction on social structures; this statement of responsibility reasserts the concurrent emphases on agency and constraint defining structural symbolic interactionism.

3. Conventional sociological use of the term "theory" often ignores an important distinction. If "theory" intends a proposes explanation of social phenomena that can be evaluated through empirical evidence, neither symbolic interaction nor role theory meets the test. Both offer perspectives on social life and concepts pointing to what the perspectives deem important to explaining social life. To label them frameworks does not devalue them. Perspectives and concepts are tools theorists use to build theories by translating perspectives and concepts into an empirically testable account of why specified social phenomena occur. Effective theory building is not likely absent a persuasive perspective and prescient concepts. The distinction is especially important in thinking about symbolic interactionism. For many, its central ideas are assumed true and the derivation of testable theories unnecessary. Too, for some symbolic interactionists the very idea of testable general theoretical arguments is misbegotten. There also are symbolic interactionists who believe it possible to work with symbolic interactionist ideas *and* accept the charge of formulating general theoretical explanations of human social behavior subject to reasonably rigorous empirical examination and test.

As noted, the structural symbolic interactionist frame incorporates aspects of traditional symbolic interactionism and role theory, more of the former. The second section of this chapter reviews as much of these two intellectual streams as seems useful for understanding their contributions to the frame. The third section reviews and appraises critiques of traditional symbolic interactionism and role theory to provide insight into the motivation for merging them, then presents the structural symbolic interactionist frame. In the fourth section, attention shifts to theories emergent from this frame taken from the author's work. These are intended only to serve as illustrations of the frame's capacity to generate theories. One, a theory of role-choice behavior, has received a fair number of tests. A second offers an extension of identity theory addressing the broad question of the social circumstances contributing to relative freedom of action. The fifth section provides a brief coda.

SOURCES OF THE STRUCTURAL SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST FRAME

Traditional Symbolic Interactionism

The most significant precursors of this frame are the Scottish moral philosophers of the 18th century and American pragmatic philosophers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries,

especially William James and John Dewey. The psychologist James Mark Baldwin, the sociologists Charles Horton Cooley and William Isaac Thomas, and beyond any other the philosopher and psychologist George Herbert Mead contributed more directly to its evolution, whose further development and promulgation was largely although not exclusively tied to Herbert Blumer and other University of Chicago sociologists and their students in the period after World War I.

The Perspective of Traditional Symbolic Interactionism. There is considerable variation among the forerunners and formulators of traditional symbolic interactionism. However, they tend to share an imagery of human beings, society, the relation of society and human beings, and the nature of human action and interaction. Society is a web of communication or interaction, the reciprocal influence of persons taking each other into account as they act. Interaction is symbolic, proceeding in terms of meanings developed in interaction itself. The environment of action and interaction of humans is symbolically defined. Persons use symbols developed in their interaction and they act through the communication of these symbols. Society is a summary of such interaction. In this image, social life is a thoroughly dynamic process. Society does not exist as a static entity; it is continuously being created and recreated as persons act toward one another. Social reality is a flow of events involving multiple persons. Just as society derives from the social process, so do persons: Both take on meanings that emerge in and through social interaction. Since both derive from the social process, neither society nor the individual possess a reality that is prior to or takes precedence over the other. Society, as a web of interaction, creates persons; but the actions of persons create, through interaction, society. Society and person are two sides of the same coin; neither exists except as they relate to one another.

The symbolic capacity of humans implies they have minds and think, i.e., manipulate symbols internally. They can think about themselves—respond reflexively to themselves—and in so doing come to have a self both shaped by the social process and entering into the social process. Thinking occurs in the form of internal conversation making use of symbols that develop out of the social process. Mind and self arise in response to interruptions in the flow of activities, or problems, and involve formulating and selecting among possible courses of action to resolve the problems. Choice is part of the human condition; its content contained in the subjective experience of the person emerging in and through the social process. Consequently, in order to comprehend human behavior, sociology must come to terms with the subjective experience of persons studied and incorporate that experience into accounts of their behavior. Part of that subjective experience, important for choices made, is the experience of self.

Contained in the imagery is the idea that, individually and collectively, humans are active and creative, not only responders to external environmental forces. The environments in which they act and interact are symbolic environments; the symbols attaching to human and nonhuman environments are produced in interaction and can be manipulated in the course of interaction; thought can be used to anticipate the effectiveness of alternatives for action intended to resolve problems; and choice among alternative courses of action is a feature of social conduct. Thus, human social behavior is indeterminate; as a matter of principle (and not incomplete knowledge) neither the course nor the outcomes of social interaction can be predicted from factors and conditions that precede that interaction.

Early Precursors. This exposition of the forerunners of symbolic interactionism begins with the Scottish moral philosophers. The start point has a rationale: these thinkers were important in establishing an empirical basis for the study of persons and society and they directly influenced early American sociology (Bryson, 1945). They were committed to induc-

tions from empirical observation as the road to useful knowledge. Observing their everyday experience, they theorized by reference to principles found by understanding human nature via introspections informing them of the fundamentals of human mind. Most important to an emergent symbolic interactionism, they agreed that as the science of man, psychology is basic to understanding society, but the facts of human association are basic to understanding human psychology.

Links between these philosophers and the symbolic interactionist frame appear in the former's emphases on communication, sympathy, habit, convention, and imitation, all placing persons in social relationships and most emphasizing mindedness. These links are seen in ideas propounded in the work of Adam Smith, David Hume, and Adam Ferguson. Most likely known as key in shaping classical economics, Smith (1759) argued that society is a network of interpersonal communication through which persons are controlled by the approval, disapproval, desires, and evaluations of others, and that sympathy is a universal human characteristic allowing putting ourselves in other's places to see the world through their eyes. Anticipating Cooley (1902), Smith offers the figure of society as a mirror through which persons view and judge their own behavior. Hume (1888) sees persons as weak and defective alone, society as compensating for these deficiencies, the interests of person and society as inextricably tied to one another, noting that sympathy permits the development of fellow feeling and concern for society and a sense of benefits that can be expected from society. Ferguson (1792), espousing an instinct doctrine, stressed that behavior also results from habit acquired through association with others and their indications about what is and what is not acceptable conduct.

Many of these ideas reappear in the work of American pragmatic philosophers, finding their way into symbolic interactionism through William James, John Dewey, and James M. Baldwin. James' (1890) import is through his treatment of consciousness and the "self" that emerges as a consequence of consciousness. For James, self is everything that persons call theirs; implied is that humans respond to themselves as to any object in the external world. More, how they respond to self impacts how they act with reference to both themselves and external objects (including others). Elaborating four types of self—material, spiritual, social, and pure ego—what is said about social self is most relevant: The source of the social self is recognition given to a person by others; while persons have as many social selves as individual others who recognize them, as a practical matter they have as many social selves as distinct groups of others about whose judgments they care. For Dewey (1930), personality organization is largely a matter of habit and social organization largely a matter of collective habit or custom. The intimate relation of custom and habit means there is an intimate relation of society and person. Since everyone is born into society, habit reflects prior social order. Custom and habit are requisite to thinking; thinking is instrumental, allowing persons to adapt to their environments. Humans define objects in their world (Dewey, 1896), rehearse in thought possible actions with respect to those objects, and choose those actions facilitating adaptation. Baldwin (1906) modifies James' concept of self, insisting that all self is a product of person–other relationships. The relationship of social and personal, society and mind, evolves through three stages of development: a projective stage when children are aware of others, distinguish others from objects, and differentiate among others; a subjective stage when self-consciousness emerges through imitating others and learning there are feelings associated with those imitations; and an ejective stage when children become aware, by associating feelings with conceptions of persons, that others also have feelings just as they do. This last stage "provides a foundation on which Cooley's method of sympathetic introspection and Mead's theory of role taking rest" (Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975, p. 12).

Cooley (1902) moves these ideas in a phenomenological direction. According to Cooley, the special concern of sociology is the mental and subjective because these are distinctively social. Persons exist in the personal idea, society is a relation among personal ideas, and the solid facts of society are imaginations persons have of one another. Thus, the business of sociology is to observe imaginations ultimately accessible only to those experiencing them. Cooley rejected Cartesian introspection as the method of sociology, privileging "sympathetic introspection," a process of imagining the life of others through intimate involvement with them, then recalling and describing those imaginations. He saw individual and society as the distributive and collective aspects of the same human life. Consequently, he saw self as inextricably bound up with others, a social product defined and developed in social interaction, specifically through a "looking-glass self" process in which persons imagine how they appear to others, imaging other's judgment of how they appear, and react with affect (e.g., pride or shame) to those judgments. This conception of self reinforces ideas in the symbolic interactionist stream: there is no individuality outside of social order; individual personality is a development from extant social life and the state of communication among persons sharing that social life; and central to the development of personality are expectations of others.

W. I. Thomas' (1931) import lies in his joint emphases on the methodological and substantive significance for sociological theory of subjective facts of how persons and groups define situations they are in *and* objective, verifiable facts of situations. Sociology's purpose is analyses of processes of adjustment of people and groups to other people and groups. Adjustments occur in situations as responses to objective circumstances in which persons and groups are embedded. However, definitions of the situation intervene between objective circumstances and adjustments; they are necessary parts of explanations because the same objective situation does not lead to identical behavior. To capture persons' definitions of situations, Thomas looked to personal documents: case studies, life histories, autobiographies, letters are the principal sources through which the meaning of the situation from the point of view of a participant is revealed and the principal sources revealing important variables affecting behavior, suggesting hypotheses to account for how these variables affected that behavior, and aiding in the interpretation of mass data. He recognized, however, that personal documents in themselves could not test hypotheses. For this purpose, Thomas opted for statistical research.

George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer. Mead (1934) is the most important influence shaping symbolic interactionism, whether traditional or structural, and Herbert Blumer is the most important voice articulating a symbolic interaction to which the structural version is a reaction. Mead's basic social psychological dictum—begin social psychological analysis with the social process—is his answer to the philosophical problem he set himself: derive mind and self from society without assuming a preexistent self. It follows from the evolutionary principles undergirding his philosophy and psychology: essential to human survival is communication; communication about solutions to problems related to survival is made possible by symbols held in common by those whose survival is at stake; and symbols emerge in and develop through interaction, the social process. Mind, self, and society are concurrent emergents from the social process. Mead, like Dewey, insists on the active nature of human behavior, asserting that things become stimuli as they take on meaning, and they take on meaning when defined as relevant to completing acts initiated by the person. This holds for acts relating persons to their physical environments and for acts implicating other humans. Since other humans are actors, meanings they take on are developed in interaction, the social process made possible by communication.

Self develops via the same social process; it exists in viewing oneself reflexively by

adopting the standpoint of others to attach meanings to self. Thus, self emerges from interaction; it is a social product. According to Mead, it is necessary to understand the critical role of self to understand human behavior. He specifies two parts to self: the "me," or organized attitudes of others with reference to the person, and the "I," or the person's responses to these attitudes of others. Behavior is a product of an internal conversation in which the "I" responds to the "me" responds to the "I," and so forth. The "I" represents spontaneity and creativity; characteristically, Mead sees these as occurring within the social process. He sees behavior as self-controlled but takes social control to be necessary for self-control. He suggests that self develops in stages along with a child's language competence. In play, the child takes the role of particular others (e.g., playing "mommy"); in the game, the child learns to respond to an intricate pattern of organized behaviors of multiple others (e.g., to play baseball, a player must anticipate the responses of a diverse set of team members, opponents, and umpires in order to play the game well). In brief, self-development presupposes the prior existence of organized patterns of multiple persons' actions; self-development presupposes society. But society presupposes self; just as society shapes self, the self (through the I–me dialectic) shapes society. Society continuously undergoes recreation; it is a continuous construction. Social order and social change are aspects of the larger social process. As the society shapes self-argument, self must be continuously under construction; personal order and personal change are aspects of the larger social process as well.

Blumer's influence on traditional symbolic interactionism is greater than that of anyone since Mead. He is especially significant to a structural symbolic interactionism: his writings serve as a negative model with respect to the aspiration for a symbolic interactionist frame permitting adherence to canons of science, while not abandoning essentials of the position found in Mead. Importantly, his polemical writings persuaded succeeding generations of symbolic interactionists who reject the possibility of reasonably meeting that goal. He defines symbolic interactionism (he invented the term) by strongly contrasting it to conventional sociology. Symbolic interactionism recognizes the obdurate fact of humans as defining, interpreting, and indicating creatures who have selves through which they construct actions to deal with their worlds. Conventional sociology sees social behavior as resulting from values, norms, expectations, role requirements, and so on, a practice inconsistent with these obdurate facts. Social organization has little impact in modern societies, since there are few situations to be dealt with through standardized actions. Even established forms of action have to be continuously renewed through interpretation and designation, and social organization enters only to the extent it shapes situations and provides the symbols used in interpreting situations. From this viewpoint, society is not organization or structure; it is the sum of the actions of persons occurring in situations constructed and reconstructed by those persons through interpreting the situations, identifying and assessing things that have to be taken into account in the situations, and acting on the basis of these assessments (Blumer, 1962).

That vision leads Blumer (1954, 1956) to assert methodological principles and positions contra conventional understandings of science. Sociologists should avoid initiating research with "definitive concepts," prescriptions for what to see blinding them to what would really enable understanding the situations they investigate; they should begin their research with "sensitizing concepts" that only suggest directions in which to look. For similar reasons, he argues against initiating research with hypotheses based on prior theory or extant literature, and that there is no point to measuring variables or seeking relationships among variables as part of a scientific sociological inquiry (because anything that is defined can be redefined, thus is without the qualitative constancy or stability required of variables).

Role Theory

There are two role theories, structural and interactional (Stryker & Statham, 1985), the latter drawing heavily on symbolic interactionism. Treatment here focuses on structural role theory.

The Perspective of Structural Role Theory. The theater is the major metaphor of structural role theory: the vision is of actors playing parts in scripts written by culture and shaped by evolutionary adaptation. The parts are written to restore the play to its original form should improvisation threaten its fundamentals. Analysis of a part is in terms of how its relationship to other parts meets survival needs of the larger system. Society is a system with functional substructures having their own substructures; the group is the structural context of most social interaction. Groups are systems of cooperating actors with common goals, recognized membership, and recognized interdependency. Persons enter groups as parts that are action systems of members, and behaviors toward group members are guided by subjective meanings and by evaluations using normative standards. Repeated interactions develop expectations of proper behavior among the persons involved. Norms applying to one relationship need not apply to others, nor are norms the same for all parties to relationships. Behaviors of interrelated pairs are likely mutually reinforcing and satisfactory, an image reflecting the conceptualization of groups as cooperative, goal-seeking systems and the assumption that parts are functional for the system as a whole.

Visualizing groups as made up of actors behaving in varying, interrelated ways makes necessary a language describing the variation. Structural role theory uses "status" for parts of organized groups and "role" for basically fixed behaviors expected of persons occupying a status. Underlying roles are moral norms rooted in culture. Roles exist prior to interaction of persons occupying statuses. They derive from the accumulated experience of past occupants of statuses, shaped slowly as past generations adapt to environmental requirements. Socialization is the process by which norms are transmitted, how persons learn expectations for others and for themselves that attach to statuses. For persons in social relations, these expectations tend to develop into moral imperatives that, if society works properly, fit well together. When persons in relationships conform to complementary expectations, they gain approval from others occupying related statuses and playing related roles; that approval reinforces conformity.

Shapers of Structural Role Theory. Deeply embedded in sociological thought from the 19th century on is the premise that persons are systematically influenced by positions they occupy in society. That premise is embodied in the conceptions of exteriority and constraint Durkheim used to define a social fact and is basic to his accounts of moral behavior (Durkheim, 1950) and anomie (Durkheim, 1960). It is developed in Weber's (1946, 1947) discussions of bureaucratic structure, a point of reference for a role theory of organizations, as well as his use of the concept of calling, or vocation, as critical in relating social structure and person. His methodological argument (Weber, 1949) that sociology must grasp the subjective motivation of actors in order to explain their behaviors is a bridge between role theory and symbolic interactionism. Simmel (1950) also made use of the concept of vocation. Raising the Hobbesian question of how society is possible, he answers that society, as the minded association of persons, becomes possible when persons are in part "generalized." To be members of a group, persons must be both more and less than individual personalities. They enter society by foregoing aspects of individuality for the generality of parts played as members of social units.

Society appears to persons as a set of vocations that can be filled by anyone. Persons move into vocations partly as a consequence of an inner call and are motivated to accept the requirements of the vocations they enter. Simmel and Weber both emphasize that social structures contain differentiated positions. Role theory joins this emphasis to Sumner's (1906) types of norms that place variable demands on members of society to arrive at the conception of role as understood in structural role theory. That is, differentiated norms are assembled into sets of expectations applicable to persons occupying specific positions in organized social units, and those expectations define a role.

This conception of role was given currency by the work of Park (1926), Moreno (1934), and others, and the idea that group members' performances are affected by group norms is exploited by early small group researchers using various theoretical perspectives (e.g., Festinger, Back, Schacter, Kelley & Thibaut, 1950; Sherif, 1936; Bales, 1950). However, structural role theory developed mainly through Ralph Linton (1936) and Talcott Parsons (1951) who focused on societies as functional units. For Linton, society is composed of persons whose adaptation and organization are required for survival. A division of labor, elaborated and stabilized over time, makes individual conduct predictable and cooperation among individuals complete and effective. Adaptations are perpetuated through continuous training guided by ideal patterns, positively valued ideas transmitted across generations through imitation and instruction, which also guide behaviors in situations for which persons are not specifically trained. Never completely realized, ideal patterns strongly influence behavior. Linton sees every culture as having ideal patterns for social relationships, the essence of which is reciprocity, creating circles of rights and duties. Persons occupy polar statuses in reciprocal ideal patterns. Roles are the dynamic aspect of statuses, their associated rights and duties in action. Conflicting duties and obligations within the same or among different persons are rare; otherwise, society could not function. Persons have a general role, summarizing particular roles, determining what they do for society and what they can expect in return. Status and role bring ideal patterns to the level of the person; a smoothly functioning society reflects the adjustment of persons to their statuses and roles. Critical to functioning of society, general roles (e.g., age and sex) tend to be ascribed without regard to individual differences; other roles are open to achievement. Most of these are escapes for individuals or baits for socially acceptable behavior.

While functionality of parts vis-à-vis social systems as wholes and complementarity of role expectations are not among its necessary features, there is an empirical tie between structural role theory and the structural–functional perspective in sociology reflecting the fact that many influential role theorists (e.g., Davis, 1949; Parsons, 1951) worked from a structural–functional perspective. Parsons, recognizing that perfect integration of parts of society is likely empirically impossible, used this special case as a start point for analyzing conformity to societal expectations, suggesting this is induced through actors gratifying one another's needs, acting in ways useful to each other's attainment of goals, feelings of gratification accompanying conformity to legitimate expectations and the demands of others when shared values are internalized, and approval and esteem received for conformity to others' expectations that results from sensitivity to others' attitude. Structures of social systems are made up of interactional systems relating individual actors and the status-role is the most convenient unit for the analysis of these systems. Roles are what people in statuses do as constrained by normative expectations, institutionally defined and regulated parts of relationships shaped by shared values and internalized norms made part of actors' personalities. Conformity to role expectations is rewarded, failure to conform sanctioned, and an equilibrium of interpersonal interactions is maintained. The larger systems of interaction developing in society are modeled on

the interpersonal system. Thus, roles are complementary and various inducements lead persons to conform to their roles. Persons, according to Parsons, choose their courses of action in concrete situations. In principle arrived at through freely expressed preferences or the demands of personality, choices are basically understood as defined by the culture in which roles are institutionalized.

Linton and Parsons focused their theoretical work on total societies; Robert Merton's (1949) argument for the development of theories of middle range led to a shift in focus of role theorists to communities, associations, and groups that link paired interaction to total societies. Otherwise, the major themes in Linton and Parsons permeate the newer role theoretic emphasis: roles are the main mechanisms linking persons to social structures, and persons are under continuous and heavy pressure from both outside and inside themselves to conform to social expectations.

STRUCTURAL SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Reviewing critical appraisals of traditional symbolic interactionism and structural role theory sets the stage for discussion of the structural symbolic interactionist frame and theory based on the frame. In particular, doing so can illuminate the motivation behind that frame.

Criticisms of Traditional Symbolic Interactionism and Role Theory

An early and trenchant critique of traditional symbolic interactionist ideas is Mead's (1930) comment on the solipsism inherent in Cooley's conception of society. In the intervening years, critiques have been offered by persons who work within the frame (Meltzer, 1959; Kuhn, 1964; Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Statham, 1985; Reynolds, 1990) and others whose perspectives fall outside the frame (Gouldner, 1970; Collins, 1975; Huber, 1973). These cover a wide gamut of intertwined ideological, theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues. Interest here lies in only those to which a structural symbolic interactionism sought to be responsive: those directed to the scientific adequacy of the frame, and those directed to the failure to take social structure sufficiently seriously.

The first set of criticisms asserts that traditional symbolic interactionism does not provide clear and precise concepts necessary for developing theory subject to rigorous empirical test. If concepts are neither clear nor precise, they cannot be used in rigorous research. Two basic interactionist concepts—self and situation—illustrate these criticisms. With regard to situation, sociologists have long complained there exists no satisfactory understanding of its referents. Volkart (1951) argues, in spite of the centrality of the term in Thomas' work, it was never defined with sufficient precision to make it a useful descriptive or analytic tool. Years later, the same conclusion is reached (Stryker, 1964). After another 30 years, Seeman (1997) initiates his attempt, harking back to his analyses of alienation, to solve the problem of conceptualizing a situation by iterating this conclusion. With respect to the concept of self, while defining self as that which is an object to itself, i.e., by the reflexive responses of persons to themselves as objects, is evocative, the precision required for theory and test of theory is absent. This is particularly true when the attempt to give content to that conception of self has largely followed James' (1890) tack by asserting that self includes anything to which the personal pronouns I, me, or mine can be attached, thereby rendering self in a virtually limitless way.

Criticisms claiming the scientific inadequacy of traditional symbolic interactionism go beyond such relatively narrow methodological matters to broad epistemological issues. These hold that the extreme process imagery of the frame, arguing social life is continuously under construction through actors' interpretive processes and that interpretations themselves are continuously reformulated in the context of situated activity, means that society and self—and all intervening concepts implying some degree of organization or structure—exist in the moment and have no reasonable applicability beyond the moment. That implication itself asserts that seeking the development of general, testable theories of social life applicable beyond the momentary is a false aspiration, not in accord with the essential character of human behavior: We can hope to achieve post hoc understandings of what happened but we cannot hope to achieve theoretical accounts of what will or is most likely to happen. In short, critics argue, science is defeated a priori. Too, science is defeated a priori for those who view it as presupposing a deterministic universe: The emergence that underwrites a view of social life as indeterminate rules out the possibility of predictive theory

A methodological principle underlying denial of the possibility of science, according to critics of traditional symbolic interactionism, is the demand that accounts of human behavior be based on the points of view of actors involved in interaction studied. That principle and implications of an emphasis on process also are said by critics to deny the import of social structure for social behavior. That is, the demand that the interpretations of actors be central to accounts of social behavior, the correlative emphasis on definitional processes organizing ongoing interaction, the focus on immediate situations of interaction, and a view of social structure as a temporary emergent from ongoing interaction, all serve to minimize or trivialize the importance for social behavior of social structure on any level beyond the immediate situation of interaction. This methodological demand and the resultant foci of attention mean the perspective or frame cannot deal with the relations among societies or with large-scale features of societies such as the differential distribution of wealth, social class, or power structures; in effect, the charge is that social structural realities are dissolved in a universal solvent of definitions of the situation. On these grounds, traditional symbolic interactionism is accused of ideological bias in favor of the status quo (Gouldner, 1970; Kanter, 1972). Huber (1973), on different grounds, comes to the same conclusion. The charge of ideological bias also has been leveled against traditional symbolic interactionism as a consequence of its emphases on communication and the development of shared meanings and on cooperation as the necessary means for evolutionary survival, the charge being that these emphases lead to a neglect of the fact and functions of conflict in social life. Presumably contributing to this neglect is Mead's view that evolutionary processes favor the ultimate arrival of a universe of discourse coterminous with humanity.

Structural role theory has also been charged with ideological bias (Gouldner, 1970). In good part as a result of its link to structural functionalism, role theory has been criticized as promulgating a one-sided view of social behavior emphasizing consensus, cooperation, and continuity in social life at the expense of disagreement, conflict, and change, and as rationalizing the subservience of persons to the social order. A related, more value neutral criticism is that structural role theory has an oversocialized conception of man (Wrong, 1961), solving the Hobbesian problem of social order by denying or explaining away any impact of individual human beings in the social process. Persons are visualized as automatons who simply accept and reflect social norms they have been socialized to adopt. Their motivations are the result of internalizing norms via socialization and conformity to these norms that come from self-esteem derived from the positive feedback from others for conformity.

Just as structural role theory implicitly is a critique of traditional symbolic interactionism,

so too is the latter a critique of structural role theory through its insistence that human beings are actors who through self creatively construct their actions with reference to others as well as through other themes in Blumer's work reviewed earlier. Aaron Cicourel (1972), whose "cognitive sociology" shares the premise of traditional symbolic interactionism privileging the interpretations of the actor, asserts it is not clear that concepts like status and role have much relevance for how people negotiate everyday behavior, and that the structural frame of status and role presupposes agreement on their content and takes for granted that their content is known and clear, while in reality these are problematic.

Appraising the Criticisms

Some criticisms reviewed may not be as applicable as critics believe and some may apply only to a segment of the frame criticized. For example, the criticism of traditional symbolic interactionism's concepts as vague and imprecise has general validity. However, the claim of some critics that this frame stands in opposition to the goal of formulating general theoretical accounts of social life and testing these using any available social science method depends on accepting Blumer's (1969, pp. 1–2) contention that his methodological dicta are made necessary by defining premises of symbolic interactionism (Stryker, 1988). Blumer infers from these premises that general, predictive sociological theory makes no sense, since preexistent concepts cannot match emergent interpretations of actors constructing their lines of social interaction.

Consequently, research initiated by a priori theory anticipating behavioral outcomes through hypotheses deduced from such theory is futile; methods that fail to directly examine interpretations in the process of emergence (e.g., experimentation, surveys) lack validity and the capacity to generate meaningful data; mathematical manipulations of numerical data produce findings bereft of meaning. However, the fundamental ideas of the symbolic interactionist frame do not necessarily lead to the metatheoretical and methodological conclusions Blumer reaches. Actors' interpretations, demonstrably important to the course and content of interaction, are not unconstrained. Meanings that are possible for actors to invoke in defining situations and those they are likely to invoke from among those possible are not random events. Too, there is stability over time to most meanings persons attach to objects; these meanings do not change greatly from moment to moment in ways that call for radical change in behavior. Indeed, if considerable stability in meanings did not exist, even over years, social life could not and would not have the predictability that enables persons to live their lives as they do. In short, that meanings can change greatly and precipitously does not say they do change either greatly or precipitously. If this is a reasonable assertion, theoretical propositions offering explanations of empirical generalizations going beyond individual phenomenology are possible and not subject to a priori rejection whatever may be their fate on meeting empirical evidence. That social life is constructed and there are few limits on what constructions are possible does not require sociology to forego predictions of future behaviors or force sociologists to believe predictions of social behavior must lack validity. Nor does acceptance of a social construction position mean that sociologists cannot recognize that the social process often crystallizes in a manner allowing the use of abstract concepts like self, role, and social structure in general theoretical arguments seeing that to which these concepts refer as effectively constraining and limiting the possibilities for emergence in social life and operating to change possibility to probability.

Implicit in the last paragraph is another assertion: To accept a principled indeterminacy in

social life does not require sociologists to reject aspiring to generalized theoretical knowledge based on the degree to which empirical evidence supports theory-based explanatory claims, and it does not require rejecting conventional science as a model for work sociologists do. A deterministic universe is not needed to justify science, only that there is some regularity in behavior of interest; given such regularity, the task of a science is to describe and explain it. Nor does adequate explanation require accounting for every one of a class of cases for which it is argued to hold. Science seeks explanations of classes of behaviors, not particular behaviors, and all particular behaviors differ in some way. Sociology draws its data from the everyday world of social interaction, the number of variables entering so great that each instance of interaction must in some ways be unique. The search for general patterns of social behavior and general explanations for observed patterns must ignore that which may be idiosyncratic about but nonetheless crucial for some instances of social interaction. Consequently, some instances of interaction develop in ways contrary to what holds for most cases and so exist as exceptions to general explanations. Aspiring to explanations that hold for every concrete social behavior is unrealistic is implied. Stated alternatively and more positively, all empirical generalizations and explanations of these in sociology and social psychology are probabilistic in form.

Again, some criticisms may not be as valid as critics offering them believe. The charge that an interactionist framework, traditional or structural, does not incorporate macrolevel variables or does not provide for relations of macrolevel units, e.g., nation-states (Reynolds, 1990) is damning only if the frame is offered as a general frame for sociology as a whole. While some present a symbolic interactionist frame in that way; others present it as restricted in scope to social psychology or even more restricted to a sociological social psychology. Any frame, to be useful, must be partial in pointing up a selected set of concepts deemed of special import for illuminating problems with which the frame is concerned. By virtue of pointing up particular concepts a frame must, at least relatively, downplay others. However, limiting a frame's claims to issues important to a sociological social psychology does not absolve it from providing conceptual means for articulating social cognitive and interactional processes and social structures impinging on those processes, nor from providing for articulating links between those impinging social structures and more macrostructures that impinge on these. Indeed, the meaning of a sociological social psychology requires that such matters be attended to. Since the structural symbolic interactionism frame is explicitly pointed to a sociological social psychology (Stryker, 1980, 2001), this issue will be discussed further.

Sociologists have a penchant for "either–or" dichotomies: social behavior is either completely determined by location in social structure or is free of external constraints; social life is either process or structure; subjective definitions or interpretations either underlie human behavior or do not matter; the human is either actor or reactor. In the present context, this penchant is expressed by either accepting or rejecting in their entirety traditional symbolic interactionism or structural role theory, but neither the criticisms offered of these frames nor the frames themselves need be fully accepted or fully rejected. As Wrong (1961) long ago observed, the image of human beings as thoroughly socialized creatures contained in structural role theory has its purposes so long as it is not taken as the whole truth about human beings. Similarly, as W. I. Thomas claimed, definitions of the situation are important to human behavior but so are the realities of the situations themselves. More generally, cooperation and stability are readily observable in social life and so are conflict and change. An adequate frame intended for use in the analysis of social life must include conceptual means for dealing with both cooperation and conflict, stability and change. Put in other terms, the process emphasis of traditional symbolic interactionism *and* the structure emphasis of structural role theory are both needed.

The either–or propensity also can be problematic by obscuring useful aspects of a frame

to which there otherwise may be legitimate objections. While the overall emphasis of structural role theory may well be one-sided in its view of social life as based on consensus, cooperation, and the contribution of parts of a social system to the stability of the whole, the structural role theoretic frame also provides resources for visualizing dissensus and conflict as normal in social life. It does so by making explicit what is implicit in a conception of social groups as structures of differentiated statuses and roles, namely, that persons are typically involved in multiple groups and so occupy multiple positions tied to multiple roles. While this may mean persons carry norms of a group to others and so minimize conflict among groups, it also means that conflicting norms can be introduced into persons and the groups of which they are a part, affecting the behavior of both. The insight that multiple role involvements can result in intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intragroup conflicts as well as the obverse of these owes much to the work of structural role theorists such as Merton (1957) and Goode (1960).

Building a conceptual frame capable of underpinning empirically testable theories of social behavior and make a contribution to the larger sociological enterprise is a worthy goal for sociologists who do social psychology. Summarizing the argument thus far: meeting this goal is more likely if appropriate elements in structural role theory are joined to appropriate elements in symbolic interactionism, and achieving the goal requires working within the framework of science.

A Social Structural Version of Symbolic Interactionism

Since structural symbolic interactionism builds on a recombination of elements contained in traditional symbolic interactionism and structural role theory, to describe it as the latter two frames were described would involve considerable redundancy. To avoid this repetitiveness, the structural frame is described in a different way, by first drawing on an essay (Stryker, 1996) written in response to the question: What is the message of social psychology? The essay answered that question from the point of view of a sociologist whose special interests are in social psychology; in so doing, it provides the metatheoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the structural symbolic interactionist frame. Then it presents a statement of the frame drawing on and elaborating an earlier discussion (Stryker, 1980).

Once self and society emerge in interaction, they exist in a recursive system: their relations are reciprocal. That reciprocity, however, does not preclude recognizing that every historical human being is born into and cannot survive outside the context of already-existing organized social relationships and social interactions, which themselves are embedded in larger systems of relationships and interactions. This recognition underwrites assigning priority to "society" in the metatheoretical starting point of the structural symbolic interactionism frame, the assertion "in the beginning, there is society."

This aphorism, a sociological response to the question of how best to conceptualize the relation of person and society asserts that social psychological inquiry taking the isolated individual as its start point and then asking how individual experience and behavior is affected by others will misunderstand many social psychological issues, and treatments of the social as simply setting for individual experience and behavior will be similarly deficient. In short, it accepts Mead's argument that the most fruitful way of conceptualizing the relation of person and society requires recognizing that society is built into the mind and self of the individual. There is no individuality outside of society, yet there is no society except through persons' actions. Society and individual are indeed constitutive of one another. Nevertheless, for purposes of investigating the society–person(s) relationship, society is assigned causal priority.

The implications of the preceding paragraph provides the metatheoretical context of a structural symbolic interactionist frame:

1. *Human experience is socially organized.* Mead prepares for this assertion by arguing that the organization and content of self reflect persons' participation in society. However, Mead's image of society does not reflect the complexity of contemporary society in which members occupy multiple positions in multiple social structures. Contemporary societies are not particularly unitary or coherent; they incorporate diverse congeries of organized role relationships, groups, social networks, institutions, strata, some isolated and some not, some overlapping and some not, some conflicting and some not. Persons' experience is importantly shaped by what relationships, groups, networks, institutions, and strata they enter or leave and by how these structures relate to each other. Experience is not random but is strongly impacted by persons' locations in social structures. Social structures define boundaries, some permeable, others less so. The boundaries serve as barriers to or facilitators of interaction, the barriers inhibiting or precluding interactions with others, the facilitators encouraging or requiring interaction with others. Social structures, then, are likely to bring only certain people together to interact over particular topics with particular instrumental and symbolic resources; alternatively, they are likely to keep certain people out of particular interactions. Who persons interact with and who they do not is critical to their life chances generally to the kinds of situations they have opportunities to enter; to the resources, symbolic and otherwise, they have available to define situations they do enter; to the kinds of self they can and are likely to develop; and so on. Again, human experience is socially organized; who and what persons are and can do, while not determined, reflects that fact.

2. *Social life is constructed.* The forms and the content of social life are not fixed by nature; they are products of collective activities of persons as they develop solutions to problems in their lives. To say that social forms and content are constructions is to say they are results of human action and interaction, and that reconstruction of and even radical change in these forms and content are possible. These assertions, however, do not imply there is no objective social world or that the objective world does not limit and constrain the structures and cultures constructed. Nor do they imply that social constructions are ephemeral, incapable of limiting the probability of reconstruction or radical change.

3. *Human beings are actors.* As noted, sociologists sometimes have presented a view of individuals as socialized automatons, as merely reactors. Symbolic interactionist thought says otherwise, asserting that mind and self, the symbolic and reflexive capacities of humans, permit actors to formulate, anticipate outcomes of, select from alternative lines of action, and revise actions as information is returned in the course of the action itself. Its social constructionism develops from viewing humans as active agents. This view does not deny the impact of normative demands on persons to enact roles as scripted, nor does it deny the impact of conditioning on human behavior; it simply asserts that humans can and sometimes do have significant impact over what happens to them. We can expect most if not all social behavior to reflect a blend of action and reaction, the blend in given cases a matter of empirical investigation, as is the question of the circumstances under which behavior reflects primarily (or even totally) prior conditioning or normative demands and the circumstances under which behavior reflects the initiative of actors. Implied in this conception of humans is that social psychology has the obligation of investigating both processes of social production and change as well as processes of social reproduction and stability, conformity and creativity, constraint and autonomy.

4. *The subjective and the symbolic are central in social life.* Restating the import of

persons' definitions and interpretations for behavior, the assertion does not imply there is no reality outside of definitions and interpretations: that undefined and uninterpreted aspects of the world have no impact on person: definitions denying the existence of social class does not eliminate the impact of class on those holding such definitions, nor do interpretations attributing disease to the devil lessen the effect of germs. What the assertion does imply is that actors' definitions and interpretations are consequential for how they construct their own behavior and how they interact with others; thus, explanations of social interaction must take into account interactants' definitions and interpretations.

5. *Self mediates the relation of society to social behavior and social behavior to society.* How persons define themselves reflects response to them of coparticipants in ongoing interactions and social relationships. Once defined, selves interact dialectically with others' responses to produce emergent selves that organize and guide persons' behavior. Thus, built into self are processes of social control and self-control, means to account theoretically for the impact of society on person and person on society.

6. *There is both constraint and freedom in personal and social life.* Persons are constrained in what they are, can become, and do as a consequence of membership in society. Yet, they have some freedom of action. In many ways, the most interesting and important questions of sociology and of social psychology are contained within this apparent paradox.

7. *The concept of role facilitates the articulation of symbolic interactionist and role theory ideas.* The fundamental referent of this concept is the expectations impinging on persons in their interaction with others. These expectations are used as a basic building brick by symbolic interactionists (who do not necessarily use the language of role) to build "down" to the social person in pursuing their interest in issues relating to personal organization and disorganization, socialization and interaction processes themselves. Role theorists use these expectations to build "up" to larger and more complex social units in pursuing their interest in issues of social organization and change, the functioning of groups and larger units of social organization. A satisfactory framework for a sociological social psychology must bridge structure and person, allow movement from the level of the person to the level of larger-scale social structures and back again. A common theme of interactionist thought is that social structure creates social persons who (re)create social structures ad infinitum. Basic to understanding social life, that insight is both trite and trivial unless it leads to research specifying variations in social structures and variations in social persons and the connections of these variations. Getting to that research requires a conceptual frame facilitating movement bridging person and social structure.

A brief and highly generalized version of the structural symbolic interactionist frame follows (see Stryker, 1980, for an expanded statement).

Behavior depends on a named or classified world providing the ends toward which human activity is directed and the means by which these ends are (or are not) achieved. That world represents opportunities for action, conditions that enhance or defeat success, and makes more or less probable contact with others with whom persons cooperate or conflict as they act. Names or class terms attached to the physical and social environment carry meanings: shared behavioral expectations growing out of social interaction. One learns from interaction how to classify objects and in that process learns the expectations for behavior with reference to those objects. Among the class terms learned are symbols used to designate positions, relatively stable morphological components of social structures, and the kinds of persons it is possible to be in a society. Attached to positions are the shared behavioral expectations conventionally called roles. Roles, necessarily social in derivation and in that all roles at least

implicitly reference counterroles, vary in ways important to interaction: they may carry strong norms or not; require specific behaviors or be couched in nonspecific terms; be clear in demands made or vague and uncertain; apply to few interactions or across a large range of interactions, and so on.

Persons acting in the context of social structures recognize and label one another as occupants of positions. Doing so, they invoke expectations for behavior. They also name themselves. These reflexively applied positional designations become part of the self, creating internalized expectations with regard to persons' own behavior. Such selves may develop in response to contingencies in immediate situations of interaction; they also may enter into different and new situations. When entering an interactive situation, persons define that situation by applying names to it, themselves, other participants, and particular features in the situation, and use these to organize their own behavior in the situation. Others engage in the same process. Interactions with others can validate and often challenge definitions, including self-definitions; they are venues of conflict among competing definitions. Indeed, interactions are often battles of varying intensity over whose definitions will organize the interaction. Early definitions constrain the possibilities for alternative definitions to emerge, but behavior is not determined by early definitions. Behavior is the product of role-making (Turner, 1962) beginning with expectations invoked in the process of defining situations but continuing through a tentative, probing, sometimes extremely subtle interchange among interacting persons that shapes the form and content of the interaction. The degree to which roles are simply played or are made and the elements entering the construction of roles depend on the larger social structures in which interactive situations are embedded. Every structure limits the kinds of definitions available to call into play, and thus limits possibilities for interaction. Nonetheless, some structures are relatively open to creativity and innovation in roles and in role performances. Changes can occur in content of definitions, in names and class terms used in those definitions, and in the possibilities for interaction, depending on the degree to which roles are made rather than played. Such changes can lead to changes in social structures within which interactions take place.

The structural symbolic interactionist frame holds a view, consistent with the imagery of contemporary sociology, of society as a complex, differentiated but organized mosaic of relatively durable interactions and relationships embedded in an array of groups, organizations, communities, and institutions intersected by encompassing structures of age, gender, class, ethnicity, religion, and more. Persons live and act in relatively small and specialized networks of social relationships, largely doing so through roles underwriting their participation in these networks. The networks themselves are embedded in larger units of social structure that constitute boundaries affecting the probability of persons entering those networks, consequently interacting with the particular kinds of others also in those networks rather than other kinds of persons, and developing shared meanings constrained by the constitution of those networks.

IDENTITY THEORY AND RELATED IDEAS

If a framework can be tested, it is by its fertility, i.e., by the theories it generates that can be examined empirically. The claim here is that structural symbolic interactionism is a fruitful source of theories of social behavior important to sociology. Attention now turns to work developing from the symbolic interactionist frame that can be characterized and judged as theory. In particular, an account of role-choice behavior called "identity theory" and related

ideas was selected for the most obvious reason: these have been the central preoccupation of this essay's author for the past 35-plus years.

Identity theory seeks to explain why, where choice is possible, one role-related behavioral choice is made rather than another. It is a minimal but potentially useful theory applicable to a particular kind of social behavior that examines a small set of variables representing part of the heritage of Mead, somewhat amended, to see how far they can serve to explain behavior of interest. Derived from structural symbolic interactionism, the theory shares assumptions of that frame: humans are actors as well as reactors; social interaction and social structures constrain human action; action and interaction are shaped by definitions or interpretations of situations based on shared meanings developed through interaction with others; self-conceptions are critical to producing action and interaction and are shaped in part by others' responses to persons. This last premise is often stated as self reflects society; it, together with the third premise, underwrite the standard formula of symbolic interactionism, a formula that insists on the reciprocity of its parts: society shapes self and self shapes social behavior.

Identity theory builds on refinements of traditional symbolic interactionism and specifications of that formula. It adopts a view of society consistent with the imagery of contemporary sociology that is contained in a structural symbolic interactionism.

Arguing the priority of society on grounds suggested earlier, the point of departure in developing the theory is specifying what it seeks to explain. Specification is required because, clearly, social behavior is much too general a category to be researchable; i.e., one cannot hope to develop and test a theory of social behavior in general both because it is impossible to observe social behavior in general and because the category includes too varied content to be subject to the same explanatory account. Identity theory elects to focus on role choice behavior as worthy of social psychological and sociological attention. It is central to many interesting and important questions about social life. Why does a man devote time and effort in one arena of his life—say, work—to the neglect of other social relationships—say, family? What underwrites radical change in careers or in lifestyle more generally? Why do some members of a social movement engage in dangerous activities in the interests of the movement while others will not do so? What are the consequences of role choices made for ongoing interaction and social relationships?

While the relationship is not deterministic—social constraints on choice obviously are limiting factors—the interactionist formula and identity theory suggest that role-choice is a product of self. However, self also requires specification. If in the beginning there is society, self must reflect society; and if contemporary selves reflect contemporary society, an image of self emerges that reflects the complexities of contemporary society. That vision sees self as highly differentiated but organized, made up of multiple parts reflecting the multiple structures of various kinds that exist within society, as well as the multiple ways these structures relate to one another: overlapping, isolated, cooperative, conflicting. The theory accepts James' (1890) idea that persons have as many selves as groups of persons with which they interact and, using the term "identity" to refer to each group based on self, asserts that persons have as many identities as distinct sets of social relations in which they occupy a position and play a role. Since roles are expectations attached to positions in networks of relationships, identities are internalized role expectations. The theory holds, reflecting the import of hierarchy as an organizational principle in society, that identities are organized in a salience hierarchy. Identities are understood as cognitive schema (Markus, 1977; Markus & Zajonc, 1985), internally stored information and meanings; as schema, they are cognitive bases for defining situations and they result in greater sensitivity to external and internal behavioral cues matching in some way the schema. As cognitive schema, they carry across situations in which persons find

themselves. The salience of an identity is defined as the probability an identity will be invoked in and across situations (alternatively, as the differential probability across persons that an identity will be invoked in a given situation). Identity theory hypothesizes that the higher the salience of an identity relative to other identities in into the self, the higher the likelihood of behavioral choices corresponding to expectations attached to that identity.

Building identity theory also required specification of the third term in Mead's formula—society—and accomplishes that specification through the concept of "commitment." As noted earlier, persons live and act in relatively small, specialized networks of social relationships. Commitment concerns ties to networks and refers to the degree persons relations to others in networks depend on having particular identities and playing particular roles, measured by the costs of foregoing meaningful relations with others should the identity and role be foregone. The hypothesis is that the salience of an identity reflects commitment to the role relationships requiring that identity. Identity theory's specification of Mead's formula arrived at with this step is: commitment shapes identity salience shapes role choice behavior.

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the research examining identity theory hypotheses, either by the author and colleagues or others. Two observations about that research are, however, pertinent. First, while research confirms the linkages indicated in this specification (see Stryker & Burke, 2000); it also suggests the need for refining and amplifying the conceptual resources of identity theory to expand its explanatory power. Stryker (1987) believes that master statuses (e.g., ethnicity, gender) can be incorporated into the theory by recognizing that both at times have the characteristics of role identities and that often they serve as modifiers of role identities (as in female lawyer). Serpe (1987) demonstrates that commitment has two partially independent components—affect and interaction—and that introducing this distinction in research clarifies relationships of commitment to identity salience and identity salience to role behaviors. Stryker and Serpe (1994) show that introducing the psychological centrality (Rosenberg, 1979) of identities along with identity salience adds to the understanding of how commitment links to role choices. Ervin and Stryker (2001) propose incorporating self-esteem into the identity theory model to expand the scope of that model considerably. Stryker and Burke (2000) offer a consolidation of their respective identity theory emphases, the former's focus on the ways in which social structures link to identities and the latter's on internal processes of self-verification, which promises a more complete understanding of the reciprocal relation of self and society. Second, this research evidences the capacity of identity theory to sustain a programmatic (rather than a scattershot) approach to research on issues of identity.

Earlier, it was said a paradox of freedom and constraint poses interesting and important social psychological questions. An extended identity theory can deal with these questions provided freedom and constraint are defined to allow direct or indirect observation. Conceptualizing freedom as the degree to which persons exercise choice, constraint as the degree to which choice cannot be exercised meets this proviso. But persons can choose only among available options. So conceived, freedom can be measured by the range of realistic alternatives open to actors; constraint by limitations on this range. This conceptualization permits the question: What expands or contracts action alternatives available to actors? Consider what expands alternatives. To exist and have reasonable probability of enactment, alternatives must be symbolically present in thought: we cannot choose what we can or do not conceive of doing. To be viable, alternatives must attach to self; we are not likely to choose what we can or do not conceive we can or would do. To be probable, alternatives must relate to salient identities; if not, they are unlikely to emerge in a situation. For identities to be salient, they must link to networks of relationships to which persons are highly committed. For a given

alternative to have high probability of being chosen, some networks must be organized around that set of actions. Otherwise, little social support in existing networks is likely available, making the actions unattractive. For social networks to support action alternatives in some degree oppositional, the networks must be independent of one another. If not, they are likely to evolve equivalent norms and remove alternatives. To support oppositional alternative actions, networks must be relatively open. If not, persons' access to multiple identities with attached varying and oppositional alternatives will be restricted. For networks to be open yet independent, society must have crosscutting boundaries and mobility across boundaries. Otherwise, networks will consist of persons sharing the same characteristics or persons will be unable to resist conformity pressures from networks they cannot escape. The same elements (with different values) account for constraint. Societies with few independent networks and little social mobility are unlikely to permit or support multiple independent identities calling for alternative, especially oppositional actions. When not symbolically present, attached to salient identities, or supported by networks to which persons are highly committed, alternatives have low likelihood of being chosen.

CODA

The story of identity theory's development illustrates what is needed to move from the level of frame to the level of theory derived from a frame. In so doing, it suggests the challenge that faces those sociologists who believe the ideas reviewed in this chapter are worthy of their serious consideration and that serious consideration must involve translating the ideas into testable theory made to confront empirical evidence. Identity theory per se is a small theory applicable to a restricted albeit important social psychological issue; expanding the theory's explanatory scope requires expanding its repertory of concepts. However, its potential is wide, as illustrated by the theoretical attempt to deal with the broad issue of freedom and constraint in social life. A framework is a heuristic, and heuristics change as the questions of persons using them shift. That humans live in a historical social world guarantees new questions will be asked, existing concepts of a framework reformulated, and new concepts introduced. This chapter has been written in the belief that the sociological traditions of symbolic interactionism provide a strong and lasting basis for such further development .

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