

# ADVANCES IN GROUP PROCESSES

**Edited by** Shane R. Thye, Will Kalkhoff  
and Edward J. Lawler

ADVANCES IN  
GROUP PROCESSES

**VOLUME 41**

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# ADVANCES IN GROUP PROCESSES

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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## PREFACE

*Advances in Group Processes* is a peer-reviewed annual volume that publishes theoretical analyses, reviews, and theory-based empirical chapters on group phenomena. This series adopts a broad conception of “group processes.” This includes work on groups ranging from the very small to the very large, and on classic and contemporary topics such as status, power, trust, justice, conflict, social influence, heuristics, identity, decision-making, intergroup relations, and social networks. Previous contributors have included scholars from diverse fields including sociology, psychology, political science, economics, business, philosophy, computer science, mathematics, and organizational behavior.

Several years ago, we added an editorial board to the series to broaden the review process and draw upon the collective expertise of some of the top scholars in the discipline. That board consists of Jessica Collett, Joseph Dippong, Ashley Harrell, Karen Hegtvedt, Will Kalkhoff, Jeff Lucas, Joseph Quinn, and Jane Sell. This group of scholars has made the series better and we are grateful for their service, guidance, and advice.

The volume opens with three chapters that make significant contributions to the social identity tradition. First, Jan E. Stets and Peter J. Burke provide a comprehensive review of recent theoretical and empirical work in the social identity tradition. Discussed are advances in the understanding of racial and/or stigmatized identities, how identity theory integrates with other theoretical traditions, and advances in conceptualizing identity characteristics. This is the first review of its kind in a decade and so should interest anyone attempting to get current on the identity literature. Next, Chelsea Rae Kelly uses affect control theory and a primary college student dataset to compare cultural meanings of popular romantic relationship labels – and the corresponding relational identities they give to their occupants – for dyad labels both defined (non-hookup culture relationship labels, e.g., “*exclusively dating*”) and undefined (hookup culture “situationship” labels, e.g., “*talking to*,” “*hanging out*,” “*hooking up*”). She shows that different labels have mutually exclusive (between label) and culturally-shared (between persons) affective meanings within and across the two cultural frameworks. Through subsequent EPA profile comparisons and *Interact* simulations, she shows the culturally-predicted identity, consequent emotion, and behavioral expectation-related outcomes of different relationship label adoptions. Finally, Robert E. Freeland, Lynn Smith-Lovin, Kimberly B. Rogers, Jesse Hoey, and Joseph Quinn measure individual beliefs regarding the gender makeup of different occupations and ask if there are differences between perceived and actual gender makeup. Integrating three unique datasets, they find that (i) individuals underestimate levels of occupational segregation and (ii) sentiments regarding gender

significantly impact the perceived gender composition of occupations. This chapter has implications for how people consider the occupations that they choose and is the first study of its kind to utilize data from every census occupation listed. This work opens the door for occupational scholars to examine such identities in novel and exciting new ways. Together, these three chapters make important and much needed contributions to the social identity landscape.

The next two chapters examine issues within the exchange tradition. Joseph Quinn and Ashley Harrell ask how the variety and diversity of exchange networks impact an individual's trust toward strangers at a later point in time. Using the Affect Theory of Social Exchange, they examine how the forms of exchange alter the decision to trust a new individual in a one-shot trust game who either shares (or does not share) a salient social identity. The results indicate that form of exchange (e.g., productive exchange), but not identity diversity, is the key predictor of subsequent trust. The implication is that the positive impact associated with form of exchange can overwhelm the deleterious impact of out-group identity. The work suggests interesting intervention possibilities that might overcome the negative outcomes associated with out-group bias. Next Scott V. Savage and Monica M. Whitham examine how the refusal or acceptance of offers affects the ultimate distribution of benefits in a reciprocal exchange structure; they also vary the amount of information individuals have regarding whether offered benefits are accepted or refused from one's partner. In general, they find (i) that people tend to give more when they have more information about acceptances and refusals and (ii) that information about the structure of the network may eliminate this effect. This chapter is one of the few to examine how accepting and rejecting offers impacts future exchange processes. Both chapters add depth to an extensive literature on the effects of repeated exchange and the importance of the form of exchange.

The last four chapters address issues related to status and discrimination processes. Joseph Dippong and Zara Jillani investigate how vocal accommodation (i.e., the shifting of voice frequencies among interacting partners) impacts social influence and performance expectations in dyadic interaction. Using data from a laboratory experiment they find that vocal accommodation is a significant predictor of social influence and that performance expectations mediate this relationship. The study illustrates how this technology may be useful as a new unobtrusive measure of status accommodation in groups and opens the possibility to new kinds of investigations in a variety of more naturalistic environments, given that vocal data are readily and often publicly available. Second, Christabel L. Rogalin and associates ask whether or not the characteristics of efficient leaders are more closely associated with men or women, and whether those perceived associations (when attached to the task at hand) give men advantages over women. The results from a laboratory and online survey experiment indicate that men are perceived to be more closely aligned with the characteristics of effective leaders than women, and that when these characteristics are attached to a group task, this significantly advantages men. The implication is that women may be broadly disadvantaged by these associations, net of their actual competency relative to male counterparts.

Next Malissa Alinor and Yvonne Chen explore the coping strategies people use in response to discrimination and examine how long-standing norms impact those strategies. To investigate these questions, they conduct qualitative interviews with 34 black and Asian Americans regarding how they cope with instances of racial discrimination. The findings indicate a variety of mechanisms: including humor, seeking social support from family friends, and other coping strategies. They find that African Americans are more likely to seek parental support whereas Asians prefer talking to siblings or more distant relatives. The study illustrates how cultural norms can shape the manner of social support individuals seek when dealing with these forms of discrimination. Finally, Anne E. Haas and Hanna J. G. Rupert examine how physical attractiveness and a task cue they call “working smart” can allow certain women to attain higher status than others in dyadic interactions. Using qualitative comparative analysis, they examine data from a study regarding the impact of physical attractiveness on verbal measures of status. The results indicate that more work-efficient women attain higher status overall and this difference is accentuated when those women are also physically attractive. This study provides yet another way to check the veracity of Status Characteristics Theory using novel data and coheres with decades of research documenting the benefits of physical attractiveness. Together, these final four chapters make important strides to deepen our understanding of status processes in groups large and small.

Shane R. Thye, Will Kalkhoff, and Edward J. Lawler  
Volume Co-editors

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# ADVANCES IN IDENTITY THEORY

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** *We review the major developments that have occurred in identity theory since 2014, when we last reviewed the theory in Advances in Group Processes.*

**Methodology/Approach:** *Our focus is on changes and developments in the theory itself rather than a review of the substantive findings of research using the theory.*

**Findings:** *During the past decade, there have been important conceptualizations to the identity process to help refine it, which we discuss. We also include a more precise way of measuring the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional responses to identity nonverification, which earlier were expressed in verbal terms rather than mathematical terms. We discuss advances in conceptualizing identity characteristics, such as identity prominence and salience, and we add identity dispersion to these conceptualizations. Over the past decade, there has been more integration of the perceptual and structural foci in identity theory, showing the unity of one theory. We can see this in how the identity–society relationship has been explicated in more detail, which we highlight. Identity theory continues to integrate with other theories, and we discuss how this integration has occurred most closely with exchange theory during the past decade. Finally, advances in substantive areas have been made such as new research on racialethnic identities and counter-normative and stigmatized identities, and we briefly review this work.*

**Originality/Value of Paper:** *We show the many ways identity theory has advanced in the past 10 years. We anticipate that developments in the next 10 years will be just as exciting.*

**Keywords:** Identity theory; intersectionality; identity prominence; identity salience; counter-normativity

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## INTRODUCTION

We discuss advances that have been made in identity theory over the past decade when we last reviewed developments in the theory (from 1988–2014) (Stets & Burke, 2014a). Since 2014, over 100 papers and books have been published that have made contributions to understanding the theory and its applications. We begin by outlining the basic processes in the identity model, noting the modifications that have been made. We then discuss important changes in our understanding of identities, including (1) the changing conceptualizations of the characteristics of identities, (2) an expanded view of identity change, (3) advances in integrating the structural and perceptual control foci in identity theory, (4) developments in conceptualizing the identity–society relationship, (5) the integration of identity theory with other theories, and (6) substantive developments in the theory.

## ADVANCES IN THE IDENTITY MODEL

We have expanded our understanding of the perceptual control of identities by examining additional features and processes not considered in earlier discussions of the theory. We discuss these developments as we review the identity process.

### *Identity Standard*

An identity is the set of meanings that describes who one is in an identity. These meanings are stored in the identity standard as indicated in the identity model shown in Fig. 1.<sup>1</sup> *Meaning* can be understood as internal responses by a person to an external stimulus. These internal responses, called mediational responses, are interpretations of the stimulus, and they mediate between the external stimulus and the ultimate response of the individual to the response. For example, a bump on the shoulder may be interpreted as a show of affection, as a “pat on the back,” as an aggressive move, or as an accidental jostle in a crowd. The interpretation or mediational response then acts as an internal stimulus for the person to react to the bump on the shoulder (Osgood et al., 1957; Stets & Burke, 2025). Meaning is the interpretation that one makes of a stimulus before acting on the stimulus. When the stimulus is oneself, meaning is how individuals describe or characterize themselves; what it means to be who one is.

People can describe or characterize themselves based on who they are as a person (“I am a ‘moral’ individual” or “I am an ‘outgoing’ individual”). They also can describe themselves in a role (“I am ‘studious’ as a student” or “I am ‘controlling’ as a parent”). And they can characterize themselves as a group member (“I am ‘competitive’ as a member of my softball team at work” or “I am ‘devout’ as a member of my local church”) or as a member of a social category (“I am a ‘caring’ female,” or “I am ‘prouder’ to be an African American”) (Burke & Stets, 2023). Thus, individuals have person, role, group, and categorical identities.

The earliest work in identity theory focused on role identities and the meanings that people associate with the roles they play in relation to the counter roles

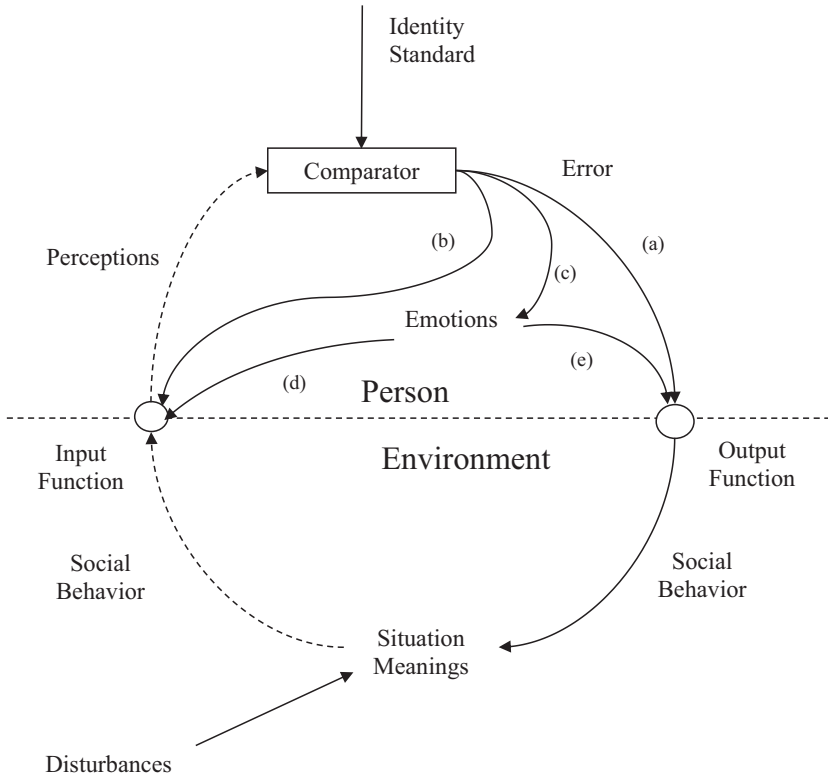


Fig. 1. The Identity Model.

of others with their corresponding counter role identities. Recent work on role identities has included research on the student identity (Brashears, 2023; Grindal & Trettevik, 2019), the friend identity (Markowski, 2021), and the parent identity (Collett et al., 2015, 2019). Recent work in identity theory has further developed person identities (how individuals define themselves as unique entities) beyond earlier work on the moral identity (Stets & Carter, 2012) by investigating other person identities such as the dominant identity (Burke et al., 2021; Stets et al., 2020) and the fairness identity (Savage et al., 2017, 2019; Stets et al., 2018).

While there has been a discussion of group and categorical identities, there has been less work on group identities than categorical identities. Group identities would include members of a book club or hospice volunteer group.<sup>2</sup> Categorical identities are identities that involve membership in social categories, such as having an identity with respect to one's gender (Kiecolt et al., 2019; Stets, Kushida, et al., 2023), race (Kiecolt et al., 2021; Reichelmann & Hunt, 2021; Talbert & Christie-Mizell, 2021), ethnicity (Burke & Harrod, 2021; Grindal et al., 2021), and sexuality (Miller, 2023; Mize & Doan, 2023).

Earlier work labeled group and categorical identities as social identities, though differences in the verification process between groups and categories warrant their separation (Stets & Burke, 2014a). Membership in groups and social categories do share some features, such as providing a sense of belonging and feeling of “we-ness.” Both groups and social categories also offer a sense of certainty because membership in them elicit certain thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are routinely associated with being in the group or category, thereby lending predictability for the self. However, we recently distinguished between group and categorical identities (Burke & Stets, 2023), abandoning the idea of labeling them both social identities because the way in which verification is achieved is different.

In group identities, individuals interact with others in their group rather than simply identify with the collective as in categorical identities. In interaction with each other, group members share the meanings of how to behave in the group, group members maintain group boundaries of the in-group from the out-group, and they contribute to the group’s goals through coordinated activity given the different roles and positions they assume in the group. Coordination may be seen in the verification process, which is directly tied to interacting with other group members. Group members may find that to achieve verification, they must alter the meanings in their identity standard given the appraisals of others in the situation. However, they simultaneously are appraising others, with others making their own adjustments when they need to accomplish verification. Thus, we have a situation of mutual verification in groups that does not occur in categories. Mutual verification happens when each person, in verifying their own identity, thereby also helps to verify the identities of others in the group.

In categorical membership, rather than interacting with others and coordinating behavior, individuals simply recognize themselves as a member of the category and display the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are often found in the social category (Burke & Harrod, 2021). Individuals act in a uniform rather than a coordinated manner. Membership in some categories and not others may involve having higher status in the social structure, having more resources than others, and being better treated. Some categories are ascribed rather than achieved and visible in situations such as one’s race/ethnicity and gender. Those that are less likely to be ascribed or visible are still recognizable through physical appearance, demeanor, and speech, such as one’s social class or nationality. The more visible the classification, the more likely the identity will get activated within and across situations. Verification occurs when people perceive that their identity standard meanings are the same as other categorical members’ meanings. Others recognize them as a member of the category and like them. This is different from verification in groups where the distinctiveness of group members based on different roles, for example, involves coordinating meanings and each adjusting to the perceived feedback of others to achieve verification.

### *Perceptions*

Perceptions of identity relevant meanings in the situation come into the identity, as indicated by the dotted line on the left side of the figure and are fed into the

comparator. The comparator compares these perceived situational meanings with the meanings held in the identity standard. The term *identity relevant meanings* indicate those meanings in the situation that need to be controlled to match the meanings in the identity standard. Other meanings in the situation are irrelevant to the identity.

*Perceptions* are the stimuli people's senses take in through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch, which are interpreted and given meaning. They are people's source of information about what is happening around them. Perceptions are key to the identity process because they are what individuals are trying to control when an identity is activated. Rather than trying to control the environment, including one's own behavior, individuals are trying to control their perceptions of the identity relevant meanings in a situation to match the meanings in the identity standard. Many miss this idea of controlling perceptions rather than the environment. While we may change the environment, it is always in the service of making our perceived identity relevant meanings match the identity standard meanings.

The comparison of perceived situational meanings ( $p$ ) and identity standard meanings ( $i$ ) is the difference ( $p-i$ ) along the dimensions of magnitude and direction. The difference or *error* is the output of the comparator as shown in Fig. 1. It is sometimes referred to as a discrepancy. The smaller the error or discrepancy, the more perceptions of identity relevant meanings in the situation match the identity standard meanings, and the more an identity is verified. The larger the discrepancy, the more there is a mismatch between perceived situational meanings and identity standard meanings, and the more an identity is not verified.

The perceived meanings that enter into the comparator come from three sources: *reflected appraisals*, *actual appraisals*, and *self-appraisals* (Burke & Stets, 2023). Reflected appraisals have received the most attention in prior identity research (Stets & Carter, 2012; Stets et al., 2018; Stets & Harrod, 2004; Stets & Trettevik, 2016). Reflected appraisals are the identity meanings that people think others hold about them.

However, some work, especially more recently, has studied actual appraisals (Burke et al., 2021; Burke & Harrod, 2005; Savage et al., 2017). Actual appraisals are the direct feedback that individuals receive as to how others see them. This feedback might be formal (as when an employer writes up a performance review of an employee), or it may be informal (as when friends or family members (spouse, parent, or sibling) share their views of others as to how they see them). More work is needed on actual appraisals, but the evidence to date indicates that they operate like reflected appraisals in the effect they have when the appraisals produce a discrepancy, that is, individuals experience negative feelings.

Self-appraisals are the identity meanings that individuals think are being given off by their own behavior. While prior work on self-appraisals is limited (Burke, 2006; Riley & Burke, 1995), recent work is examining it more. For example, identity nonverification based on self-appraisals was studied to see the moderating effects of identity prominence and salience on people's negative reactions to nonverification during the pandemic (Burke & Stets, 2024). Interestingly, while identity prominence increased the negative responses to identity nonverification,

identity salience decreased the negative effects. We will explain these counter-vailing effects later in the paper when we discuss this study in more detail.

All three sources of perceived meanings that serve as the basis for a verifying or nonverifying experience (reflected, actual, and self-appraisals) are going on simultaneously, with each having an independent effect on the outcome. For example, recent work on the development of social bonds in exchanges examined identity verification based on both reflected and actual appraisals and found independent effects (Stets et al., 2018). While verification based on reflected appraisals increased social bonds both directly and indirectly through increasing positive feelings and reducing uncertainty, verification based on actual appraisals operated indirectly through uncertainty reduction to increase social bonds.

Other research that examined nonverification based on reflected appraisals and actual appraisals in social exchanges studied how the fairness identity can exaggerate or depress structural pressures toward inequality (Savage et al., 2017). Nonverification based on actual appraisals led high fairness actors to decrease the level of inequality in exchanges, and this same pattern held for the high-power exchange partner when nonverification was based on reflected appraisals. Finally, in a recent study on the pandemic, identity nonverification based on reflected appraisals and self-appraisals was investigated, and each was found to be positively related to depression and anxiety (Stets et al., 2024). Future research needs to continue to examine these multiple sources of perceived meanings in the situation.

### *Responses to Error/Nonverification*

As the perceived situational meanings increasingly differ from the identity standard meanings ( $p-i$ ), that is, the discrepancy departs from zero, people will experience more negative emotions. This is path “c” in Fig. 1. When the error is close to or at zero, a person will feel slightly negative or neutral. As the error departs from zero, it signals whether the perceived meanings are higher or lower than the identity standards, and by how much. Either direction produces negative emotion, but the strength of the negative emotion is a function of the magnitude of the squared difference. For example, if perceived and standard meanings are each on a 10-point scale and the error is  $-2$  (the perceptions are two points lower than the identity standard), the person would feel a weaker negative emotion than if the error is 4 (perceptions are four points higher than the standard).

The direction of the discrepancy signals to the individual whether they must adjust the perceived meanings up or down to match the identity standard. To restore the perceived situational meanings to match the identity standard meanings, individuals will be motivated to alter their behavior as well as modify how they see the situation. These are paths “a” and “b,” respectively, in Fig. 1. The goal in either changing behavior or perceptions is to reduce or eliminate the discrepancy and thus the negative feelings people experience. Most prior work in identity theory has focused on path “a” or behavioral changes on the output side of the identity model that changes the perceived meanings.

People respond behaviorally to nonverification in a compensatory manner by acting either to increase or decrease the perceived identity relevant meanings in a situation, depending upon whether those meanings in the situation fall short or exceed their identity standard meanings. If they perceive meanings in the situation that fall short of their identity standard, they may increase the level of meanings in their behavior, working harder than previously to better align perceived situational meanings with identity standard meanings. If they perceive situational meanings that exceed their standard, they may decrease the level of meaning in their behavior, backing off from what they are doing.

Recent work evidenced these patterns in a study on whether the fairness person identity influenced inequality in negotiations depending upon whether participants received feedback that verified or did not verify their fairness identity (Savage et al., 2017). The findings revealed that when participants with a high fairness identity received feedback that they were not being fair in the negotiations, they acted to increase their level of fairness by seeking fewer resources in the negotiations, thus reducing the inequality in the four-person networks in which the negotiations were embedded. When participants with a low fairness identity received feedback that they were being very fair, they acted to decrease their level of fairness by seeking more resources in the negotiations, thus increasing the inequality in the networks.

People's cognitive response to nonverification, path "b" on the input side of the model, has not received prior attention theoretically or empirically. This is beginning to change (Stets & McCaffree, 2019). Earlier theorists discussed the cognitive strategies people might use to ward off negative (nonverifying) experiences. For example, early researchers discussed such strategies as selective perceptions or selective interpretations of situations to confirm rather than disconfirm identities (McCall & Simmons, 1966/1978). Others discussed excuses and justifications that individuals employ to disavow a particular view of themselves (Scott & Lyman, 1968). Recently, it has been suggested that people may use certain cognitive mechanisms depending upon the type of identity that is not being verified (Stets & McCaffree, 2019).

In an analysis of the moral identity, Stets and McCaffree suggested that when moral meanings are activated in a group or categorical identity and individuals do not meet their moral meaning standard in their group or categorical identity (for example, they claim the moral meanings of being "helpful" and "caring" in their group identity, but then don't help someone in need when the situation arises), they may use the mechanism of *diffusion of responsibility* to explain the discrepancy. They may think that others are responsible for helping them maintain their identity standard and not solely themselves. When everyone looks to other group members to initiate behavior that is consistent in meaning with their identity standard meanings, no one may take responsibility for behaving according to their identity standard meanings.

Other strategies that may be used when moral meanings are activated in a group or categorical identity include *victim blaming* (claiming that the victim is responsible for one's bad behavior) or *dehumanization* (dehumanizing the target to justify one's immoral action) (Stets & McCaffree, 2019). Alternatively, when

the moral meanings are activated in a role identity, people may use *displacement of responsibility* in response to nonverification (Stets & McCaffree, 2019). For example, those in the work role identity may minimize their part in committing fraud in a company by shifting the responsibility to those who have authority or power over them.

Paths “d” and “e” represent how an emotional response to nonverification may modify the cognitive and behavioral responses on the input and output sides of the model. These paths were not considered in earlier theorizing on the identity process thus they are new to the identity model. Theoretically, we have argued that as an emotion gets stronger, given the magnitude of the discrepancy, it may add strength in correcting the discrepancy, behaviorally and cognitively (Burke & Stets, 2023). A weak emotion or little discrepancy may have less impact on the behavioral and cognitive responses.

Additionally, emotions carry their own meaning, and these meanings may influence the behavioral and cognitive meanings (Burke & Stets, 2023; Stets & Burke, 2023). For example, a person may feel anger in response to identity nonverification. Anger is negative feelings directed outward to others. Cognitively, a person may see that another is responsible for the discrepancy. Behaviorally, the person may try to get the other to apologize for creating the nonverifying situation. Either the cognitive or behavioral responses may reduce or remove the nonverification, and they are consistent with how one would respond if they were angry.

Importantly, the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive responses to the error or nonverifying experience are not alternatives but are thought to all occur simultaneously. Individuals feel bad and begin behavioral changes and cognitive strategies to reduce the discrepancy. Theoretically, all the responses are thought to act in concert to restore a verifying state. For example, in a study examining the dominant person identity, we investigated how persons with dominant identities responded to nonverification when they were in negotiations over resources in a four-person network (Stets et al., 2020). When participants experienced nonverification, they behaved in ways to counteract the meanings of the discrepant feedback, for example, high dominant identity participants who were told they were not high in dominance responded in a dominant fashion by requesting more resources per negotiation. In addition, these participants shifted their self-view in the situation in the direction of the feedback by rating themselves lower in dominance following the non-verifying feedback. While the cognitive and behavioral responses were contradictory as they were working in opposite directions, both served to bring perceptions and standards closer together toward verification.

#### *Measuring the Responses to Error/Nonverification*

Given the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive responses to identity nonverification, we have represented them in mathematical terms in the following way (Burke & Stets, 2023). For paths “a” (behavioral) and “b” (cognitive) the equation would be: