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Identity Work within and beyond the Professions: Toward a Theoretical Integration and Extension

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Abstract Our chapter examines identity work within and beyond the professions. To lend structure to this emerging perspective, we begin by forwarding a general theoretical model of identity work. We then reexamine and extend this model by examining identity work amongst professionals. To do so, we first deepen connections with literature on the professions to highlight salient and unique dynamics facing this occupational group. We then assess these dynamics in light of our model. Specifically, we show how an examination of professionals can advance theories of identity work by highlighting new motives and triggers, and recasting identity work as a relational process.

Keywords Identity, Identity work, Identity construction, Professionals

1. Introduction

Issues of identity, and identity work, have long been intertwined with professionals. Over half a century ago, *Boys in White* chronicled the socialization of medical residents, and how they came to see themselves as physicians [1]. Indeed, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, scholarship on

identity dynamics amongst professionals proliferated, including research on social workers, psychotherapy, physicians, lawyers, and nursing among others. Identity was – and still is – seen as critical as it is a central lens that individuals use to make sense of, and ultimately enact their environments [2]. These largely sociological treatments tended to view identity, a product of social structures called roles, as relatively stable, structured, enduring, and resilient. Furthermore, the formation of this relatively stable professional identity was thought to occur primarily during socialization.

Increasingly, however, individual identities, even among professionals, are conceptualized as inherently precarious, malleable, and ongoing enterprises that require active and ongoing construction or “work.” Here individuals are viewed as engaging in variety activities to build, revise, maintain, repair, and otherwise craft their identities. In this way, identities not only shape values, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors, but also serve as personal projects. People both enact and *act upon* their identities. This chapter builds on this growing perspective to examine the construction of professional identities¹ (e.g., [3], [4], [5], [6]). In doing so, we follow a broader trend within organizational studies that examines different forms of active “work” – namely how “individuals and organizations purposefully and strategically expending effort to affect their social-symbolic context” [7: 223].

The purpose of this chapter is to integrate and extend theory on identity work by examining the case of professionals. Our chapter makes three contributions. First, although identity work constitutes a growing and emerging perspective within organizational studies, the literature remains “loosely affiliated” without an orienting and integrating structure. This lack of integration makes offering insight to specific empirical settings – in our case professionals – challenging, and obscures ways in which professionals can contribute new theoretical understanding to general models of identity work. Indeed, scholars have started to review and critique this emerging focus on identity [8], suggesting enough research is in place to take stock. To address this lack of integration, our first

¹ Following a recent review by Pratt [8], we use the terms “identity work” and “identity construction” synonymously.

contribution involves synthesizing extant research, and presenting a general model of identity work.

Table 1. Definitions of Identity Work / Construction Work

Source	Identity Work & Construction
Snow and Anderson (1987: 1348) [14]	"...the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self- concept. So defined, identity work may involve a number of complementary activities: (a) procurement or arrangement of physical settings and props; (b) cosmetic face work or the arrangement of personal appearance; (c) selective association with other individuals and groups; and (d) verbal construction and assertion of personal identities."
Giddens (1991: 244) [17]	"...the capacity to keep a particular narrative going."
Ibarra (1999: 779) [3]	"Identity construction is not just a process of producing possible selves but also one in which people select and discard the possibilities they have considered."
Alvesson and Willmott (2002: 621, 626) [29]	"...identity construction as a process in which the role of discourse in targeting and moulding the human subject is balanced with other elements of life history forged by a capacity reflexively to accomplish life projects out of various sources of influence and inspiration."
Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003: 1165) [6]	"...people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness."
Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini (2006: 309) [18]	"...like all subjective meanings, identity is constructed through a complex interplay of cognitive, affective, and social interaction processes, occurring within particular cultural and local contexts."

Table 1. Continue

Source	Identity Work & Construction
DeRue and Ashford (2010: 630) [33]	"...identity work is undertaken both by an individual projecting a particular image and by others mirroring back and reinforcing (or not) that image as a legitimate identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). We refer to this broader, multiparty process as identity construction..."
Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010: 137) [12]	"...we introduce the term narrative identity work to refer to social efforts to craft self-narratives that meet a person's identity aims. By self-narrative we mean a narrative or story—terms we use interchangeably—about the self."
Pratt (2012: 26) [8]	"...constructing identity comes as individuals both act (e.g., working) and react (e.g., customizing) with others in their social environments... Thus, a second base for identity formation is relational. With regard to relationships, a social identity approach emphasizes categories as a key component of identity; such categories, in turn, are inherently relational - depicting differences between those similar to us (i.e., an ingroup) and those different from us (i.e., an outgroup)."
Wei (2012: 444) [13]	"...individuals' active construction of their identities in social contexts."

Second, our chapter builds upon research to further ground identity work in the realities that are unique or salient to professionals. Professions have been an important setting for scholars of identity construction, including examinations of medical residents [5], bankers and management consultants [3], and priests [4] among others. Yet, many studies downplay the distinguishing features of professional work, with only few notable exceptions hinting how professions bring to the fore certain identity construction dynamics. For example, Pratt and colleagues [5: 236] find that because professionals are primarily defined by "what they do" rather than by their organizational membership, identity dynamics center more on roles and the content and process of work tasks. Our

chapter reviews literature on the professions to highlight particularly salient or unique conditions that shape identity construction in this context. In doing so, we call attention to the *professional* in professional identity work.

Finally, we conclude by showing how identity work amongst professionals provides opportunities to reconsider and extend theories of identity work more generally. Specifically, we argue that analysis of professional identity work highlights new problems and drivers that underlie identity work. Moreover, we suggest identity work amongst professionals extends research by illustrating that identity work is *relational*. Taken together, our chapter seeks to integrate, empirically ground, and extend our understanding of identity work within and beyond the professions.

2. Toward a General Model of Identity Work

Several themes appear central to the concept of identity work. First, identity work is often referenced through “verbs” as opposed to “nouns.” That is, the central, and perhaps defining, feature of identity work is its focus on activities: be it behaviors, cognitions, and possibly emotions. Identity work is, in other terms, about “doing,” as opposed to simply “being” [8]. These “doings” are discussed in various terms including “practices” (e.g., [9], [10]), “strategies” ([11], [3], [12], [5], [12], [5], [13]), “activities” [14], or “tactics” ([15], [16], [4]). Consequently, identity in this perspective takes on a process-perspective rather than a variance perspective – it is an unfolding of events rather than a “variable” [8].

Second, these activities are oriented toward a particular target, namely one’s personal or social identities. Echoing his early research on structuration, Giddens [17] argues that identities are not only the “causes” of individual action, but also the “target” of action. In this way, identities not only serve people, but people serve or support their own identities by engaging in various actions to build, retain, maintain, or otherwise revise them. As noted in our introduction, this implies that identities are somewhat malleable, tenuous, and generally require some effort in order to inform one’s self-definition – a notion

consistent with perspectives that suggest identities must be enacted to be retained [9]. Identity construction, therefore, assumes identities are continuous “works in progress” – as Giddens [17: 52] argues “something that has to be routinely created and sustained.” In this way, perspectives on identity construction suggest alternative ways of theorizing identity as more or less enduring. Identity might be enduring from an identity work perspective, but it is an accomplishment that requires active work, not an unproblematic given.

Third, although often implicit, definitions assume identity work is motivated, though these motivations may vary. For example, the above definitions refer to motives such as “coherence,” “congruent” and “distinctiveness.” A deeper look at extant research suggests these motives do not occur in a vacuum, but may work in tandem and are often exogenously triggered. Building on these themes, we offer a broader role of identity work that emphasizes central elements across these various definitions: one that includes both the various processes (e.g., subtracting) as well the motivated and targeted nature of identity construction.

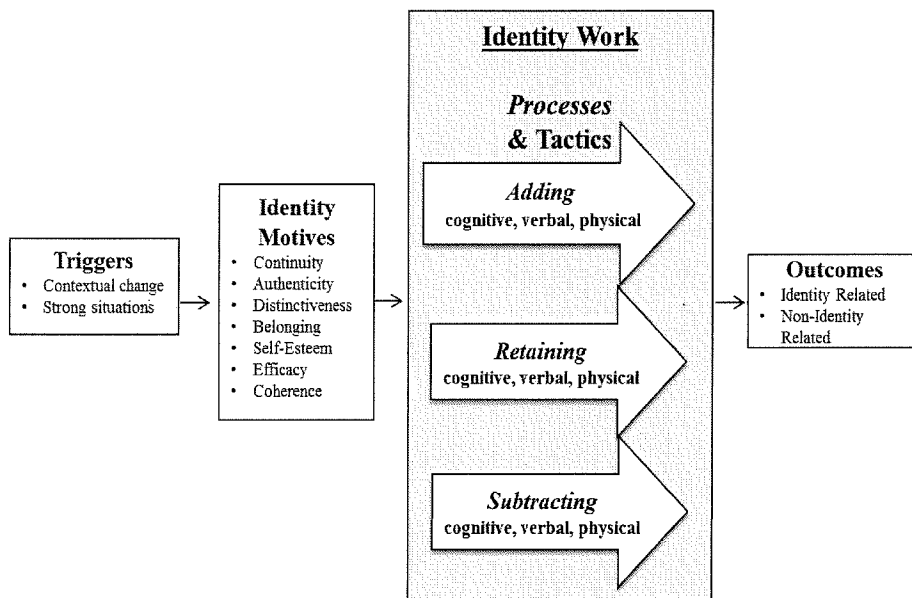


Figure 1. An integrated model of identity work

To explore these themes, and to build a conceptual foundation for theorizing, we performed a broad review that includes multi-disciplinary research on “identity work” and “identity construction” from organizational studies, psychology, and sociology. Our review highlighted several core elements that compose a general model of identity work – motives, triggers, tactics, process, and outcomes (see Figure 1). As noted below, these various elements of identity work represent the *why*, *when*, *what*, and *how* of identity work.²

2.1. Motives

We begin our discussion by focusing on one of our central boxes that addresses the basic question, why does identity work occur? In other words, what drives the activities and processes associated with the construction of identity? We refer to these underlying drivers as *identity motives*. Vignoles and colleagues [18] offer a useful definition and typology to explore these mechanisms. They define identity motives as “pressures toward certain identity states and away from others, which guide the processes of identity construction” [18: 309]. Individuals may or may not be conscious of such motivations, but their existence and salience can often be inferred through predictable behavior. Our review highlighted several core motives for identity work including: continuity, authenticity, distinctiveness, belonging, self-esteem, efficacy, and coherence, and meaning.

While some research focuses on a dominant motive, identity work often involves multiple motives working in tandem or even at odds. For example, Ashforth and Kreiner’s [19] examination of dirty work occupations emphasizes self-esteem as the principal driver of identity construction. Pratt and colleagues [5], however, argue for the interlocking drives for competence (learning how to do one’s tasks) and authenticity (aligning tasks with self-views). Ibarra and Barbulescu [12] focus on motives of authenticity and belonging during macro-role transitions, while Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep [4] consider identity work as the interplay of contrasting motives – namely, distinctiveness

² We do not review place or “where” identity work occurs given its under representation in the literature (cf. Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010) and space constraints.

and belonging. The underlying motives scholars employ derive in part from the theories of identity they use (e.g., self-esteem in social identity theory), but also from the situational characteristics in which identity work is presumed to occur: what we define as triggers.

2.2. Triggers

Scholars assume that identity work is continually driven by these motives, but tend to study situations where identity motives are somehow at odds. As Mercer [20: 43] suggests “identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis.” Put differently, even though scholars examine diverse reasons *why* identity work occurs, they are united in their assumption of *when* it occurs: namely, in situations where identity motives are somehow challenged, problematized, or generally unrealized. For example, Alvesson, Ashcraft, and Thomas [21: 15] suggest that identity work occurs when “the routinized reproduction of a self-identity in a stable setting is discontinued and may be triggered by uncertainty, anxiety, questioning or self-doubt.” Others suggest identity work occurs when it is “problematic” [5: 237] and “is a theme of engagement during crises or transitions” [6: 165].

We consider triggers to be events or situations that problematize – that is, frustrate or leave unfulfilled – one or more identity motives. Triggers are broader than threats [22] in at least two ways. First, triggers can focus on present, as well as potential future events. Second, triggers do not necessarily involve harm or “injury.” Rather, triggers can create a deficit in an identity motive thereby creating the desire to further satisfy or actualize it (cf. [23]). Our review identified two general types of triggers: *contextual change* and *strong situations*. *Contextual change* includes institutional, industry, and work practice change (e.g., [10]), as well as individual transitions (e.g., [3], [12], [5]). In these settings, motives of authenticity and continuity ([24], [25]) tend to come to the fore. Under *strong situations*, individuals’ social environments place demands on motives of authenticity (e.g., [16], [13]), self-esteem [26], and efficacy (e.g., [5]). Strong culture organizations [27], constraining workplaces (e.g., [16], [13]), contexts characterized by deficient resources [14], and “greedy occupations” [4] are all examples of such strong situations.

Although these triggers tend to problematize certain motives, the relationship between triggers and motives is not one-to-one.

2.3. Identity Work

The prior discussion of “why” (motives) and “when” (triggers) takes us to the heart of the concept – to the “what” and “how” of identity work (i.e., tactics and processes). Identity work, by definition, involves some type of “work,” but what this means remains unclear. We look to provide clarity to this issue by arguing that identity construction involves an array of cognitive, verbal, and physical tactics that underlie three general identity-related processes. Separating these components illustrates the diverse and creative actions, means, and processes through which individuals influence their identities.

2.3.1. Tactics

Identity work is about the responses that result when an identity motive is somehow triggered. These responses go by a variety of terms including “activities,” [14] “constructions,” [6], “tactics” ([16], [4]), or “strategies” ([11], [3], [12], [5]). As Kreiner and colleagues [4: 1042] describe, tactics are “stratagems and devices that occurred as more natural responses to identity demands and tensions.” Thus, tactics are the discrete micro-mechanisms that form the “what” or “work” of identity work. Scholars have identified a broad range of tactics including role distancing and merging [4], splinting, enriching, and patching [5]; role-model imitation [3], evaluative tweaking [13], displaying style [16], and rebuilding narratives [26] among others.

These tactics can be grouped into three primary types: verbal, physical, and cognitive (see also [28]). *Verbal tactics* include research on discourse and narratives (e.g., [29], [15], [30], [12], [6], [31], [32]). Fine [11], for instance, examines the rhetorical strategies chefs use to justify their work and identities. Likewise, Snow and Anderson [14] focus on forms of “identity talk” that reinforce the homeless’ sense of belonging. *Physical tactics* include both performances and the use of artifacts. Ibarra [3], for instance, finds that identity work depends upon a trial and error process of observation, experimentation, and reflection. Similarly, Elsbach [16] describes how creative workers affirm

their identities through the work they produce or the artifacts they employ (see also [9], [11]). Finally, we find that some tactics are primarily *cognitive*. Examples include priests creating an identity hierarchy and casting their selves as emblems [4]; and medical residents splinting, enriching, and patching their identities by either adopting and dropping temporary identities, adding nuanced meanings to their professional identities, or combining different professional identities [5]. While we treat each separately, identity work can involve a combination of various tactics. For example, some view identity work as the dynamic interaction of verbal and physical behaviors, as in the case of leader and follower identity construction [33].

2.3.2. Processes

Tactics of all types are posited to serve three basic identity construction processes: adding, retaining, and subtracting.³ To begin, *adding* is the process by which an individual engages in tactics to form, gain, enhance or otherwise take on an identity. This may involve the process of an identity coming into existence within the self-concept. However, individuals can also add to existing identities throughout their lifespan by embellishing, enriching, or expanding their content. Adding identities is a well-studied phenomenon – and is perhaps the most studied of the processes. Examples of adding include research on socialization practices [5], transitions between roles [3], adoption of new logics [10], gaining a leader or follower identity [33], and entering into a community of practice [34].

Identity *retaining*, as the term itself suggests, involves maintaining, strengthening, affirming, or stabilizing an identity. Retaining is therefore primarily about general upkeep – sustaining, bolstering, or continuing to validate an identity. Studies that illustrate this process include the role of illegal work practices in validating preferred identities [9]; male pilots attempting to preserve gendered identities [15]; creative workers attempting to maintain their

³ We view these processes at the level of identity but recognize that facets of identity may be changed as well. Thus, a doctor may revise her identity by adding new knowledge, but still consider herself a doctor.

artistic integrity ([16], [13]); priests affirming their personal identities [4]; and cooks justifying their self-worth [11].

Finally, *subtracting* involves deleting, losing, or eliminating an identity. Although both identity adding and subtracting are often implicit in general processes of change – that is revision or editing – subtracting is often less explicit. Subtracting focuses on some form of loss – how preexisting identities or identity attributes undergo partial or full deletion. Deleting is often the most difficult type of change [35], and is likely done under extreme circumstances, such as when an identity no longer helps an individual to function. Of the three processes, subtraction has received relatively limited attention, though some research has focused on processes of loss in response to bullying [26] or changing the meaning of an identity (e.g., [22]). Pratt and colleagues [5] also discuss how a student identity is both added and then deleted from radiology residents' professional identity.

2.3.3. Outcomes

Identity work is often construed as an ongoing process (e.g., [11], [3], [5], [14]) and scholars have tended to examine this process as an *explanandum* (an process to be explained) rather than *explanans* (explanation to another outcome). To the degree identity work could be construed as its own outcome, scholarship tends to examine cases of “success” – how individuals effectively add, maintain, or subtract an identity. For example, Anteby [9] illustrates how managerial leniencies regarding illegal workplace practices foster workers' desired occupational identities. Pratt and colleagues [5: 235] find that work-identity violations “were resolved through identity customization processes.” Likewise, Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep [4: 1031] describe how priests negotiate an optimal balance between personal and social identities. Less often, however, do scholars examine identity work that in some manner “fails” – where efforts to maintain an identity lead to loss, attempts to add an identity are not realized, or efforts at subtraction result in unwanted continuity.

Additionally, only a few studies use identity work to explain another outcome or process, or position it as intertwined with other processes. This includes research that ties identity work to feelings of professional competence

[5], the form of work products [16], building of social resources [23], the adoption of new institutional logics [10], and, more broadly, role effectiveness [3].

2.3.4. Critique and Summary

In taking stock, several themes emerge that suggest future directions for research. First, our review suggests scholars generally frame their studies of identity work around triggers and the potential identity motives they implicate. Thus, research tends to be centered on the “problem” driving identity work not identity work *itself*. In other words, by focusing on responses to unique triggers, scholars often miss opportunities to build new theory by overlooking similarities and differences between the tactics and processes they uncover, and how these may challenge, revise, or extend current understandings of identity work in related literatures. It is perhaps for this reason that a comparison across identity work processes reveals theoretical duplication. For example, scholars have noted the importance of distancing and embracing roles across multiple studies (e.g., [4], [14], [13]). Given the body of knowledge accumulated, the time is ripe for scholars to examine identity construction processes *across* literatures (e.g., socialization, race and gender, social control).

Second, much of the research frames triggers in negative terms. Little has been done to examine the role of desires, wishes, and aspirations as triggers of identity work and how they may differ from triggers that frustrate identity motives. In a similar vein, research on processes are weighed much more heavily on adding (and possibly retaining) identities than subtracting them. However, as noted, subtraction may be very difficult to do. Third, explanations of identity work tend to downplay emotions. Although cognition seems necessary to identity work, and has been implicated in responses to triggers, in motives, and in processes, additional research is necessary to better understand the role of emotions in the identity construction process. Fourth, because scholars typically examine cases of “success” we fear scholars have too often sampled on the “dependent variable.” As a result, it is somewhat unclear if “failure” involves the absence of certain conditions and processes or presents unique conditions and processes. Finally, scholars can enrich our

understanding by treating identity work as an instigator of, or partner with, other processes (e.g., learning) rather than focusing on it solely as an outcome of other processes. This represents an important next step to further demonstrate the importance of identity work in and around organizations and occupations.

Despite recent interest in professional identity construction, the literature on identity work has lacked a general model. In turn, this has obscured how examination of professionals can enrich our understanding of identity work more generally. To address this, we forwarded a general model to explain why, when, with what, and how identity construction occurs. In the following section we review literature from the professions and speculate about important identity work dynamics professionals currently face. We then consider this review in light of our general model to show how the study of professionals can revise and extend this general model.

3. Identity Work within the Profession: Three Triggers

Although several recent studies of identity work have examined professionals, scholarship could be more fully grounded in the situational realities facing professionals. To address this, we draw upon the professions literature to highlight important, salient, and unique features of identity work in this occupational group. We focus on three situational triggers that seem unique or salient to professional work – deprofessionalization [36], jurisdictional disputes or turf wars (e.g. [37]; [38]), and value displacement [39] – and describe how each is associated with professional identities. In the section following, we examine these phenomena in light of our model to show how investigating these dynamics may extend our understanding of identity work.

3.1. Deprofessionalization

Professionals often define themselves by “what they do” ([5]; [40]). An important feature of this “doing” is the degree of complexity and abstraction of

the work itself [37]. Professionals are viewed as possessing esoteric skills and knowledge – techniques, practices, and schemas that are inherently specialized and difficult to acquire. It is through long periods of socialization that individuals begin to take on both these skills and their accompanying identities as professionals ([1], [5]). Given this, one might expect trends that render skills and knowledge more common, less complex, and less mysterious to be an important trigger or threat to professionals' identities, ultimately propelling identity work forward. *Deprofessionalization* captures this dynamic.

Following Haug [36: 206], we define deprofessionalization as anything that may “undermine professional claims to being the sole repositories of esoteric knowledge useful to society and the individual.” Deprofessionalization, therefore, refers to the various processes – technological, legal, cultural, and the like – that erode professionals' exclusive control of abstract knowledge. To illustrate, information is increasingly plentiful and easy to obtain. Moreover, sophisticated information technologies can easily displace professional expertise in some arenas. Thus, at a basic level, deprofessionalization weakens the very basis upon which professional claims rest.

Deprofessionalization is theorized as an important dynamic in the professions literature (e.g. [41], [36]). For example, Hardley [42] illustrates how the Internet has become a source of health information that can undermine doctors and nurses' professional credibility. Similarly, Barley [43] shows how the introduction of CT scanners diminished the authority of radiologists relative to technicians given technicians' knowledge of the new technology. Taken together, we would expect deprofessionalization to trigger important identity work processes amongst professionals.

3.2. Jurisdictional Disputes

The exclusivity of professional's work is not only determined by its complexity, but also by professional's ability to claim sole control over solving particular social problems. Thus, according to Abbott [37], a defining feature of professional work is the ability to claim jurisdiction – that is, the ability to solely define, diagnose, treat, and make inferences regarding human problems through abstract knowledge. Jurisdiction, however, is zero-sum: “Jurisdiction

is a more-or-less exclusive claim. One professions jurisdiction preempts another's" [37: 34]. As a result, professions can be conceptualized as an interdependent system, where different occupational groups compete [37]. We would expect that because professionals' identities are intimately linked with doing, such disputes likely invoke feelings of challenge or threat [22] to one's identity. *Jurisdictional disputes* capture such challenges to a professional's sphere of influence.

The literature on professions is replete with examples of jurisdictional disputes [44]. For example, Dezalay and Dezalay [45] and Sugarman's [46] portray struggles between lawyers and accountants; Flood [47] describes the tensions between English and US law firms; and Abbott [37] examines professional disputes in law, information, and personal problems. Given the increasingly technical nature of work that organizes work along occupational lines [48], inter-occupational interaction and disputes are likely to increase, making identity work dynamics increasingly commonplace.

3.3. Value Displacement

In addition to being defined by "what they do" professionals can also be defined by "why they do what they do." Indeed, many assume that professionals conduct their work in service of something larger than themselves. Thus, according to some, professionalism has historically been associated with transcending the self in service of something greater rather than self-interested pursuits, such as economic returns or personal satisfaction. As Sullivan [49: 5] argues:

The 'more than that' is the special dedication and clear accountability which, to common sense, distinguishes a profession from other trades and businesses. A profession is by definition 'in business' for the common good as well as for the good of its members, or it is not a profession.

Professional work, therefore, has been described as an "institutionalized vocation" or calling [50]. Empirical studies reflect these sentiments. For example, journalists and genetic scientists cite pro-social concerns as a central justification for their work [51]. Likewise, priests consider their social

identities in terms of a calling [4]. These examples suggest *meaning* is an important identity motive amongst professionals – to perceive one’s work as worthy and servicing something beyond the self ([52], [53]).

At the same time, realizing meaning is increasingly problematic for professionals. These barriers are often thought to result from the encroachment of market-based forces. For example, scholars have noted how the introduction of market concerns into professional work promotes resistance. For example, the literature on institutional logics often conceives of market and professional logics as misaligned and conflicting (e.g., [54], [55]). This is in part because market-based logics tend to promote self-interest and efficiency over public interest and duty. As Sullivan [50: 15] notes, “Perhaps most significantly, professions such as medicine, law, and the academy are still reluctant to embrace the ubiquitous imagery of business and industry, clinging instead to values of institutional mission, and public service.” To illustrate, Turco’s [56] study of Motherhood Inc. found that some professionals actively resisted a commercialization attempt because it failed to resonate with their “professional projects.” These professionals claimed that “... at the heart of MI [Motherhood Inc.] is a mission to really be a resource for women” and “I get to do work I find meaningful” [56: 403]. When Motherhood Inc. attempted to commercialize, these professionals found selling uncomfortable and “exploitive,” ultimately undermining their mission to help mothers. As professionals are increasingly employed by all manner of organizations [57], pressures from market forces and the displacement of prosocial values seem increasingly likely.

4. Revising and Extending Theories of Identity Work

Although scholars are increasingly interested in professional identity construction, they have less often examined the unique or salient identity dynamics facing this occupational group. By bridging literature on the professions with identity work, we highlight three important identity-implicating dynamics or triggers facing professionals:

deprofessionalization, jurisdictional disputes, and value displacement. Such dynamics bring to the fore important questions, as well as empirical settings where identity work may be ripe for further investigation. By emphasizing deprofessionalization, jurisdictional disputes, and value displacement, we hope to have further brought to the fore the *professional* in professional identity work.

At the same time these three examples invite reconsidering and extending general understanding of identity work processes. Together, we believe these profession-centric triggers can enrich understand by: (1) broadening our attention to new motives and triggers; and (2) increasing attention to the relational nature of identity construction. We briefly detail each below. In doing so, we also invoke some analytic generalizability regarding how these processes may play out in similar, but not professional, occupations. Indeed, an understanding of professionals may generalize in light of the rise of protean careers and shifting meanings of work that can lead individuals to define themselves in terms of their work, rather than their organizational memberships [58].

4.1. New Motives and Triggers

As most vividly illustrated with the introduction of market forces, professional identity work can be triggered by a need for meaningfulness. However, we notice that meaningfulness is largely absent from the identity work literature – even research on the identity construction of professionals – while motives such as continuity, distinctiveness, authenticity, and self-esteem have been favored. This is surprising for several reasons. First, meaningfulness has been found to be the single strongest motive for identity construction exceeding self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the like [18]. As noted by Lepisto and Pratt [52], the importance of seeing value in one's work beyond its implications for self-interest is a hallmark of certain conceptualizations of meaningful work. In addition, as an occupation charged with advancing the public good, moral motivations may also be worth exploring. For example, Frye [30] highlights the importance of morality and virtue as motivating factor behind identity constructions. Thus, we argue that meaningfulness and morality may be central

triggers for professional identity work.

We encourage scholars to explore if and how motives such as meaningful work or morality enrich our understanding of the entire professional identity construction process. Such an exploration may suggest a wider array of settings or “triggers” in which identity work occurs. As noted, scholars examine identity work when it is somehow problematic, often in strong situations or during contextual change. A focus on meaningfulness, however, may bring to light the challenges and process of identity work in “weak” settings. For example, Frankl [59] and Baumeister [60] argue that within the domain of work, meaningfulness can be frustrated by an inability to justify the value of one’s work. The problem here is not overbearing or constraining systems of meaning (e.g., cultural codes), but the degree of choice and openness regarding definitions of worth. Thus, highlighting the motive for meaningfulness may suggest moving identity construction models beyond their typical focus of constraint. Taken together, the motive for meaningfulness and morality, and corresponding triggers, are two ways the study of professionals can expand our general understanding of identity construction.

4.2. Relational Nature of Identity Work

Perhaps most significantly, each example highlights the important role of *others* in identity work – whether clients or the general public in the case of deprofessionalization, other professions in the case of jurisdictional disputes, or beneficiaries in the case of meaning. While scholars have long recognized the relational nature of identity, it is rarely the focus of research on identity construction. For example, Pratt and colleagues [5] posit the role of social validation; Ibarra [3] suggests others serve as role-models; Dutton and colleagues [23] explain the ways identity construction promotes social resources; and Wei [13] finds that manager and employees’ identity work tactics are interrelated. However, in these studies, the other is often treated as something akin to a trigger: an exogenous force influencing how an individual engages in identity construction. Perhaps rather than casting the individual as the main focus of analysis, research might be better served by simultaneously examining both the identity holder and his or her audience.

One way to examine this is through the *process* of claiming and granting. This view traces its roots to both the literature on professionals, as well as identity. With regard to the former, Abbott [37: 58] shows that jurisdiction is not a state or structure, but rather an evolving, tenuous, and contested matter involving professional *claimants* and *granting* audiences: “[claims] cannot become recognized jurisdictions without concrete social claims and legitimating responses. Interprofessional competition, that is, takes place before public audiences... [a] process of claim and response.” Thus, a central feature of professional work – developing and maintaining jurisdiction – is not simply a result of claiming, but also responding. Similarly, Ibarra and Petriglieri [61: 11-12] note:

A primary objective of identity work, therefore, is acting and looking the part, so as to be granted the claimed identity...when discrepancies arise between what people “really” feel and the images they feel are obliged to convey as role occupants ([3]; [62]), people also engage in identity work to manage or reduce the discrepancies.

With regard to the latter, the notion of the social other has a long intellectual history in theories of identity ([63], [64], [65]) and more recently identity construction ([8], see also [66]). However, few theorists capitalize on identity work process as truly relational.

Professionals clearly illustrate the power of others in the identity construction process, and as such are an important setting to extend our general understanding. Indeed, this relational nature underlies recent investigations of identity amongst professionals [67]. Professionals, for example, can claim unique knowledge, but such claims need to be legitimized, otherwise deprofessionalization occurs. Similarly, professionals can claim certain jurisdictions as central to their identity, but such claims have to be negotiated within the context of other professionals.

How does explicit recognition of claiming and granting change how we view identity work? We believe it changes the field of inquiry in several fundamental ways. First, it would involve explicit recognition that identity work by professionals is not done in a vacuum, but in the context of customers [67],

other professionals (e.g., [37], [35]), and other stakeholders. This is significant as identity work may be viewed not only as a series of “tactics” involved in claiming, but as a bevy of granting tactics as well. Moreover, these claiming and granting tactics will interact over time, with the potential for claims by the claimant to spark identity work in the granter and vice versa. Consequently, we need to consider triggers and claims not only for the initial claimant, but for the initial granter(s) as well.

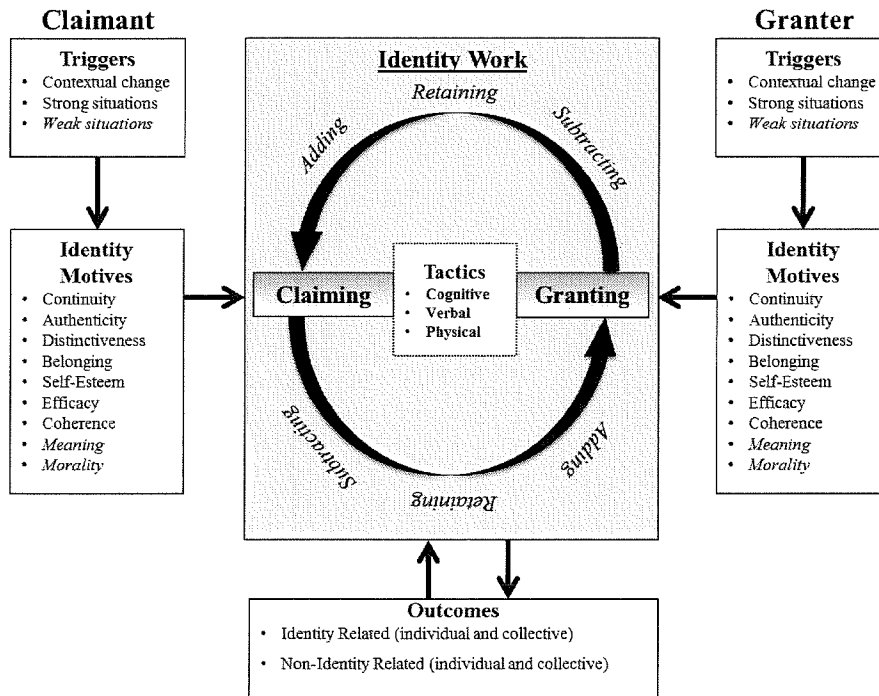


Figure 2. A revised model of identity work: a claiming and granting perspective. *Figure Key: Note that additional triggers and motives are in italics. Additionally, the positioning of processes (e.g. adding, retaining, and subtracting) are illustrative*

Second, to the degree that identity construction becomes an interplay of claims and grants all identity construction may involve identity negotiation. Thus, researchers may need to explore how the processes of adding, subtracting, and retaining occur together in identity work. For example, the advent of “physician extenders” (e.g., nurse practitioners and physician assistants) may

not only cause the loss of some aspects of a physician's identity (i.e., as providers of basic health care), but it may also come with gains (e.g., a move toward a specialist identity, and its associated rise in status, even among primary care and other generalists). In Figure 2, we offer speculations regarding how claiming and granting may unfold in identity work. We model a dyadic relationship of identity work, but such work may involve many entities.

Explicit recognition of identity work as a claiming and granting process also invites new research questions. For example, under what conditions are certain claims more successful than others in terms of being granted? What happens to the identity work partners – as a unit – when a claim is not granted, or when granting audiences are ignored? And given the relational nature of the process, how does claiming and granting influence not only individual “outcomes,” but collective ones as well? In short, the study of professionals holds promise to advance and revise basic understandings of identity work.

5. Conclusions

Despite a long history linking issues of identity and professionals, research has only begun to tap the potential of this connection. Our chapter built from recent momentum to examine this intersection through the lens of identity work. To provide the foundation for this connection, we began by developing an integrated model of identity work. We then drew upon literature from the professions to identify three unique identity-implicating dynamics facing professionals. Finally, we returned to our integrated model to speculate how studying these professional dynamics provide opportunities to extend and recast existing understandings of identity work. Taken together, we hope these efforts strengthen, enrich, and extend our understanding of identity work processes – both within and beyond the professions.

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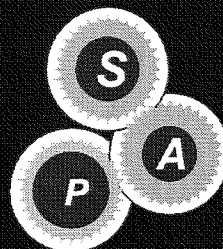
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