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CHAPTER 8

Affect Control Theory

DAWN T. ROBINSON
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When David Heise (1977, 1979) published his early statements of affect control theory, contributing to the newly developing sociology of emotion was not his primary goal. The main objective of the theory was to explain behavior in the context of social interactions. Heise hoped to develop a formal framework that could describe both the routine, expected role behaviors that people enact under normal circumstances *and* the creative responses they generate when encountering noninstitutionalized or counternormative situations. He combined insights from a measurement tradition in psycholinguistics (Osgood 1962, 1966; Osgood et al. 1973, 1975), empirical studies of impression formation (Gollob 1968; Gollob and Rossman 1973; Heise 1969, 1970), and a cybernetic model of perception (Powers 1973) to create his new theory of social action.

Heise's work has *become* a central part of the new sociology of emotions for three main reasons. First, one of the theory's fundamental assumptions is that cognitive understandings of social interaction around us cannot be separated from our affective reactions to them. Every cognitive label—every way that we think or talk about our social life—brings with it an affective meaning. Affect is irrevocably linked to all of our thoughts, identities, and actions. Second, the core affect control principle is that people act to maintain the affective meanings that are evoked by a definition of the situation. Therefore, affect control theory makes the control of *affect* the key feature underlying social life. The theory is a new variant of symbolic interactionism, in that it stresses that social actors respond to a symbolically represented world and strive to maintain the meanings that are associated with the elements of that world. ~~But~~ it turns the historically cognitive symbolic interactionist paradigm on its head, positing that the dynamics of affective processing underlie

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both routine role-taking behavior and creative, negotiated responses to nonroutine situations. Third, the affect control model was elaborated soon after it developed to conceptualize emotions as signals about self-identity meanings within a situation and how well those meanings were aligned with stable, fundamental self-conceptions. Basically, emotions were signals about how well the situation was maintaining self-identity meanings. Because of its formal mathematical model, affect control theory could be much more specific about this process than earlier formulations were.

In this chapter, we will first very briefly review the history of symbolic interactionist thought on emotions. We distinguish between *affect* and *emotion* as two separate phenomena in affect control theory. We then describe the basic structure of the theory, with an emphasis on the parts of the formal model that allow prediction of emotional responses to events. We briefly compare affect control theory to other symbolic interactionist approaches, pointing out where competing hypotheses are logically generated by the different approaches. Finally, we review the research literature and suggest fruitful avenues for future work.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONIST ROOTS OF AFFECT CONTROL THEORY

Although Chapter 7 in this volume gives a more comprehensive treatment of symbolic interactionist thought, we begin with a brief review to highlight affect control theory's points of commonality and its distinctive features (see also Turner and Stets 2005:100–150). Mead's (1938) original statement of the interactionist perspective focused on how gestures (words or behaviors) could operate as symbols for which people shared meanings. Such shared symbols allow social actors to take the role of another person and to understand how other people were experiencing the situation. The ability to think about social life with these symbols gives people the capacity to anticipate how other actors are likely to respond to possible actions. Mead divided the self into two elements—the *I* and the *me*—representing the agentic element that had impulses to act and the symbolic processor that generated the anticipated reactions of others. Mead concentrated exclusively on the cognitive meanings that actors shared; affect control theory, on the other hand, uses the *affective* meanings that symbols hold for actors to describe how they anticipate, plan, and react to events. As with Mead's original formulation, people process what happens in social interaction symbolically. How one reacts to a social interaction depends on how one labels who has done what to whom. Affect control theory also depends on the shared nature of these symbols. Without some shared symbols and meanings, interaction would be a confusing kaleidoscope of uninterpretable physical events (similar to listening to someone speaking in a foreign language without signs or context to help interpret his or her utterances). We must share some meanings even to have a meaningful conflict about events that we are jointly considering.

Mead thought social action was motivated by impulses generated by disequilibrium with the environment (see discussion in Turner and Stets 2005:103–106; Ward and Throop 1992). This assumption becomes the core principle of affect control theory—that people act to maintain an "equilibrium" in the meanings they assign to an interaction. Mead's conception of disequilibrium was rather general, however; he was primarily concerned with the ways that impulses focused attention on certain parts of the environment and motivated their manipulation to resolve the disequilibrium.

Cooley's (1964) concept of the looking-glass self made more explicit the aspect of disequilibrium that would become the focus of most symbolic interactionist research. Cooley suggested that people were especially concerned with their appearance in others' eyes. He was the first to bring emotions explicitly into symbolic interactionist thought, seeing shame and pride as responses

to the sense of evaluation by others.[2] Since Cooley, most symbolic interactionist treatments of emotion have emphasized social actors' concern with maintaining their positive self-meanings and the negative emotions that result from failure to maintain these meanings (see summary in Turner and Stets 2006). As a version of symbolic interactionism, affect control theory shares this concern with the maintenance of symbolic meanings. It views disequilibrium in the social environment more generally, however. People respond not just to disequilibrium in how others view them, but also to dislocations in other symbolic meanings (like those for others' identities and for social actions).

In the late 1970s, Shott (1979) added symbolic interactionist insights to the fast-developing new sociology of emotions. She built directly on Cooley's work, arguing that physiological emotional arousal was ambiguous enough to be labeled in a variety of ways. Shott followed Mead in assuming that social life was understood through symbolic representation; she applied this idea to emotions, arguing that emotional response was socially constructed by using cultural labels for emotional states and feeling rules about what emotions were normatively appropriate in situations. She thought that emotions were an important mechanism for social control, since normative emotional responses led to negative emotions when institutional rules were violated. Therefore, social control became self-control after emotional socialization occurred.

Shott also developed the distinction between the general personal identities that people carried from interaction to interaction and the situational identities that designated who actors were within a particular social situation. Affect control theory does not take a strong position on the nature of physiological emotional response—it may be the ambiguous, diffuse arousal that Shott discussed, or an array of specific physiological responses as described by Kemper (1978, 1987) and Turner (2000). However, the theory shares with Shott the emphasis on the cultural labels for emotions and the meanings that they carry. Perhaps more important, it conceptualizes identities and actions as having both general, stable meanings and situated meanings that are created in the immediate social context. Indeed, it is the tension between these two types of meanings that gives the theory its dynamic character.

As implied above, affect control theory makes distinctions among concepts that are often lumped together in other symbolic interactionist theories. The theory's distinction is that it defines these concepts in precise, measurable ways. This feature permits the development of a formal model, including empirical estimates and mathematical statements of its theoretical principles. Therefore, we offer a few definitions before turning to the formal structure of the theory.

DEFINITIONS

The terms *affect*, *emotion*, *sentiment*, and *mood* are often used interchangeably in the emotions literature (see discussion in Smith-Lovin 1995). In affect control theory, they mean very different things.

Affect

Affect is the most general term. Traditionally, it refers to any evaluative (positive or negative) orientation toward an object. In developing affect control theory, Heise (1977, 1979) used a psychometric literature to talk about the *affective meaning* that cultural labels for identities and actions carried. In the 1950s, Osgood and his colleagues (1957) found that three abstract dimensions—evaluation (good versus bad), potency (powerful versus weak), and activity (lively versus

quiet)—could represent people's reactions to a wide variety of concepts. Osgood called these dimensions "affective meaning" to distinguish them from the more denotative types of meaning that we find in dictionaries (e.g., a father is a man who contributes sperm in the creation of a biological offspring compared to an affective definition of a father as quite good, very powerful, and somewhat lively). Therefore, he expanded the definition of affect to include three fundamental dimensions of meaning. The fact that these three dimensions seemed to represent reactions in a wide variety of national cultures (Osgood 1962; Osgood et al. 1975) encouraged Heise (1977, 1979) to use them as an effective way to measure the symbolic meaning of social events.

Affect control theory recognizes the fundamental nature of affect and its link to the labeling process. The theory rests on the idea that all labelings evoke affect. It is this affect, rather than the specific labels themselves, that we try to maintain during interaction.

Sentiments

Affect control theory views these three fundamental dimensions of meaning as cultural abbreviations, acting as an abstract summary of social information about all elements of an interaction—including identities, behaviors, emotions, and settings—that are symbolically represented in our definition of a situation.

All labels for social concepts evoke a certain amount of goodness, powerfulness, and liveliness. These are referred to as sentiments in the theory. *Sentiments* are transsituational, generalized affective responses to specific symbols in a culture. They are more socially constructed and enduring than simple emotional responses.[3] Although the dimensions themselves are universal across cultures, symbol-specific sentiments are products of a culture. Fathers come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes, colors, ages, and demeanors. Individuals in a culture may widely vary in attitudes toward and understandings about their *own* fathers. Nonetheless, all of us in the middle-class U.S. culture basically agree that the abstract notion of a Father[4] is somewhat good, quite powerful, and moderately active. In contrast, our culturally shared sentiments about employees are more neutral on all three dimensions, and our image of child molesters is very negative indeed on the evaluation dimension. It is our agreement about the generalized meanings associated with specific symbols that allows us to communicate effectively with other members of our culture.

Transient Impressions

When we define a social situation using culturally meaningful labels, the affect generated by that definition does not remain static. Affect control theory assumes that people respond affectively to every social event (the *affective reaction principle*). The theory further presumes that affective responses can be indexed along Osgood's three dimensions of affect meaning—evaluation, potency, and activity. Picture a Boss with his Employee at an office Party. The sentiments generated by the labels, Boss, Employee, and Party will help us make sense of this situation and know what actions we might expect to follow. Now imagine that we see an event that we label as the Boss Browbeating the Employee. Our feelings about that boss, that employee, that party, and perhaps even what it means to browbeat someone, are altered somewhat from their generalized cultural meanings. In affect control theory, we call these situated meanings *transient impressions*. Impressions are contexutalized affective meanings that are generated by symbolic labels in specific social events.

Emotions

Emotion is another subset of affect. Emotional labels have the same kinds of affective meanings that identities and actions do: to be contented is to feel good, powerful (secure, in control), and quiet. To be elated is to feel good and powerful, but very activated/lively.

In affect control theory, emotions are the labels (with their associated cultural meanings) that are applied to the ways that we feel after an event has occurred (Smith-Lovin 1990). There is a formal, mathematical model that predicts what emotion we will experience after we have participated in a social interaction (Averett and Heise 1987); we describe this model in detail below. At this point, the important thing to recognize is that emotions are culturally given labels that we assign to experiences in the context of a social interaction that is self-referential. They are signals about how we feel within a situation and how that feeling compares to the stable affective meanings that are usually associated with our self-identity.

Emotions, like other elements in the theory, are indexed as three-number profiles that typify the amount of pleasantness, potency, and activation associated with the emotion. The distribution of these typifications in a particular language can reveal important information about the structure of emotions in that language culture (MacKinnon and Keating 1989). For example, in English, as in some other languages, there are words for pleasant emotions that vary substantially in activation (e.g., contrast peaceful with thrilled). In English, however, all pleasant emotion words are relatively powerful. Unpleasant emotions, on the other hand, can vary in their degree of both potency and activation. The English emotion lexicon contains labels for unpleasant emotions that are quiet and weak (sad), quiet and powerful (bitter), active and weak (panicked), or active and powerful (furious).

Affect control theory distinguishes between characteristic and structural emotions (MacKinnon 1994; Smith-Lovin 1990). *Characteristic* emotions are the kinds of emotions that individuals experience when performing a role perfectly. For example, Heise (2004) points out that when a minister role is perfectly confirmed, an actor in that role is predicted to feel generous, compassionate, and kind. *Structural* emotions refer, instead, to the recurrent emotions that individuals experience in the context of role relationships. Situations—and relationships—constrain the degree to which experiences can be perfectly confirming. So, when ministers interact with sinners, they are predicted to feel emotions such as lovesick, apprehensive, or overwhelmed. In the context of their relationship to God, in contrast, ministers will, instead, feel grateful, relieved, and sympathetic according to affect control theory predictions (Heise 2004). The model for these predictions is detailed below.

Moods and Traits

Emotions in affect control theory represent the feelings that are situated in the moment after an actor processes a social event and responds to it affectively. They are momentary feelings that reflect past interactions, but do not necessarily motivate future action. Sometimes, an emotion can become more enduring and continue to affect social interactions after it is experienced. In affect control theory, we can represent this by modifying an actor's role identity with a label that represents a lasting emotional state—a mood. So, instead of dealing with a Father after one returns home two hours after curfew, one might deal with an Angry Father. This combination of mood and identity would have a different cultural meaning (which can be predicted from the separate meanings of Angry and Father as cultural labels). It would be much more negative in evaluation (less nice), even more potent, and considerably more activated/lively. Our recognition

of the mood and identity within the situation would lead us to predict and feel different things than we would of a normal Father.

Sometimes moods become so typical of a given social actor that we (and perhaps they) come to think of the mood as a characteristic one—that is, tied to a person across virtually all situations. This mood then becomes a trait that might be a part of a personal identity (cf. Shott 1979) that is part of how that person thinks of him or herself and how others view him or her. In affect control theory, this trait might modify virtually all identities that one takes on in social situations. If I think of myself as a Kind person, then I will be a Kind Teacher, a Kind Wife, and perhaps even a Kind Customer. Again, the trait has a culturally given affective meaning (a Kind person is good, powerful, and fairly neutral on activity) that can be combined with the general, cultural meanings of the identities. When we expect someone in an identity to be kind (e.g., a kind benefactor), the trait may be fairly redundant and would not change its affective meaning very much. But if we do not expect the abstract role actor to be kind (e.g., a Kind Judge), the meaning might change more dramatically. In any case, the key distinction here is that moods may temporarily become part of a person's identity within a situation, and, therefore, the person might work to maintain that feeling, rather than just experience it as a flash of emotion, or a stable, long-term orientation might come to be seen as a personality trait that is part of our sense of self and actively maintained by ourselves and others who know us.

THE FORMAL STRUCTURE OF THE THEORY

The basic definitions and theoretical principles above do not distinguish affect control theory from many other symbolic interactionist approaches. Along with most other symbolic interactionist approaches, it argues that:

1. Actors react to social situations in terms of symbols and the meanings that those symbols carry for them.
2. The meanings that symbols have are largely shared within a culture, leading actors to be able to role take, viewing the situation from the position of other actors and anticipating their reactions to the interaction.
3. Actors are motivated to maintain the meanings associated with the self.
4. Meanings can shift within situations as a result of one's own or others' actions.
5. Emotions act as signals about how events are maintaining or failing to maintain self-identities within an interpersonal situation.

The thing that really differentiates affect control theory from other forms of symbolic interaction is the fact that it measures cultural meanings in such a well-defined, abstract way. The three dimensions—evaluation, potency, and activity—obviously lose some information about social roles, behaviors, and settings. Things that are affectively similar (e.g., Winner and Hero) may have denotative differences. One becomes a Winner by besting others in a contest, while one becomes a Hero by rescuing others from potential trouble. But the fact we can characterize *all* symbolic elements of a situation on the *same* three dimensions allows affect control theorists to talk concretely about how events change meanings. We can track actors, actions, settings, emotions, moods, traits, and virtually anything that we can name by using the same three affective-meaning scales. Furthermore, we can use these three scales to measure both the enduring culturally given sentiments about the symbols *and* the transient meanings that they take on in the context of situations. By specifying how events change meanings, we can then specify what events will maintain or restore those meanings.

Impression Change

In order to understand affect control theory's model for predicting emotions, it is necessary first to understand the theory's general predictive model. Affect control theory uses this Actor-Behavior-Object (ABO) grammar to represent the simplest social event, *Actor Behaves* toward *Object*. Each of these event elements can be represented with a three-number profile that captures the fundamental sentiments it evokes in terms of evaluation, potency, and activity. The transient impressions evoked by a specific event can be measured by in-context ratings of those event elements. So, imagine an event: "Employee Corrects the Boss." Impressions of *that particular employee* are likely to be somewhat different from our generalized sentiments about all Employees. Heise (1969, 1970) adapted analytic tools developed by Gollob (1968) describing exactly how our affective meanings toward symbols change as a result of their coappearance in social events. We can regress our generalized sentiments about Employee, to Correct someone, and Boss on the situated impressions of that employee in order to learn more about how these social elements combine to form new impressions during social interactions.

$$A' = c + b_1A + b_2B + b_3O \tag{1}$$

where A′ stands for the predicted impressions actor (the Employee that we see Correcting the boss), A refers to the more stable sentiments we associated with Employees in general, B stands for the generalized sentiments about the behavior (to Correct someone), and O refers to the generalized sentiments toward the object (Boss, in our example). Heise (1969, 1970) made the important observation that when these simple event sentences described a social interaction, the resulting equations specified how that event changed impressions of the people and the actions involved in the situation.

When we expand this equation to include a specification of the actor, object, and behavior on all three affective dimensions we get an equation like the following from Smith-Lovin (1987):

$$\begin{aligned} A'_e = &- 0.98 + .468A_e - .015A_p - .015A_a + .425B_e - .069B_p - .106B_a \\ &+.055O_e - .020O_p - .001O_a + .048A_eB_e + .130B_eO_e + .027A_pB_p \\ &+.068B_pO_p + .007A_aB_a - .038A_eB_p - .010A_eB_a + .013A_pB_e \\ &-.014A_pO_a - .058B_eO_p - .070B_pO_e - .002B_pO_a + .010B_aO_e \\ &+.019B_aO_p + .026A_eB_eO_e - .006A_pB_pO_p + .031A_aB_aO_a \\ &+.033A_eB_pO_p + .018A_pB_pO \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Equation (2) uses information about the sentiments associated with all of the elements in a social situation (A_e, $A_p \ldots O_p$, O_a) to predict the situated impressions of the goodness (evaluation) of the Actor (A'_e). Each of the coefficients in this equation captures something about the normative process of impression formation in our culture. Note that the largest predictor of how nice an Actor seems in a given situation is the generalized goodness normally associated with the identity of that Actor. So, our impressions about the niceness of the Employee who Corrected the Boss are largely shaped by how nice we think Employees are in general. This strong, positive A_e in this equation captures the idea that Actors seem nicer when they are occupying identities that the culture already sees as good. In contrast, someone occupying a negatively evaluated identity like Perpetrator might seem relatively nasty, no matter what he or she did and to whom. Similarly, the strong, positive B_e term reflects how much nicer an actor seems when he or she is behaving in

nice ways. In general, people seem nicer when they Help someone (a very positively evaluated act) than when they Correct them (a mildly negative behavior). The smaller, positive O_e term reflects the idea that the niceness of our interaction partners rubs off on us a bit. We seem somewhat nicer when we act toward others who are good, and we seem a little less good when we interact toward those whose identities are generally considered bad in our culture (guilt by association). In keeping with traditional parental advice, our reputations depend partly on the company we keep. These last two effects are qualified, however, by a positive and sizable interaction between them, captured in the B_eO_e coefficient. This interaction (called the *balance* term, after Heider's [1958] balance theory) captures the idea that social actors seem especially nice when they behave nicely toward good others (or badly toward mean others); actors do not seem as good when they are either mean to good others or nice to bad others.

A full set of impression formation equations like Equation (2) predict changes in the impressions of Actors, Behaviors, and Objects on evaluation, potency, and activity (A'_e, A'_p, A'_a, B'_e, B'_p, B'_a, O'_e, O'_p, O'_a), as a result of their combination in various social events. Taken as a set, these impression formation equations generate empirical summaries of basic social and cultural processes. They characterize how people's meanings change when they symbolically react to events, as well as capturing important descriptive information about the ways in which social events temporarily transform the local impressions of the symbolic labels that we use to define these events. Along with the sentiment dictionaries, these equations provide the empirical basis for the theoretical predictions made by affect control theory.

Currently, there are full sets of impression formation equations for the United States (Smith-Lovin 1987), Canada (MacKinnon 1994), Japan (Smith et al. 2001), and Germany (Schneider 1996). Researchers have done partial studies of affective change in working-class Catholic schools in Belfast, Northern Ireland (Smith-Lovin 1987) and among Lebanese and Egyptian students studying in the United States (Smith 1980).

Control Principle

Sentiments refer to the culturally shared, fundamental meanings that we associate with particular social labels. Impressions refer to the more transient meanings that arise as social interactions actually unfold. Discrepancies between sentiments and impressions tell us something about how well interactions that we experience are confirming cultural prescriptions. Following the pragmatic assumption that social actors strive to maintain their working definitions of social situations, affect control theory proposes that actors try to experience transient impressions that are consistent with fundamental sentiments. This proposition is called the *affect control principle*. Inspired by Power's (1973) work on perception control theory, Heise (1977, 1979) developed a control system theory to model this principle.

The core mechanism in a control system is that the current state of a system (e.g., the air temperature in a room) is compared to a reference level (e.g., a thermostat setting). The direction and size of the difference between the two guide the future behavior of the system. Modern control system theories of identity (most notably affect control theory and Burke's (1991) identity control theory) share a common image: actors use identity meanings as a reference level to which they compare what is happening in the current social situation. The behavior of self and others is judged according to how well it maintains those reference level meanings. New actions are planned and carried out to maintain identities.

Affect control theory uses the fact that both cultural sentiments *and* transient impressions are measured in the same way, on the same dimensions, to develop a formal model of the meaning

control process. Affect control theory defines *deflection* as the discrepancy between fundamental cultural sentiments and transient, situated impressions in the relevant semantic space (usually the three-dimensional evaluation, potency, and activity space). Mathematically, researchers usually operationalize this concept as the squared Euclidean distance between the sentiments and impressions (usually in evaluation-potency-activity space).[5] In a standard A-B-O event, deflection would therefore be operationalized as

$$D = (A'_e - A_e)^2 + (A'_p - A_p)^2 + (A'_a - A_a)^2 + (B'_e - B_e)^2 + (B'_p - B_p)^2 + (B'_a - B_a)^2 + (O'_e - O_e)^2 + (O'_p - O_p)^2 + (O'_a - O_a)^2 \quad (3)$$

This equation can be used with the impression-change equations to implement the affect control principle. Notice that we can substitute the regression equation (e.g., Equation (2) above) for each transient impression (e.g., A'_e) in Equation (3). This gives us a very long and complicated expression, but that expression is composed entirely of things that we can measure. In addition, since the elements that predict the situated impressions are all the same, many of the terms in the equations cancel each other out, simplifying the expression a great deal.

We can then solve for a set of three-number profiles for a behavior that minimizes deflection. These equations predict the optimal behavior (in the form of a three-number evaluation-potency-activity profile) for generating an event whose corresponding impressions are as close as possible to the initial sentiments. (All of these calculations are done automatically for researchers by the simulation program INTERACT.) As an example, the deflection generated by the event Employee Corrects Boss is 2.0, indicating a relatively low discrepancy between the situated impressions and our cultural sentiments about Employees, Bosses, and Correcting.[6] The profile for a behavior that would *optimally* confirm our sentiments is an evaluation of 1.84, a potency of 0.03, and an activity of 0.74, corresponding closest to actions like Agree with, Obey, and Speak to. After the Correcting, the Employee would have to do a new behavior with a cultural meaning like evaluation = 1.96, potency = −0.37, and activity = 0.86 (corresponding most closely to Admire) in order to bring situated impressions back into line with cultural sentiments. Alternatively, the Boss could Instruct, Reassure, or Counsel the Employee (optimal profile: evaluation = 1.46, potency = 1.34, activity = −0.49). These predicted actions represent minor "repair work" after the slight dislocation in state and power that the Correcting has caused.

Reconstruction Principle

Sometimes events produce deflections that are so large that it is difficult or impossible to find a behavioral approach for resolving them. No amount of repair work can restore our sense that the people are who we thought they were. Affect control theory's *reconstruction principle* states that inexorably large deflections prompt redefinition of the situation.

To implement this, we can use the same type of equation used to predict behavioral resolution of deflection, only solve instead for a new actor identity or a new object identity. Consider the following event: Nurse Abandons Patient. This event produces a deflection of 19.0. It yields no predicted behaviors because no behavior exists in the sentiment dictionary that could possibly resolve that amount of deflection. In other words, there is nothing that a Nurse can do after Abandoning a Patient that would fully resolve the deflection produced by that event. One way of thinking about this result is that there is nothing that a Nurse could do to restore our image of him or her as a responsible, professional occupant of that role identity, we continue to define the

action as Abandoning. So, he or she must offer an account that will lead us to change our view of what happened: Was the act something other than Abandoning? Or, was the person who appeared to be a Patient actually someone else? To resolve our affective reaction to this untenable event, we have to do something to reframe our understanding of the situation.

Using affect control theory's mathematical model, we know what kinds of redefinition will fill the bill. If the Nurse makes no account for his or her behavior, we might relabel her. We can solve for the optimal actor identity that would minimize deflection. In this case, we get a new actor-identity evaluation, potency, and activity of −2.34, .001, −.69, corresponding most closely to an identity of a Malcontent. Alternatively, if the Nurse (or someone else arguing for a more benign interpretation of events) *does* offer an account, affect control theory can anticipate what type of framing might undo the affective damage. For example, viewing the action as Accommodating (2.02, 1.06, −.17), the patient (who presumably wanted to be left alone) would make the Nurse's behavior seem more appropriate. Alternatively, we can solve for a new object identity. These labeling equations allow affect control theory to model processes like our tendency to "blame the victim" in the case of unusual events. Our example is so extreme that there is, in fact, no identity that would be appropriate for a Nurse to Abandon (the predicted solution is −1.59, 1.96, 5.85, which is outside the range of logical possibilities for identity profiles), suggesting that Nurses would *never* be expected to abandon a patient, no matter who it was. If, however, we use considerable latitude on the activity dimension and search for the object identity *closest* to that profile, we get predictions like Outlaw, Gangster, and Mobster. So, while the affect control theory equations predict that nurses would never abandon a patient, the identities that would come closest to "deserving" such treatment would be these sorts of extremely bad, powerful, and lively actors.

Emotions

The impression formation equations characterize impressions that get generated by specific social events; the behavioral prediction equations use the affect control principle to tell us how actors are likely to behave, given specific definitions of the situation. The labeling equations tell us how we are likely to redefine actors, objects, or actions as a result of observed or experienced interactions. All these parts of the formal model show us how affective meanings serve to guide our actions and interpretations of social interaction. But, as we noted above, affect control theory distinguishes between affect and emotion. Although events that do not maintain affective meanings may seem unlikely, surprising, disturbing, or even unreal (in the case of extreme deflection), these do not necessarily imply negative emotions. They *do* motivate us to resolve the discrepancy—to reduce deflection—by restoring our affective meanings. In that sense, they may evoke some sense of stress or physiological reaction (Robinson et al. 2004); but the theory distinguishes between this motivational state and emotion. Instead, affect control theory represents emotions, moods, and even personality traits that indicate typical emotional orientations through the use of identity modifiers.

If we take the same labeling equations described above and hold the actor's *identity* constant, we can solve for a modifier that can be combined with the actor identity in order to produce a combination modifier-identity profile that best confirms the event's sentiments.

Averett and Heise (1987) estimated equations of the form

$$C = c + b_1 I_e + b_2 I_p + b_3 I_a + b_4 M_e + b_5 M_p + b_6 M_a \qquad (4)$$

where C is the evaluation, potency, or activity of a composite modifier and identity (e.g., an Angry Professor), I is the identity of the composite (Professor), and M is the modifier associated with

that identity in the composite (Angry). Once we know what the C_e, C_p, and C_a should be in the event (by producing the actor profile that would "make sense" of the experience), we can solve for the T values in the equation; both the C's and the I's are known.[7]

Consider our event Employee Corrects Boss. What kind of an Employee would Correct his or her Boss? Affect control theory answers this question by first solving for the optimal actor identity for the event (Actor) Corrects Boss. Since affect control theory translates everything into affective meanings to calculate its answers to such questions, our answer comes in the form of a three-number profile: an Actor with an evaluation of −1.5, a potency of 0.0, and an activity of 0.37. Then, we can look up that three-number profile in a dictionary of affective meanings from some group in order to translate it into a symbolic label: the identity of Tease is closest to this profile in the U.S. undergraduate dictionary.

If the identity of the actor is well established by the institutional context or personal knowledge, however, we might want to hold that identity constant. We then hold the identity of Employee constant and solve for the trait with the three-number evaluation-potency-activity profile that, when combined with Employee, produces a combined profile that is closest to that optimal identity. These attribution equations tell us what kind of Employee would Correct his or her Boss (answer: a *Contemptuous* Employee).

The attribution equations solve for traits or characteristics that, when added to an identity, can make sense of observed behaviors. Heise and Thomas (1989) showed that we can use these same equations with a set of emotion words to make predictions about what kind of emotions actors and objects are likely to feel in social events. Using information about the original identity (I in the equations below; Employee in the example above) and the combined, transient identity (C in the equations below; Tease in the example above), we can solve for the particular emotion that would make sense of the event (E in the equations below).

$$\begin{aligned} E_e &= .364 - .871I_e - .182I_p - .162I_a + 1.722C_e + .317C_p + .365C_a \\ E_p &= .430 - .139I_e - 1.17I_p - .104I_a + .240C_e + 1.691C_p - 0.21C_a \\ E_a &= .015 - .110I_e - .174I_p - .816I_a + .139C_e - .159C_p - 1.326C_a. \end{aligned} \tag{5}$$

These equations reveal that emotions are a result of both the transient impressions produced by the event (the Cs) *and* the original identity meanings for the role identity that we occupy (Averett and Heise 1987). In other words, emotions reflect how a situation is making us feel (in the context of our role identity within the situation), as well as signaling to us how those feelings compare to our reference standard.

Looking at the evaluation dimension, we can see that the effects of the fundamental sentiments (I) is negative and roughly half the size of the effects of the transient impressions (captured by the predicted identity combination, C). This shows us that the positivity of emotion is predicted by the positivity of the transient impression (t), as well as the positivity of the deflection produced by that transient impression (t − f). In other words, nice events make us feel good. Events that are even better than our identities would lead us to expect feeling even better. Note further than when events are perfectly confirming (e.g., t = f), then the pleasantness of our emotion should roughly reflect the niceness of that fundamental identity. This suggests the *characteristic* emotion for a given identity should be evaluatively congruent with that identity:

$$(2t - f) = t + (t - f) \tag{6}$$

The potency and activity equations reveal similar dynamics. Both of those equations can be

roughly reduced to

$$(1.5t - f) = .5t + (t - f). \quad (7)$$

As with emotion evaluation, we see that emotion potency and emotion activity are each influenced by both the deflection and the transient impressions. When events push us further upward in potency than our identities suggest, we experience more powerful emotions. Likewise, when events make us seem livelier than our identities suggest, we experience more active emotions. In the case of perfectly confirming events (when t = f), we experience a characteristic emotion, whose potency is roughly half of the potency associated with fundamental identity. The picture is roughly similar for predictions about emotion activation. The emotion and trait equations turn the basic A-B-O event in affect control theory into a M-A-B-M-O event, where M stands for an identity modifier (either a trait or an emotion).[8]

While we can use the modifier equations to predict emotional response, we can also use them to create "new" identities—either a mood that is embraced for a short period of time or a personality characteristic that is embraced transsituationally. If we combine a modifier with a role identity for a substantial period (e.g., an Angry Father), this combination is no longer a simple *result* of a specific situation, but a new temporary identity that is maintained over several rounds of interaction. Maintaining an identity like Angry Father will obviously lead to different actions than a nonangry Father.

Therefore, experiencing a mood has very different effects than a situated emotional response. Emotions, in affect control theory, do not *cause* actions; instead they indicate or signal how we are experiencing a situation. It is deflection, not emotion, that leads to restorative action. Emotions are reflexive, and to some extent we end up acting in ways that are opposite from the emotions that we experience. A Novice that feels Elated at the Compliment of an Expert might still act in a way to bring down the Expert's view of him or her to a level more consistent with the role identity of Novice. The positive emotion comes from the interactions that are experienced in the situation (which have moved the situated meanings above the reference level); actions will serve to counterbalance them and bring things back into line. On the other hand, a Cheerful Novice (i.e., one who is in a persistently good mood for several rounds of interaction) might act nicer than a Novice who is not in such a nice mood.

When people consistently have the same modifier attached to (virtually) all of their identities, that modifier might actually become part of a personal identity. Then it becomes a part of the reference level in all situations. So, such typical emotional states act in affect control theory like status characteristics or any other identity modifier that is permanently attached to all identities. Just as we can talk of a Female Judge having a somewhat different meaning than a (prototypically male) Judge, we can also say that a Depressed person might enact the role identities of Mother, Employee, Friend, and so forth, all in the Depressed state. Combining the modifier with all identities shifts their meaning in a predictable direction, and it is the new meaning that is maintained through action and perception.

INTERACT

Both the logic and the substance of affect control theory are contained in its mathematical specification. The empirically estimated equations contain crucial information about affective processing that reflects basic social and cultural processes in patterns of attribution, social judgment, justice, balance, and response to deviance. The logic of the theory (for example, the affect control

principle and the reconstruction principle) is implemented through mathematical manipulation of these equations to produce predictions about behaviors, emotions, and labelings during interaction. The equations and the dictionaries containing culture-specific sentiments in the form of evaluation, potency, and activity ratings of identities, behaviors, emotions, settings, and so on are contained in a software program called INTERACT. The current version of the INTERACT software allows users to choose among eight sentiment dictionaries (U.S. 1979, U.S. 2003, Canada 1988, Canada 2002, Japan, China, Germany, Northern Ireland). This software provides a user-friendly interface that allows researchers and research consumers to work through implications of the theory.

Simulation results using this software can be taken as explicit predictions of the theory and thus subjected to testing through empirical investigation. The theory can generate several kinds of hypotheses:

1. It can predict characteristic emotions—which offer an epidemiology of social emotion, showing how occupants of different social positions *typically* feel in response to normal situations that maintain their role identities. Since we can set the transient, situated meanings in Equations (5) and (6) equal to the fundamental reference levels, we can make predictions about how those role occupants would usually feel under meaning maintenance.
2. It can predict emotional responses to specific events that fail to maintain meanings (e.g., underreward and overreward). If an Expert Flatters a Novice, we expect different emotions than if the predicted, identity-maintaining behavior (Instructs) occurs. This feature of the theory can be used to "predict" much of what we already know. That is, affect control theorists can use the control theory framework to interpret experimental and clinical phenomena that have been observed in other studies.
3. It can show how persistent mood states (or personality characteristics) can systematically alter the performance of a large number of role identities across situations. For example, a depressed individual might be affected by that mood state in a variety of role performances and so engage in interactions as a Depressed Teacher, a Depressed Mother, and a Depressed Wife.
4. At a more macro level, it can describe the feeling rules or emotion norms that come from prototypical events that lead to emotional response. Therefore, we can say that a Lover who has been Jilted has a "right" to feel Angry, in the same way that a Mother who has lost her Child is "supposed" to be Sad. Similarly, we can describe the systematic production of jointly experienced emotions by interaction ritual chains (Collins 2004).

EMPIRICAL STUDIES OF EMOTION USING AFFECT CONTROL THEORY

Because of the marked progress in the sociology of emotions during the past three decades (Smith-Lovin 1994; Turner and Stets 2006), many recent studies of affect control theory have focused on the emotions component of the model. However, in spite of the range of predictions possible (see the list above), there are two basic themes in most affect control research on emotions: (1) studies that use the theory to predict emotion reactions and (2) studies that show how emotions act as a signal about identities.

The first type of study shows that the theory does a good job of predicting what people will feel in what social circumstances. Robinson and Smith-Lovin (1992) began the experimental

assessment of affect control prediction of emotional response to deflecting events. Following closely an experimental paradigm developed by Swann et al. (1987), Robinson and Smith-Lovin selected participants from an undergraduate psychology pool who had either very positive social self-esteem or relatively negative social self-esteem.[9] The participants then read a three-minute passage from *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* during which they thought their performance was being evaluated by two raters to develop a new communication coding scheme. The participants got feedback from the two raters (in counterbalanced order). Their emotional responses to the first feedback and their choice of which raters to interact with in the second part of the experiment were the dependent variables. The affect control hypotheses proposed a counterintuitive pattern: that positive evaluation by a rater would create positive emotion for participants with both high and low social self-esteem, but that low social self-esteem participants would choose future interaction with those who *confirmed* their negative self-identities. The hypotheses were confirmed—positive evaluation led to positive emotion and negative evaluation led to negative emotion, but participants chose future interaction partners who confirmed their self-images even when that confirmation caused them to feel bad.

Although behavioral studies like Robinson and Smith-Lovin (1992) are the most compelling examples, they only deal with a very limited number of situations for practical reasons. Research using vignettes has demonstrated accurate prediction over a wider range of (imagined) situations. Heise and Calhan (1995) asked students to imagine themselves in 128 situations and report what emotion they felt. This study makes use of the fact that symbolic interactionist theories like affect control theory presume that events are processed symbolically—thinking about being in a situation is expected to arouse the same types of emotions that actually *being* in that situation would evoke (MacKinnon 1994). The students reported their emotions on a graphic emotion spiral that mirrored the structure that Morgan and Heise (1988) found: pleasant emotions (Happy, Proud) are at the top, while unpleasant feelings (Annoyed, Disgusted) are at the bottom. Vulnerable (low potency) emotions like Scared and Ashamed are inside the spiral, while high potency emotions like Bitter and Angry are toward the inside. Lively versus quiet emotions (Excited versus Contented) are represented on the left/right axis. Half of the imagined situations had the student as the actor and in the other half, the student was the object. For example, students were asked to "Imagine that you are flattering a professor. How do you feel at the moment?" Alternatively, they might be asked "Imagine that an evangelist is condemning you? How do you feel at the moment?" The study supported the theory. When Heise and Weir (1999) examined scatter plots of distances from the affect control prediction and the frequencies with which the students chose an emotion, they found that the distributions typically fit the following generalizations:

1. The emotion that a person reports feeling in an event usually is close to the theoretical emotion predicted by affect control theory.
2. People rarely report feeling an emotion in an event that is far from the theoretical emotion predicted by affect control theory.

Since emotions indicate *how someone occupying an identity with a particular meaning* is responding to an event, people can use them as signals to help define ambiguous situations. Robinson, Smith-Lovin and Tsoudis (1994; Tsoudis and Smith-Lovin 1998, 2001; Tsoudis 2000a, 2000b) used this feature of the theory to explore how emotional displays impact judgments made about criminal defendants. The studies follow a common design: they present students with a description of a court case (either a criminal confession or testimony by the victim of a crime), varying the emotions displayed by the perpetrator or victim in the case.[10] INTERACT predicts that people occupying fundamentally good identities should feel remorse after they

have committed a negative act toward a good person (e.g., injured an innocent during a drunk driving accident); actors who have fundamentally negative identities would experience more neutral emotions. Similarly, victims who occupy good identities should feel devastated by being the object of such an action, while those occupying stigmatized identities expect negative acts to be directed at them and show less emotional response. In the studies, students gave lighter sentences to and thought less negatively about perpetrators who showed the repentant emotions that INTERACT would predict of fundamentally good actors. They also used the emotional reactions of the victim to shape their sentences and degree of empathy with those who had been hurt in the crime.

This research on judgments about criminals focuses on expected emotional responses to bad behaviors. Affect control theory makes the more general prediction that one's emotions should be evaluatively congruent with one's actions (Heise and Thomas 1989). In order to examine this prediction, Robinson and Smith-Lovin (1999) conducted vignette experiments that systematically varied the niceness of an actor's behavior with the emotion displayed. These experiments demonstrated that not only can actors mitigate damage to an identity by displaying an appropriately negative behavior, as in the case of remorseful defendants, but they can actually contribute to a spoiled identity by not feeling appropriately happy when engaged in beneficent behaviors.

Since emotional experiences are crucial for understanding mental health, some affect control research has examined clinical issues. Francis (1997), for example, conducted a qualitative study of two support groups: a divorce group and a bereavement group. In both cases, people entered the groups with negative identities and the unpleasant, powerless, low activation emotions that we would expect those identities to evoke. Divorced people saw themselves as failing at marriage, and bereaved spouses felt responsible for their partners' pain and ultimate death. Since it was difficult to redefine the event (divorce or death), Francis (1997) found that support group leaders worked on the identities of the group members and their former partners. They reinforced the positively evaluated, potent, and activated identities that the group members could occupy that would generate positive feelings from new events. In addition, they helped relabel the former partners in a more negative way, giving them responsibility for the negative event (divorce or death). In effect, the event became "a bad person does something bad to a good person (the support group member)." Since even this event construction involves some deflection and negative emotion, the group leaders then encouraged the group members to forgive their former spouse—a good, deep act that helped to support their new positive identity. The most important finding from the Francis study is that the group leaders did *not* focus directly on the negative feelings that the group members had. Instead, they shaped the view of the situation—the identities of self and other—to generate a new set of emotions that would be more productive for continuing life.

EMOTIONS IN UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND POLITICS

Given the power of affect control theory to link the framing of a situation and the emotional experiences that the situation evokes, it is natural that the theory has found powerful applications to the framing of social movements. Heise (1998) pointed out that we develop emphatic solidarity with other groups if we find ourselves having the same emotional reactions that they have to the same events. Feeling chagrin and annoyance at Summers' remarks about women's potential at science and math indicates to us that we have some solidarity with women scientists who have spoken out against his views. Berbrier (1998) and Schneider (1999) have both discussed

the framing and cultural meanings that neoconservative and white separatist movements use to support their positions.

Researchers have applied the theory to more traditional political processes as well. Troyer and Robinson (forthcoming) used INTERACT simulations to show how political advertisements and voting behavior can be modeled using affect control theory. MacKinnon and Bowlby (2000) used the theory, together with social identity theory (Abrams and Hogg 1990), to explore the affective dynamics of intergroup relationships and the stereotypes that people form about other groups.

While we may not think of nation-states as unitary social actors to which social psychological theories apply, Lerner and colleagues (Azar and Lerner 1981; Lerner 1983) have noted that the symbolic processing that affect control theory models *can* be used to interpret the cultural understandings that world leaders have about international events. When we process statements like "the United States attacks Iraq" or "the Soviet Union is an Evil Empire," we have affective reactions that guide our cognitive labeling of ambiguous actions, our policy preferences for future events, and our feelings of solidarity (or lack thereof) with other collective actors. Seeing Arab citizens rejoicing in the streets at an event that causes us great distress (e.g., the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon) creates a sense that these people view the world very differently from us and cannot be trusted to behave in a predictable, "moral" manner.

Of course, social movement activity can involve institution building as well as the framing or interpretation of political events. One example of a stigmatized group developing new institutions, interaction ritual chains, and shared symbolic meanings is Smith-Lovin and Douglass (1992). This study combines the quantitative measurement that is typical of affect control research with qualitative field observations in a study of two religious groups. Smith-Lovin and Douglass (1992) asked the question: How do gay people who occupy stigmatized identities in the mainstream culture develop a religious interaction ritual that consistently generates positive, rewarding emotions and subcultural support for being simultaneously gay and religious? The study contrasted a traditional (and relatively liberal) Unitarian church with the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), a religious denomination explicitly developed to serve the gay community.

Using participant-observation, Smith-Lovin and Douglass first compiled a list of thirty social identities and thirty behaviors that were significant social labels in both religious groups. Church members then rated these concepts on the evaluation, potency, and activity dimensions. The data showed large differences between the two groups' ratings of religious and, especially, gay identities, but not for social actions.[1] Unitarians had much more negatively evaluated, impotent meanings associated with gay identities compared with the MCC (several were rated in the study). There were also big differences in the potency and activity meanings of the religious figures—both symbolic (God) and institutional (minister). Notice that in the MCC context, Gay Person and Worshiper have very similar profiles (with the Gay Person being quite a bit livelier), while in the Unitarian Church group, there is a large difference on all three dimensions, most notably on evaluation.

Smith-Lovin and Douglass used the fundamental sentiments that they had measured in the two congregations for simulations in INTERACT. These simulations produced hypotheses about the religious rituals expected in both institutional contexts and about the standard production of emotions that those interaction rituals (Collins 1990, 2004) would produce. The more potent, lively meanings associated with religious identities in the gay church led INTERACT to produce more dramatic, flamboyant interactions, which contrasted markedly with the more staid role relationships among religious figures in the Unitarian church. For example, the expected action of a Minister to a Worshiper in MCC had the affective profile (e = 0.9; p = 1.7; a = 0.7), with actualizations like Stroke, Visit, and Please. In the Unitarian group, the same role relationship was

supported by an action with the profile (e = 0.3; p = 1.0; a = 0.2), implying actions like Appeal-to, Flatter, and Consult. But the institutionalized religious interactions in *both* congregations predicted deep, positive emotions for both groups: presumably an important part of the religious experience. The very different meanings associated with homosexual identities also generated very different simulations. Using the MCC sentiments about Gay Person, INTERACT predicted positive interactions among gays (e.g., Applaud, Play With, Court) and directed to a Gay Person from the Congregation (Court, Play With, Desire Sexually). By contrast, the Unitarian meanings led INTERACT to predict that homosexuals will experience negative, unhappy interactions with one another, with God, and with formal religious figures.

To validate their simulation results, Smith-Lovin and Douglass created sixty descriptions of social events, each specifying an interaction between gay and religious identities. They selected the behavior directed from one identity (actor) toward the other (object) in each event from one of three sets of behavioral predictions: (1) those produced by the MCC sentiments, (2) those produced by the Unitarian sentiments, or (3) those produced through random selection of behaviors from the INTERACT corpus. Seven judges from the MCC church then rated the likelihood of these events (twenty from MCC sentiments, twenty from Unitarian sentiments, and twenty with randomly chosen behaviors). This allowed them to test whether or not the perceived likelihood of events generated by one's own group's fundamental sentiments were higher than those produced by another group's meanings (or randomly selected behaviors). An ANOVA produced a significant result for the three-category grouping variable, and a follow-up test confirmed the investigators' prediction of a significant difference between the MCC and Unitarian events. MCC raters saw the events generated from the MCC sentiments as more likely than events generated from the Unitarian sentiments. Smith-Lovin and Douglass (1992:243) concluded from their analyses that affect control theory shows promise as a "generative model of culture."

Britt and Heise (2000) argue that social movement organizations seek to transform negatively evaluated emotions associated with a stigmatized or minority identity such as shame or depression into other, more active emotions such as pride in an attempt to incite and motivate individuals to participate in group activities. They state that a primary tactic used in gay identity politics is to instill fear in group members through discussions about homophobic reactions toward gays and lesbians, but as they point out, fear renders individuals vulnerable and is less likely to leave them feeling as though they should fight for the group cause. These feelings of vulnerability must then be transformed into more active emotions such as anger. Britt and Heise conclude that fear and anger can be viewed as emotional capital for social movements. These emotions provide an individual-level resource that, when properly transformed, leads to group solidarity and subsequently aid in the achievement of group goals.

Recent work by Lively and Heise (2004) indicates that the experiential structure of emotions is very similar to the meaning structure of emotions. Moreover, the findings of Lively and Heise indicate that the "emotional capital" discussed by Britt and Heise (2000) may not require an external catalyst for use by social movement organizations. Instead, Lively and Heise (2004) determined that the connections between emotions and action may be more closely linked to one another due to their relative proximity to one another as measured by a remoteness index.

Although a majority of the empirical evidence for affect control theory comes from U.S. populations, Schneider (1996) illustrates the utility of affect control theory, a formal statement of symbolic interactionism for understanding how cultural differences in meaning translate into differences in affective responses. Schneider conducted a cross-cultural comparison of a U.S. undergraduate sample and a German undergraduate sample for over 400 identities. His results indicate that American students systematically rated sexual-erotic identities as more negative and active compared to the German sample. The differences in meanings associated with role identities

between the two samples resulted in substantial differences in the emotions associated with these identities. Although German students associated emotions of impression and passion with sexual-erotic identities, American students associated more deviant and violent emotions with these identities. Furthermore, the results of the Schneider study indicate that as agreement on the level of sexual eroticism of identities converged between the two cultures, the affective responses to the identities illustrated a pattern of dramatic divergence. Schneider's results illustrate not only the importance of the broader social context for establishing meaning, but also indicate how the formal statement of symbolic interactionism, in the form of affect control theory, permits an empirical investigation of cross-cultural comparisons.

A Brief Comparison with a Close Theoretical Cousin

Due in large part to common symbolic interactionist roots, affect control theory (Heise 1977, 1979) and identity control theory (Burke 1991) share many assumptions, principles, and propositions. Both theories take as a starting point the symbolic interaction principles of shared meanings and individual attempts to maintain those meanings. Shared meanings are not only a requirement for meaningful interaction (Mead 1938). The attempt to maintain these meanings is the cornerstone of the individual creation and re-creation of structure—a core symbolic interaction principle. Affect control theory and identity control theory also agree that individuals attempt to maintain meanings through the confirmation of identity meanings. Disconfirmation of meanings in both theories motivates the individual to affect his or her environment in such a way as to stabilize the interaction system at or near the reference level given by one's definition of the situation.

As previously mentioned, the control model used by Heise (1977, 1979) is not specific to affect control theory. Burke (1991) also incorporates Powers's (1973) control model into the conceptual and theoretical framework of identity control theory. While both theories posit that social actors rely on this cybernetic control loop to guide interaction through the comparison of meanings to reference levels, Burke (1991) developed a specific version of the control model wherein individuals compare reflected appraisals to self-identity meanings in an attempt to maintain identity meanings. Conversely, affect control theory argues that individuals attempt to maintain the meaning of the situation, including the identity meanings of all actors, behaviors, and the setting. The control system incorporated into both theories moves the conceptualization of the individual beyond the oversocialized view of the social actor. The theories effectively permit individuals to act and react to novel and unexpected circumstances that disturb their understandings of what is happening in the social situation. For both theories, the emotions resulting from the comparison process represent signals regarding the maintenance of meaning; however, their specific emotional predictions vary.

The measurement of affective meanings represents an area of divergence between the two theories. Heise (1977, 1979) and Burke (1991) differentially incorporated the work of Osgood (Osgood et al. 1957, 1975) into their respective measurement strategies. Osgood and colleagues identified three central dimensions of meaning evaluation, potency, and activity that, when measured, captured the culturally defined affective orientation of all concepts. Conceptual measurements used semantic differential scales anchored by opposing adjectives (e.g., good versus bad, active versus passive). Heise drew more heavily from the psycholinguistic measurement literature (Osgood et al. 1957, 1975) and the psychology of impression formation (Gollob and Rossman 1973; Heise 1969, 1970), traditions that emphasized the ubiquity of transsituational meanings. Burke, on the other hand, adhered more closely to the symbolic interactionist and identity theory

Au: Not in ref. list

traditions (Stryker 1980), stressing the importance of domain-specific meanings for individuals and the relative importance of identities within the salience hierarchy. As a result of these differences, affect control theory measures general meanings of identities and actions and identity control theory emphasizes the more personalized, institutionalized meanings of individuals for interaction outcomes.

Given their common conceptual ground, it is surprising that the two control theories produce rather disparate predictions regarding the production of emotion. On the other hand, theories sharing a common set of assumptions (as these do) are likely to generate truly competing hypotheses that allow empirical comparison. The differential predictions and competing hypotheses represent opportunities for exploring the strengths and weaknesses of both theories, leading to their future development.

Before we outline areas of divergence, we should note some broad areas of agreement in the prediction of emotion. Both theories predict that emotion results *both* from confirming and disconfirming situations. Likewise, affect control theory and identity control theory agree that negative emotions result when individuals in normal, positive identities do bad things or have bad things done to them.

The theories *do* differ in the types of emotions that are predicted under some fairly unusual circumstances. For instance, affect control theory would predict negative emotion resulting from the confirmation of a negative identity, ~~while~~ identity control theory argues that the confirmation of all types of identities (even negative ones) results in positive emotion. Similarly, identity control theory postulates that the disconfirmation of identities, resulting from a lack of support in the form of reflected appraisals or from overreward, is always stressful and produces negative emotions, ~~while~~ affect control theory emphasizes the valence of situated identity meanings and the direction of deflection in the production of emotion. For instance, a mother who is evaluated more positively than expected would be predicted, by identity control theory, to experience negative emotions (because of the disconfirmation), ~~while~~ affect control theory would predict more positive emotions than those typically associated with the confirmation of this positively evaluated identity. Because the identity is conceived of as a positive identity to begin with and the deflection in this situation would cause the transient sentiments of the identity to exceed those of the fundamental sentiment, the result would be a more positively evaluated emotion.

whereas

whereas

whereas

These points of divergence represent opportunities for critical tests of the two theories. However, very few tests of this sort have been undertaken, with the exception of Stets (2003, 2005) and Burke and Harrod (2005). The majority of normal, institutionalized identities are positively evaluated. In confirming situations, both theories make identical predictions regarding the positive emotions that result from occupying such identities. Similarly, the disconfirmation of such positively evaluated identities will most likely be in a negative direction (at least on the evaluation dimension), leading to a prediction of negative emotions for both theories. In these commonly observed situations, it is almost impossible to determine whether these negative emotions arise from identity disconfirmation or from downward identity deflection.

Therefore, much research in both traditions, investigating the emotional outcomes of disrupted identities, supports both theories. The general conclusions of these investigations indicate that negative emotions are a likely product of situations wherein support for positive identities is lacking (Burke 1991) or those situations in which positive identities are disconfirmed (Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1992). Research has also demonstrated that positive emotions ~~may~~ might result when individuals occupying positive identities are treated more positively than expected (Robinson and Smith-Lovin 1992). These findings provide empirical support for affect control theory's predictions regarding deflection and the interaction between the valence of an identity and the direction

that

might

of the deflection. Recent work by Stets (2003, 2005) has provided further support for both theories, although some of the results of this work indicate that the predictions of affect control theory may be more accurate in situations of positive deflection. Stets (2003) found that when individuals were overrewarded, they experienced more positive emotions and those that were underrewarded experienced more negative emotions. Finally, Burke and Harrod (2005) demonstrated support for identity control theory in their analysis of survey data collected from married couples in the first years of marriage. The findings of this study indicate that positive evaluations of husbands and wives by their spouses, when those positive evaluations were higher than the spouses' self-image, produced more negative emotions or moods for the spouse. These results appear to conform to the general stress process outlined by Burke (1991) concerning the congruence of meanings and reflected appraisals. Specifically, Burke (1991) argued that any incongruence, regardless of the valence of the identity or the direction of the disturbance, is likely to produce stress, which is then translated into more negative emotions. Although both theories have enjoyed considerable empirical support, much more work needs to be done to investigate the competing hypotheses generated by the theories. We will now turn to outlining what we view as the important directions for future research for both theoretical traditions.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As we noted at the beginning of this chapter, affect control theory differs from other symbolic interactionist theories in its view of emotions. Other symbolic interactionist theories regard failure to maintain an adequate presentation of self as negative. Even Burke's identity control theory, a perspective that shares much of affect control theory's cybernetic structure, regards disruption of identity meanings as leading to stress and unpleasant feelings (Burke and Harrod 2005; Stets 2003, 2005). In affect control theory, there is a real difference between the sense of unlikelihood, stress, and unreality that may come from deflection and the evaluative valence of emotion. We can be devastated that our interaction partners act negatively toward us (if we have a typically positive self-image), but we can also be dazed and elated by an unexpectedly good fortune (recall Equations (5)–(7), above). To assess which view is more accurate, we will need measures that can differentiate between deflection and emotion—a tall order. Physiological measures may offer some traction on this issue (Robinson et al. 2004), and research on under- and overreward represents an important substantive domain for its exploration (Stets 2003, 2005).

Related to this issue, we note that empirical affect control theory research to date has focused heavily on evaluation dynamics, almost to the exclusion of attention to potency and activity dynamics. This is particularly unfortunate because one of affect control theory's distinguishing features is its attention to all three of these fundamental dimensions of social meaning. The three-dimensional, circumplex structure of emotions (MacKinnon and Keating 1989) highlights the distinctive need for attention to potency and activity in the area of emotions because most of the interesting variation occurs in the potency and activity dimensions. The theoretical structure of affect control theory affords opportunities for making distinguishing predictions about power dynamics among identities in interaction and discriminating among emotions with different levels of intensity and expressivity. Investigation into these predictions would better capitalize on the full structure of the existing theory and facilitate the exploration of predictions that are unique to affect control theory and nonoverlapping with related theories (especially in terms of distinguishing emotion from deflection).

Finally, we note that affect control theory (and most other symbolic interactionist approaches) predicts emotional response *only* as a response to the situated and culturally given (fundamental)

meanings associated with one's *own* identity. The empirical reality is that we often respond to the observation of others' situations and often share their emotional reactions even when we are not directly involved in an interpersonal event. "I feel your pain" might be a cliché, but even very young infants have the ability to model the emotional responses of others. That simple empathic response develops into a much more refined sensibility as children develop and expand their ability to take the role of the other. Given how basic this process is to our understanding of the self from an interactionist perspective, affect control theory is strangely lacking a model of empathic emotional response. Clearly, theoretical work is needed in this domain.

NOTES

1. Blumer (1969) labeled Mead's ideas "symbolic interaction," the term that most scholars now use to refer to this theoretical tradition.
2. Goffman (1959, 1967), Scheff (1990), and Shott (1979) built directly on Cooley's insights to develop their own contributions to the sociology of emotions.
3. This definition follows Cooley's classic statement (1964) and Gordon's (1981:566–567) more modern definition of sentiments as "a socially constructed pattern of sensations, expressive gestures and cultural meanings organized around the relationship to a social object."
4. Here, we follow the affect control theory convention of capitalizing cultural labels that carry measured affective meanings.
5. Some writers refer to the mathematical operationalization of deflection as a definition of the concept. We distinguish here between the conceptual definition and the operationalization to allow for times when researchers are focused on different event elements (e.g., settings) or even different dimensions. The important point, however, is that the measurement of meanings in a systematic, abstract way *allows* the theory to specify deflection mathematically and to model its effects.
6. All simulation results presented here were obtained using female equations and dictionaries from the 2003 U.S. Project Magellon Data in Java INTERACT. www.indiana.edu/~socpsy/ACT/interact/JavaInteract.html (last updated April 23, 2005).
7. The I's are the cultural sentiments associated with the original actor identity—Employee, in this case.
8. The basic A-B-O grammar of affect control theory has been elaborated in other ways as well, but these elaborations remain largely underexplored. Behavior settings, behavioral modifiers, and self-directed actions can all be represented using simple event sentences (e.g., the Doctor Insulted a Patient at the Party or the Daughter Obeyed her Mother while Rolling Her Eyes).
9. This social self-esteem scale contains many items about public presentation of self and public speaking and is not correlated with general self-esteem or with depression.
10. The vignette stimuli are designed to correspond to actual court cases, but are modified to embed emotion cues that are supposedly transcribed from a videotape to help the research participant imagine the original video.
11. This pattern supports the common use of the U.S. (undergraduate) behavior dictionary for subcultural analyses and is consistent with Heise's (1966, 1979) suggestion that most social actions will not have different meanings across subcultures. As Kalkoff (2002) points out, it also gives greater specificity to the claim in the deviance/criminological literature (e.g., Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967) that subcultures are only partially different from the larger, parent culture.

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