8-2011

Positive Identity Construction: Insights from Classical and Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives

Laura Morgan

Stephanie J. Creary

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.upenn.edu/mgmt_papers

Part of the Management Sciences and Quantitative Methods Commons

Recommended Citation (OVERRIDE)

Positive Identity Construction: Insights from Classical and Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives

Abstract

This chapter presents a framework for *innovation-inspired positive organization development* (IPOD); IPOD is presented as both a radical break from the problem solving approaches that have come to dominate the field, as well as a homecoming to OD's original affirmative spirit. The converging fields that inform the theory and practice of IPOD are detailed: appreciative inquiry, positive organizational scholarship, positive psychology, design theory, and the rise of sustainable enterprises. The theory of change underlying IPOD is articulated, including the three stages in creating strengths-based organizational innovation: the elevation-and-extension of strengths, the broadening-and-building of capacity, and the establishment of the new-and-eclipsing of the old. Recent work from the city of Cleveland, Ohio, illustrates how these stages unfold. The chapter concludes with an agenda for evolving the field of IPOD, calling for a focus on designing *positive institutions* that refract and magnify our highest human strengths outward into society.

Keywords

Innovation-inspired positive organization development, appreciative inquiry, managing as design, sustainability, positive institutions, strength-based management, innovation, theory of change

Disciplines

Management Sciences and Quantitative Methods

Oxford Handbooks Online

Positive Identity Construction: Insights from Classical and Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives 🔒

Laura Morgan Roberts and Stephanie J. Creary

The Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship
Edited by Gretchen M. Spreitzer and Kim S. Cameron

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter develops a more comprehensive theory of positive identity construction by explicating proposed mechanisms for constructing and sustaining positive individual identities. The chapter offers a broad, illustrative sampling of mechanisms for positive identity construction that are grounded in various theoretical traditions within identity scholarship. Four classical theories of identity—social identity theory, identity theory, narrative-as-identity, and identity work—offer perspectives on the impetus and mechanisms for positive identity construction. The Dutton et al. (2010) typology of positive identity is revisited to highlight those sources of positivity that each classical theory explains how to enhance. As a next step in research, positive organizational scholarship (POS) scholars and identity scholars are encouraged to examine the conditions under which increasing the positivity of an identity is associated with generative social outcomes (e.g., engaging in prosocial practices, being invested in others' positive identity development, and deepening mutual understanding of the complex, multifaceted nature of identity).

Keywords: Identity, positive identity, identity construction, positive organizational scholarship, generative outcomes

Identities situate an entity within a social world through the construction of defining characteristics and relationships with other entities; they also evoke a set of cognitions, feelings, and behaviors that are associated with such characteristics and relationships. The study of identity reveals the meaning and significance of such self-relevant constructions for both individuals and organizations. In this chapter, we explore the intersection between positive organizational scholarship (POS) and individual identities.

Within the vast domain of identity research, general agreement exists that most individuals seek to hold positive self-views (Gecas, 1982), desire to be viewed positively by others (Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989), and, as a result, seek to construct positive identities—those that consist of a self-definition that is favorable or valuable in some way (Dutton & Roberts, 2009). Yet, the vast amount of research in the identity domain has also made it difficult to discern what might be "positive" about identity. The POS lens on "positive identity" reflects an intentional inquiry into the sources of positivity for identity and the mechanisms for positive identity construction. Building upon the body of work on positive identities and organizations (see Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Roberts & Dutton, 2009), we first describe the various ways in which an individual might derive a positive sense of self at work. We then examine the proposed mechanisms for constructing and sustaining positive individual identities that are embedded in theoretical approaches toward the study of identity in organizations. Each of the classical theories of identity that we review—social identity theory, identity theory, narrative-as-identity, and identity work—offers a perspective on the ways in which positive identities are shaped, formed, organized, constructed, evaluated, and/or maintained. Following this review, (p. 71) we offer guiding principles and driving questions from the POS approach to inquiry that might illuminate generative mechanisms for positive identity construction, whereby mutual growth, enhancement, and shared empowerment co-occur as a person views herself as more virtuous, worthy, evolving, adapting, balanced, and coherent.

What Is a Positive Identity?

Dutton et al. (2010) synthesized literature on identity in organizations into a four-part typology that answers the question, "What makes a work-related identity positive?" We briefly summarize this typology below, as it provides an important review and synthesis of potential sources of positivity in work-related identities. We point readers to the full elaboration of each perspective in the Dutton et al. (2010) review article.

The four-part typology includes the virtue perspective, the evaluative perspective, the developmental perspective, and the structural perspective, each of which highlights a different source of positivity. According to the virtue perspective, an identity is positive when it is infused with the qualities associated with people of good character, such as "master virtues" (Park & Peterson, 2003) like wisdom, integrity, courage, justice, transcendence, redemption, and resilience. The evaluative perspective focuses on the regard in which individuals hold their personal identity (i.e., as an individual), relational identity (i.e., as a member of a relationship), and social identities (i.e., as members of social groups). According to this perspective, an identity is positive when it is regarded favorably by the individual who holds it and/or by referent others who regard the identity favorably. The developmental perspective focuses on changes in identity over time and assumes that identity is capable of progress and adaptation. The developmental perspective asserts that an identity is positive when it progresses toward a higher-order

stage of development (for an example, see Hall's [2002] description of progress through distinct career stages). The developmental perspective also asserts that an identity is positive when the individual defines him- or herself in a way that generates fit between the content of the identity and internal or external standards (e.g., adapting to new roles at work, see Ibarra [1999]; resisting stigmatization and oppression, see Creed, DeJordy & Lok [2010] and Meyerson & Scully [1995]). The structural perspective focuses on the ways in which the self-concept is organized. Research fitting this perspective asserts that an individual's identity structure is more positive when the multiple facets of the identity are in balanced and/or complementary relationship with one another, rather than in tension or conflict with one another (see Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, & Lee, 2008; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010).

In the next section, we turn to four prominent theoretical approaches to identity in organizational studies that unearth potential mechanisms for enhancing one's sense of self as virtuous, favorably regarded, progressive, adaptive, balanced, and "whole." We refer to these theoretical approaches as "classical theories of identity," due to their well-established trajectories of conceptual and empirical scholarship.

Classical Theories of Identity

Classical theories of identity—social identity theory, identity theory, narrative-as-identity, and identity work—suggest several different mechanisms through which individuals construct positive identities. By "mechanism" we refer to "a process that explains an observed relationship … how and/or why one thing leads to another" (Anderson et al., 2006; see also Hedstrom & Swedberg, 1998). In this section, we discuss each of the classical theories, identifying the different mechanisms for positive identity construction that theory proposes. We do not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of possible mechanisms for positive identity construction, but rather aim to offer a broad, illustrative sampling of mechanisms that are grounded in various theoretical traditions within identity scholarship. Throughout this section, we also revisit the typology proposed by Dutton et al. (2010) in order to establish clearer linkages among past and current perspectives on positive identity, in hopes of developing a more comprehensive theory of positive identity that highlights the sources of positivity each theory explains how to enhance.

We chose to focus on these four theoretical perspectives because they offer varied accounts of the nature, origin, and influences of identity, yet they hold in common the core assumption that individuals possess a certain degree of agency in defining themselves in "positive" ways. Given our primary interest in how individuals co-construct positive identities at work, our review does not feature theoretical perspectives that view identity as essentially rigid, structurally bound, narrowly defined, and/or exploitative. However, our account of positive identity construction does feature explanatory

mechanisms for coping with devaluation, stigmatization, and oppression, as well as those mechanisms for cultivating more positive identities that are not catalyzed by identity threat. (p. 72)

Table 6.1 gives an overview of each of the classical theories of identity according to the impetus for positive identity construction, proposed mechanisms for positive identity construction, and the effect these behaviors have on self-views.

Table 6.1 Positive identity construction			
	Impetus for Construction	**Mechanism of Construction**	**Effect on Self-views**
Social Identity Theory	1. Group identification 2. Categorizing into social groups 3. Identity devaluation	→ Pursue optimal distinctiveness → Make favorable self-enhancing comparisons → Enhance social valuation of identity	→ More Positive identity structure and identity evaluation → More Positive identity evaluation → More Positive identity evaluation
Identity Theory	1. Role–identity mismatch 2. Identity activation/salience 3. Identity conflict	→ Align actions with expectations → Prioritize identities → Segment or integrate identities	→ More Positive sense of adaptation and identity structure → More Positive identity structure → More Positive identity structure
Narrative-as-Identity	1. Identity transition 2. Unexpected, untimely, involuntary, or uncertain circumstances	→ Integrate life experiences across time → Craft narratives of growth	→ More Positive identity structure → More Positive sense of development
Identity Work	1. Stereotyping 2. Desire for authenticity 3. Desire for social validation	→ Engage in agentic identity performance → Engage in agentic identity performance → Negotiate identity through claiming and granting	→ More Positive identity evaluation and identity structure → More Positive identity evaluation and identity structure

Subscriber: University of Pennsylvania; date: 06 February 2018

			→ More Positive identity evaluation, identity structure, and sense of self as virtuous

Social Identity Theory

Core assumptions about identity

Social identity theorists purport that individuals belong to multiple social categories, including those inclusive of organizational membership, race/ethnicity, gender, and age cohort (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Through self-categorization, individuals segment, classify, and order the social environment and their place in it (Turner, 1987). According to researchers, the existence of a social identity constitutes both a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social group or category (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the feelings associated with that membership. A social category is represented in the self-concept as a social identity that both describes and prescribes how one should think, feel, and behave as a member of that social group (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As a member of a social group, an individual shares some degree of emotional involvement in and degree of social consensus about the evaluation of his group and of his membership in it with other group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Proposed mechanisms for positive identity construction

Pursue Optimal Distinctiveness

Group memberships provide opportunities for optimal distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991); people experience belonging and differentiation simultaneously, as they define themselves as similar to their in-group, yet distinct in positive ways from members of other groups. Optimal distinctiveness elevates self-esteem and thus fosters more positive identity evaluations (Brewer, 1991). Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep's (2006) study of Episcopal priests suggests a link between optimal distinctiveness and positive identity structures. They detail several boundary work tactics that priests employ to identify strongly with their vocation, but protect their personal identity from being overpowered by their professional demands. The priests' continued pursuit of optimal distinctiveness helps to increase the positivity of their identity structures by balancing their needs for belonging and differentiation. Thus, optimal distinctiveness research helps to explain how group (p. 73) identification cultivates more positive identity evaluations and structures.

Make Favorable, Self-enhancing Comparisons Between In-groups and Out-groups

The favorable comparison mechanism explains how categorization into social groups might increase positive self-regard. According to social identity theory, members make favorable comparisons between their in-group and a relevant out-group in order to sustain their perception that the in-group is positively distinct from the out-group (Tajfel

& Turner, 1979). According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), group identifications are "relational and comparative: they define the individual as similar to or different from, as 'better' or 'worse' than members of other groups" (p. 101). Tajfel and Turner's (1979) proposition that "positive social identity is based to a large extent on favorable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and some relevant out-groups" (p. 41) suggests that the favorable comparison mechanism explains the linkage between social group categorization and positive identity from the evaluative perspective.

Enhance social valuation of identity.

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) early propositions of social identity theory also indicate how people enhance the social valuation of their identity when facing identity threats. Specifically, their proposed mechanisms for coping with identity threat and devaluation help to explain how individuals increase the positivity of their identity evaluation. These mechanisms are particularly relevant for members of socially devalued groups (i.e., groups that are generally characterized within society as possessing unfavorable defining characteristics, and that are often stigmatized by negative stereotypes and low relative status in social hierarchies). Members of socially devalued groups face an unusual predicament in constructing positive identities; rather than belong to a positively distinct group, instead, they belong to group that likely distinguishes them on the basis of negative attributes.

To cope with the social identity threats that result from a lack of positive distinctiveness, some members of devalued groups may attempt to symbolically or physically exit their devalued group in order to join a more positively regarded group. They might attempt to affiliate with a highly regarded group by portraying themselves as prototypical members of that group—demonstrating that they possess the defining characteristics of the valued group (rather than the devalued group), so that they will be viewed as legitimate members. For example, certain people attempt to suppress their invisible devalued identities while in the workplace, so they will be perceived as members of their higher-status work groups (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Ragins, 2008).

Other members may use cognitive tactics to reevaluate their in-group using a set of criteria that will reestablish positive distinctiveness. For example, individuals whose occupations involve dirty work (Hughes, 1951) seek to negotiate and secure social affirmation for their identities (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Specifically, these individuals may transform the meaning of their marginalized work and tainted identities by devaluing negative attributions and revaluing positive ones to make the occupation more attractive to insiders and outsiders (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Positive self-regard is maintained by dis-identifying with a negatively regarded group or by reweighting evaluative criteria to maintain the in-group's relative worth. In sum, these social identity enhancement tactics are examples of the mechanism through which people sustain positive identity evaluations in the face of identity devaluation.

Identity Theory

Core assumptions about identity

Like social identity theory, identity theory offers perspectives on the social nature of the self-concept and the socially constructed nature of the self (Hogg et al., 1995). Yet, identity theory also emphasizes a multifaceted self that mediates the relationship between social structure and individual behavior (Hogg et al., 1995). Identity theory differs from social identity theory in its primary focus on the identities attached to the multiple roles that individuals occupy in society, rather than on the wider range of master statuses (i.e., gender, race, ethnicity) that can be ascribed to individuals (Hogg et al., 1995).

Identity theory refers to two different yet strongly related strands of identity research (Stryker & Burke, 2000). The first strand, rooted in traditional symbolic interactionism, claims that social structures affect the self, and the structure of the self influences social behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000; see also Stryker 1980; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). In this regard, identity theory reflects Mead's (1934) assertion that "society shapes self shapes social behavior" (quoted by Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 285). Sluss and Ashforth (2007) expound upon this core premise in their work on relational identities in the (p. 74) workplace; they describe how individuals derive a sense of self from their various role-based interpersonal relationships and how relational identities shape patterns of interaction.

The second strand of identity theory focuses on the internal dynamics of self-processes that impact social behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000; see also Burke, 1991; Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Burke & Stets, 1999). Identities are thought of as "self-meanings" that are attached to the multiple roles an individual performs and the meanings of an individuals' behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000). For example, Burke and Reitzes (1981) found that college students' self-views of academic responsibility (a dimension of the student identity) were a strong predictor of college plans, suggesting that individuals will align their behaviors with their sense of self when both factors share meaning. Both strands of identity theory hold in common the belief that external social structures and the structure of the self are inextricably linked (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Proposed mechanisms for positive identity construction

Align Actions with Role Expectations

This mechanism explains how behavioral congruence with role expectations cultivates more positive identities according to the developmental and structural perspectives. Given that the self is multifaceted and that individuals have as many identities as they have social roles (Stryker & Burke, 2000), it is important for individuals to align their actions and sense of self with the expectations of a given role. At times, people may experience a mismatch between role expectations and their sense of self. In response, they may modify their behavior or expectations to increase alignment. For example, professionals who experience a mismatch between their roles and their identities may customize or alter their identities to fit work demands (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). Pratt et al. (2006) uncovered three types of identity customization processes that are used among medical residents—identity enriching, identity patching, and identity splinting. *Identity enriching* occurs when professionals deepen their understanding of their professional identity without changing an identity structure (e.g., evolving definitions of what it means to be a physician). *Identity patching* occurs when professionals draw upon one identity to make sense of another identity, and when professionals make sense of workplace situations by changing their identities to fit how they do their jobs. *Identity splinting* occurs when professionals adopt a prior identity to support the development of a new identity that is less secure (e.g., a new resident adopting the identity of a medical student). These examples of alignment help to show how meeting role expectations fosters a sense of self as capable of adapting to internal and external demands without subjugating self-interest to role expectations. In addition, aligning actions with role expectations helps to negotiate potential conflicts within one's multifaceted self-concept, thus promoting the construction of positive identity structures.

Prioritize Roles in the Salience Hierarchy

The prioritization mechanism is a pathway to constructing more positive identity structures by negotiating and balancing multiple role demands. According to identity theory, identities are organized in a salience hierarchy, such that an identity that is higher in the salience hierarchy is more likely to be invoked across a variety of situations (Stryker & Burke, 2000). The salience of an identity reflects commitment to the role relationships associated with that identity because an individual is more likely to behave in accordance with an identity that is higher in the salience hierarchy than one that is lower (Stryker & Burke, 2000). For example, Ragins (2008) describes how social experiences can shape the extent to which a person identifies him- or herself as a mentor (i.e., prioritizing the identity higher in the salience hierarchy) and, consequently, can increase commitment to performing acts consistent with the positively regarded mentor identity. Given the multitude of role expectations, identity theorists purport that role prioritization may be important for increasing the clarity of relational identities and commitment to varied role expectations (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Thus, prioritization helps people cultivate more positive identity structures by shaping commitment to particular actions.

Segment or Integrate Multiple Identities

Positive Identity Construction: Insights from Classical and Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives

According to identity theory, a third mechanism for positive identity construction is to cognitively structure the multiple facets of one's own identities in ways that promote complementarity. Like the prioritization mechanism, this mechanism is important for reducing or preventing the internal identity conflicts that may arise when multiple identities are not mutually reinforcing (Stryker, 2000). If the conflicting identities differ greatly in salience, then the identity higher in salience will be invoked. However, if the conflicting identities reflect similar positions in the salience hierarchy, stress is likely (p. 75) to ensue (Burke, 1991), and individuals will be motivated to employ coping strategies to construct positive structural identities.

Segmentation and integration are both viable strategies for mitigating identity conflict (see Ashforth et al., 2008 for a review). Individuals who use segmentation tactics tend to compartmentalize multiple identities, whereas those who integrate their identities may experience their multiple identities as compatible and mutually enhancing, rather than in conflict or in opposition with one another (Caza & Wilson, 2009; Rothbard & Ramarajan, 2009). Although compartmentalization may reduce the impact of stress in various life domains, it may also inhibit a person's ability to draw upon the psychological, social, and cognitive resources that accompany various role identities across domains. Therefore, both segmentation and integration are mechanisms that help cultivate more positive identity structures. However, Dutton et al. (2010) conclude that in low-stress situations, integration tactics may be most potent for enhancing the degree of complementarity that an individual experiences between his or her multiple identities.

Narrative-as-Identity

Core assumptions about identity

The narrative-as-identity approach views identity as an emergent, interpretive process rather than as a static structure. Specifically, narrative-as-identity scholarship refers to "the stories people construct and tell about themselves to define who they are for themselves and for others" (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006, p. 4). According to this perspective, an identity is comprised of an individual's narratives or stories of interaction with his or her social world. Identity narratives contain key themes that situate one's existence within a plot of unfolding events. These narratives provide people with a sense of order and continuity, in the midst of potentially disconnected or even conflicting life episodes.

Proposed mechanisms for positive identity construction

Integrate Life Experiences Across Time

The integration mechanism is particularly important for making sense of identity transitions over time. Narrative identity scholars explain how to construct more positive identity structures through integrating experiences to provide a sense of unity and purpose (Erikson, 1959) and to bring coherence to life (McAdams, 1985, 1997). Some theorists emphasize that integrative narratives are not simplistic; they contain many

voices in dialogue with each other (Gergen, 1991). This "conversation among narrators" or "war of historians" (Raggat, 2006) accounts for the opposition that is inherent within selfhood (Gregg, 2006). Regardless of the degree of contradiction within one's life story, self-narration represents the construction of a coherent sense of self across time and circumstance, by enabling individuals to simultaneously accommodate change and consistency (Ashforth et al., 2008). For example, according to Ibarra and Barbulescu's (2010) discussion of career transitions, self-narratives enable a person to bridge gaps between old and new roles and identities. A coherent self-narrative allows an individual to explain career and identity transitions through stories that depict one's career trajectory as a series of purposive events. To appeal to different audiences, an individual may create multiple self-narratives, such that each individual self-narrative becomes part of a larger and more varied narrative repertoire (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Thus, the mechanism of integrating life experiences helps to explain how individuals construct positive identities from a structural perspective by increasing the sense of coherence and continuity between various aspects of one's identity and related experiences.

Craft Narratives of Growth

Narrative-as-identity scholarship also unearths the process by which individuals craft stories of growth, which fosters the creation of positive identities from a developmental perspective. Narrative construction involves sense-making activities (inquiring and interpreting one's embeddedness within a social context), which help people to derive meaning from challenging situations and to (re)construct a positive sense of self even through disappointment and unexpected changes (Ashforth et al., 2008). Growth narratives are particularly potent when individuals seek to construct positive identities in the face of unexpected, untimely, involuntary, or uncertain circumstances. For example, growth is a central theme in the derivation of redemptive meaning from negative life stories (McAdams, 2006), in reflection and sense-making about traumatic events (Maitlis, 2009), as well as in narratives of hope that reflect anticipation of future growth (Carlsen & Pitsis, 2009). Maitlis' (2009) research on positive identity construction reveals how musicians who have suffered career-altering injuries compose self-narratives that enable them to make sense of who they are as professionals and humans post-injury. Some musicians in her study (p. 76) developed narratives of growth that signaled a greater sense of empowerment and agency in crafting a fulfilling professional and personal life, even though the shift was brought on by an unexpected, untimely, or involuntary circumstance. Thus, this mechanism suggests that, as people craft narratives of growth, they come to see themselves as evolving in positive ways, which forms a basis of positive identity from the developmental point of view.

Identity Work

Core assumptions about identity

Positive Identity Construction: Insights from Classical and Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives

Although social identity, identity theory, and narrative-as-identity approaches each offer perspectives on the socially constructed nature of the self, the identity work approach develops this notion further to posit that the self emerges from the dynamism of interaction with one's social world. In the tradition of symbolic interactionism, the identity work perspective includes a broad body of research on the interpersonal nature of identity construction (Stryker, 1980). The phrase "identity work" is often attributed to Snow and Anderson (1987), who defined identity work as "the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (p. 1348). In other words, individuals do not simply respond to external stimuli in developing positive identities, but are proactive agents in constructing socially validated identities that reflect aspects they deem most central to their sense of self.

Identity work encompasses a range of agentic tactics that people employ to proactively shape the meaning or significance of their identity in a given context. The identity work perspective typically illustrates the ways in which people respond to discrepancies or threats to their identities, such as those prompted by stereotyping, stigmatization, or legitimacy challenges (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1998; Ibarra, 1999). However, recent scholarship on positive identity also raises the possibility that "identity work … is inspired by an entity's desire to grow and evolve rather than a need to maintain social status or self-worth in the face of threat" (Roberts, Dutton, & Bednar, 2009, p. 510; see also Kreiner & Sheep, 2009). Below, we highlight two identity work mechanisms that have garnered considerable attention within the organizational psychology and organizational behavior literatures. We focus here on distinct *behavioral* identity work mechanisms that are not explicitly addressed by the other three classical identity theories. Unlike cognitive approaches to identity work (e.g., shifting dimensions of comparison to evaluate one's own social identity more favorably, sense-making of past experiences to story oneself in more positive ways), behavioral techniques focus on active and relational sense-making processes that help individuals construct more positive identities.

Proposed mechanisms for positive identity construction

Engage in Agentic Identity Performance

Identity performance involves proactively shaping others' perceptions of one's social group memberships and identification (Roberts & Roberts, 2007), which helps to increase the positivity of identity evaluations and structures. Agentic identity performance may be a mechanism for positive identity construction in two circumstances: when an individual desires to increase his or her experience of authentic engagement (see Roberts & Roberts, 2007, for a review); and when an individual seeks to counter negative stereotypes (see Roberts, 2005, for a review). For example, individuals often disclose their feelings about group membership and involvement in social-identity group activities in order to communicate how important those identities are to their self-concept and daily living (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Meyerson & Scully; 1995; Roberts, Cha, Hewlin, & Settles, 2009). They may also educate others about the inaccuracies of group stereotypes, hold

themselves up as a positive exemplar who does not embody the stereotypes, play into group stereotypes to accrue social benefits, or avoid discussions of difference altogether (Creed & Scully, 2000; Ely, 1994; Roberts, Settles, & Jellison, 2008). These attempts to claim or suppress identities occur via strategic self-presentation—visible displays of physical appearance (hair, makeup, clothing, jewelry); use of symbolic gestures to emphasize certain cultural orientations (displaying photos or cultural artifacts, engaging in cultural rituals); the use of strategic verbal disclosures to shape perceptions of competence or fit; or the enactment of certain public affiliations (i.e., strategic socialization) (Bell, 1990; Clair et al., 2005; Roberts & Roberts, 2007). The central insight from this body of work is that individuals take on an agentic role in constructing positive identities. Specifically, as individuals make strategic choices about identity displays and disclosures (even in the case of coping with identity threat), they increase the positivity of identity from the evaluative perspective by publicly claiming the identities they (p. 77) hold in high regard (Roberts et al., 2009) and showing themselves as prototypical members who possess the favorable, defining qualities of a social identity group (Branscombe et al., 1998; Turner, 1987). The identity performance mechanism can also help to increase the complementarity of identity structures by integrating the most valued and valuable aspects of one's nonwork identities into one's work identity (Cha & Roberts, 2010).

Identity Negotiation Through Claiming and Granting

Although identity performance research tends to focus on an actor's deliberate attempts to navigate his or her social context via self-expression and impression management, research on identity negotiation illuminates the iterative, interactive nature of positive identity construction. Specifically, identity negotiation research suggests that individuals will negotiate with themselves and with others to enhance their identities and to ultimately achieve social validation of their authentic selves (Swann, 1987). As such, this mechanism helps to explain how individuals form more positive identities from the evaluative, virtue, and structural perspectives. Bartel and Dutton (2001) provide a useful framing of these identity negotiation techniques in their discussion of the claiming–granting processes by which identities are socially constructed. The claiming–granting perspective offers a dynamic account of the identity work that unfolds during interpersonal encounters and thus emphasizes the interdependence of an actor and audience when constructing positive identities within a social context. Claiming occurs when individuals perform acts that they believe embody their self-view. Granting occurs when others within the social environment engage in comparison processes that allow them to affirm or disaffirm the identity an individual desires. We offer a few illustrations of this mechanism in organizational studies: DeRue, Ashford, and Cotton (2009) describe claiming and granting of the leader identity; MacPhail, Roloff, and Edmondson (2009) describe shared recognition of and appreciation for team members' expert identities; and Milton (2009) and Polzer, Milton, and Swann (2002) describe identity confirmation processes in work groups. Each study illuminates how identity claims are validated by others in order to legitimate the credibility of an identity and attain interpersonal goals. To the extent that discrepancies exist between identities claimed and granted in social

interactions, individuals may also engage in narrative identity work (cognitive and interpersonal tactics) to bridge these gaps (Ibarra & Barbalescu, 2010). In sum, the identity negotiation research helps to show how the dynamic process of claiming and granting positive identities helps to enhance a person's sense of self as favorably regarded (i.e., validated by others) and authentic or "whole" from a structural perspective (i.e., reducing discrepancies between self-and-other views). This mechanism also reveals how virtuous identity claims are validated, as an individual is viewed as the possessor of qualities that distinguish people of good character and that are defined as inherently good.

Summary of Explanatory Mechanisms for Positive Identity Construction

To summarize, each of the four classical approaches to identity research imply different mechanisms for how individuals might strengthen the positivity of their identities at work. The implied mechanisms specify several potential links between Dutton et al.'s (2010) four-part typology and these classical identity perspectives; namely, in how they function to increase the positivity of one's feelings, sense of growth, development, adaptation, and coherence or balance.

Social identity theory and identity work theories help explain how individuals construct identities that are evaluated more favorably. Social identity theory's emphasis on one's sense of self-regard enables the construction of identities that are more positive from an evaluative perspective. The identity work research, although broad and varied, points to the means through which individuals seek and attain self-verification or identity-granting through proactive, agentic identity claims. This work also aligns with the evaluative perspective on positive identity, in that it explicates the process of constructing identities that are personally and socially valued.

Social identity theory, identity theory, and narrative-as-identity scholarship reveals mechanisms for creating more positive identity structures. The emphasis on optimal distinctiveness in social identity theory is related to the structural perspective's characterization of positive, multifaceted identities that are balanced. Identity theory's focus on boundary management and prioritization within one's identity also illuminates how individuals construct positive identity structures that are complementary. Narrative-as-identity scholarship features sense-making and story-telling as critical processes for building a sense of coherence between one's past, present, and future selves—another indicator of a positive structural identity.

(p. 78) Each of the four classical theories suggests how to construct identities that are more positive from a developmental perspective. Narratives of growth capture an individual's sense of evolving and becoming stronger, wiser, more capable, or better in some way. Narratives of hope incorporate expectations of oneself and one's circumstances becoming more positive in the future. The emphasis on adaptive identity development is prevalent in role identity research. Identity customization tactics promote adaptation through altering one's thoughts and behaviors, so that they align with internal values and situational expectations.

The virtue perspective is least obvious in each of the proposed mechanisms for increasing the positivity of one's identity. Although researchers do not explicitly document the impact of such mechanisms on defining oneself as virtuous in some way, certain mechanisms might be useful in constructing more virtuous identities. For instance, identity work could increase the likelihood that others will perceive a person as virtuous

(e.g., moral, authentic, compassionate, courageous, generous), which could increase both positive evaluations and the positivity of virtuous identity content. Likewise, if one's growth narrative includes the self-characterization of becoming more virtuous over time, narrative-as-identity theories will align with developmental views of positive identity. If an individual identifies with a group or role that is viewed as noble, righteous, courageous, or moral in some way, social identity theory and identity theory can inform our understanding of the construction of more virtuous identities.

Future Directions

In this section, we offer two avenues for future research in this domain that would help to further examine the mechanisms through which individuals cultivate more positive identities at work: constructing positive complex identities, and evaluating the generative potential of mechanisms for positive identity construction.

Constructing Positive Complex Identities

Workplace and social trends suggest that identity complexity is becoming a more salient and central issue for organizations and their members, since the workplace is becoming increasingly diverse (Johnston & Packer, 1987), boundaries between work and nonwork roles are blurring (Ashforth, 2001), and personal and professional networks are intersecting through online social networking sites. To add another layer to positive identity research, we encourage scholars to develop theories of positive identity that more fully explicate how individuals develop and sustain socially validated, positive complex identities. We suggest that this underexplored mechanism is central to discovering how positive identities can enable people to build positive relationships at work.

The structural perspective on positive identity offers preliminary insight on this topic, as it expounds upon the multifaceted nature of identity construction and the importance of viewing one's various roles and identities as balanced and complementary. Yet, research to date does not focus on how individuals develop a shared understanding of one another as people who possess multiple identities. Instead, identity theories typically focus on cognitive processes for simplifying one's own identity structures (e.g., hierarchical ranking) and for simplifying others' identity structures (e.g., categorization). Much of the popular identity research purports that identities are arranged according to a presumed hierarchy of identity and then viewed in terms of the most situationally salient identities, for example, master statuses (Hughes, 1945) or distinctive (token) identities (Kanter, 2003). Individuals are said to be motivated to identify with *one* group in order to resolve the tensions of belonging and distinctiveness (as with optimal distinctiveness; Brewer, 1991). Classical perspectives also suggest that individuals will use segmentation tactics, such as dis-identification (Steele, 1997) and compartmentalization (Roccas & Brewer, 2002), to create boundaries between identities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), or use integration tactics, such as dual identification (Hornsey & Hogg, 2000), superordinate categorization (Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, & Neale, 1998), and hyphenation (Roccas & Brewer, 2002) to combine two or more identities so that they are no longer viewed as separate (Ashforth et al., 2009; Caza & Wilson, 2009; Johnson et al., 2006; Russo, Mattarelli, & Tagliaventi, 2008). The aforementioned studies focus primarily on how individuals structure their own identities into more positive ones, according to social identity theory and identity theory. Identity work's emphasis on claiming–granting processes and self-verification offers little explanation of how individuals construct socially validated positive, complex identities. We believe this gap presents an opportunity for future research on positive identity construction.

Regardless of the cognitive structure of one's identity, we learn from identity work research that individuals seek social validation for their own sense (p. 79) of self. Self-verification theory suggests that people want self-confirmatory feedback and assumes that an individual's ability to recognize how others perceive them is the key to successful interpersonal relationships (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Geisler, 1992). To the extent that a

person defines oneself in complex (and perhaps even paradoxical) terms, we propose that he or she will also seek to gain interpersonal understanding of her complex existence. Research has not explicitly examined this process of claiming and granting complex identities. Thus, we invite scholars to consider how an individual may employ "identity expansion" tactics to foster a shared understanding as one who belongs to multiple groups and possesses multiple roles, all of which are significant and related to one another. Identity expansion occurs when an individual socially constructs a more complex identity by communicating to others that they are "both A and B" where "and" means either that identities are embedded or that A and B are perceived as two distinct in-group identities (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Identity expansion can lead to shared understanding, especially in situations where mistaken assumptions regarding the membership, significance, or valence of another person's multiple identities surface. For example, during the 2008 U.S. Democratic primaries, then Senator Barack Obama repeatedly introduced himself in large and small gatherings as both the son of a Kenyan immigrant and a white woman with Midwestern roots. In so doing, he countered public pressures to identify himself in either-or terms (Thomas, Roberts, & Creary, 2009):

> I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather who survived a Depression to serve in Patton's Army during World War II and a white grandmother who worked on a bomber assembly line at Fort Leavenworth while he was overseas. I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slaveowners—an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters. I have brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, uncles, and cousins, of every race and every hue, scattered across three continents, and for as long as I live, I will never forget that in no other country on Earth is my story even possible. It's a story that hasn't made me the most conventional candidate. But it is a story that has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts —that out of many, we are truly one. (Barack Obama "A More Perfect Union" March 18, 2008)

This example reveals how Barack Obama directly communicated the complexity of his social and professional identities, ultimately increasing the salience of multiple facets of identity and shared understanding and acceptance of such complexity. To this end, we invite scholars to consider two questions related to the claiming and granting of complex identities: Under what circumstances might an individual pursue self-verification of positive complex identities? And, how might "identity expansion" impact the nature of interpersonal relationships?

Evaluating the Generative Potential of Mechanisms for Positive Identity Construction

The second avenue for future research in this domain involves examining the social consequences of positive identity construction mechanisms. Concerns about the potentially problematic nature of positive identity construction often point to the potentially destructive nature of inflated self-views that are not grounded in reality (e.g., egotism, narcissism—as embodied in the sarcastic phrase, "a legend in one's own mind") and therefore may promote behaviors that compromise individual and group well-being (even if they garner material success) (Ashforth, 2009; Brookings & Serratelli, 2006; Colvin, Funder, & Block, 1995; Fineman, 2006; Lee & Klein, 2002). Although Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar (2010; see also forthcoming) address some of these concerns, our synopsis of mechanisms presents additional research questions.

Some mechanisms feature the social construction of positive identity through cognition and behavior, whereas other mechanisms place a primacy on cognition over behavior. This distinction may be indicative of epistemological and philosophical debates on the nature of human existence. Although Descartes concluded that cognitions alone define human existence ("I think, therefore I am"), Carl Jung stated that "You are what you do, not what you say you'll do." According to Jung, espoused self-views may be inconsistent with actual behaviors, and Jung considers the latter to be more revealing of the true essence of one's identity than who one might think that he or she is. We encourage scholars to articulate their core assumptions about defining characteristics of positive identity—behavior, cognition, or both—as they evaluate the potency of these mechanisms for cultivating more (p. 80) positive identities. This distinction is particularly important because some of the proposed mechanisms may be quite effective in increasing the positivity of one's identity through cognitions and emotions, but may be disconnected from actual practices that one would deem to be generative (i.e., growth-enhancing and beneficial in some way, generally producing a favorable impact on people or situations beyond one's own self-interest). For example, one might successfully claim an identity as a "powerful leader" among her peers by manipulating and disempowering others, even while those who are oppressed attempt to contest her leadership position. As another example, a religious leader might consider himself exempt from the moral consequences of his continued ethical violations due to his ingrained growth narrative of forgiveness and redemption. The impact of these identity mechanisms for reinforcing toxic behaviors must be examined within a social context.

An area of particular concern emerges from social identity theory, in which categorization processes prompt the elevation of one's own reference group in comparison to others. This zero-sum equation for positive identity enhancement dictates that a person diminishes her regard for another individual or group in order to elevate her own sense of relative worth. In order for one person's identity becomes more positive, another's must become less positive. This "zero-sum/better-than" view of positive identity construction directly counters Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's observation about the importance of mutuality in building relationships across difference. The famous civil rights leader stated that "all [humans] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied with a single garment of destiny, [such that] I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be." The West African proverb "I am, because we are" implies the same equation

of mutual interdependence in cultivating positive identities. Positive organizational scholarship research on relationships points to the importance of mutual regard in developing high-quality connections, even across dimensions of difference (James & Davidson, 2007; Roberts, 2007; Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011, Chapter 29). Ironically, the pursuit of positive identity cultivation through relative comparisons can obstruct mutual regard, particularly during intergroup interactions. Social identity research often points to the self-enhancement motive as a root cause for in-group bias, out-group discrimination, and inter-group conflict (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Given that POS emphasizes a focus on individual and collective strengths, generative mechanisms, and positive outcomes, we suggest that it also introduces a higher standard for the conception of a positive identity. Whereas psychologists might emphasize how individual cognitions and emotions can meet self-focused needs (e.g., ego preservation, self-actualization), a POS perspective on positive identity invites scholars to consider also the externalities of these mechanisms for the self and others through the embodiment of generative practices at work. For example, experimental research might trigger various mechanisms of positive identity construction and then assess their impact on actors' and observers' identities. Archival data might also provide rich illustrations of the varied mechanisms for positive identity construction and their impact on social approval, performance, and social outcomes (e.g., among political candidates, elected officials, and religious leaders).

Finally, we encourage scholars to extend beyond these four identity research traditions to discover alternate mechanisms through which individuals might cultivate a positive sense of self in organizational contexts other than those we have presented. For example, Wrzesniewski's (2011; Chapter 4) chapter in this Handbook of POS on "callings" reviews how responding to "a meaningful beckoning toward activities that are morally, socially, and personally significant" (pp. 46) can increase one's sense of self as a social contribution (i.e., virtuous identity) and elevate self-esteem (i.e., positive identity evaluation). Composing a *reflected best self-portrait* (Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, & Quinn, 2005) is another mechanism for positive identity construction that helps people understand how to associate their own strengths (virtues and core competencies) with large- and small-scale generative contributions to society. Studies of prosocial behavior in work organizations also suggest that engaging in helping behavior (e.g., community service, coming into contact with fundraising beneficiaries) can reinforce the construction of virtuous and favorably regarded identities (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, in press).

In conclusion, our broad, illustrative sampling of mechanisms for positive identity construction that are grounded in various classical and contemporary theoretical traditions within identity scholarship offers a set of perspectives whereby mutual growth, enhancement, and shared empowerment co-occur as a person views herself as more virtuous, worthy, evolving, adapting, balanced, and coherent. (p. 81) We invite POS and

identity scholars to continue to examine sources of positivity and generative mechanisms for identity construction that promote truly extraordinary social outcomes.

Acknowledgments

References

Anderson, P.J.J, Blatt, R., Christianson, M.K., Grant, A.M., Marquis, C., Neuman, E. et al. (2006). Understanding mechanisms in organizational research: Reflections from a collective journey. *Journal of Management Inquiry, 15*, 102–113.

Ashforth, B.E. (2009). Commentary: Positive identities and the individual. In L.M. Roberts, & J.E. Dutton (Eds.), *Exploring positive identities and organizations: Building a theoretical and research foundation* (pp. 171–187). New York: Routledge.

Ashforth, B.E. (2001). *Role transitions in organizational life.* LEA's Organization and Management Series. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Ashforth, B.E., Harrison, S.H., & Corley, K.G. (2008). Identification in organizations: An examination of four fundamental questions. *Journal of Management, 34*, 325–374.

Ashforth, B.E., & Kreiner, G. (1999). How can you do it? Dirty work and the challenge of constructing a positive identity. *Academy of Management Review, 24*, 413–434.

Ashforth, B.E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of Management Review, 14*, 20–39.

Bartel, C., & Dutton, J.E. (2001). Ambiguous organizational memberships: Constructing organizational identities in interactions with others. In M.A. Hogg, & D.J. Terry (Eds.), *Social identity processes in organizational contexts* (pp. 115–130). Philadelphia: Psychology Press.

Bell, E. (1990). The bicultural life experience of career oriented black women. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 11*, 459–477.

Bell, E., & Nkomo, S. (2001). *Our separate ways: Black and white women and the struggle for professional identity.* Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Branscombe, N.R., Ellemers, N., Spears, R., & Doosje, B. (1999). The context and content of social identity threat. In N. Ellemers, R. Spears, & B. Doosje (Eds.), *Social identity context, commitment, content* (pp. 35–58). Blackwell: London.

Brewer, M.B. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 17*, 475–482.

Brookings, J.B., & Serratelli, A.J. (2006). Positive illusions: Positively correlated with subjective well-being, negatively correlated with a measure of personal growth. *Psychological Reports, 98*, 407–413.

Burke, P.J. (1991). Identities and social structure: The 2003 Cooley-Mead Award address. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 67*, 5–15.

Burke, P.J., & Reitzes, D.C. (1981). The link between identity and role performance. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 44*, 83–92.

Burke, P.J., & Stets, J.E. (1999). Trust and commitment through self-verification. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 62*, 347–366.

Carlsen, A., & Pitsis, T. (2009). Experiencing hope in organization lives. In L.M. Roberts, & J.E. Dutton (Eds.), *Exploring positive identities and organizations: Building a theoretical and research foundation* (pp. 77–98). New York: Routledge.

Caza, B.B., & Wilson, M.G. (2009). Me, myself, and I: The benefits of work-identity complexity. In L.M. Roberts, & J.E. Dutton (Eds.), *Exploring positive identities and organizations: Building a theoretical and research foundation* (pp. 99–123). New York: Routledge.

Cha, S., & Roberts, L.M. (2010). Navigating Race: Asian American Journalists' Engagement of Identity-related Resources at Work. Unpublished manuscript. McGill University: Toronto.

Cheng, C., Sanchez-Burks, J., & Lee, F. (2008). Connecting the dots within: Creative performance and identity integration. *Psychological Science, 19*, 1178–1184.

Clair, J., Beatty, J., & Maclean, T. (2005). Out of sight but not out of mind: Managing invisible social identities in the workplace. *Academy of Management Review, 30*, 78–95.

Chatman, J.A., Polzer, J.T., Barsade, S.G., & Neale, M.A. (1998). Being different yet feeling similar: The influence of demographic composition and organizational culture on work processes and outcomes. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 43*, 749–780.

Colvin, C.R., Funder, D.C., & Block, J. (1995). Overly positive self-evaluations and personality: Negative implications for mental health. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 68*, 1152–1162.

Creed, W.E., DeJordy, R., & Lok, J. (2010). Being the change: Resolving institutional contradiction through identity work. *Academy of Management Journal*, forthcoming.

Creed, D., & Scully, M. (2000). Songs of ourselves: Employees' deployment of social identity in workplace encounters. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *9*, 391–412.

Davidson, M., & James, E.H. (2007). The engines of positive relationships across difference: Conflict and learning. In J. Dutton, & B. Rose Ragins (Eds.), *Exploring positive relationships at work: Building a theoretical and research foundation* (pp. 137–158). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

DeRue, D.S., Ashford, S.J., & Cotton, N.C. (2009). Assuming the mantle: Unpacking the process by which individuals internalize a leader identity. In L.M. Roberts & J.E. Dutton (Eds.), *Exploring positive identities and organizations: Building a theoretical and research foundation* (pp. 217–236). New York: Routledge.

Dutton, J.E., & Roberts, L.M. (2009). *Exploring positive identities and organizations: Building a theoretical and research foundation*. New York: Routledge.

Dutton, J.E., Roberts, L.M., & Bednar, J.S. (in press). Positive Identity Rejoinder. In press. *Academy of Management Review.*

Dutton, J.E., Roberts, L.M., & Bednar, J.S. (2010). Pathways for positive identity construction at work: Four types of positive identity and the building of social resources. *Academy of Management Review, 35*, 265–293.

Dutton, J., Roberts, L., & Bednar, J. (in press). Prosocial practices, positive identity, and flourishing at work. In S. Donaldson, M. Csikszentmihalyi, & J. Nakamura (Eds.), *Applied positive psychology: Improving everyday life, schools, work, health, and society*. New York: Routledge.

(p. 82) Ely, R.J. (1994). The effects of organizational demographics and social identity on relationships among professional women. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *39*, 203–238.

Erikson, E.H. (1959). Identity and the life cycle: Selected papers. *Psychological Issues, 1*, 1–171.

Fineman, S. (2006). On being positive: Concerns and counterpoints. *Academy of Management Review, 31*, 270–291.

Gecas, V. (1982). The self-concept. *Annual Review of Sociology, 8*, 1–33.

Gergen, K.J. (1991). *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. New York: Basic Books.

Gregg, G.S. (2006). The raw and the bland: A structural model of narrative identity. In D.P. McAdams, R. Josselson, & A. Lieblich (Eds.), *Identity and story: Creating self in narrative. Narrative study of lives* Vol. 4 (pp. 63–88). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Hall, D.T. (2002). *Careers in and out of organizations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hedstrom, P., & Swedborg, R. (1998). Social mechanisms: An introductory essay. In P. Hedstrom, & R. Swedborg (Eds.), *Social mechanisms: An analytical approach to social theory* (pp. 1–31). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hogg, M.A., Terry, D.J., & White, K.M. (1995). A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 58*, 255–269.

Hornsey, M.J., & Hogg, M.A. (2000). Assimilation and diversity: An integrative model of subgroup relations. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 4*, 143–156.

Hughes, E.C. (1945). Dilemmas and contradictions of status. *American Journal of Sociology, 50*, 353–359.

Hughes, E.C. (1951). *Group psychology and the analysis of the ego*. New York: Liveright.

Ibarra, H. (1999). Provisional selves: Experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 44*, 764–791.

Ibarra, H., & Barbulescu, R. (2010). Identity as narrative: Prevalence, effectiveness, and consequences of narrative identity work in macro work role transitions. *Academy of Management Review, 35*, 135–154.

Johnston, W.B., & Packer, A.H. (1987). *Work force 2000.* Indianapolis: Hudson Institute.

Johnson, M.D., Morgeson, F.P., Ilgen, D.R., Meyer, C.J., & Lloyd, J.W. (2006). Multiple professional identities: Examining differences in identification across work-related targets. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*, 498–506.

Kanter, R.M. (2003). Men and women of the corporation. In R.J. Ely, E.G. Foldy, & M.A. Scully (Eds.), *Reader in gender, work, and organization* (pp. 34–48). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Kreiner, G.E., Hollensbe, E.C., & Sheep, M.L. (2006). Where is the "me" among the "we"? Identity work and the search for optimal balance. *Academy of Management Journal, 49*, 1031–1057.

Kreiner, G., & Sheep, M. (2009). Growing pains and gains: Framing identity dynamics as opportunities for identity growth. In L.M. Roberts, & J.E. Dutton (Eds.), *Exploring positive identities and organizations: Building a theoretical and research foundation* (pp. 23–46). New York: Routledge.

Lee, S., & Klein, H.J. (2002). Relationships between conscientiousness, self-efficacy, self-deception, and learning over time. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87*, 1175–1182.

MacPhail, L., Roloff, K., & Edmondson, A. (2009). Collaboration across knowledge boundaries within diverse teams: Reciprocal expertise affirmation as an enabling

condition. In L.M. Roberts & J.E. (Eds.), *Exploring positive identities and organizations: Building a theoretical and research foundation* (pp. 319–340). New York: Routledge.

Maitlis, S. (2009). Who am I now? Sensemaking and identity in posttraumatic growth. In L.M. Roberts, & J.E. Dutton (Eds.), *Exploring positive identities and organizations: Building a theoretical and research foundation* (pp. 47–76). New York: Routledge.

McAdams, D.P. (1985). *Power, intimacy, and the life story: Personological inquiries into identity*. New York: Guilford.

McAdams, D.P. (1997). The case for unity in the (post)modern self: A modest proposal. In R.D. Ashmore, & L. Jussim (Eds.), *Self and identity. Fundamental issues* (pp. 46–78). New York: Oxford University Press.

McAdams, D.P. (2006). *The redemptive self: Stories Americans live by.* New York: Oxford University Press.

McAdams, D.P. Josselson, R., & Lieblich, A. (2006). *Identity and story: Creating self in narrative. Narrative study of lives* Vol. 4. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Mead, G.H. (1934). *Mind, Self and Society.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Meyerson, D., & Scully, M. (1995). Tempered radicalism and the politics of ambivalence and change. *Organization Science,* 6(5), 585–600.

Milton, L. (2009). Creating and sustaining cooperation in interdependent groups: Positive relational identities, identity confirmation, and cooperative capacity. In L.M. Roberts & J.E. Dutton (Eds.), *Exploring Positive Identities and Organizations: Building a Theoretical and Research Foundation.* (pp. 289–317). New York: Routledge Press.

Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2003). Virtues and organizations. In K.S. Cameron, J.E. Dutton, & R.E. Quinn (Eds.), *Positive organizational scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline* (pp. 33–47). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Polzer, J., Milton, L., & Swann, W. (2002). Capitalizing on diversity: Interpersonal congruence in small work groups. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *47*, 296–324.

Powell, G., & Greenhaus, J. (2010). Sex, gender and the work–to–family interface: Exploring negative and positive interdependencies. *Academy of Management Journal, 53*, 513–534.

Pratt, M.G., Rockmann, K.W., & Kaufmann, J.B. (2006). Constructing professional identity: The role of work and identity learning cycles in the customization of identity among medical residents. *Academy of Management Journal, 49*, 235–262.

Raggat, P.T.F. (2006). Multiplicity and conflict in the dialogical self: A life-narrative approach. In. D.P. McAdams, R. Josselson, & A. Lieblich, *Identity and story: Creating self in narrative. Narrative study of lives* Vol. 4 (pp. 15–35). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Ragins, B.R. (2008). Disclosure disconnects: Antecedents and consequences of disclosing invisible stigmas across life domains. *Academy of Management Review, 33*, 194–215.

Roberts, L.M. (2005). Changing faces: Professional image construction in diverse organizational settings. *Academy of Management Review, 30*, 685–711.

Roberts, L.M. (2007). From proving to becoming: How positive relationships create a context for self-discovery and self-actualization. In Dutton, J.E., & Ragins, B.R. (Eds.), *Exploring positive relationships at work: Building a theoretical and research foundation.* (pp. 29–46). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

(p. 83) Roberts, L.M., Cha, S.E., Hewlin, P.F., & Settles, I.H. (2009). Bringing the inside out: Enhancing authenticity and positive identity in organizations. In L.M. Roberts, & J.E. Dutton (Eds.), *Exploring positive identities and organizations: Building a theoretical and research foundation* (pp. 149–169). New York: Routledge.

Roberts, L.M., Dutton, J.E., Spreitzer, G.M., Heaphy, E.D., & Quinn, R.E. (2005). Composing the Reflected Best-Self Portrait: Building pathways for becoming extraordinary in work organizations. *Academy of Management Review, 30*, 712–736.

Roberts, L.M., Settles, I., & Jellison, W. (2008). Predicting the strategic identity management of gender and race. *Identity, 8*(4), 269–306.

Roberts, L.M., & Roberts, D.D. (2007). Testing the limits of antidiscrimination law: The business, legal, and ethical ramifications of cultural profiling at work. *Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy, 14*, 369–405.

Roccas, S., & Brewer, M.B. (2002). Social identity complexity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 6*, 88–106.

Rothbard, N.P., & Ramarajan, L. (2009). Checking your identities at the door: Positive relationships between non-work and work identities. In L.M. Roberts, & J.E. Dutton (Eds.), *Exploring positive identities and organizations: Building a theoretical and research foundation* (pp. 125–148). New York: Routledge.

Russo, D., Mattarelli, E., & Tagliaventi, M.R. (2008). Multiple professional identities: One big happy family? Unpublished manuscript, presented at the Academy of Management Meeting, Anaheim, CA.

Sluss, D., & Ashforth, B. (2007). Relational identities and identification: Defining ourselves through work relationships. *Academy of Management Review, 32*, 9–32.

Snow, D.A., & Anderson, L. (1987). Identity work among the homeless: The verbal construction and avowal of personal identities. *American Journal of Sociology, 92*, 1336–1371.

Steele, C.M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist, 52*, 613–629.

Stephens, J.P., Heaphy, E., & Dutton, J.E. (2011). High quality connections. In K.S. Cameron & G.M. Spreitzer (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Stryker, S. (1980). *Symbolic interactionism: A social structural version.* Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin Cummings.

Stryker, S. (2000). Identity competition: Key to differential social movement involvement. In S. Stryker, T. Owens, & R. White (Eds.), *Identity, self, and social movements* (pp. 21–40). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Stryker, S., & Burke, P.J. (2000). The past, present, and future of an identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 63*, 284–297.

Stryker, S., & Serpe, R.T. (1982). Commitment, identity salience, and role behavior: A theory and research example. In W. Ickes, & E.S. Knowles (Eds.) *Personality, roles, and social behavior* (pp. 199–218). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Swann, W.B., Jr. (1987). Identity negotiation: Where two roads meet. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 53*, 1038–1051.

Swann, W.B., Pelham, B., & Krull, D. (1989). Agreeable fancy or disagreeable truth? Reconciling self-enhancement and self-verification. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57, 782–791.*

Swann, W.B., Jr., Stein-Seroussi, A., & Geisler, B. (1992). Why people self-verify. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 62*, 392–401.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J.C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W.G. Austin, & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole.

Thomas, D.A, Roberts, L.M., & Creary, S.J. (2009). The rise of President Barack Hussein Obama. *Harvard Business School Case No. 409115.*

Turner, J.C. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. New York: Blackwell.

Wrzesniewski, A. (2011). Callings. In K.S. Cameron & G.M. Spreitzer (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Positive Identity Construction: Insights from Classical and Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives

Laura Morgan Roberts

Laura Morgan Roberts, Leadership and Change PhD Program, Antioch University, Yellow Springs, Ohio

Stephanie J. Creary

Stephanie J. Creary, Carroll School of Management, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA