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## IDENTITIES, DEADLY

“Deadly identities” is the literal translation of the title of Amin Maalouf’s nonfiction *Les identités meurtrières* (1998), which examines the issues and problems surrounding individuals having multiple social identities. Maalouf (b. 1949) is a Lebanese-born Catholic Arab novelist who has lived in Paris since 1977, writes in French, and is the 1993 winner of the Goncourt Prize, France’s most prestigious literary award. For Maalouf, the term *identity* is a “false friend.” “It starts by reflecting a perfectly permissible aspiration, then before we know where we are it has become an instrument of war” (Maalouf [1998] 2000, p. 32). The meaning of *identity* here is that of social identity, which results from our identification with others in social groups according to shared religion, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, occupation, place of residence, and so forth. Social identities generate violence when social groups are in conflict, and their respective members behave antagonistically toward each other, though they may have no animosity toward one another as individuals. Such conflicts have become more common in the age of globalization, Maalouf believes, because of an ever-accelerating intermingling between peoples. For many, then, the dilemma this often creates is a choice between a complete loss or a vigorous assertion of traditional identities between the disintegration of identity and fundamentalism.

But Maalouf argues that this choice is an illusion, because people do not have just one social identity, which is then their individual identity; rather, they have many social identities, the specific combination of which gives each person a unique individual identity. This is the concept of *complex identity*, and it is not unchanging, but changes over a person’s lifetime, as do a person’s associa-

tions and experiences. Maalouf offers several interpretations of complex identity. One is the idea of a limiting concept: the “more ties” one has, the “rarer and more particular” one’s identity becomes (Maalouf 1998 [2000], p. 18). Alternatively, an individual’s complex identity develops continuously over a lifetime as new characteristics are acquired “step by step” (p. 25). The meaning, however, that most directly targets the problem of violence is complex identity as that which individuals assemble and arrange for themselves out of their different social identities (p. 16), since this presupposes a capacity for reflection about one’s social identities, which Maalouf sees as the best protection against the insanity of murder and butchery in the name of some “tribal” identity.

In this respect, Maalouf is close in his thinking to that of the 1998 Nobel laureate in economics, Amartya Sen (2006), who has also argued that individuals can appraise their identities rather than be captives of them. Both writers, then, closely associate individual identity with this reflective capacity. Their understanding of what it means to be an individual contrasts with the view in much of social science that takes individuals to be unconsciously responsive to a variety of motives, drives, and desires.

SEE ALSO *Ethnic Fractionalization; Ethnicity; Identity; Identity Matrix; Politics; Identity; Religion; Sen, Amartya Kumar; Tribalism; Violence*

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## IDENTITY

Identity is a pervasive concept in popular culture. Broadly speaking, *identity* refers to the overall character or personality of an individual or group. For example, a young mother might define her identity as that which reflects the essence of who she is (such as being a woman, spouse, and parent) and how she got to be that way. A business can have its own identity, perhaps defined by its unique corporate culture or its advertising history. Significant historical events like wars, natural disasters, or surges in immigration can play important roles in helping to define a nation’s identity.

On the one hand, the defining features of identity frequently entail elements that must be “found” by an

individual or group. For example, a musical group or the cast of a television show might have to work together for a long period of time before its performances flow smoothly and effortlessly and it is able to establish its own voice or overall character. Adolescents as well as adults can pass through *identity crises* that refer to periods of personal uncertainty or confusion. When a sports coach talks about his or her team finding its identity, this may refer to the development or recognition of a consistent way of playing or performing.

On the other hand, individuals or groups can also “lose” their identity through a variety of events or circumstances. For example, when politicians, celebrities, or other public figures engage in controversial behavior, those individuals must frequently work to reclaim or redefine their identities. A company that has made poor business decisions might be referred to as having lost its corporate identity. The modern phenomenon of *identity theft* is another example of identity loss, although it is more accurate to refer to this phenomenon as *identification* or *ID theft*. The popularity of the *identity theft* label suggests that an important part of lay definitions of individual identities are the public, demographic, and commercial means of identification.

As the previous examples illustrate, the popular boundaries of the identity concept are quite broad. This concept is similarly pervasive and broad in the theories and research of the social sciences and humanities. *Self* and *identity* are frequently used interchangeably by such theorists and researchers. In fact, sometimes writers will combine the terms into concepts such as *self-identity* or *ego-identity*. Within the social sciences and humanities, different disciplines emphasize different components of the concept. Thus, it is useful to consider how different fields define and operationalize identity.

Social science theorists and researchers distinguish a large number of different kinds of identity. Examples of identity types include racial, ethnic, group, social, religious, occupational, gender and sex role, cultural, physical and bodily, musical, athletic, academic, and so forth. Among these different identity types, a common distinction is made between *personal* and *social* identities. Personal identity usually refers to the unique characteristics of a person, including personality traits, personal values, opinions and preferences, physical characteristics, and career and lifestyle choices. In other words, these refer to aspects of a person's identity that are distinct and different from other people. Social identity usually refers to one's social roles, such as gender, racial, religious, political, ideological, and national group memberships. Typically, these roles involve ways that a person's identity is similar to others, such as sharing a physical characteristic, speaking a common language, having a similar social class or

socioeconomic status, practicing the same religion, or living in a common region.

Regardless of whether one focuses on personal or social facets, identity development involves a sense of sameness, continuity, and unity. Philosophically speaking, personal identity refers to the extent that an individual's characteristics are the same over time. That is, identity establishes the conditions that define a person's stable uniqueness. This can refer to the physical, psychological, and social aspects of the person. Thus, most social scientists agree that identity is something that develops over time and requires organization and integration, often achieved through the resolution of personal or social conflicts or crises. The failure to achieve some degree of identity coherence is thought to be a symptom of psychological, social, or cultural problems.

Identity also entails an individual commitment to a set of values and goals associated with specific characteristics. For example, much of personal identity involves identifying one's unique features and determining the value of those features and how they relate to a person's short-term and long-term goals. Social identity supposes an awareness of one's group memberships, as well as some level of commitment, closeness, or emotional attachment to those groups. People who highly value their social identities are more likely to act in ways that are consistent with those roles than people who do not value their social identities. Identity development is, therefore, tied to how people think about themselves and how they decide which aspects of their experience are most important as they define themselves. In other words, the development of identity involves personal and social processes of definition, construction, and negotiation.

## HISTORY OF THE IDENTITY CONCEPT

The pervasiveness of identity-related concerns is a relatively recent cultural and historical phenomenon. The psychologist Roy Baumeister (1986) described several influential social trends in European and American societies running from about 1500 to 1800. During these centuries, a variety of social, cultural, and economic changes corresponded with a shift in how philosophers, artists, writers, and the lay public viewed personhood and identity. Since the Middle Ages, there has been a weakening of the importance of a person's geographical home and of the institutions of marriage and job in defining one's identity. At the same time, the formerly important roles of one's family of ancestry, social rank, gender, and religion have been at least somewhat trivialized. Thus, traditions and institutions that had previously defined people's identity lost importance and influence.

These changes corresponded with new views on what constituted a person's identity. For example, people began to consider the possibility that there is a hidden self; that individuality is important; that there is a separation of their public, social lives from their private lives; and that children develop and have their own potentialities worthy of attention. In other words, the boundaries of identity became increasingly broad and malleable. Baumeister (1986) argued that these trends continued through the twentieth century, reflecting an age of mass consumption, greater occupational choices, dramatic technological changes, and the marketing of both products and people. The net effect of these social, cultural, and economic changes is that people in industrialized societies are now plagued with difficulties in defining their identities. Because of the loss of traditional ways of knowing who one is, the more abstract, elusive sense of identity makes it increasingly difficult to define. Much more than was the case one hundred or two hundred years ago, people must work to find or uncover who they are, in order to resolve the dilemmas of modern personhood.

Contemporary identity requires choice, achievement, and frequent self-redefinitions as opposed to the passive assignment of identity of the past. With the widespread desire for establishing and determining one's individuality and uniqueness comes greater difficulty, choice, and effort in achieving this. For instance, modern identity can be constructed out of one's personality traits, material possessions, personal accomplishments, group memberships, and activities and organizations. For these reasons, various writers have labeled identity as "empty," "saturated," and "overburdened," and as reflecting "an epidemic of role distance" (Hoyle et al. 1999, p. 49). Some writers argue that European and American culture's extreme preoccupation with an inner, independent identity leads to a devaluing or ignoring of the social world and the potential negative effects of contemporary social arrangements. This causes a seeking out of experiences and material possessions in order to avoid feelings of worthlessness or identity confusion.

#### TREATMENTS OF IDENTITY IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Identity is a topic of extensive theory and research for many of the social sciences. Two disciplines that have devoted a great deal of attention to identity are sociology and psychology. Sociologists generally define the overall self as consisting of multiple identities tied to the different roles a person plays in the social world. Early twentieth-century sociologists such as Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929) and George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) emphasized how other people provide "reflected appraisals" that encourage the understanding and estab-

lishment of a sense of identity. In his 1959 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, the sociologist Erving Goffman (1922–1982) brought a dramaturgical approach to social identity. Goffman theorized that people play social roles like actors on a stage, claiming and becoming committed to a particular public or group identity. Part of this identity includes a public "face" that a person claims and then defends in social interaction. In later writings, Goffman presented the idea of a "spoiled" identity, in which a person can be stigmatized as a result of deviant behaviors or personal characteristics.

More recently, the symbolic interactionist perspective has assumed a prominent role in the sociological approach to identity. Contemporary versions of symbolic interactionism examine how a person's identity is affected by the elements of social structure, in particular the social positions or roles that one plays and the meanings and expectations associated with those roles (Stets and Burke 2003). Role identities may differ in number, prominence, salience, and value to an individual, and sociologists have conducted a great deal of research on these aspects of role identity. For example, a greater number of role identities have been associated with greater resistance to stress and more positive mental health, particularly when those identities are voluntary or freely chosen ones rather than when they are conferred or obligatory.

The meaning of a role identity is something that a person must determine and negotiate. As such, it can be affected by the reactions of others. Over time, there can be changes in a role, as well as in the identity associated with that role. For example, when a person takes on a new role of being a spouse in a married couple, specific behaviors associated with that role must be defined and may change over time. In addition, the definition and boundaries of the spouse identity can change. Thus, the taking on, development, internalization, and changing of multiple roles comprise the most important features of identity from a sociological perspective.

Within psychology, the best-known treatment of identity comes from Erik Erikson's (1902–1994) psychosocial stages of development across the lifespan (Erikson 1968). When and how does a coherent sense of identity develop? Research suggests that identity concerns are especially prominent among late adolescents and early adults. This seems to be due to the fact that it is only by this time that young people become physically and sexually mature, are competent in abstract thought, show increased emotional stability, and have a certain amount of freedom from parental and peer constraints. Younger children are typically not assumed to have an identity (at least in the overall coherent and stable sense of the term). However, aspects of identity (e.g., age, sex, and race) have been shown to be important to the self-perceptions and

self-definitions of younger, preadolescent children. Understanding how a person is similar to and different from others is an important part of identity formation. In this regard, significant others can help to define the developing sense of identity.

In Erikson's theory, adolescence is a time of increased power and responsibility and also a time when young adults must determine who they are and where they fit into their culture and society. Thus, the struggle for a sense of identity and the formation of a "philosophy of life" seems to be especially intense during this period. There are several different ways that young adults might deal with their identity struggles (Marcia 1980). For example, a person might show identity *foreclosure*. This can occur when people prematurely commit to and unquestioningly adopt the beliefs, values, or roles prescribed by parents rather than going through the process of developing their own beliefs, values, and career choices. Second, people may delay commitment in order to try out alternative identities, beliefs, roles, or behaviors. In this situation, called an identity *moratorium*, such people are actively caught up in the throes of the identity struggle and are striving to resolve it. However, they have yet to develop a coherent and stable identity.

A third possible outcome of the young adulthood identity crisis is called identity *diffusion*. This refers to an unwillingness to confront the challenge of charting a life course and a failure to achieve a stable and integrated sense of self. Unlike in the moratorium, such people show little concern or effort to resolve their self-doubt, apathy, and passivity. Finally, people can arrive at a sense of self and direction and form an integrated image of themselves as unique persons. This is called identity *achievement*. Such individuals have passed successfully through the identity crisis and are now able to make a commitment to a career objective and a personally meaningful set of beliefs and values. For Erikson and other identity theorists, adequate identity formation is the foundation of sound psychological health in adulthood. Identity confusion can interfere with important developmental transitions during the adult years.

More recent psychological approaches to identity include the idea that self-narratives or life stories serve as central features in the creation of a person's identity. Psychological research also shows that people engage in a wide variety of behaviors to construct, test, and confirm their identities. For example, social psychologists have studied the processes by which people present specific identity aspects to others and manage the impressions that others form of them. What makes particular identity characteristics salient is likely to be tied to the social setting or context. Psychologists are also interested in studying how organized cognitive structures (or schemata) serve to

maintain a person's identity. For instance, cognitive structures can filter out competing or inconsistent information or lead to other forms of biased information processing that serves to protect or maintain one's identity.

Whereas sociologically based identity theories focus more on the different roles that constitute a person's identity, psychologically based social identity theory deals with how membership in groups is associated with self-categorization and social identities. For example, those who belong to the same group are seen as *ingroup* members, whereas nonmembers or those who belong to different groups are seen as *outgroup* members. A large amount of research has shown that such ingroup-outgroup categorization (sometimes based on arbitrarily defined group membership) results in ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination. Thus, it appears that merely belonging to a group can create meaningful social identities with strong attitudinal (e.g., prejudice) and behavioral (e.g., discrimination) implications.

Other disciplines within the social sciences and humanities also have utilized the identity concept in their theories and research. For example, political scientists are interested in the role of identity as a source of people's political beliefs or political party affiliation. They are also interested in how identity is affected by isolation, alienation, anomie, and social injustices in modern society and how these problems impact social structure, political party affiliation, political action, and international relations. As such, the identity concept is one of many factors that can affect political actions and larger social conflicts.

Political scientists sometimes focus on how membership in particular groups is associated with a specific identity that may have implications for social movements, community mobilization, and other forms of collective behavior. That is, through the identification or construction of a collective identity, groups may be able to increase pride and consciousness, mobilize resources, and bring about societal changes. In other words, groups may strive to expand the range of a particular identity characteristic into a political force with accompanying social and legislative reforms. This process is referred to as *identity politics*. Examples of identities that fall into this category include religion, race, ethnicity, gender, and physical disability. Critics have argued that politicizing an identity component can be counterproductive to the goal of social change. For example, by calling attention to a specific identity, a group may find it more difficult to address the social injustices associated with it. Or there may be broader social or cultural backlashes directed toward a group identity.

Anthropologists and other social scientists have explored the processes of cultural identification and cultural variations in identity construction. A popular dis-

tion relates to identity differences that are based on independent (or individualistic) and interdependent (or collectivistic) cultural construals. Educational researchers consider the development of academic identity and the relationship of various identity facets to academic achievement. Business and marketing researchers examine the mechanisms and processes associated with developing a corporate or brand identity in consumers. Within the humanities, a great deal of attention has been devoted to cultural and historical trends in the construction and management of identity (e.g., identity politics) and how identity is represented in and affected by works of art, music, theater, and literature.

Some of the current issues related to the identity concept include how to best measure the different kinds of identities and how multiple identities (and conflicts among these) affect behavior in specific situations. In addition, the development of different kinds of identities and how they interrelate from childhood through adulthood has received little research attention. How do multiple identities overlap and affect individual and group behavior? This is a particularly important question when considering broad social, cultural, or nationalistic actions, where several different identities may combine or conflict. For example, adopted or biracial children may experience unique issues as they attempt to develop their racial or cultural identity. More broadly speaking, one of the effects of an increasingly multicultural world is that the establishment of one's identity may become more difficult or complicated. One interesting domain for identity theorists and researchers concerns how technological changes, particularly those associated with the Internet, affect identity processes. For example, the social scientist Sherry Turkle (1995) has shown that exploration of new, alternative, and multiple identities has become significantly easier and more varied through online communities, multiuser domains, role-playing games, and fantasy worlds.

In summary, identity is a very broad and influential concept in the social sciences and humanities. It has proven to be remarkably fluid and malleable, with different disciplines able to define identity in ways that best suit their purposes and emphases. The cultural and historical trends that led to changes in identity over the past several centuries are likely to continue to provide new challenges to identity formation in the future. Increasing globalization, industrial development, scientific advances, and technological innovations will mean that difficulties in defining identity will be a worldwide phenomenon.

**SEE ALSO** *Adolescent Psychology; Cyberspace; Economics, Behavioral; Economics, Stratification; Erikson, Erik; Ethnicity; Gender; Goffman, Erving; Groups; Hybridity; Identity Crisis; Identity Matrix; Identity, Social; Internet; Nation; Nationalism and Nationality;*

*Performance; Personality; Politics, Gender; Politics, Identity; Popular Culture; Psychology; Race; Representation; Role Theory; Self-Classification; Self-Representation; Social Science; Sociology; Stages of Development; Values*

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Thomas M. Brinthaupt

## IDENTITY, SOCIAL

*Social identity* is defined as an individual's identification with others. In contrast, the concept of personal identity can be understood as an individual's identity *apart* from others. At the same time, social identity and personal identity are clearly related. Furthermore, whereas individuals are usually thought to have a single personal identity, they have many social identities associated with the many different collections of other individuals with whom they identify. These different collections of other individuals are usually thought of as social groups, though there are different ways to understand the idea of a social group, explain its boundaries, and account for the attachment individuals have to social groups. For example, individuals might identify with others by race, gender, nationality, and religion (very large social groups or social categories), with those in their workplaces and communities (intermediate size social groups), and with friends and family members (small social groups). In all cases, social identity provides a social basis for how individuals see themselves—a *sense of self* or *self-image*—that depends on their seeing themselves as being much like a reflection of those others with whom they identify.

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There are two broad approaches to understanding social identity: the social identity approach (particularly in

the form of self-categorization theory) and the sociological approach to identity (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995). The social identity approach derives principally from the work of Henri Tajfel and John Turner, who explain social identity in terms of the individual's knowledge that he or she belongs to certain social groups, combined with the emotional and value significance this membership imparts. Self-categorization theory concerns the cognitive processes by which individuals come to identify with others and embrace membership in social groups. In experimental research, individuals exhibit in-group favoritism and out-group biases for arbitrarily constructed social identities. This can be understood as an "accentuation effect" of group membership, whereby once individuals believe a particular social category applies to them, they perceptually "accentuate" both the similarities among stimuli falling within that category and the differences between stimuli from that and other categories (Tajfel 1959). Tajfel argued that the accentuation effect helps explain such phenomena as stereotyping, prejudice, and ethnocentrism.

The sociological approach to identity derives from the symbolic interactionist thinking of George Mead, and assumes there to be a reciprocal relation between the self and society or between the self and individuals' social identities (Stryker 1980). Social groups are seen as being structured in terms of different roles, and individuals accordingly have different types of relationships to social groups depending on the roles they occupy in those groups (Stets and Burke 2000). Roles can be paired with counter-roles (such as parent and child), or in more complicated group and institutional settings (such as in business firms) where roles are more highly differentiated, they can exhibit a variety of interconnections with one another. On the assumption that there is a reciprocal relation between the self and society, roles are subject to interpretation and negotiation, while at the same time individuals generally seek to match their own self-conceptions or self-images with social expectations of their roles. Thus, whereas social identity theory focuses on in-group and out-group relationships with respect to particular social groups, the sociological approach focuses on how individuals' social identity relationships are structured and negotiated within social groups.

Neither the social identity approach nor the sociological approach to identity pays significant attention to the relationship between social identity and personal identity. Yet the meaning of social identity as "identification with others" implies that there is a separate someone who identifies with others, and thus that individuals have an identity apart from or over and above their social identification with others. Also, the idea that an individual has many social identities implies some concept of personal identity, if only because it assumes the existence of a single subject

to whom those multiple identities belong. Thus, the concepts of social identity and personal identity are related to one another, and need ultimately to be explained jointly to give a full understanding of either concept. Unfortunately, little has been done to develop this more comprehensive kind of explanation.

**SEE ALSO** *Collective Wisdom; Communication; Gender; Groups; Groupthink; Identification, Racial; Identity; Identity Matrix; Mead, George Herbert; Prejudice; Race; Role Theory; Self-Classification; Self-Identity; Social Cognitive Map; Social Psychology; Society; Sociology; Symbols*

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## IDENTITY CRISIS

~~"Identity versus Identity Confusion" is the fifth of Erik Erikson's eight psychosocial stages of development, which he developed in the late 1950s. Adolescence is the most salient time for defining identity, the process of determining the meaning, purpose, and direction of one's inner, unique core of self while also maintaining some sense of sameness and continuity with one's past and of comfort within the context of one's culture. An identity crisis is "a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation" (Erikson 1968, p. 16). The most common use of the term identity crisis refers to normative psychosocial development during the periods of adolescence and emerging adulthood. This concept of crisis, however, has been applied quite broadly, at times being used to include not only healthy individual growth but also other issues of individual therapy and reconsiderations of what it means to be part of a reconstituted nation in the process of rapid historical change.~~



are terms that have been used to describe people whose external features are nonwhite (red, yellow, and brown respectively) but whose internal thought patterns are said to be white and reflective of a high degree of self-hatred. The individuals who are the recipients of such negative appellations defend themselves by claiming that it is possible to assimilate some values of the dominant society while at the same time rejecting those (such as white superiority) that they find offensive. Research in support of the possibility of such selective socialization is sparse.

The feminist-oriented research in this area is a reminder that self-hatred is not restricted to members of marginalized groups or subcultures. It is found in the wider society and has been linked to symptoms of depression, substance abuse, and general anxiety. What is perhaps unique about this type of self-hatred is that it does not seem to be related to anything other than a sense of personal failure. It has proven difficult, if not impossible, for researchers to specify a causal link among the possible variables. Self-hatred is as much a cause of as well as a result of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and gender ambiguity. It can therefore be viewed as both the hub and a spoke of the wheel of social misfortune. As a hub it represents the central role that the self, however damaged or elevated, plays in the dynamics of social life. As a spoke self-hatred represents one of the negative consequences of the socialization process itself.

**SEE ALSO** *Anxiety; Assimilation; Depression; Psychological; Ethnicity; Feminism; Freud, Sigmund; Gender; Goffman, Erving; Identity; Jews; Looking-Glass Effect; Mead, George Herbert; Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity; Nationalism and Nationality; Race; Racism; Sexual Orientation; Social and Economic Consequences; Socialization; Stigma; Uncle Tom*

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## SELF HELP ORGANIZATIONS

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## SELF-IDENTITY

The notion of the social self has been of particular interest in the social sciences because it reflects a concern with how people's social behavior varies not only as a function of different social roles but also as a function of the kind of social others with whom a person interacts. Within the social sciences, a distinction is made between personal identities, self-identities, and social identities (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995; Thoits and Virshup 1997). Personal identities consist of self-definitions in terms of unique and idiosyncratic characteristics. Social identities, on the other hand, reflect identification of the self with a social group or category. *Self-identities*, the focus of this article, are conceptualized as a definition of self as a person who performs a particular role or behavior.

Self-identity refers to a person's self-conception, self-referent cognitions, or self-definition that people apply to themselves as a consequence of the structural role positions he or she occupies or a particular behavior he or she engages in regularly. Self-identities reflect the "labels people use to describe themselves" (Biddle, Bank, and Slavings 1987, p. 326). For example, a person's self-identities may include the fact that she is a mother, a wife, a daughter, a social worker, and a blood donor. Self-identities provide meaning for the self, not only because they refer to concrete role specifications or behaviors but also because they distinguish roles or actions from counterroles or opposing behaviors (Lindesmith and Strauss 1956). For example, "the role of mother takes on meaning in connection with the role of father, doctor in connection with nurse, and so on" (White and Burke 1987, p. 312).

Theoretically, the importance of the concept of self-identity is derived from identity theory (Stryker 1968, 1980; Burke 1980; Stryker and Serpe 1982; Wiley 1991), which views the self not as an autonomous psychological entity but as a multifaceted social construct that emerges from people's roles in society and the behaviors they perform. Symbolic interactionists such as Mead (1934) and Cooley (1902) considered the self to be a product of social interaction: It is through social interaction that identities actually acquire self-meaning and people come to know who they are. It is important to note that identity theory focuses on the self-defining roles that people occupy in society rather than on the wider range of different social attributes, such as gender, race, or ethnicity, that can be ascribed to the self. Thus, the general perspective of identity theory forms the basis for a relatively large body of microsociological literature concerned with predicting role-related behavior (Simon 1992; Thoits 1991). Within social psychology, however, researchers have been more interested in using self-identity to improve our understanding and prediction of the relationship between attitudes and action.



The concept of self-identity is pivotal in the link between social structure and individual action. Self-identities, by definition, imply action (Callero 1985) and are a set of expectations prescribing behavior derived from a person's social position and considered appropriate by others. Satisfactory enactment of roles or behaviors not only confirms and validates a person's self-identity (Callero 1985), it also reflects positively on self-evaluation. The perception that one is enacting a role satisfactorily should enhance feelings of self-esteem, whereas perceptions of poor role performance may engender doubts about one's self-worth and may even produce symptoms of psychological distress (Thoits 1991; Hoelter 1983; Stryker and Serpe 1982).

### THE APPLICATION OF SELF-IDENTITY IN THE ATTITUDE-BEHAVIOR RELATIONSHIP

Within the field of social psychology, the greatest interest in self-identity has been shown by researchers in the attitude-behavior field. Within this field, it has been argued that self-identities can determine intentions and behaviors. For example, political activists may participate in protest actions because activism has become a central part of their self-concepts, and blood donors may give blood because being a donor has become an important part of their self-definition. Self-identity may have a predictive effect on intentions, independent of attitudes and other constructs, because self-identity encapsulates people's goals or interests that are distinct from those expressed by their attitudes. Indeed, as noted by Sparks (2000), the integration of self-identity into the theory of planned behavior "offers the opportunity to examine the social, moral, and emotional dimensions of people's attitudes and behaviour in greater detail" (p. 45).

Several authors have addressed the extent to which self-identity might be a useful addition to the dominant models of the attitude-behavior relationship, namely the theories of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen 1974) and planned behavior (Ajzen 1991). Self-identity has been found to contribute significantly to the prediction of behavior across a number of domains, including altruistic behavior such as blood donation (Charng, Piliavin, and Callero 1988), political behavior such as voting (Granberg and Holmberg 1990), environmental behavior such as recycling (Terry, Hogg, and White 1999), health behaviors such as exercise behavior (Theodorakis 1994) or licit and illicit drug use (Conner and McMillan 1999), and consumer behavior such as food choice (Sparks and Shepherd 1992). On the basis of past research, Conner and Armitage (1998) argued that it is reasonable to assume that there are certain behaviors for which self-

identity is an important determinant of intentions (Armitage and Conner, 2001).

### THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN SELF-IDENTITY AND PAST BEHAVIOR

One important question for self-identity researchers is the nature of the interplay between self-identity and past behavior. Identity theory assumes that self-identity and past behavior interact to influence intentions. That is, with repeated performance of a behavior, that behavior is more likely to be seen as an important part of the self-concept, increasing the predictive power of self-identity. However, support for this hypothesis has been equivocal: Some studies have found that self-identity is more predictive of intentions at higher levels of past behavior (Charng et al. 1988), some tests have found no evidence that the effects of self-identity vary as a function of past performance of the behavior (Astrom and Rise 2001; Terry et al. 1999), and other tests have found that self-identity is more predictive of intentions at lower levels of past behavior (Conner and McMillan 1999; Fekadu and Kraft 2001). Conner and McMillan argued that the stronger impact of self-identity on intention at lower levels of past behavior may reflect the role that initial experiences play in strengthening the relevance of identity to intentions. However, as behavior is repeated, intentions become less under the control of cognitive factors such as self-identity and more under the control of habitual forces such as past behavior. Given these inconsistencies, more research on the interplay of self-identity and past behavior, using a wide range of populations and behaviors, is needed in order to understand more fully the role of self-identity in the attitude-behavior context.

### ASSESSING SELF-IDENTITY

Within the literature, self-identity is assessed in a number of ways. Initially, researchers used direct and explicit statements to measure the extent to which a particular role or behavior was integrated as part of the self. For example, researchers working within the theory of planned behavior have asked people to indicate their level of agreement with statements such as, "I think of myself as the sort of person who is concerned about the long-term health effects of my food choices" (Sparks and Guthrie 1998), "Blood donation is an important part of who I am" (Charng et al. 1988), or "I am not a type of person oriented to engaging in contraception" (Fekadu and Kraft 2001).

Such measures have been found to be reliable and to predict behavioral intention; however, several criticisms have been noted. First, explicit statements require people to declare in public his or her identification with a particular role and behavior, therefore increasing the salience of that behavior (Sparks, Shepherd, Wieringa, and