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An Identity Theory Approach to Commitment*

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Commitment highlights one of the ways in which individuals infuse roles and social structure with self-motivated behaviors, thereby linking the self to social structure. Past theoretical formulations of commitment, including work by Becker, Stryker, and Kanter, tended to focus on commitment as a tie between an individual and either 1) a line of activity, 2) particular role partners, or 3) an organization. An approach based on identity theory or affect control theory (each of which uses a cybernetic model of identity processes) suggests that commitment connects an individual to an identity. In this view, commitment does not link a person to consistent lines of activity, other role partners, or organizations, but to a stable set of self-meanings. These stable self-meanings, in turn, produce consistent lines of activities. This idea is borne out in an analysis of data from the college student role, in which there exist multiple, independent bases of commitment containing cognitive and socioemotional components. Commitment moderates the relationship between student identity and role performance such that the relationship is stronger for persons with higher commitment.

One of the central tenets of social psychology is the recognition of the reciprocal relationship between social structure and the individual (Stryker 1980). Yet both House (1981) and Turner (1988) conclude that sociological social psychology has done a better job of investigating the structural factors that influence the individual than of exploring the effects of the individual on processes of society. Thus, to improve our understanding of the effects of the individual on the processes of society, social psychology must give special attention to the *active self*. Individuals capable of reflexive thought and self-initiated action are the agents (sometimes as single individuals and sometimes as members of social movements or institutions) that create, sustain, and change larger social structures.

This observation is somewhat ironic in light of one of the central themes of symbolic interaction theory: although the self is social, it is also active (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934). The problem has been that despite some important theoretical insights (see overviews in Gecas 1982; Rosenberg 1979; Stryker 1980) and renewed empirical interest in the self (see Stryker 1987), there has not emerged an integrated theory of self that elaborates the

social and active character of the self and the reciprocal link between self and social structure. One reason for this problem has been the difficulty in explaining the *persistence of individual action across situations* beyond the narrow concept of normative expectations of role theory.

Foote (1951) introduced the concept of *commitment* to examine how active individuals initiate and sustain lines of activity. He argued that role playing without identity is empty behavior, without motive or incentive, and suggested that identity and one's full commitment to one's identity are necessary for an active self. Foote further suggested that an active self is necessary to explain the persistence of individual lines of action. In this sense, then, although commitment (to an identity) begins to elaborate the active self, it also creates a link between the individual and social structure (as persistent lines of action). Therefore commitment plays a central role in the connection between the individual and society.

In this paper we review three different conceptions of commitment that tie the person in various ways to lines of action (Becker 1960, 1964), to organizations (Kanter 1968, 1972), and to role partners (Stryker 1968, 1980). We then consider an identity-based understanding of commitment implicit in the work of Foote (1951). This approach which draws on identity theory and affect control

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theory leads to a more unified understanding of commitment. Commitment, from this perspective, does not link a person to consistent behaviors, other individuals, or organizations. Instead it may be viewed as linking a person to a stable set of self-meanings (identity). That connection, in turn, produces apparent ties to actions, organizations, and persons. We use the college student identity and the data from a survey of 640 undergraduates from a large midwestern state university to explore commitment, the measurement of commitment, and its implications for the persistence of lines of action that make up social structure.

PAST CONCEPTIONS OF COMMITMENT

Commitment has been a concept widely used but not clearly or consistently formulated in the social sciences. Three sets of formulations offer important perspectives for furthering our understanding. Becker (1960, 1964) turned to commitment to explain why people engage in consistent lines of activity¹ over time and across situations. He distinguished the outcome of commitment (consistent lines of action) from commitment mechanisms or processes, which he called *side bets*. The committed person, by invoking side bets, "has acted in such a way as to involve other interests of his, originally extraneous to the action he is engaged in, directly in that action" (Becker 1960, p. 35). By doing so, the person has a stake in continuing the line of action because the costs of change become prohibitive. For example, shortly after taking a job, a woman is offered another position by a competing firm, which she considers more desirable. She turns down the offer, however, because she feels that her reputation for trustworthiness would be tainted if she changed jobs in the first year. Staying with her present job, the consistent line of action, is the outcome of the side bet. It is the value that the woman places on her professional reputation. Similarly, the importance a person places on a pension may serve as a side bet to dissuade that person from early retirement or a career change.

One contribution of Becker's understand-

ing of commitment is that it focuses attention on the social psychological processes involved. He points out that consistent lines of action cannot be explained solely as the outcome of social sanctions or social control. Instead we must consider active individuals who, through side bets, not only internalize role expectations but work out the behavioral implications of roles and role boundaries. On the other hand, the institutional and interpersonal contexts of roles have resources, such as financial benefits or prestige, which individuals may construe as rewards for maintaining consistent behaviors. The weakness of Becker's approach is that it does not examine the relationship between commitment and identity which is central to understanding why individuals make side bets in the first place, and why certain lines of action are valued. In the example of a woman choosing not to pursue a better job, the disconfirmation of her professional identity as trustworthy is a key to understanding why she would not take the position.

Kanter (1968, 1972) was interested in the problem of merging organizational requisites for the survival of utopian communities with the personal needs and satisfactions of individual members. She turned to the concept of commitment for a solution. Commitment referred to the willingness of members to give their energy and loyalty to a community: "In sociological terms, commitment means the attachment of the self to the requirements of social relations that are seen as self-expressive" (1972, p. 66). Kanter uses social action theory to generate three dimensions of commitment. *Instrumental commitment* refers to the material benefits (food, clothing, shelter, goods, and services) to which individuals have access as a result of their membership in a community. *Affective commitment* focuses on the positive cathetic feelings that bind members to a community and generate gratifications stemming from involvement with all the members. *Moral commitment* identifies the evaluative orientations that provide members with a sense of self-worth and self-esteem and with community pride and confidence in the values and goals of their community.

According to Kanter, each type of commitment is strengthened by a different set of dissociative and associative processes. Instrumental commitment is enhanced by sacrifice mechanisms, which make membership more

¹ "Consistent lines of activity," according to Becker (1960, p. 33), refers to an outcome of commitment, namely ongoing role behavior or behavior that continues a role portrayal.

costly and therefore more important to participants, and by investment mechanisms, which increase a person's stake in the community. Affective commitment is increased by renunciation mechanisms, which require members to relinquish competing attachments, and by communion mechanisms, which foster significant contact with the collectivity. Moral commitment is fostered by mortification mechanisms, which require the submission of individual rights and beliefs to the control of the community, and by surrender mechanisms, which increase the individual's identification with the group.

Kanter avoided tautological problems by distinguishing clearly among the causes of commitment (the six commitment mechanisms), the types of commitment, and the results of commitment, such as the retention of members and the perpetuation of the community. Of special interest is her recognition that commitment may be multidimensional and may reflect different ways in which individuals are linked to groups. She suggests that high levels of commitment on one dimension are not necessarily linked to high levels on the other two. Indeed, she found that communes which failed often fostered commitment on one dimension but not on the others. Kanter's formulation is very different from Becker's approach because she defines commitment in terms of attachments that link individuals reciprocally to groups or communities rather than to roles or consistent lines of action. The weakness in this formulation is that it does not explain individual variations in commitment to the group or community.

Finally, commitment has been used by McCall and Simmons (1966) and Stryker (1968, 1980) as one of the ways in which individuals infuse self and subjective meanings into roles. McCall and Simmons argued that when an individual is committed, he gambles his regard for himself on living up to his self-conception. Commitment is increased when one benefits materially by rewards such as money, labor, goods, favors, or prestige. Stryker discussed commitment as part of a formally developed identity theory concerning the reciprocal relationship between the self and social structure, and their mutual influence on behavior. According to Stryker, commitment refers to the strength of one's relationships to others while in a particular role identity: "Commitment is measured by the 'costs' of giving up meaningful relations

to others should alternative courses of action be pursued" (1968, p. 560). Stryker suggested two dimensions of commitment: 1) extensiveness, the sheer number of relationships to others entered by virtue of having an identity, and 2) intensiveness, the depth of the relationships entered by virtue of an identity. Both McCall and Simmons (1966) and Stryker (1980) proposed that commitment is related positively to the hierarchical ordering of identities as well as to the frequency of role performances.

McCall and Simmons, as well as Stryker, have revisited and extended Becker's (1960, 1964) point that individuals pursue role behaviors not as a result of external threats or sanctions, but as a result of side bets and the process of increasing their stake in consistent lines of actions. These scholars advance our understanding by basing their formulation of commitment on a symbolic interaction orientation that highlights both the dynamic and the reciprocal relationship between social structure and self-processes. One of the special contributions of McCall and Simmons and of Stryker is that their work has generated an empirical tradition which has explored the relationship of commitment to identity salience, to self-esteem, and to role evaluations in a variety of roles, including donating blood, time in the religious role, and college students' academic, athletic, and extracurricular activities (Callero 1985; Hoelter 1983; Serpe 1987; Stryker and Serpe 1982).

In summary, past formulations of commitment are varied. Although they are not contradictory, they also are not cumulative or mutually reinforcing. At best they are independent of each other, placing the "ties" of commitment in different locations. Becker proposed commitment to account for consistent lines of action, Kanter used commitment to describe the reciprocal ties that bind individuals to their communities and communities to their members, and Stryker viewed commitment as tying persons to role partners. In this research, we bring together these different views and distinguish the different dimensions or bases of commitment. We do this within the framework of structural symbolic interaction. Instead of linking commitment to role partners, however, we locate commitment within the context of role

identities.² In this way, commitment to an identity provides the basis for ties to activity, organizations, and role partners.

A NEW FORMULATION OF IDENTITY AND COMMITMENT

Identity

Identity theory (Burke 1980; Burke and Reitzes 1981; Burke and Tully 1977; Stryker 1968, 1980) and affect control theory (Heise 1979, 1988; Smith-Lovin and Heise 1988) present the commitment process as one of the ways in which individuals participate in the establishment and maintenance of identities. The self is understood as the hierarchical organization of a set of identities ordered by centrality or salience (McCall and Simmons 1966; Stryker 1968). Identities are the shared social meanings that persons attribute to themselves in a role. Burke and Reitzes (1981) note three distinctive features of identities. First, identities are *social products* that are formed, maintained, and confirmed through the processes of 1) naming or locating the self in social categories (Foote 1951; Stryker 1968); 2) interacting with others in terms of these categories (McCall and Simmons 1966; Stone 1962); and 3) engaging in self-presentation and altercasting to negotiate and confirm the meanings and behavioral implications of the social categories (Goffman 1959; Weinstein 1969). Second, identities are *self-meanings* (Burke and Tully 1977; Heise 1979; Osgood, Succi, and Tannenbaum 1957) that are acquired in particular situations and are based on the similarities and differences of a role in relation to its counter-roles (Lindsmith and Strauss 1956; Turner 1956). Third, identities are *symbolic*, calling up in one person the same responses as are called up in others. Finally, identities are *reflexive*. Persons can use their identities as reference points to assess the implications of their own behavior as well as of other people's behaviors; this assessment is part of the reflected appraisals process (Burke 1980; Felson 1985; Wells 1978). We now add that identities are a source of motivation for action (Foote 1951; Gecas 1982; Heise 1979), particularly actions

that result in the social confirmation of the identity (Hull and Levy 1979). The self becomes an active agent in interaction.

Burke (1980, 1989), in the context of identity theory, noted that identities as active agents are conceptualized most effectively as cybernetic control systems (Powers 1975). Identity processes, viewed from a cybernetic control perspective, may be regarded as acting like a thermostat. A thermostat compares an input (the current temperature) with its setting (also a temperature) and acts to produce outputs (turning on the furnace or air conditioner) until a match exists between the current temperature (input) and the setting. An identity allows a person to compare an input (the identity meanings implied in social interaction, which we will call "reflected appraisals")³ with its setting (the identity) and produces outputs (meaningful behavior) that change interaction until the meanings of the input match the meanings of the identity (setting). Thus, individuals use their identities as thermostats to assess the identity implications of interactions and to initiate behaviors that maintain or restore congruency between the identity and the reflected appraisals. Similarly, Heise (1979, 1988), in the context of affect control theory, used a cybernetic control model to close the affect-control loop. Affect control theory proposes that people behave within the framework of their identities; they attain experiences that confirm their fundamental sentiments about identities by engaging in role-appropriate actions.

The college student identity may serve as an illustration. A student may set his or her college student identity at a certain degree of academic responsibility (the primary dimension of meaning that college students use to identity themselves, as suggested by Reitzes and Burke 1982). Behavior then would be assessed in terms of academic responsibility. A lack of congruity between inputs (identity-challenging reflected appraisals that arise in

² The linking of commitment to identity is consistent with Foote's (1951) earlier discussion of commitment as a source of motivation for individual role performance.

³ Although the term "reflected appraisals" generally has been understood to denote evaluative responses of others to some aspect of the self or identity (cf. Felson 1985), we deliberately broaden its meaning to include not only the evaluative dimension, but other dimensions of self-meaning as well. In this way we continue to follow Rosenberg (1979) in taking our understanding of the self beyond the dimension of self-esteem and self-evaluation. Identities include many dimensions of meaning beyond self-esteem; thus the concept of reflected appraisals must broaden its coverage of the nature of the feedback provided to the self.

ongoing social interaction) and the identity (what affect control theory calls a “deflection”) generates pressure to engage in behavior that will alter the social interaction process and its implied meanings. Thus a student may view herself as academically responsible, but her friends may not agree. Accordingly she may abandon her old friends and find new friends who agree with her self-assessment, and/or she may engage in behaviors that change the way in which others act toward her. In taking the latter tack, she may justify her lack of studying (“I already know the material”), highlight past behaviors that support her identity claim (reminding others that she has done “A” work in the past), or engage in new behaviors such as spending more time in an academically responsible manner. This student is trying to change the way in which others act toward her by initiating actions that are intended to bring other people’s perceptions and behaviors into accord with her student identity. This process shifts the deflection of the transient perceptions back toward the fundamentals of the identity (Heise 1979).

Commitment Processes

We suggest that commitment can be understood as part of this conception of the identity process as a cybernetic control process. Let us return to the mismatch or incongruity between the reflected appraisals (inputs) and a person’s identity (setting). The mismatch itself does not determine the individual’s behavior. Instead, what the person does initially may be considered as random. Behavior settles on a pattern only when it *results in a match* between the individual’s identity setting and the identity implications of the social interaction—that is, the reflected appraisals. From this perspective, behavior will tend toward *whatever results in reestablishing the congruity between inputs and setting*. In terms of affect control theory, individuals reduce deflections through the construction of new behavioral events.

Commitment, in our view, refers to the sum of the forces, pressures, or drives that influence people to maintain congruity between their identity setting and the input of reflected appraisals from the social setting. If the forces are weak, people will engage in behavior to change the reflected appraisals

toward congruity with their identity setting 1) only some of the time, 2) only if the incongruity is extreme, 3) only if little effort is required, 4) only to a limited degree, 5) only in some situations, and 6) only if the cost is not high. Greater commitment, on the other hand, implies a greater correspondence between inputs (reflected appraisals) and the identity setting. In cases of greater commitment, the reflected appraisals are more likely to contain shared meanings that affirm and are consistent with an identity. Because the reflected appraisals themselves depend in part on the behaviors in which the person engages, we would also expect that the meaning of the behaviors enacted by the person would correspond more (or less) closely with their identity meanings insofar as that person was more (or less) committed to the identity.

Individuals participate actively in the cybernetic control process. People can learn which behaviors are effective⁴ in maintaining congruence between their identity setting and the reflected appraisals. In addition, they can learn how to develop and stabilize lines of action to maintain congruity, provided that the meanings of objects and behaviors do not shift or change while they are engaged in that learning—that is, provided that they are in a stable semantic context. Such learning is not simple and easy; it is complex, demanding, and stressful (Burke 1989). Therefore the individual has an interest in staying within a stable semantic context to avoid the demands and stresses of renegotiating shared meanings for self, others, and interactions. Commitment occurs as individuals strive to preserve a congruity between their identity and the identity implications of interactions with others (reflected appraisals).

Let us return to the example of the college student who is committed to her identity as an academically responsible individual. The night before an important test, she must weigh the implications of going to a party

⁴ It is not necessary to assume that one’s identity is stable and constant. Identities can and do change, although, generally they change slowly. Indeed, changes in identities may appear to be changes in commitments to particular roles or groups. As an identity changes, meanings that would be congruent to the identity change, and the behavior that would bring about those congruent perceptions, also would change. In order to achieve congruency with the changed identity, an individual may have to renegotiate his or her role or (in an extreme case) remove himself from the group or relationship.

with friends or continuing with her final preparations for the examination. When she declines the invitation to go out, she may feel that she is doing what is right for her, namely engaging in a course of action that will provide reflected appraisals consistent with her identity as an academically responsible college student. Another student with an identity low on academic responsibility may find a comparable invitation consistent with his identity, and may welcome the opportunity for a social engagement that will distract him from the impending test. Thus, rather than defining commitment as a tie to activities, organizations, or role partners, we view commitment as the sum of the forces that maintain congruity between one's identity and the implications for one's identity of the interactions and behaviors in the interactive setting.

Bases of Commitment

Commitment, as one of the forces in the identity process, underlies, subsumes, and accounts for the commitment processes discussed by Becker, Kanter, McCall and Simmons, and Stryker. Although we have tied commitment to identities, we do not wish to imply that the bases of such commitment are necessarily different from those of prior conceptions of commitment. Gained rewards and avoided costs, along with attachments to others, have been proposed as the most common bases of commitment. We continue to use these bases, but in a slightly different manner. The bases of commitment are those factors which give rise to the forces of commitment. Gained rewards and ties to others may form the basis for commitment (a strong force for maintaining congruity between one's reflected appraisals and one's identity), but they are not commitment. We can say, however, that persons who gain rewards or are tied to others by virtue of having and maintaining an identity are more likely to have high levels of commitment to that identity than are persons who do not gain such rewards or have such ties to others.

We propose two bases of commitment. *Cognitive bases of commitment* refer to those perceived positive meanings and rewards, and to the assessment of the overall reward-cost balance of maintaining the identity. In our example, the female student may have been persuaded to continue to study by her

expectations of praise from significant others for a high test score and/or by a sense that the rewards of partying were less than the identity costs of not doing well on the examination. *Socioemotional bases of commitment* refer to the emotional and identity-sustaining ties created by "interaction with others based on role identity" with others. Belonging to a social network and being related to other role partners provides a basis of commitment. The warmth, support, and continued interaction between our student and those who interact with her as an academically responsible student serve to increase the forces to engage in identity-confirming behavior.

Consequences of Commitment

One of the consequences of high levels of commitment to an identity is that people will work harder to maintain reflected appraisals (inputs) consistent with their identities. Individuals with low commitment to an identity will not work as hard to maintain congruity between inputs and identities, and there will be less correspondence between meanings of identity and meanings of role behaviors. In this way we can see that commitment moderates the relationship between an identity and role performance.

Our formulation of the consequences of commitment is very different from Kanter's (1968, 1972). First, we view individuals as using their behavior to increase rewards and values received for having a particular identity, whereas Kanter sees organizations as using rewards and values to control the behavior of individuals. Second, we view individuals as using links to others to complete the feedback cycle of the identity process. In this way they obtain the reflected appraisals that further confirm and support the identity. In contrast, Kanter sees organizations as providing individuals with links to others to enmesh them in a network. Finally, our interpretation of commitment focuses on inputs (reflected appraisals) and their relationship to identity, and highlights the individual as an active agent making choices. Kanter's interpretation of commitment, however, focuses on the outputs or behaviors of individuals, thus casting individuals as manipulated objects of organizations.

Summary

We suggest that commitment be concept-

alized as referring to the strength of the forces that maintain congruity between one's identity standard and the reflected appraisals or identity-relevant meanings from the social setting. High levels of commitment (strong forces toward congruity) will result in involvement in activities, in organizations, and with role partners, all of which support the person's identity. In earlier work we identified two processes that maintain an identity and serve as bases for commitment: 1) rewards and positive evaluations of the identity, which form the cognitive base of commitment, and 2) ties to others as sources of "we-ness" and warmth, which form the socioemotional base of commitment. In the following section we will investigate the form and structure of these two bases of commitment. We will also examine their consequences for the relationship between identity and role behaviors. Our hypothesis is that commitment influences or moderates the relationship between identity and identity-confirming behaviors. Specifically, we expect commitment to reveal itself in an interaction effect such that a stronger relationship exists between identity meanings and behaviors for persons who have more commitment than for persons who have less commitment.

DATA AND MEASURES

The data are based on a survey administered to 640 undergraduates at a large midwestern university in 1976 as part of a study of the student role and student life. Although the sample is not random, it is fairly representative of the students enrolled at the time. The nonrandom character of the sample is not problematic because we are interested in examining general human processes of commitment rather than in generalizing to some population.

In the survey, we asked respondents questions about their identities as college students as well as about behaviors that are outcomes of the student identity. The survey also included items relating to each of the bases of commitment that we have identified: cognitive commitment (rewards, costs, and value of being a college student) and socioemotional commitment (interpersonal ties to others while being a student). These factors are discussed further below.

We also measured three aspects of an identity that have been used in past research

as important determinants of behavior: *self-esteem*, *centrality*, and *salience*. Because these have been linked empirically and conceptually to commitment (McCall and Simmons 1966; Stryker 1968, 1980), we include them here as control variables in examining the effects of commitment. We measure self-esteem using the 10-item Rosenberg scale (1979), modified to refer to the self in the student role. For example, the first modified item reads "I feel that I'm a student of worth, at least on an equal basis with others." Salience, or the probability that a given identity will be invoked (Stryker 1968), was measured with two items: 1) "During a vacation break, when you are visiting your parents, you meet someone new. How important would it be to you that in the course of the conversation you mentioned that you are a college student?" 2) "To know you as you really are, how important is it to know that you are a college student?" Response categories were "very important," "important," "moderately important," "only somewhat important," and "not at all important" (coded 5 to 1).

We used two items to measure the centrality or importance of the student identity (McCall and Simmons 1966): 1) "If someone said, 'You have no right to call yourself a real student,' how would you respond?" Response categories included "very upset," "upset," "moderately upset," "only somewhat upset," and "not very upset." 2) "Below are a number of social roles that you may now occupy. How important is each to you?" For the student role, responses included "very important," "important," "somewhat important," and "not very important" (coded 4 to 1).

Using the Burke-Tully (1977) procedures, we measured each respondent's college student identity on the primary semantic dimension that defines what it means to be a college student for this sample:⁵ *academic responsibility*. We have three measures of behavioral

⁵ Academic responsibility was the first and most important of four dimensions that distinguished the college student identity from four counter-role identities: high school student, graduate student, college graduate, and noncollege peers. The substantive meanings of academic responsibility include studious, motivated, responsible, independent, mature, and individualistic. See Reitzes and Burke (1980) for a fuller description of this dimension and of the procedures used to measure the identities.

outcomes: *amount of time spent in the role of college student, college grade point average and subjective adjustment to the college student role.* We measured amount of time in role by asking students "How much time do you spend in the role of college student?" Responses were "just about all the time," "most of the time," "a good deal of the time," "some time," and "not very much time" (coded 5 to 1). Grade point average (GPA) is a self-report of the respondent's performance in school. It ranges from below 2.00 to above 3.75 in nine categories, with increments of .25.⁶ Adjustment to the college student role is measured by asking students "How well do you think you have adjusted to college life?" Responses were "very well adjusted," "well adjusted," "adjusted OK," "not so well adjusted," and "poorly adjusted" (coded 5 to 1). Each of these outcomes is relatively independent of the others. The correlation between time in role and GPA is .16; the correlation between time in role and adjustment is .13; the correlation between adjustment and GPA is -.08.

FINDINGS

The Meaning and Structure of Commitment

As stated above, we are interested in two empirical issues. The first relates to the structure of the bases of commitment; the second relates to the effect of commitment on the relationship between identity and behavior. With respect to the first issue, Tables 1 and 2 present principal component analyses, with varimax rotation, of the items dealing with the cognitive (Table 1) and socioemotional (Table 2) bases of commitment. Table 1 shows results for eight items relating to the cognitive basis of commitment. These items do not form a single factor; instead, two factors having eigenvalues greater than 1 and significantly larger than the remaining factors (based on a skree test) are present. The first factor consists of the positive support, praise, and value one obtains from playing the student role. The second factor consists of the negative meanings (criticism from others) that may result from playing this role. The interesting feature of these results is that these

⁶ This measure is not available for freshman students. Consequently, analyses of grade point average do not include these students.

Table 1. Principal Components Analysis (with Varimax Rotation) of Items Relating to Valued Inputs of Student Identity

Items	Factors	
	Positive	Negative
Degree of satisfaction or fulfillment I get from being a student	.730*	.002
Feel being a student is beneficial or rewarding in terms of my future	.681*	.098
People say I am right in placing importance on being a student	.609*	.089
Frequency of strong praise as a student	.546*	.024
Perceived degree of disappointment of others to failure as a student	.535*	-.059
Frequency of mild criticism as a student	-.107	.846*
Frequency of strong criticism as a student	-.031	.846*
Balance of criticism and praise as a student (high score indicates more criticism)	.348	.638*
Ω reliability	.75	.71

* Significant at the .05 level.

rewards and costs are not opposite ends of a single factor, but load on independent factors.⁷ The merging of the two, as in the work of Becker and Kanter, is not supported. The reward and the cost components of cognitive commitment are independent.

Table 2 shows the results of an analysis of eight items relating to the socioemotional basis of commitment: one's ties to others while in the role of student. We performed a principal component analysis with varimax rotation on the items. Again, we found not a single factor, but two separate factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 and significantly larger than any of the remaining factors (based on a skree test). The first factor pertains to a role incumbent's emotional ties to family and friends (Stryker's "intensive" commitment). The second factor pertains to the number of one's ties as a role incumbent (Stryker's "extensive" commitment). Thus the extensive and the intensive factors appear to be separate bases of commitment.⁸

⁷ Even without the orthogonal constraints in using factor scores, the two factors have only a small correlation (.18).

⁸ Again, without the orthogonal constraints in using factor scores, the two factors have a very small correlation (.04).

Table 2. Principal Component Analysis (with Varimax Rotation) of Items Relating to Interpersonal Ties

Items	Factors	
	Intensive	Extensive
Brother/sister is important to me as a student	.704*	.231
High school friends are important to me as a student	.697*	-.117
An intimate met in high school is important to me as a student	.673*	-.218
Parents are important to me as a student	.641*	.275
An intimate (lover, fiancée, spouse) is important to me as a student	.547*	-.083
Number of people I would miss if I were no longer a student	.190	.741*
Number of friends made in college	-.008	.701*
Number of people I would no longer see if I were no longer a student	-.130	.387
Ω reliability	.75	.62

* Significant at the .05 level.

The results of these initial analyses suggest the presence of four, rather than the two anticipated, relatively independent bases of commitment to the college student identity. The first two are what we have termed cognitive bases: 1) the rewards (POSITIVE) and 2) the costs (NEGATIVE) resulting from interaction as a student. Each set of cognitive meanings emerges as a separate factor. The socioemotional bases of commitment produce two additional factors: 3) positive ties to family and friends while in the role (INTENSIVE), and 4) the sheer number of ties to others while in the role (EXTENSIVE).

We constructed separate scales for each factor, using principal components (see Tables 1 and 2) to examine the relationships among the four bases of commitment. The correlations among these bases are presented in Table 3. These results make it apparent that despite some significant correlations, each basis is relatively independent of the others. Persons who are high or low on one are not correspondingly high or low on another.

Consequences of Commitment

The second empirical issue deals with the

Table 3. Correlations For Variables Measuring Bases of Commitment

	Correlations			
	Cognitive Bases		Socio-emotional Bases	
	Positive	Negative	Intensive	Extensive
Positive	1.000			
Negative	.034	1.000		
Intensive	.209*	-.006	1.000	
Extensive	.223*	-.037	-.025	1.000

* Significant at the .05 level.

consequences of commitment. Commitment refers to the sum of the forces that maintain congruity between one's identity setting and the input of reflected appraisals from the social setting. In this sense, the effects of commitment will be seen in the way in which it moderates the strength of the link between identity and behavior. This expectation, of course, assumes a stable semantic environment in which people have learned what behaviors produce perceptions of self that are congruent with their identities. We begin by examining the effects of student identity on behaviors associated with that identity, investigating specifically how these relationships are moderated by the effects of commitment. Because we do not have direct measures of the forces favoring commitment, we use our measures of the bases of commitment as proxies for direct measures of commitment.

We examine the effect of the student identity (academic involvement) on the three behavioral measures: time in role, GPA, and adjustment to the student role identity. In each case, the higher the academic responsibility of the student identity, the greater the expected time in role, the expected grade point average, and the expected adjustment. We hypothesize, however, that this basic relationship is moderated by the effects of commitment. For persons with greater commitment, the above-mentioned relationships should be stronger than for those with lesser commitment. Finally, to prevent the confounding of relationships, we hold constant the levels of self-esteem, salience, and centrality of the student role.

The analysis is a standardized regression in which each of the three behavioral measures is regressed on academic responsibility and on the control variables (with listwise deletion of missing data). In addition, terms represent-

ing the interaction of each of the bases of commitment with academic responsibility are present. Each basis has been standardized (i.e., has a mean of 0 and a variance of 1) to facilitate interpretation. Results are presented in Table 4.

To interpret these results, let us consider the first row of Table 4, which shows the effects of the identity variable (academic responsibility) on time in role, with positive rewards as the basis of commitment. The effect of identity on time in role for persons with average commitment is 0.154. In addition, we find a significant interaction effect between commitment and identity on time in role. For persons whose commitment level is one standard deviation above the mean, the effect of identity on time in role is 0.258 (.154 + .104). For persons whose commitment level is one standard deviation below the average, the effect of identity is 0.050 (.154 - .104). Thus for people with low commitment, little relationship exists between identity and time in role, but as commitment increases, the relationship becomes significant and strong.

Overall the analysis reveals three basic results. First, commitment, as indicated by the bases serving as proxies, moderates the relationship between one's identity and one's behaviors (shown in the "Commitment Basis by Identity" column). Second, the exception is that NEGATIVE does not act in this manner and therefore may not represent a basis of commitment. Third, the moderating effect of commitment on the relationship between identity and behavior holds even when we control for the self-esteem, the salience, and the centrality of the student role.⁹

In Table 5 we extend these results by examining simultaneously the interactive effects of each basis of commitment. We have seen already that the bases are relatively independent of each other, and Table 5 shows that their effects are independent and cumulative. Consider Row 2, in which GPA is the outcome variable. The standardized regression coefficient representing the effect of student identity on GPA is .066 (n.s.) for persons with average levels on each of the

four bases of commitment. The effect for persons who are one standard deviation above average on POSITIVE is .226 (.066 + .160). The effect for persons who are one standard deviation above average on both POSITIVE and INTENSIVE is .359 (.066 + .160 + .133). The effects are cumulative, so the impact of identity on GPA for persons who are above average on all bases of commitment is quite large.

Table 5 reveals the same pattern of results as we saw in Table 4. The costs dimension (NEGATIVE) does not act as a basis of commitment, but each of the other dimensions does so, and they do so independently of each other and independently of the levels of self-esteem, salience, and centrality of the student role. As the level of commitment established on any of the bases (with the exception of NEGATIVE) becomes greater, the relationship between student identity and activity resulting from that identity becomes stronger. Persons with higher commitment are acting to keep the correspondence between their identity and their behavior more congruent. Identity theory anticipates precisely this effect of commitment.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We began our investigation with an interest in commitment as one of the ways in which individuals infuse roles and social structure with self-meanings and motives. Unlike Becker and Kanter, we do *not* formulate commitment in terms of stable lines of action. Instead we propose that a line of activity is an output of the identity process. Commitment can be understood more clearly as a tie to one's identity in terms of *maintaining particular inputs to the identity process*—that is, particular perceptions of the meaning of the self (those congruent with one's role identity). This shift of focus unifies the prior conceptions of commitment and allows us to account for variations in activities without changes in commitment (as would be required if commitment were made to particular lines of activity).

Using this shift in focus, we examined two different bases of commitment to identities that have been discussed in the literature. The first, cognitive commitment, is based on the rewards and value of being a student. The second, socioemotional commitment, is based on ties to other people. Analysis of measures

⁹ When we undertook these analyses without the controls, the only difference was an additional significant effect of academic responsibility on grade point average in all instances.

Table 4. Effects of Student Identity (Academic Responsibility) on Behavioral Outcomes as Moderated by Commitment (Standardized Regression Coefficients)

Basis of Commitment	Behavioral Outcome	Identity (Academic Responsibility)	Commitment Basis by Identity				R ²	N
			Self-Esteem	Salience	Centrality			
Positive	Time in role	0.154*	0.105*	0.131*	0.145*	0.228	.232	481
	Grade point average	0.057	0.141*	0.282*	0.092	0.149*	.133	327
	Adjustment	0.112*	0.019	0.148*	0.072	0.047	.029	458
Negative	Time in role	0.148*	-0.015	0.156*	0.154*	0.258*	.223	481
	Grade point average	0.040	0.096	0.318*	0.111*	0.112*	.126	327
	Adjustment	0.114*	-0.003	0.152*	0.074	0.041	.027	458
Intensive	Time in role	0.157*	0.014	0.108*	0.125*	0.246*	.184	536
	Grade point average	0.107*	0.111*	0.287*	0.083	0.098*	.126	368
	Adjustment	-0.019	0.089*	0.088	0.070	0.063	.012	511
Extensive	Time in role	0.180*	0.110*	0.095*	0.107*	0.242*	.194	536
	Grade point average	0.065	0.098*	0.299*	0.110*	0.087	.124	358
	Adjustment	0.012	0.114*	0.071	0.044	0.089	.023	511

* Significant at the .05 level.

of these bases suggests that commitment is built on multiple, independent bases. With respect to cognitive commitment, items dealing with rewards and values loaded on a separate factor (POSITIVE) from items dealing with costs (NEGATIVE). This approach differs from those of Becker and Kanter, who merge them. The NEGATIVE factor, however, does not act as a basis for commitment at all. Thus, not only are rewards and costs different factors, but commitment is based only on rewards, not on costs, at least with respect to the student identity component of academic responsibility.

For the second basis of commitment, which we termed the socioemotional basis, we measured two component parts. The INTENSIVE component emphasizes ties to specific others as sources of input for the identity system. The EXTENSIVE component deals with the number of others as such sources of

input. In the data analysis we found that the two components of socioemotional commitment are relatively independent of each other, and that each maintains identity processes within the interaction system.

We then turned our attention to the consequences of commitment. Most prior work on commitment centered on factors that control the individual's behavior, factors that encourage behavior which is consistent with role requirements and which remains constant across situations. These earlier formulations focused on the outputs or behavior of the individual and on ways in which the individual is controlled by the organization to engage in community-sustaining and -supporting behaviors. The vantage point is that of the outsider.

In our reformulation of commitment from the perspective of identity theory or affect control theory, we turned the issue around.

Table 5. Effects of Student Identity (Academic Responsibility) on Behavioral Outcomes as Moderated by All Bases of Commitment (Standardized Regression Coefficients)

Outcome	Identity (Academic Responsibility)	Interactions of Commitment Basis with Identity				Self-Esteem	Salience	Centrality	R ²	N
		Positive	Negative	Intensive	Extensive					
Time in role	0.159*	0.137*	-0.042	0.013	0.084*	0.118*	0.126*	0.221*	.255	444
Grade point average	0.066	0.160*	0.072	0.133*	0.138*	0.302*	0.091	0.188*	.188	303
Adjustment	0.076	0.024	0.002	0.078*	0.128*	0.108*	0.017	0.029	.080	426

* Significant at the .05 level.

OWe focus on the control that individuals maintain over the congruity between their reflected appraisals and their identity standard. Individuals are agents acting to control their own identity processes. We suggest that people will do what they need to do to maintain their identities, and those with stronger commitment will work harder to maintain their identities. Thus people will act to maintain the inputs or reflected appraisals that are necessary to sustain and support their identities. Commitment measures the degree to which people strive to keep these inputs. Individuals act to control their inputs (reflected appraisals); organizations act to control the outputs (the individual's lines of action).

In our study of the consequences of commitment, we examined the effect of commitment on the link between identity and behavior. We focused on the primary dimension of the meaning of the student identity, and on three outcome behaviors suggested by prior literature: time in role, role performance (GPA), and adjustment to role. An identity approach suggests that when persons are committed, they need not be tied to a line of activity (an output of the individual) but rather are tied to maintaining reflected appraisals congruent with their identity standard. Thus a college student would be committed not to the activity of doing well in school, but rather to being perceived as the particular kind of student implied by his or her identity.

This expectation is borne out in the analysis which shows that among those with higher commitment, not all spent more time in role, had a higher GPA, or displayed greater adjustment (see Tables 4 and 5). Rather, we found a greater correspondence between the meaning of the identity and the behavior of those who were more highly committed. This finding suggests that the highly committed spent less time in role and had lower GPAs, for example, if their student identity indicated low levels of academic responsibility.

In conclusion, in view of the diverse interests and perspectives of the earlier theorists, it is not surprising that their formulations of commitment differed. An approach based on the cybernetic models of identity theory or affect control theory offers a theoretically and empirically rich tradition that explores fully the implications and outcomes of commitment processes. It also

provides a way of unifying the variety of existing perspectives on commitment. Finally, the results of our analyses are in accord with the expectation that people pursue lines of activity which sustain and support their identities to the extent they are committed to those identities. Commitment emphasizes that individuals are active agents who make their own decisions.

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