The Idealized Self and the Situated Self as Predictors of Employee Work Behaviors

Steven M. Farmer
Wichita State University

Linn Van Dyne
Michigan State University

This article presents a model integrating research on idealized and situated selves. Our key premise is that identity-relevant behaviors are most likely to occur in the workplace when identities are psychologically central and activating forces make those identities salient. Analysis of matched data from 278 employees, supervisors, and organizational records generally supported our model. Helping identity and industrious work identity were positively associated with related role behaviors only when time-based occupancy in the role of organization member was high. Industrious work identity was positively associated with role behaviors only when reflected appraisals from coworkers were consistent with that identity. In contrast, reflected appraisal of helping identity had an independent relationship with identity-relevant role behaviors. Results demonstrate the importance of theory linking the idealized self and the situated self to understanding identity relations with work performances.

Keywords: Role identity, role behaviors, identity salience, reflected appraisal, role occupancy

Role identities—self-definitions based on occupying particular roles—are practically important in the workplace because they influence work-related performance behaviors such as employee creativity (Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-McIntyre, 2003), citizenship behaviors (Pinkelstein & Penner, 2004), and volunteering (Grube & Piliavin, 2000). In addition, organizations can cue and reinforce work-related role identities in ways that reinforce desired behaviors (Farmer & Aguinis, 2005; Lord & Brown, 2004). Role identities also are theoretically important because identity enactment is both constructed by the person (Stryker, 1987) and shaped by the situation. Identity research suggests an important way that individuals define in-role behaviors (Parker, 2007) as people seek to create meaning by constructing identities (e.g., through crafting their jobs; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), and this helps to explain the link between identities and performance behaviors.

Despite the obvious theoretical and practical import of work-role-related identities, meaningful gaps remain in our knowledge about how identities affect behaviors within organizations. Current research tends to adopt one of two basic approaches. The first view emphasizes the level of psychological importance of the identity within the person’s overall self-concept (Burke, 1991; Stryker & Serpe, 1994). This approach focuses on internal cognitive and affective processes (e.g., Burke, 1991, 1996) and how psychological importance or centrality of a self-identity affects identity-related actions. In contrast, the second view focuses on the self-concept as subordinate to outside forces (Lord & Brown, 2004). For example, Markus and Wurf (1987) described the working self-concept such that different selves vary in their activation across times and contexts. McCall and Simmons (1978) emphasized identity salience, defined as the probability that a role identity will be enacted behaviorally (Stryker, 1987), and Alexander and Wiley (1981) described situated identity as aspects of the self that are activated in a particular situation. In sum, the first approach places primary emphasis on self-cognitions and the internal dynamics of specific selves, and the second approach emphasizes contextual factors and identity salience.

Although there is significant support for both approaches, the joint importance of self and situation together has been neither well elucidated nor well explored in role identity research. While a healthy stream of qualitative investigation exists (e.g., Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, & Fugate, 2007; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006), quantitative knowledge is particularly limited concerning identity-based action in organizational contexts. For example, even though researchers have proposed that psychologically important identities are more likely to be activated by contextual factors (Ashforth, 2001; Stryker & Serpe, 1994), little if any quantitative research has been conducted into how this affects role performance in organizations. Likewise, even though identity is viewed as a critical motivating force (Foote, 1951), it is often positioned as distal to behavior (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Cropanzano, James, & Citera, 1993).

Responding to this gap, we conducted our research to extend current knowledge by advancing a model linking identities to role performances based on factors both internal and external to the person that interact to predict role behaviors at work. We draw on theoretical work on the psychological centrality of role identities (Burke & Reitzes, 1991; Stryker, 1987; Stryker & Statham, 1985), as well as research on the salience of identities (McCall & Simmons, 1978) and situational activation of self-relevant traits (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000) to develop a conceptual model that integrates psychological and situational approaches. We propose that contextual factors moderate the relationship between psychological importance of identities and identity-

Steven M. Farmer, Department of Management, Wichita State University; Linn Van Dyne, Department of Management, Michigan State University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Steven M. Farmer, Department of Management, Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount, Wichita, KS 67260. E-mail: steven.farmer@wichita.edu
consistent role performance by augmenting or diminishing the salience of identities. The core premise of the model is that identity-relevant behaviors are most likely to occur when work identities are psychologically central and activating forces make identity salient.

In the following, we describe the theoretical bases for the two identity perspectives and propose a conceptual integration that highlights how internal and external identity processes interact to predict role behaviors. We apply these ideas to the current study involving multiple identities and multiple role behaviors and present the rationale for specific hypotheses. Analysis of field data from multiple sources (278 employees, their supervisors, and organizational records) provides general support for the model, demonstrating interactive relations between psychological centrality of identity and situated salience of identity as predictors of work role behaviors.

**Theory Development**

The self has been the focus of major streams of research in psychology and sociology. In cognitive psychology, the self has been described in terms of a system of affective–cognitive structures (i.e., schemata) that organize and lend coherence to individual experiences, particularly self-relevant ones (Markus, 1977; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Sociological approaches stem largely from symbolic interactionism, which views the self as multifaceted and the result of relationships with others (Stryker, 1980). Both approaches have linked self-structures to the concept of "identity." Both approaches emphasize self-conception and self-schemata that reflect how individuals describe themselves. Thus, identities are internal; they refer to reflexive cognitions and affect about the self.

In this study, we focused on two specific role identities often important to employees and their organizations. The first is helping identity, defined as the extent to which employees personally view helping as a core part of their sense of self. Helping role identity is a context- and target-specific instantiation of a prosocial identity (Grant, 2007; Grube & Piliavin, 2000). Prosocial identity is a relatively abstract, higher order identity encompassing more concrete, lower order identities, which tend to be especially salient and subjectively important to individuals (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). The second role identity is industrious work identity, defined as the extent to which individuals view consistency, reliability, and discipline in following organizational routines as a core part of their personal sense of self (Eisenberger, 1992; Moorman & Blakely, 1995). This identity concerns self-views of work efficiency, reliability, and consistency in getting work done. The contrast between these two identities parallels distinctions often emphasized in the organizational citizenship literature (e.g., the distinction between compliance versus altruism [Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983] and the distinction between citizenship behavior directed toward the task/organization versus toward other individuals [Williams & Anderson, 1991]).

The Psychological Importance of Self-Concept: The Idealized Self

A role identity provides a systematic organizing structure for needs and desires associated with that identity (Callero, Howard, & Piliavin, 1987; Cropanzano et al., 1993; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Role identities represent what McCall and Simmons (1978) termed the idealized self—how people see themselves and what is important to them, given their needs and desires. Consistent with symbolic interactionism and its immediate descendent, identity theory (Burke, 1991, 1996; Stryker & Statham, 1985), identity is therefore based on meaning in the form of behavioral expectations, with special emphasis on "meanings and expectations one attributes to oneself in a role (and that others attribute to one)" (Burke, 1996, p. 142). Thus, identity reflects priorities that guide actions across situations and over time (Stets, 2006).

A particularly important aspect of role identities is their psychological importance, or centrality, within the person's overall self-concept. A role identity can range from low to high in importance to the individual. At one extreme, very high importance is reflected in Turner's (1978) concept of role–person merger. When this merger occurs, a particular role becomes so important that the idea of self-in-the-role comes to dominate the individual's sense of self. In other instances, a role identity can be moderate, low, or even extremely low in centrality. For example, a person may have an identity as a volunteer, but this identity may not be very meaningful to the individual, whereas being a high achiever at work may be much more central to that person's sense of self. The more psychologically important an individual's role identity, the higher the probability behaviors will be consistent with that identity across situations (Stryker, 1980). This consistency exists because enactment of the role fulfills a critical need for self-verification (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Geisler, 1992) and allows relevant others as well as the self to identify and categorize the individual (Burke, 1991).

The two identities that we study differ in their foci, with industrious work identity focusing primarily on task activities and helping identity focusing primarily on interpersonal activities. In essence, both identities represent the "self-as-doer" (Houser-Marko & Sheldon, 2006) because the identity schemata concern actions of helping and consistent, reliable, and disciplined behavior. Consistent with our earlier description of identity centrality as a driver of role behaviors, Houser-Marko and Sheldon (2006) demonstrated that individuals who identify as doers show greater behavioral persistence and achievement regarding identity-related goals. Given the importance of matching the focus of predictors and outcomes (Ajzen, 1991), we expected that centrality of a particular identity would predict identity-related behaviors because the specific schemata of each identity has special relevance to the identity-relevant behavior. Thus, we expected helping identity would be related to helping behaviors and industrious work identity would be related to industrious work behaviors.

The Contextual Importance of Social Situations: The Situated Self

Given that identities are systematic organizing structures of related sets of cognitive elements, individuals can store many such self-schemata. At any given time, however, active memory contains a limited number of schemata. Markus and Wurfs (1987) referred to currently accessible self-schema as the working self-concept, which is based on a continually active, shifting array of accessible self-knowledge. In symbolic interactionism, the concept of salience has been used to represent temporary activation of identities (Stryker, 1980). Identity salience is a state of heightened...
sensitivity to identity-relevant stimuli (cf. Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). Factors external to the individual sensitize people to their existing self-schema; the more that elements of self are similar to elements of the situation, the greater the sensitization (Markus, 1977), leading to greater salience of that identity (Stryker, 1987). It is important to note that identity salience is conceptually (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 1987) and quantitatively (Forehand, Deshpande, & Reed, 2002) distinct from identity centrality. Centrality is internal and psychological; salience is triggered externally and is based on the situation.

Thus, salient identities reflect a situated self rather than an idealized self (Stets, 2006) because salience is anchored outside the self (Wiley & Alexander, 1987) and is based on situational forces and cues that prompt increased processing of identity-relevant information (Cropanzano et al., 1993), leading to identity-related behaviors. Cognitive psychology research on stimulus cues such as reference group symbols (Cialdini et al., 1976) and aspects of social context such as group membership (Hogg & Turner, 1987) support the situated nature of salience. For instance, Forehand et al. (2002) demonstrated that ethnic identity primes affected ethnic identity salience and subsequent responses to targeted advertising, and Lord and colleagues (e.g., Lord & Brown, 2004; Lord, Brown, & Harvey, 2001) have demonstrated that leaders can prime and activate desired follower identities.

Integrating the Idealized and Situated Selves

Researchers have recognized that theories of self must account for both stability and variability in the nature and expression of selves (Llinville & Carlson, 1994), and Markus and Wurf (1987) offered a model that describes "core self-conceptions embedded in a context of more tentative self-conceptions that are tied to the prevailing circumstances" (p. 306). These two aspects of self-concept are empirically independent (Stryker & Serpe, 1994) and represent conceptually different aspects of the self, but theory suggests they do not operate independently. Nevertheless, the two approaches come from different theoretical traditions that have historically emphasized self or situational factors. Notably, work in which these two perspectives have been integrated to predict multiple role behaviors in organizational settings has been sparse, and the focus of research has tended to be on either central selves (e.g., Farmer et al., 2003) or situated selves (e.g., Kivetz & Tyler, 2007) but rarely on both.

Addressing this gap, we propose that psychological centrality of an identity and situational salience of an identity do not affect role behaviors in an additive way but that the two interact to predict role behaviors. Identities that are psychologically central are more likely to be chronically accessible across situational contexts and thereby foster stability in self-construct processes (Strauman, 1996) and selective pursuit and assimilation of self-confirming information (Gaertner, Sedikides, Vevea, & Iuzzini, 2002; Swann, 1990). The greater the centrality of the identity, the greater the need for role support (Burke, 1991) and the more vigorous the attempts to enact the identity proactively by creating opportunity structures (Swann, 1987). Psychologically central identities reflect self-schema that are accessible and easy to activate because they reflect core dimensions of the self (Lord & Brown, 2004; Stryker, 1987).

This identity-based perspective is consistent with recent work highlighting how aspects of the situation can prime and elicit behaviors associated with self-centrality (Verplanken & Holland, 2002). Trait activation theory (Tett & Guzman, 2000) proposes that traits—"intraindividually consistent and interindividually distinct propensities to behave in some identifiable way" (p. 398)—are more likely to be exhibited in situations in which they are relevant and which provide opportunities for their expression. Forces that affect the salience and thereby the behavioral expression of identities can stem from the task (e.g., job demands), the social environment (e.g., needs and expectations of others), and the organization (e.g., culture or climate; Tett & Burnett, 2003). This process is comparable to identity salience in role theory, where role performances are a function of social structure and interaction history (Stryker, 1987).

In this study, we considered two activating forces that affect identity salience. The first is role occupancy. Since roles prescribe appropriate behaviors for the situation regardless of the personality of the role holder, role occupancy can be a powerful prime for role-relevant behavior because it reflects all three cue levels described by Tett and Burnett (2003) (task, social environment, and organizational). The second activating force, reflected appraisals, is social in nature because it concerns perceived relationships between the actor and various reference individuals or groups.

Role Occupancy as an Activating Force

In organizational contexts, role occupancy carries specific responsibilities and obligations that lead to development of role occupancy schemata (the set of behaviors expected of a person in a particular role). Some role expectations are obvious and included in formal job descriptions. Other role expectations are implicit and evolve, such that they are only internalized when individuals are more experienced and more involved in the role. For example, Pfeffer and Baron (1988) described temporal variations in exposure to organizational influences such as occur based on duration of employment and time spent at work. With increasing temporal involvement, role expectations are internalized such that they then function as a subtle form of control.

Role occupancy has typically been conceptualized in dichotomous terms as whether or not one holds a certain role (e.g., Arvey, Zhang, Avolio, & Kreuger, 2007). This approach, however, does not allow for other aspects of role occupancy, such as temporal involvement in the role. Thus, moving beyond mere occupancy and following Pfeffer and Baron (1988), we conceptualize role occupancy in terms of time spent in the role, such that increasing time in role indicates greater temporal involvement.

In our research context, time in the role of organization member was especially important because of the ways in which the organization reinforced client-helping behaviors and industrious work behaviors (e.g., ongoing mandatory training, face-to-face meetings with managers, and regular communication materials from top management) for all employees in all jobs, regardless of specific job content. Each of these ongoing processes emphasized a stewardship focus whereby employees "share common norms, values, and attributes, and develop custodial [role] orientations" (Jones, 1986, p. 264). Therefore, we focused on two key aspects of temporal involvement in the role of organization member that should influence the situational salience of identities. The first is
the span of time or tenure. Organizational tenure can affect identity processes (Van Dyne & Farmer, 2005) because it reflects ongoing socialization experiences (Stryker & Statham, 1985) that provide the social knowledge, values, and understanding of expected behaviors necessary to fully assume a specific role. Since the organization had ongoing socialization programs that emphasized client-helping and industrious work behaviors in all work roles, the situational salience of these behaviors should be greater for those with more tenure.

The second aspect of role occupancy is work status differences in the amount of time spent in the role of organizational member for part-time versus full-time employees. Work status can influence work behaviors (Stamper & Van Dyne, 2001). For example, partial inclusion theory (Miller & Terborg, 1979) and metanalytic research (Thorsteinson, 2003) describe part-time employees as physically less involved in the organization. They spend less time in the role and have less exposure to ongoing socialization processes, which should reduce the situational salience of identities (Reichers, 1987).

As temporal involvement for employees increases, role schemata become more elaborate and employees become increasingly enmeshed in networks of structural role obligations that make specific identities salient (Stets & Burke, 2003; Stryker & Statham, 1985). The direct experience of time in the role reinforces normative expectations and activates role behaviors (Callero et al., 1987). With increasing time in role, those with psychologically central identities (already motivated to act) have more opportunities to seek out and engage in role-related behaviors. Thus, opportunities should be more numerous and more salient. Accordingly, we expected that role occupancy would interact with psychological centrality of identity, such that greater temporal involvement would strengthen the identity-role performance relationship.

Role occupancy, in terms of greater temporal involvement as denoted by organizational tenure and work status, should reinforce helping role obligations and make them more salient for those with a strong helping role identity and reinforce and make more salient industrious work behavior role obligations for those with a strong industrious work identity. Further, high levels of organizational tenure and full-time work status should increase opportunities to engage in role-related behaviors. Because an already-central role identity indicates a motivation to fulfill role obligations through role performances and to seek out such opportunities, we propose the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1**: The relationship between helping identity and helping behaviors will be moderated by role occupancy (H1a: organizational tenure; H1b: work status), such that the greater the role occupancy, the stronger and more positive the relationship.

**Hypothesis 2**: The relationship between industrious work identity and industrious work behaviors will be moderated by role occupancy (H2a: organizational tenure; H2b: work status) such that the greater the role occupancy, the stronger and more positive the relationship.

**Reflected Appraisals as an Activating Force**

According to situated identity theory (Wiley & Alexander, 1987), situated activity is anchored outside the self and constrained by monitoring processes. For example, social pressures from others constrain behaviors and help ensure that role enactment is consistent with role expectations (Stryker & Statham, 1985). Communication of role expectations includes social feedback about the kind of person one ought to be (Mead, 1934). However, expectations about how one should act are less a function of the actual views of others than of the *looking glass self* (Cooley, 1902), defined as people’s perceptions of how they are viewed by others (Swann, Milton, & Polzer, 2000). These reflected appraisals are perceptions of how we think others see us (Tice & Wallace, 2003), including perceptions about who one is and how one ought to act.

In cognitive terms, reflected appraisals are self-schemata of the values, roles, and behaviors that individuals think referent others expect of them and believe them capable of enacting (Tice & Wallace, 2003). Reflected appraisals are an important part of the self-regulation process (Burke, 1991; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Stryker, 1987) because people compare perceived feedback from others about a current or possible identity with internal standards about how those with a particular identity should behave. For instance, researchers have found (e.g., Lord & Brown, 2004) that reflected appraisals are powerful primes that activate identities and role behaviors associated with identities. Through reflected appraisals, the expectations that others associate with a role provide a way to link self-understandings of a role with the situational expression of an identity. The more central an identity, the more likely a person will try to generate self-confirming feedback (Swann, 1987) by meeting role expectations (Burke, 1991). Perceived feedback from others that is consistent with an identity self-schema should activate the schema, make it salient, and reinforce identity-relevant behaviors.

Research suggests that appraisal of the meaning of social feedback is more important to identity-related outcomes than the actual feedback (Swann et al., 2000). Those with stronger or more central role identities have a high need for self-verification and seek opportunities to enact the identity. Thus, they should receive stronger reinforcement for role behaviors on the basis of their self-presentations at work (Swann, 1987). Reflected appraisals of central identities signify authenticity (Shamir, 1990) and normatively appropriate behavior (Steele, 1988) and should strengthen identity centrality–role behavior relationships. Thus, we propose an interaction whereby situational salience of a particular identity strengthens the relationship between psychological centrality of that identity and identity-relevant role behaviors.

When helping is a central role identity to employees, an individual’s perception that others at work see him or her as the sort of person who helps should make that identity even more salient. Likewise, for employees with psychologically central industrious work identities, validation that others also see them in the same way should augment the salience of their industrious work identity.

**Hypothesis 3**: The relationship between helping identity and helping behaviors will be moderated by reflected appraisal as having a helping identity, such that the more the individual is seen as holding the identity, the stronger and more positive the relationship.

**Hypothesis 4**: The relationship between industrious work identity and industrious work behaviors will be moderated by reflected appraisal as having an industrious work identity,
such that the more the individual is seen as holding the identity, the stronger and more positive the relationship.

Method

Setting and Sample

We examined our hypotheses in a nonprofit organization in which the core mission was helping vulnerable children and their families. The organization provided residential treatment for very emotionally disturbed or disruptive youths, emergency shelter for runaway children or children in immediate danger of harm from others, foster care services, and similar programs. We conducted extensive exploratory work to familiarize ourselves with the organization, its operations, its values, and its employees to make sure our research questions, constructs, and operationalizations were relevant to the context. This included semistructured interviews with organization leaders and with employees in all major job categories across hierarchical levels. In total, 15 interviews (1.0-1.5 hr each) were conducted with individuals in different functional areas, jobs, and hierarchical levels.

The organization emphasized client-helping and industrious behaviors as important for all employees. Exploratory work indicated that having a client or child service orientation was a strongly normative expectation for all employees—regardless of specific job duties. Many employees had chosen to work at this organization in the belief that they would be able to fulfill their desires to help children. The organization relied on this “calling” (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997) to recruit employees since its ability to provide competitive pay was limited. Second, since the organization was under a privatization contract with the state, it had to meet a high volume of public child welfare needs with a fixed per-capita budget, making efficiency and timely, accurate reporting of client outcomes to state agencies vital for maintaining the contract. Thus, the second aspect of role performance is industrious work behaviors. Interviews revealed that work behaviors such as reliability, follow-through, scheduling, prioritization, time management, record keeping, and quantity of work were thus stressed as key to organizational effectiveness.

Both helping and industrious work roles were reinforced by the organization as part of ongoing socialization and communication programs—the former because it is consistent with the primary mission of the organization and the latter because of its critical importance to contractual obligations. As normative behaviors that were expected of all employees in all jobs, these behaviors were considered to be in role (Van Dyne, Cummings, & McLean Parks, 1995).

Data were collected in group administrations by Steven M. Farmer. Supervisors completed questionnaires on helping behaviors of their employees, and we obtained information on industrious work behaviors from organizational records. Response rates were 227 of 435 employees (63.9%) and 51 of 60 supervisors (85.0%). Employee jobs included foster care, residential youth care, family social work, placement, case management, case assistance, department management and support, and clerical work. The average age was 39 years \( (SD = 12.34) \), and the average organizational tenure was 4 years \( (SD = 3.93) \). The sample was 71% female; 59% held a college degree or higher, 32% had 1 or more years of college, and 9% had a high school education.

Measurement

Except where noted, items were anchored with 5-point Likert scales \( (1 = \text{strongly disagree}, 5 = \text{strongly agree}) \). All items were piloted and debriefed with a small organizational sample (excluded from further analysis) and reviewed by middle and senior managers to ensure relevance and appropriateness. The Appendix lists all scale items.

Role behaviors. Supervisors assessed helping behaviors of their employees with five items adapted from Van Dyne and LePine (1998). Using information drawn from interviews, we modified the original items, which focused on helping behaviors directed toward the work group, so they focused on help provided to the organization’s clients. Supervisors indicated how often employees typically exhibited each behavior \( (1 = \text{never}, 2 = \text{almost never}, 3 = \text{sometimes}, 4 = \text{often}, 5 = \text{always}, \text{and 6 = always}; \text{Cronbach’s } \alpha = .93) \). We used supervisor ratings of three items from the organization’s performance appraisal records for the time period after the first data collection to assess industrious work behaviors of employees (Eisenberger, 1992; Moorman & Blakely, 1995). This included reliability and dependability, quantity of work, and attendance and punctuality \( (1 = \text{unacceptable}, 2 = \text{needs improvement}, 3 = \text{meets expectations}, \text{and 4 = exceeds expectations}; \alpha = .70) \).

Role identities. For helping identity, we adapted Callero’s (1985) role identity scale to measure the extent to which employees viewed the role of client helping as an important aspect of self-identity. We modified this well-validated scale (Callero et al., 1987; Farmer et al., 2003) so that these three items reflected centrality of client helping with specific phrases used consistently by employees in our interviews \( (\alpha = .80) \). We also used our interviews to adapt Callero’s scale to create a three-item measure of industrious work identity, with the items focusing on the personal centrality of work consistency and following work routines \( (\alpha = .71) \).

Role occupancy. We obtained data on organizational tenure (years) and work status \( (0 = \text{part-time}, 1 = \text{full-time}) \) from organizational records. Approximately 16% of the usable sample was employed part-time, while 84% of the sample was full-time.

Reflected appraisals. For reflected helping identity, we adapted three items from Farmer et al. (2003) to reflect the extent to which employees thought coworkers viewed them as having a strong client-helping identity \( (\alpha = .85) \). We followed a similar process for reflected industrious work identity, adapting three items from Farmer et al. (2003) to reflect the extent to which employees thought coworkers viewed them as having an industrious work identity \( (\alpha = .89) \).

Control variables. Age differences in work motives can affect performance orientation (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004), so we controlled for age (measured in years). We controlled for gender \( (1 = \text{female}, 2 = \text{male}) \) because research has shown that gender is related to various forms of helping (Eagly & Crowley, 1986). Since client contact has been linked to persistence in helping (Grant et al., 2007) and since contact with people in distress can increase helping (Batson et al., 1997), we controlled for contact with beneficiaries by adapting two items from Bartel, Saavedra, and Van Dyne’s (2001) measure of client interaction \( (1 = \text{none}, 4 = \text{extensive}; \text{and 1 = rarely work with clients}, 4 = \text{always work with clients}; \alpha = .89) \). We controlled for hierarchical job level by creating a dummy variable grouping all jobs with administrative or
supervisory responsibility together (coded as 0) and all other jobs in a second category (coded as 1). Finally, using Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO-1) job classifications reported by the organization’s human resources group, we created dummy variables controlling for client-oriented jobs (0 = no, 1 = yes; 51% of all jobs) and office-clerical jobs (0 = no, 1 = yes; 13% of all jobs), which might be related respectively to helping and industrious work behaviors.

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Prior to hypothesis testing, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses of the four self-report scales (helping identity, industrious work identity, reflected helping identity, reflected industrious work identity) and the two supervisor-report scales (helping behaviors, industrious work behaviors). Results showed good fit for the hypothesized six-factor model, $\chi^2(155) = 222.16, p < .001$; comparative fit index = .97; root-mean-square error of approximation = .05. Relative fit was significantly better than alternative models that constrained the factor correlations between each identity to unity ($\Delta \chi^2$ with hypothesized model = 129.07, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), constrained the factor correlation between the two appraisals to unity ($\Delta \chi^2$ with hypothesized model = 100.51, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), constrained the factor correlation between the two supervisor-rated outcomes to unity ($\Delta \chi^2$ with hypothesized model = 55.67, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), and constrained the factor correlations between each identity and its corresponding reflected appraisal to unity ($\Delta \chi^2$ with hypothesized model = 249.07, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). On the basis of these results, we conclude that adequate discriminant and convergent validity is present for the self- and supervisor-report scales.

Hypothesis Tests

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations are presented in Table 1. Supervisors rated multiple subordinates ($M = 4.76$, median = 4.0, range = 1–17) on helping behaviors and industrious work behaviors, potentially violating the ordinary least squares regression assumption of independence. Intraclass correlation coefficient (1) was .42 for helping behaviors and .23 for industrious work behaviors, suggesting systematic group-level variance. This result could be due to rater effects but could also be due to the way in which work groups were structured around specific client-oriented activities, such as foster care or residential youth care, or around administrative or clerical activities. Thus, we tested our hypotheses using hierarchical random coefficient modeling (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). We estimated two-level models with employees nested within supervisory units, using maximum likelihood estimation to compare fixed-effects models (Snijders & Bosker, 1999). Coefficients for our predictors are all at Level 1 (between person). We set the residual variance parameters for the Level 1 predictor coefficients to zero (Snijders & Bosker, 1999). The models contain no Level 2 variables but do control for supervisor-level dependencies in the data. We used grand-mean centering for gender, age, and contact with beneficiaries. We grand-mean centered interaction components to minimize multicollinearity. Finally, to obtain meaningful intercept values, we did not center hierarchical level, work status, and job dummy variables (Snijders & Bosker, 1999).

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Helping behaviors*</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Industrious work behaviors*</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Helping identity</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.28*</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Industrious work identity</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>-0.17</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Organizational tenure (in years)</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Work status (0 = part-time, 1 = full-time)</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Reflected helping identity</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>-0.49*</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Reflected industrious work identity</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.21*</td>
<td>0.21*</td>
<td>0.38*</td>
<td>0.18*</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.33*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Age (in years)</td>
<td>39.30</td>
<td>12.34</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.33*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Gender (1 = female; 2 = male)</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.23*</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Contact with beneficiaries</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>-0.19*</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.18*</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Hierarchical level (0 = low, 1 = high)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.26*</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.28*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.23*</td>
<td>-0.18*</td>
<td>-0.60*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Client-oriented job (0 = no, 1 = yes)</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.27*</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.14*</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>-0.20*</td>
<td>0.23*</td>
<td>0.47*</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Office-clerical job (0 = no, 1 = yes)</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.22*</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.24*</td>
<td>-0.23*</td>
<td>-0.52*</td>
<td>-0.23*</td>
<td>-0.35*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 206 after listwise deletion.
* Employee role behaviors rated by supervisors.
* *p < .05. **p < .01.
Table 2 reports multilevel estimates of hierarchical modeling results for helping behaviors. We entered controls in Step 1 and the identity, role occupancy, and reflected identity variables in Step 2. In Step 3, we added the hypothesized interactions for helping behaviors. We note that substantive results for all analyses are the same when each interaction is entered individually, but we report results when all three interactions are entered in Step 3 because it is more rigorous.

Control variables explained 13% of variance, and Step 2 shows an increase of 10% explained variance, with significant main effects for helping identity (γ = .22, p < .01) and reflected helping identity (γ = .19, p < .05). In Step 3, two of the three hypothesized interactions were significant, accounting for an additional 3% of explained variance. The interaction between helping identity and organizational tenure was significant (H1a: γ = .05, p < .05), as was the interaction between helping identity and work status (H1b: γ = .80, p < .05). However, reflected helping identity did not moderate the relationship between helping identity and helping behaviors (γ = −.17, p > .05), so H3 was not supported. Instead, Step 2 shows that both helping identity and reflected helping identity had positive, additive relationships with helping behaviors.

For industrious work behavior, control variables explained 5% of variance, and Step 2 shows 1% increase in explained variance, with work status (γ = .21, p < .01) and reflected industrious work identity (γ = .10, p < .05) as significant predictors (see Table 3). Finally, in Step 3, addition of product terms added a significant 3% to explained variance, and each of the three interaction terms was significant. The relationship between industrious work identity and industrious work behaviors was moderated by reflected industrious work identity (H4: γ = .12, p < .05), organizational tenure (H2a: γ = .03, p < .05), and work status (H2b: γ = .23, p < .05).

We examined conditional effects by plotting interactions to determine whether the forms of the five significant interactions support our moderation hypotheses. Figure 1 shows a significant positive relationship between helping identity and helping behaviors for those higher in organizational tenure, r(238) = 3.46, p < .001, and no relationship between identity and helping for those lower in tenure, r(238) = 0.39, p > .05, supporting H1a. Similarly, helping identity was positively related to helping behaviors for full-time employees, r(238) = 3.14, p < .01, but failed to reach significance for part-time employees, r(238) = −1.21, p > .05, supporting H1b (see Figure 2).

Results also support H2a (see Figure 3); industrious work identity was positively related to industrious work behaviors for those with higher organizational tenure, r(229) = 2.09, p < .05, but there was no relationship for those low in organizational tenure, r(229) = −0.15, p > .05. Supporting H2b, Figure 4 shows a positive relationship between industrious work identity and industrious work behaviors for full-time employees, r(229) = 1.96, p < .05, but no significant relationship for part-time employees, r(229) = 0.47, p > .05.

Finally, results support H4 (see Figure 5). Simple slope analysis shows a positive relationship between industrious work identity and industrious work behavior for those with high reflected appraisals, r(228) = 1.98, p < .05, but not for those with low reflected appraisals, r(228) = −0.75, p > .05.

### Discussion

The last several decades have seen dramatic growth in research on roles, role identities, and their implications for organizational behavior. Prior research suggests that role identities foster role-
Table 3
Multilevel Estimates of Random Coefficient Modeling Analyses for Industrious Work Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>95% CI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchical level</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>[-0.02, 0.22]</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>[-0.10, 0.34]</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>[-0.07, 0.37]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>[-0.01, 0.19]</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
<td>[-0.18, 0.02]</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>[-0.21, 0.01]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>[-0.01, 0.01]</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>[-0.02, 0.02]</td>
<td>-0.00</td>
<td>[-0.01, 0.01]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact with beneficiaries</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>[-0.06, 0.10]</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>[-0.08, 0.10]</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>[-0.08, 0.10]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client-oriented job</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>[-0.01, 0.21]</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>[-0.15, 0.21]</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>[-0.13, 0.21]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office-clerical job</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>[-0.12, 0.28]</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>[-0.17, 0.23]</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>[-0.17, 0.23]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping identity</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>[-0.15, 0.05]</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>[-0.15, 0.05]</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
<td>[-0.15, 0.05]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrious work identity</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>[-0.11, 0.19]</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>[-0.34, 0.02]</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>[-0.01, 0.03]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational tenure</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>[-0.01, 0.03]</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>[-0.01, 0.03]</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>[-0.01, 0.03]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work status</td>
<td>0.21**</td>
<td>[0.07, 0.35]</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>[-0.03, 0.29]</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>[-0.03, 0.29]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflected helping identity</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>[-0.10, 0.10]</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>[-0.09, 0.09]</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>[0.01, 0.21]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflected industrious work identity</td>
<td>0.10*</td>
<td>[0.00, 0.10]</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>[0.01, 0.21]</td>
<td>0.12*</td>
<td>[0.01, 0.23]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrious Work Identity × Reflected Industrious Work Identity</td>
<td>0.03*</td>
<td>[0.01, 0.05]</td>
<td>0.23*</td>
<td>[0.03, 0.43]</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>[0.24, 0.54]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrious Work Identity × Organizational Tenure</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrious Work Identity × Work Status</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>127.12***</td>
<td></td>
<td>13.24*</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.70*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 216. Deviance tests and $R^2$ for Step 1 are based on a comparison with a null model (intercept only). $\Delta R^2$ = increase in variance explained by each step; all proportions of variance explained were computed as the overall proportional reduction in Level 1 and 2 variance components of industrious work behavior scores (Smijders & Bosker, 1999). Unstandardized coefficients are at each step. CI = confidence interval.

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

relevant behavior. To date, though, research has not adequately described how contextual factors influence the relationships between role identities and identity-relevant behaviors in organizational settings. Research on self-concepts as idealized (internal) or situated (affected by context) comes from different theoretical traditions, and so work in which these two perspectives have been integrated is rare. Addressing this gap, our study represents one of the only quantitative investigations into the links between idealized and situated selves.

Our core premise was that activating forces influence the salience of identities, and since individuals are motivated to enact highly central identities, activating forces consistent with meaningful identities should be especially likely to facilitate and enhance identity-relevant role performances. To our knowledge, this

---

![Figure 1](image1.png)  ![Figure 2](image2.png)

**Figure 1.** Interaction of helping identity and organizational tenure for helping behaviors.

**Figure 2.** Interaction of helping identity and work status for helping behaviors.
is the first quantitative field study to examine the joint relations of multiple role identities with both structural and interpersonal activating forces on multiple role behaviors in a work context.

Results demonstrate that psychologically central identities were related to relevant role performances only for employees with greater time-based role occupancy. This finding applied to both identity-relevant behaviors in our design: helping and industrious work behaviors. Results also show that psychological centrality of industrious work identity predicted industrious work behaviors only when reflected appraisals indicated that employees believed this identity was validated by their peers. Contrary to expectations, reflected appraisal of helping identity did not moderate the relationship between helping identity and helping behaviors. Instead,

Figure 3. Interaction of industrious work identity and organizational tenure for industrious work behaviors.

Figure 4. Interaction of industrious work identity and work status for industrious work behaviors.

Figure 5. Interaction of industrious work identity and reflected industrious work identity for industrious work behaviors.

Theoretical Implications

We first consider the theoretical implications of our findings for the moderating role of activating forces in changing the relationship between psychological centrality of identity and enactment of identity-related behaviors. Although time-based aspects of role occupancy have often been considered as moderators (e.g., tenure and work status; Stamper & Van Dyne, 2001; Thorsteinson, 2003), this research approach has not been linked to understanding how identity processes are related to role performances. Drawing on the notion of the situated self (Alexander & Wiley, 1981), we argued that temporal involvement as an organization member functions as an activating force that enables employees to develop more elaborate role schemata and become more embedded in networks of obligations. Thus, role occupancy provides structural cues that activate self-schemata associated with the role (Lord et al., 2001), and this activation is especially strong for identities that are psychologically central.

The results also help explain how role occupancy leads to desirable role performances across different role behaviors because activating forces based on organizational membership cue and reinforce behaviors that enhance meaningfulness at work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). The findings may also increase the understanding of how undesirable role performances can permeate an organization. For instance, organizations that implicitly or explicitly value end states (e.g., quarterly profitability) to the relative exclusion of the means used to achieve the end may activate and ultimately strengthen amoral or ends-focused identities (e.g., an identity as an achiever, regardless of collateral damage).
The role occupancy results also have theoretical implications for models of work behavior that aim to enhance role performance. Situational cues can prime identities (Lord & Brown, 2004) and thus enhance performance behaviors. Organizations, however, typically require role flexibility (Parker, 2007) and varied role performances across multiple domains (e.g., job-oriented, development-oriented, innovation-oriented, team-oriented, and organization-focused; Welbourne, Johnson, & Erez, 1998; interdependence- and uncertainty-based; Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). Thus, the fact that role occupancy strengthened the identity-role behavior relationship for both outcomes, even though they were not significantly correlated, suggests that some activating forces may activate multiple identities.

Our second set of theoretical implications also draws on the situated self literature and is based on our predictions and results for the moderating role of activating forces. Individuals are highly sensitive to, and actively look for, opportunities to enact psychologically central identities, especially when they believe others view them as holding these identities. Thus, we expected that reflected appraisals would moderate the relationship between identity centrality and role behaviors. Results supported this idea for industrious work behaviors but not for helping behaviors. Instead, identity and reflected appraisals had independent, additive associations with helping behaviors.

One possible explanation for this different pattern of results is differences in the nature of the two identities. Helping identity, unlike industrious work identity, can be seen as a context- and target-specific instantiation of a prosocial identity that is other- and outcome-focused (Grant, 2007). In contrast, industrious work identity may be more self-focused. Perhaps this distinction is relevant to whether identities are expressed across situations, regardless of their psychological importance. For example, prosocial identities may generate what Vallerand et al. (2003) called harmonious passion, a state of autonomous internalization in which individuals are not compelled to perform a role activity but instead freely choose to do so. Such internalization could create self-supporting stamina that sustains identity-based action even in situations in which role support from others is not available. This could be a reason that helping identity and reflected helping identity had direct, not interactive, associations with helping behaviors.

In contrast, industrious work identity may have been based on feelings of obligation (i.e., compulsive passion) to engage in industrious work performance (Vallerand et al., 2003). For example, respondents in our sample may have felt “certain contingencies are attached to the activity such as feelings of social acceptance or self-esteem” (p. 757). Thus, reflected appraisal of industrious work identity may have functioned as a social contingency that reinforced industrious work as an obligation, rather than as an autonomously chosen activity. This difference in the nature of the two identities may represent an important boundary condition that provides insight into when identities foster identity-related behaviors, such as in situations that provide or do not provide role support from others in the form of reflected appraisals. This approach suggests some potentially valuable venues for future research. At the same time, we note that it is possible that the lack of interaction effect for helping identity and reflected helping identity might be due to range restriction, given the fairly high mean and relatively low standard deviation of that identity.

Practical Implications

Our results also have practical implications for managers and leaders in organizations. Organizations face the ongoing problem of how to orient employees toward behaviors that are organizationally desired. Since organizations differ in what they consider critical role behaviors, managers should be sure to identify and communicate desired role behaviors explicitly. As exemplified by the organization we studied, managers may also find it useful to provide ongoing socialization programs for employees at all levels, regardless of their role occupancy in order to reinforce and reward desired behaviors.

Results show that reflected appraisal can be a powerful driver of behavior. Thus, managers should consider the value of communication that reinforces employees’ identities that are desired by the organization (e.g., messages designed to enhance reflected appraisal processes). In our study, validation of the two identities based on reflected appraisals operated differently, with a direct association for helping behaviors and interactive relations for industrious work behaviors. In both cases, however, it is important to note that reflected appraisals had positive implications for role performances. Reflected appraisals are individuals’ views of how they are perceived by referent others (Swann et al., 2000). Thus, reflected appraisals are a tool that managers can use to foster desired role behaviors. In some organizations such as the one we studied, the same messages could apply across the entire organization. In other settings, desired role behaviors may vary across units, suggesting the value of more focused reinforcement of role-supportive behaviors. Such displays, when viewed as authentic, should support role performances or augment role identities relations with role behaviors.

Limitations and Conclusion

As with all research, there are limitations to this study. First, repeated situational activation of identities may tend to increase identity centrality (Lord & Brown, 2004). This has two key implications. For one, the timing of situational cues is particularly important. If the measurement of situational cues precedes measurement of identity, effects on role behaviors are most likely mediated by identity. If on the other hand situational cues are measured after measurement of identity, interactive relations such as we found are more likely. Further, it is also possible that repeated situational cueing of identities (similar to what Lord and Brown, 2004, called permanent environmental priming) strengthens their centrality to the point where situational cues lose their impact (i.e., individuals tend to enact role behaviors across situations, even inappropriately; Farmer & Aguinis, 2005; Turner, 1978). If such a loss occurs, one might expect compensatory interactions in which strong identity centrality predicts role behaviors regardless of situational activating forces, rather than the augmenting or synergistic interactions between idealized and situated selves that we modeled in this study (see Verplanken & Holland, 2002). However, other research suggests individuals may suppress even a strong identity under adverse conditions (Farmer et al., 2003), indicating there are conditions under which psychologically important identities are not expressed. Clearly, more research is needed to sort out and reconcile these differing positions. In future research, consideration should also be given to the
possibly differing roles of current, ideal, and “ought” self-concepts (Higgins, 1989) relative to when and how situational cueing—whether episodic or repeated—motivates identity-relevant action.

Second, future researchers need to attend to aspects of reflected appraisals that we did not. First, we did not capture the full richness of the feedback environment (Herold & Parsons, 1985). Given the specific organization we studied, we focused on reflected appraisal of identity from the coworkers’ perspective. It is possible that the relationships we found (and did not find) could have been due to differences in chosen referent, rather than due to the specific role. We recommend that future researchers consider reflected appraisals from multiple perspectives, including both coworkers and supervisors. It also might be informative to consider reflected appraisals from clients as well as reflected appraisals of other identities. Also, while reflected appraisals are not purely external, it is possible that external appraisals might be linked to self-views of identity from a fit perspective (e.g., Anseel & Lievens, 2006). Thus, use of fit perspectives might be useful.

Third, we offered a unique time-based perspective on role occupancy, but we recognize that tenure and work status have limitations as operationalizations. While time in role should reinforce normative expectations for role behaviors as well as increase opportunities to perform them, other mechanisms for their effects (e.g., skills, abilities, or commitment) are possible. To a limited degree, this concern may be mitigated by findings that work status does not necessarily indicate differences in training, education, or qualifications (Stamper & Van Dyne, 2001), nor in work attitudes such as organizational commitment (Thorsteinsson, 2003). Future researchers should directly compare identity salience versus more psychological mechanisms such as commitment that could conceivably affect identity-role behavior relations.

We also note methodological and analytic limitations. First, much of the variation in helping behaviors and industrious work behaviors was at the supervisor (work-group) level. This may indicate some consistency effect in supervisor ratings but could also reflect real differences in opportunities for helping across work groups. Using random coefficient modeling to account for the nesting of our data within supervisors controlled for group-level differences in helping opportunities, so our results should not be biased. Perhaps organizationally important role behaviors vary at the work-group level. To address this possibility, we recommend future theory and research on multilevel or cross-level models of this phenomenon. Second, as with many field studies, interaction effect sizes were small (Cohen, 1988), suggesting caution to avoid overinterpreting the results. Third, in future research, wording of similar items should be broadened to avoid internal consistency artifacts (Bollen & Lennox, 1991; DeVellis, 1991) that can occur when items have similar wording.

As a final limitation, it is possible that the nature of the organization we studied may have influenced our findings. Occupancy in the organization member role was particularly salient for both helping and industrious work behaviors in this sample. Future researchers should consider whether role occupancy has similar relations to role behaviors in other contexts. Van Dyne and Farmer (2005) have suggested that employee motives can be differentiated as identity-expressive or instrumental (based on economic or cost-benefit considerations). We do not claim that identities and expressive processes are the sole motivating force driving role behaviors in organizations, but identity expression may be easier for employees in organizations that emphasize mission accomplishment more than financial benefits to shareholders. Still, the research on work meaning (e.g., Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003) suggests that identity issues are important in many different types of organizations (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). An increasing number of organizations are emphasizing value-based ideology (Thompson & Bunderson, 2003) in which values, norms, peer pressure, and social control influence employee behavior. Additionally, organizations increasingly emphasize employee empowerment (Speizer, 1995) and proactive behavior (Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006) as key to effectiveness. Hence, we suggest that results should generalize to most other organizations. We do suggest additional research on this issue, with emphasis on how values and ideologies of an organization shape role identities and moderate links with behavior (e.g., does the relative importance of instrumental and expressive identity motives vary according to organizational values or ideology, and does this change the association between identity and role behaviors?).

In conclusion, our research is consistent with contemporary trends in work relationships. Organizations increasingly need multifaceted role performances from employees who will readily act to help various constituencies and stakeholders—be they other employees, customers, or clients—while at the same time emphasizing reliability, quantity of work, and organizational skills. This study has shed light on factors that can foster some of these varied but necessary role performances. Results show the benefits of considering the interactive effects of the idealized self and the situated self as predictors of role behaviors. Specifically, the psychological centrality of identities influences work behaviors, especially when interpersonal and structural activating forces make these identities salient. Our study also suggests a new way of looking at role occupancy as an activating force that influences identity expression, such that time in the role of organizational member affected the behavioral expression of two organizationally critical but unrelated identities. In sum, although this study has limitations, we believe it makes a substantive contribution in linking idealized self and situated self-perspectives on identity as predictors of role behaviors in organizational contexts. We encourage future research in which the interesting and critical links between identity and role behaviors in work organizations continue to be explored.

References


(Appendix follows)
Appendix

Helping Behaviors
This employee . . .

1. Takes the initiative to help clients in creative ways.
2. Is quick to help others when it benefits our clients.
3. Volunteers to come early or stay late in order to help our clients.
4. Willingly goes out of her/his way to benefit the clients.
5. Helps clients even if it means extra work personally.

Industrious Work Behaviors

1. Reliability/dependability: Consider how well employee takes responsibility for actions and accepts assignments, follows through and completes tasks, and meets deadlines.
2. Quantity of work: Consider the volume of work completed in relation to assigned responsibilities. Consider the ability to meet and stay on schedule and proper usage of time.
3. Attendance/punctuality: Consider the employee's consistency in coming to work regularly, in a timely fashion conforming to work hours.

Helping Identity

1. Helping vulnerable children and their families is an important part of who I am.
2. Helping vulnerable children is really important to me, no matter whom I work for.
3. I have strong positive feelings about helping vulnerable children, no matter whom I work for.

Industrious Work Identity

1. Doing a job in a consistent manner is really important to me.
2. Being consistent in my work is a really important part of who I am.
3. The ability to follow routines is an important part of who I am.

Reflected Helping Identity

1. My coworkers think that helping vulnerable children is really important to me, no matter where I do it.
2. My coworkers see me as having strong, positive feelings about helping vulnerable children.
3. My coworkers think that helping vulnerable children and their families is an important part of who I am.

Reflected Industrious Work Identity

1. My coworkers would be surprised if I did not act in a consistent manner at work.
2. My coworkers see me as a "steady/predictable employee."
3. My coworkers see me as someone who is steady and predictable.

Received October 23, 2008
Revision received January 18, 2010
Accepted January 25, 2010