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AND THE STRENGTH OF MEMBER IDENTIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

Individuals vary in the degree to which they identify with their employing organization. When members strongly identify with the organization, they often use the attributes which define the organization as a basis for defining themselves. In this paper we propose that members' images of the organization (in particular, the perceived organizational identity and construed organizational image) are powerful forces in shaping how strongly a member identifies with the organization. We describe the antecedents of identification, as well as how strong identification with an organization affects expectations for organizational actions and patterns of social interaction. We then develop a set of theoretical and research implications from our application of social identity theory to understanding how organizational images relate to patterns of individual action in organizations.

I found out today it is a lot easier being a salesman for 3M than for a little jobber no one has ever heard of. When you don't have to waste time justifying your existence, or explaining why you are there, it gives you a certain amount of self-assurance. And, I discovered I came across warmer and friendlier. It made me feel good and enthusiastic to be "somebody" for a change. [quote from a 3M salesman in Garbett, 1988]

A central concern for organizational scholars is the relationship between members and their employing organizations. This paper develops a model of this relationship that describes how organizational members' beliefs about their organization's distinctive, central, and enduring characteristics (perceived organizational identity) and their beliefs about how outsiders view the organization (construed external image) relate to a set of individual members' beliefs and behaviors. We connect perceived organizational identity and construed external image to member outcomes by specifying the determinants of the strength of a member's level of identification with the organization, and how the strength of identification, in turn, affects specific individual-level outcomes. We build our arguments on a core assumption that individuals use their membership in an organization as a social group to develop their own self-concept (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Kramer, 1991; Mael and Ashforth, 1988; Tajfel and Turner, 1985). When an individual member is strongly identified with an organization this cognitive connection is evident in two ways: 1) the identity of an individual as an organizational member is more salient than alternative identities available to an individual at any one point in time; and 2) the content of the member's self-concept (or self-definition) contains attributes that define the member's organization as a social group.

Organizational scholars have explored how an individual's self-concept is shaped and changed by their membership in occupational groups (Van Maanen and Barley, 1984), membership in particular work roles (Super, 1981) and work groups (Alderfer and Smith, 1982; Tsui, Egan and O'Reilly, 1992), and by the salience of work-family roles (Lobel, 1991). Organizational researchers often examine how members' self-definitions are shaped by their knowledge that they are a member of their work organization. While any member's sense of self is tied to the multiple identities that evolve from his or her belonging to multiple groups (e.g., a social group based on race, gender, tenure, Tsui et al. 1992), this paper spotlights how an individual's

membership in a work organization relates to a person's self-concept, and the resulting beliefs and behaviors.

The model of organizational identification presented here is an individual-level model. According to this model, members have beliefs about an organization's identity that are unique to the individual (perceived organizational identity) and these beliefs match, to a greater or lesser degree, a collective organizational identity (members' shared beliefs about what is distinct, central and enduring about their organization). Individual members also have beliefs about the widespread image that outsiders have of the organization as a social group (i.e., construed external image). An individual's construed external image for the organization may differ or mirror how outside publics actually see the organization (i.e., organizational reputation). This paper explores the relationship between organizations and their members that an individual's cognitive connection to an organization as a social group creates.

The paper builds these connections in several ways. First, we describe why it is important to understand how perceived organization identity and construed external image link to members' identification with the organization. Second, we establish the major theoretical assumptions that inform our model of organizational identification. Third, we describe a model of organizational identification that highlights the effects of perceived organizational identity and construed external organizational image. Finally, we describe some of the consequences of different degrees of organizational identification for members. The paper concludes with a discussion of theoretical and research implications.

The Timeliness of a Model of Organizational Identification

An individual's well-being is tied to the fate of an organization. In many organizations, members' career opportunities and potential for individual growth are tied instrumentally to the growth and market success of an organization's products and services. An individual's well-being and behavior are also affected by the attributes that individuals ascribe to themselves and attributes that they believe others infer about them based on their organizational membership. As the opening quote from the 3M salesman illustrates, organizational members can take pride in belonging to an

organization that is associated with characteristics that are socially valued. For example, innovation and success are associated with the 3M organization--attributes that members may want to have ascribed to themselves as individuals (Garbett, 1988). At the same time, organizational membership can confer negative attributes to an individual. In fact, this connection between an individual's sense of self and organizational membership may be most transparent when an organization's actions are controversial and publicly condemned. Consider the following examples as evidence for this connection.

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (the PA) has struggled for the last ten years with what to do about the rising number of homeless persons who frequent their transportation facilities. As the media's coverage about the severity of the homelessness issue and the PA's actions on this issue became more negative over time, depicting the PA as dirty, dangerous, ineffective, and inhumane, individuals working for the PA became concerned. The press's "bashing" of the PA hurt individuals personally by criticizing employees through their organizational affiliation. As PA members construed the organization's external image in negative and socially undesirable terms, they suffered personal indignation and hurt from the inferred outsiders' criticisms. An account told by one PA member about another member's experience at a local cook-out reveals this connection between organizational actions, a negatively construed external image, and members' self-concepts.

> You know, the guy that's running the Lincoln Tunnel doesn't have a full perception of how the PA Bus Terminal or the homeless impact what he does on a day-to-day basis. But the minute he leaves and he goes to a cook-out in his neighborhood and he meets somebody and the person says, 'What do you do for a living' "Oh, I work for Port Authority." They say, "How can you stand that bus terminal? What can you do?" That's the name. That's the symbol of the Port Authority. It's the standard bearer. And you know, so personally everybody that's involved with any aspect of working for the Port Authority is identified with that place, and with that issue. (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991, p. 538).

In this example, and other incidents described in the account of the Port Authority's response to the homelessness issue, there is a very important connection between how members believe outsiders construe the organization and members' sense of who they are as individuals.

Following the Valdez incident, individuals working at Exxon were often put in awkward and unenviable positions because of the reputation that the firm had created in the public's eye, and the transfer of this reputation onto the character of Exxon employees.

> But the targets of the most scorn at the moment are probably oil-company executives. Take the case of Exxon corporation. It was only recently that executives at that company were able to admit their place of employment without the fear of being attacked by environmentalists infuriated by the company's handling of last year's oil spill at Prince William Sound. Slowly but surely, Exxon executives began to reappear at cocktail parties across the country, and occasionally, even had a good time (Fanning, 1990b:25).

Exxon employees experienced the public's view of their organization as a personal threat, thus partially explaining Exxon executives' reluctance to attend cocktail parties. Even employees working at Exxon's Credit Card Center were not exempt from the public's wrath; they received oil-soaked, cut up credit cards from angry customers. "Employees, confronted daily by criticisms of Exxon in the media and by friends and family members, are questioning their faith in the corporate giant." (Star-Ledger, 1989). When individuals identify very strongly with their work organizations such threats are experienced very personally (Schwartz, 1987).

The media is playing an increasingly important and expanded role in creating and disseminating images that shape various publics' impressions of organizations and the individuals who work for them. As media coverage makes information on organizations more public, impressions of organizations and the persons who work for them become part of the currency through which employees' identifications and self-concepts are built or dissolved. As the Exxon employees' example suggests, outsiders actively judge employees by the characteristics contained in the reputation of these employees' work organization. Inside members of the organization react to and interpret these reputations. Members' beliefs about how outsiders characterize the organization capture the concept of the organization's construed external image (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). As noted earlier, these beliefs may or may not accurately reflect the organization's true reputation. When individual members believe outsiders see the organization in a positive light, individuals "bask in the reflected glory" (Cialdini, et al. 1976), and strong

organizational identification may translate into desirable outcomes (e.g., high levels of intra-organizational cooperation or long-term task effort). On the other hand, members' understandings of the external organization's image as unfavorable may lead to negative personal outcomes (e.g., stress, depression), resulting in undesirable organizational outcomes (e.g., increased competition among members, reduced levels of long-term task effort). Over time, members may either disengage from their organizational roles (Kahn, 1990) or exit the organization (Hirshman, 1970).

Proposing a model which describes the antecedents and consequences of levels of organizational identification acknowledges a concern with the symbolic sources of connection between members and their employing organization (Alvesson, 1990). For example, in his model of employee motivation Shamir (1990) argues that an individual's self-concept is particularly potent in psychologically weak as opposed to strong situations (Mischel, 1973), i.e., "when goals are not clearly specified, when means for achieving goals are unclear, and when external rewards are not linked clearly to performance" (p.49). As rewards organizations have to offer their employees become scarce, job functions increasingly blend into one another, and employees are expected to offer more in return for less, organizational situations are becoming "weaker" in Mischel's (1973) terms (Shamir, 1990). As a result, individuals' self-concepts, and the social identities that shape them, are a potent source of employee motivation and behavior.

A discussion of the antecedents of organizational members' level of identification that features perceived organizational identity and construed external image as key constructs is theoretically important. This type of theoretical endeavor straddles the boundaries between micro and macro organizational theories by demonstrating how the concepts of perceived organizational identity and construed external image relate to an individual's self-concept. For macro theorists, organizational identification represents a social psychological mechanism through which an organization affects an individual's self-concept. Social identity theorists claim that their perspective explains how the self-concept mediates the effect of society on an individual (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, 16). Similarly we assert that organizational identification is an important process by which a member's self-concept mediates organizational effects on individuals' behavior. In

addition, we focus on the constructs of perceived organizational identity and construed external image--two organizational images that shape the meaning that an organization gives to its members.

For micro theorists, the strength of organizational identification represents an important psychological state through which an organization affects its members beyond its instrumental links to job design, reward systems or career opportunities. A focus on antecedents to organizational identification exposes a symbolic link between members' beliefs about their organization (the perceived organization's identity and construed external image) and patterns of their behavior.

The Meaning of Strength of Organizational Identification

An individual's self-concept is an interpretive structure or self-theory that mediates how individuals behave and feel in a social context (Gecas, 1982; Markus and Wurf, 1987; Schenkler, 1985). The self-concept refers to "the totality of self-descriptions and self-evaluations subjectively available to an individual" (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, 24). There has been an impressive amount of attention devoted to understanding the formation, change and effects of an individual's self-concept within both psychology and sociology (e.g., Burke, 1950; Demo, 1992; Gecas, 1982; Gorden and Gergen, 1968; Markus and Wurf, 1987; Rosenberg, 1979). A member's level of organizational identification indicates the degree to which his or her membership in an organization is tied to the content of his or her self-concept. When organizational identification is strong, a member has a self-concept that incorporates part of what he or she believes is distinctive, central and enduring about the organization into what he or she believes is distinctive, central and enduring about him or herself.

The degree of organizational identification also reveals the centrality or importance of the organization-based content in one's self-concept. Thus, when the degree of organizational identification is high, the organizational-based content of a member's self-concept is salient or central (Gergen, 1968; Stryker and Serpe, 1982), increasing the availability of this information for interpreting and affecting a member's behavior. Any individual has multiple selves as part of his/her self-concept (Breakwell, 1986; Stryker and Serpe, 1982); however, when the level of

organizational identification is high, organizational membership is a central and oft-used basis for self-definition (Kramer, 1991). For example, in Kunda's account of the "techies" at the organization he called Tech, he describes how members with a strong organizational self used behavioral displays (such as the use of company shorthand, terminology, and clichés) in informal interactions to mark and demonstrate their organization affiliation (Kunda, 1992, 188-192). Such behavioral displays may be one indication that these members' perceived organizational identity is a central part of their self-concept.

The construct of organizational identification has a rich history in organizational behavior. While some researchers have focused on organizational identification as value congruence between a member and his or her organization (e.g., Hall, Schneider and Nygren, 1970; Hall and Schneider, 1972; Lee, 1971), we focus on the cognitive connection between the definition of an organization and the definition an individual applies to him or herself. Thus, our understanding of the construct echoes Brown's (1969) idea that identification involves a process of self-definition, which is conceptually distinct from but related to the idea of behavioral commitment to the organization (Becker, 1960) or continuance commitment (e.g., Meyer, Allen, and Gellatly, 1990). Defining organizational identification in terms of a cognitive linking between the definition of the organization and the definition of self is also consistent with one piece of the attitudinal approaches to commitment (e.g., Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1982; Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian, 1974). Organizational identification means that an individual has accepted the organization's goals and values to the degree that these goals and values are identical to what he/she sees as central, distinctive and enduring about their organization. As part of the commitment process, the level of organizational identification indicates the degree to which "individuals come to see the organization as part of themselves." Thus, organizational identification is one form of psychological attachment that occurs when individuals adopt the defining characteristics of the organization as defining characteristics for themselves. Mael and Ashforth (1988) present a useful review and comparison of the concept of organizational identification and treatments of organizational commitment.

Organizational identification as used here does not necessarily connote a pride in affiliation with the organization -- a characteristic that is central in Kelman's (1958) view of identification, and as used by O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) in their work on identification as a means for psychological attachment. As noted in the beginning of the paper, the discomfort felt by oil executives, or in a different example, the frustration felt by former Drexel Burnham Lambert employees seeking a new job, illustrate that a great degree of organizational identification can result in expressed feelings of shame, disgrace or embarrassment. One article described the painful process that former Drexel Burnham Lambert's employees faced in trying to search for new jobs:

> In fact, sporting the Drexel logo in any form today--particularly on a resume--is like being branded with a scarlet letter...the public scorn has embittered many employees. Most are proud of the work that they did at Drexel. And they are angry and frustrated that their prospective employers are now judging them not by their abilities, but on the reputation of the firm and of former colleagues who have been indicted or are under investigation (Fanning, 1990a, p. 29).

Thus, high levels of organizational identification with an organization can potentially evoke a full range of expressed emotions--ranging from pride, satisfaction and honor, to anger, resentment and sadness.

Several researchers have tried to describe the process by which a member's degree of organizational identification is formed and changed. Borrowing from Tajfel and Turner (1985), Ashforth and Mael (1989), describe the process as one of self-categorization. In this depiction, greater levels of organizational identification occur when members categorize themselves into a social group (the organization), which has distinctive, central, and enduring attributes. Once classified, membership in the organization as a social group provides the individual with a social referent that allows him/her to locate him/herself in the social environment (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) or what Cheney (1983a) calls "linking the self with the social scene" (p. 342).

Organizational identification can also be described in process-like terms. For example, the context-specific adaptation of an individual's self-concept occurs through the operation of three processes: assimilation, accommodation, and evaluation. These process ideas are based on Piaget's theories of individuals' cognitive development and adaptation (Piaget, 1936; Breakwell,

1986), and they describe the way the content and structure of an individual's self-concept are formed and change over time.

Assimilation describes the process by which individuals adapt to their context by incorporating elements from the context into the content and structure of their self-concept. Thus, a person who has strongly identified with an organization is a member who has taken on some of the attributes of the organization and absorbed them into his or her self-conception or self-definition. For example, a computer technician who joins an organization that is distinctive in terms of its customer service orientation may start to see him or herself as a computer technician dedicated to customer service--with the attributes of service orientation added to the already existing content of the computer technician's self-concept.

Once assimilated, this new content or set of attributes tends to change the structure of the self-concept to some degree. Accommodation refers to the adjustment and reorganization of the existing self-concept structure to encompass the new additions (Breakwell, 1986). Organizational identification implies that a member has incorporated the attributes of the organization into his/her working self-concept in such a way that makes the new set of content meaningful or sensible in relationship to the previous content. Thus, when organizational identification occurs, the characteristic of service orientation is related to and integrated with previous elements of the member's self-concept, such as viewing a service orientation to be a facet of technical expertise.

In the final process of identification (called evaluation), an individual judges (often unconsciously), and prioritizes new attributes relative to older attributes, and allocates value to these attributes in accordance with social and personal criteria of worth. Through the process of evaluation, organizational identification implies the "application of meaning and value to identity content new and old" (Breakwell, 1986, p.23). Thus, the computer technician establishes a value for the characteristic of service orientation relative to other characteristics that make up his or her self-concept. Through the process of organizational identification, members modify and evaluate the content of their self-concepts, updating what it means to be a member of a particular organization, and how this meaning updates each individual's sense of who they are. Over time,

this process creates a sense of belongingness that an individual experiences as a member of the social group that is represented by the organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

Obviously, all individuals in an organization do not feel an equal oneness with the organization and differ in their strength of identification. Part of the reason that strength of member identification varies by individuals is due to the images that members have of the organization as a social group to which they belong. For the purposes of this paper, we are interested in how the perceived organizational identity and the construed external image of the organization affect the strength of organizational identification by members, and correspondingly, how identification strength relates to particular individual-level outcomes.

Perceived Organizational Identity, Construed External Image, and Organizational Identification

Perceived organizational identity and construed external image are beliefs that organizational members have about their organization. As mentioned earlier, perceived organizational identity refers to the attributes that insiders believe characterize their organization while what insiders believe outsiders think about their organization defines construed external image. We are treating these two images as important antecedents to organizational identification. Both sets of beliefs contribute to the degree to which individuals identify with the organization as a social group. Figure 1 depicts the proposed relationships between perceived organizational identity, construed external image and strength of organizational identification.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Perceived Organizational Identity

The beliefs that members share as distinctive, central and enduring about their organization define an organization's collective identity (Albert and Whetten, 1985). Perceived organization identity describes a particular individual member's beliefs about what he or she believes are the core attributes of his or her employer's organization. Thus, an organization's collective identity is

the organizational manifestation of the shared perceived organizational identities of individual members.

Several ideas support the claim that organizations possess collective identities. First, it is common practice for organizational leaders to articulate and claim what is distinctive, central and enduring about their organization (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Pfeffer, 1981). Whether or not these claims of distinctiveness are empirically valid (e.g., Martin, Feldman, Hatch and Sitkin, 1983) is less important than the fact that in many organizations, prominent and powerful organizational members engage in communication and influence processes that try to articulate and disseminate these claims so that members as an aggregate may hold a strong collective identity. Second, organizations have a broad repertoire of cultural forms beyond their leader behavior (e.g., rituals, symbols, ceremonies, stories) that encode and reproduce shared patterns of behavior and interpretation in organizations (Allaire and Firsirotu, 1984). Rituals, ceremonies, and stories objectify and communicate the collective organizational identity to organizational members. Members' beliefs about the organization's identity create the collective organizational identity. It is these individual-level beliefs (that are imperfectly related to the organizational-level construct of collective identity) that are of interest for the argument we are developing here.

The characteristics that individuals believe distinguish their organization often remain implicit and tacit until members see the organization's collective identity challenged in some way (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Fiol, 1991; Fiol and Dunbar, 1990), or until some precipitating event (anticipated or unanticipated) calls organizational actions or performance into question (Ginzel, Kramer and Sutton, 1993). A precipitating event can be prompted by a major actions of stakeholders or changes in the organization's environment, e.g., when regulatory changes, resource scarcity or competitive moves create major uncertainties about an organization's future viability. Alternatively, the collective organization's identity may become salient when members believe organizational actions are inconsistent with its collective identity (i.e., a social service agency buying expensive office furniture) or when individual members act in ways that contradict the collective organizational identity (e.g., professors in a teaching college

who consistently miss class). In both cases, organizational or individual actions interrupt the flow of normal organizational routines, prompting individuals to ask, "What is this organization really about?" On these occasions individuals recognize and/or may be motivated to revise their perceived organizational identity. O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) reach a similar conclusion when they assert that the means by which individuals become psychologically attached to an organization "become more salient when members face an organizational crisis (such as the Bhopal Disaster at Union Carbide, or the financial scandal at E. F. Hutton)" (page 498).

Perceived Organizational Identity and Levels of Organizational Identification

The degree to which individuals assimilate, accommodate and evaluate the perceived organizational identity into their self-concept depends on the attractiveness of this identity. Attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity depends on the degree to which it: 1) maintains the continuity of their current self-concept across time and situation (Breakwell, 1986), 2) enhances their feelings of worth and social value (i.e., self-esteem), and 3) is seen as distinctive from other groups and individuals. The bases for these three factors as guides to the level of attractiveness of the perceived organization's identity are elaborated in more detail below.

Continuity in an individual's self-concept and attractiveness of the perceived organization's identity. A member's sense of the organization's core attributes can add to or subtract from the degree of continuity that an individual perceives in his or her self-concept over time and across situations. The amount of similarity between an individual's self-concept and his/her perception of the organizational identity facilitates this continuity; it can ease the assimilation and accommodation of the perceived organization's identity into an individual's view of him or herself. Similarity between an individual's self-concept and perceived organizational identity makes the identity more attractive because being in an organization with these attributes provides easy opportunities for self-expression (Shamir, 1991). Thus, an engineer who sees him or herself as someone who is technically competent is likely to identify strongly with an organization which has a substantive technical orientation. An account of the engineer's experiences at Tech clearly captures this idea. "Similarly, many engineers acknowledge attachment to Tech's technology, which they view as

unique, and through that to the company. Says one: "Once you've worked with Tech products in a Tech environment, it's hard to go to anything else. They adjust so much better. It's an engineer's dream--if he's into technology" (Kunda, 1992, 177).

Individuals find attractive a perceived organizational identity that matches their self-concept also because they can understand it more easily than organizational identity information that is incongruent with a sense of self. Markus and Wurf (1987) document a number of findings about the information processing of self-relevant information that supports this claim: 1) "individuals show a heightened sensitivity to self-relevant information; 2) self-congruent stimuli are efficiently processed; 3) self-relevant stimuli show enhanced recall and recognition; 4) individuals make more confident behavioral predictions, attributions and inferences in self-relevant than in self-irrelevant domains; and 5) individuals are resistant to information that is incongruent with their self-structure" (pp. 316-317). Thus, when members find themselves in organizations that are distinctive on terms that match their own basis for distinctiveness, these attributes are accessible in memory, and are easily used as a basis for self-categorization (Oakes, 1987).

The assertion that the similarity between perceived organization identity and individual's self-concept increases the attractiveness of the perceived organization's identity gains empirical support from a number of sources. Schein and Diamante (1988) found a positive correlation between individuals' personality characteristics (dominance, nurturance and autonomy) and their attractiveness ratings of organizations known for these characteristics. Tom (1971), in a recruiting study, demonstrated that greater continuity or similarity between a member's self-concept and images of organizations determined organizational preferences.

The work of Chatman and her colleagues (Chatman, 1991; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986; O'Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell, 1991) also provides indirect evidence. In one study of new recruits to accounting firms, Chatman (1991) found that a great degree of fit between the pattern of organizational values and members' values predicted member satisfaction and intent to stay with the organization a year later. In addition, an increase in personal-organizational fit over the first year was significantly and positively related to increases in members' satisfaction levels. In two

different empirical contexts, O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) found that individuals who secured an attachment to the organization based on value-congruency (what they called attachment based on internalization) reported high intentions to stay with the organization (Study 1), while levels of internalization negatively correlated with actual turnover patterns (Study 1 and Study 2). Similar results were achieved in a series of studies reported in O'Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell (1991). In all three research papers, the greater the degree of fit between the individual and the organization, the greater the degree of similarity between the perceived organization's identity and an individual's self-concept. In support of the argument being developed in this paper, these results suggest that greater person-organization fit resulted in important attitudinal and behavioral outcomes.

The importance of continuity as a factor in determining the attractiveness of perceived organizational identity and hence, levels of members' organization's identification, suggests one route through which individuals maintain a stable self-concept over time. Because members more easily assimilate, accommodate and evaluate the content of group identities which match their enduring self-concept than those which do not, organizational identification has a self-fulfilling quality to it. That is, individuals will identify strongly with their organization when their prior sense of self resembles what they believe is already central, enduring and distinctive about their organization. Thus, organizational identification has a type of reciprocal, recursive quality to it: members are attracted to organizations, and assimilate organizational qualities easily and quickly into their self-concept if members believe the organization already possesses attributes similar to themselves. For these members, a high level of organizational identification represents a strengthening of self-associations that were already in place before becoming organizational members.

Self-esteem enhancement and attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity. A second major assumption undergirding predictions about levels of organizational identification concerns individuals' desires to maintain a positive self-evaluation (Steele, 1988). Each element of a member's perceived organizational identity has a value attached to it that is based on "social beliefs and values in interaction with previously established personal value codes" (Breakwell,

1986, p. 19). Individuals prefer and seek out positive information about themselves (e.g., Greenwald, 1980; Taylor and Brown, 1988); thus we expect that the attractiveness of a perceived organizational identity is related to the degree to which members see the characteristics of the perceived organizational identity as enhancing their self-esteem. High levels of self-esteem indicate a more favorable self-evaluation (Brockner, 1988). A member's enhanced self-esteem can be based on a heightened sense of competence, power and efficacy or on a sense of virtue or moral worth (Gecas, 1982). Thus, organizations that possess characteristics which individuals interpret as being associated with competence, power, efficacy, virtue or moral worth are attractive, and individuals easily and quickly incorporate these attributes into their own self-concept (increasing the strength of organizational identification).

In addition, individuals who strongly identify with the organization may react negatively when they perceive their self-esteem to be threatened. In the earlier referenced study of the Port Authority of NY and NJ (PA), one-third of the respondents noted that the organization was distinctive in terms of being a first-class, high quality institution. This conception of perceived organizational identity was an important source of self-esteem for Port Authority members (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). As a result, when PA inaction with respect to the homelessness issue raised questions about this basis for the organization's distinctiveness, individuals experienced these questions as directly related to their own self-concept and as threats to a positive evaluation of self. As one facility manager expressed:

> But I've always felt that the Port Authority is...and part of our self-image is, as I put my fingers on it, that we do things a little better than other public agencies. There's a whole psyche that goes with that...and that's why, when there's times like now, when times get tough, people are nervous a bit, because that goes to their self-image, which is that the Port Authority and therefore, we do things first class (Facility Manager).

Organizational beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and the assessment of the attractiveness of perceived organizational identity is based on a member's evaluation of the meaning of the organization for him or herself. As a result, in the same organization, individuals may evidence

very different levels of identification resulting from the different relationships that exist between members' perceived organizational identities and their self-esteem.

Distinctiveness and attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity. A basic premise in theories of social identity is that individuals desire to accentuate their own distinctiveness in interpersonal contexts (Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Turner, 1987). As a result, individuals will find organizations attractive when these identities provide them with a sense of uniqueness relative to other groups. Thus, the salesperson working for 3M may feel that his or her identification with the organization is a basis for distinctiveness in comparison to other salespeople working for organizations without such a clear identity. Kunda (1992) describes how engineers in Tech identified with the organization because of its distinctiveness. Members saw Tech as distinguished from its competitors by its uniquely honest business practices. He relays the experience of one project manager:

> I worked for awhile for a company that was built on those contracts. I worked on the ABM radar. It's not so much that I mind what the products end up doing. No. But all the dishonesty--the excessive costs, the stupidity, the unnecessary work--it really got me down. The norm was: hide the basic specs, follow the letter of the law and produce garbage, then get another contract. Disgusting stuff. Like telling reliability engineers to cook figures. At Tech at least we give customers an honest product. They get what they pay for. Most of the time I feel good about that (p. 177).

Borrowing from social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Turner, 1978; Turner and Oakes, 1986), Ashforth and Mael (1989) assert that "the distinctiveness of the group's (in this case the organization's) values and practices in relation to those of comparable groups increase member's tendency to identify with the organization" (p. 24). Accordingly, Ashforth and Mael (1989) claim that members of new, innovative organizations and organizations pursuing unique goals, should experience strong levels of identification. Individuals in organizations who believe their organization has a unique culture, unique strategy, unique structure or some other configuration of attributes making the organization stand apart from other organizations, are likely to experience strong levels of organizational identification.

When combined, these identifying principles suggest several propositions:

P1: The greater the level of attractiveness of perceived organizational identity, the greater the strength of organizational identification.

P1a: The greater the level of consistency between the attributes members use to define themselves and the attributes used to define the perceived organizational identity, the greater the level of attractiveness of the organization's identity, and the greater the strength of organizational identification.

P1b: The greater the connection between the perceived identity and enhancement of a member's self-esteem, the greater the level of attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity, and the greater the strength of organizational identification.

P1c: The greater the level of distinctiveness of the perceived organization's identity (relative to other organizations), the greater the level of attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity, and the greater the strength of organizational identification.

There is an important reciprocal quality to the relationships described in these propositions. As individuals increasingly define themselves comprehensively and centrally with characteristics that distinguish the organization (e.g., as organizational identification is strengthened), this identity looks increasingly attractive. Thus, just as Ashforth and Mael suggest (1989), one consequence of strong social identification with an organization is a strengthening of its antecedents. This relationship is depicted by the feedback loop in Figure 1 that connects strength of organizational identification with the attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity.

Level of contact with the organization and the attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity. The attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity varies with a member's length of tenure and intensity of exposure to the organization. As members gain tenure in an organization, they increase the level and breadth of exposure to the collective organization's identity, and thereby these attributes in the organization more accessible in memory (Bruner, 1957). Through exposure to the organization by either the passage of time, the conduct of organizational tasks, or intense daily interactions, individuals come to know themselves as members of the organization (Foote, 1953). For members, greater contact with the organization increases an individual's perceptual readiness (Bruner, 1957) to categorize and define oneself as a member of this social group. The longer one is with an organization, the more salient this group

membership is for self-categorization, and the more primary is organizational membership as opposed to other group memberships (Kramer, 1991).

O'Reilly and Chatman's (1986) research provides indirect support for the relationship between levels of contact, attractiveness of the perceived organization's identity, and levels of identification. They found a significant positive correlation between tenure in a university and the degree of pride and ownership that individuals felt with respect to their employing organization. If we assume that pride and ownership in the organization are associated with attractiveness of the perceived identity, results from their studies suggest that intensifying contact of long duration with an organization (as captured in greater tenure) increases the level of attractiveness of the organization's identity, contributing to a greater degree of identification.

Researchers studying the socialization process (Feldman, 1976; Van Maanen, 1975) assert that members of organizations incorporate the meaning of the organization into their self-concept. Over time, individuals are exposed more and more to the totems or symbols that remind them of their union with the organization (Stern, 1988). Through the passage of time, members change their level of inclusion in an organization, moving from the "periphery" of the organization to the "center of things" (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979). Interaction with other members increases an individual's inclusion in an organization. Thus inclusion, as a correlate of intensity and duration of contact with an organization, acts to align an individual with the organization through greater interaction with other organizational members:

> To move along this dimension [of inclusion] is to become accepted by others as a central and working member of the particular organizational segment, and this can normally not be accomplished unless the member-in-transition demonstrates that he or she too shares the same assumptions as others in the setting as to what is organizationally important and what is not (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979, p. 222).

As members experience increasing inclusion and contact with the organization, the attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity increases, resulting in a strengthening of organization identification. As was the case with the previous proposition, rising levels of identification, in turn, motivate members to increase their levels of contact with the organization.

P2: The greater a member's level of contact (in terms of intensity and duration) with an organization, the greater the attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity, and greater the strength of organizational identification.

Construed External Image and Strength of Organizational Identification

The strength of a member's identification with an organization is also affected by how a member thinks outside publics view the organization. While perceived organizational identity represents an internal member's assessment of the organization's character, construed external image refers to an inside member's beliefs about outsiders' perceptions of the organization. Construed external image provides information about the probable social evaluation of the organization and, by association, its members by outsiders (i.e., how do outsiders think of me because of my association with this organization?). Thus, the construed external image acts as a potentially powerful mirror, reflecting back how the organization and the behavior of its members are likely being seen by outsiders. As Cooley (1956) proposed in his original concept of looking-glass self: "each to each a looking glass, reflects the other that doth pass" (p. 184).

There have been multiple uses of the term corporate image in practitioners' and academics' discourse about the topic. Practitioners and consultants use the term "corporate image" to refer to the impression that an organization makes to outsiders and insiders (e.g., Dichter, 1985; Garbett, 1988; Selame and Selame, 1988). Researchers in marketing have used this term extensively and have established that corporate image matters to a firm's customers (e.g., Arora and Cavusgil, 1985; Dowling, 1988). In organizational behavior there have been two distinct usages of the term corporate image. Human resource researchers have studied how the availability of different types of information shapes the attractiveness of an organization's image during recruiting (e.g., Gatewood, Gowan and Lautenschlager, 1993; Schwoerer and Rosen, 1989). Other researchers studying the processes of organizational impression management have described how various tactics of organization image enhancement alter how outside parties view the organization and its actions (e.g., Elsbach, 1993; Elsbach and Sutton, 1991; Grinzel, et al., 1993).

We distinguish between two different uses of the term organizational image: one focusing on the beliefs of outside members, the other focusing on the beliefs of inside members. Organization reputation refers to outsiders' beliefs about what distinguishes an organization; construed external image captures internal members' own assessment of these beliefs (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991).[1] This distinction between reputation and construed external image is important. Insiders and outsiders to an organization have access to different information about the organizations, and apply different values and goals in interpreting this information. Distinguishing between construed external image and reputation possibly allows these two images of the organization to differ from one another.

Sometimes an organization's reputation in the minds of outsiders and insiders' construed external images are closely aligned. For example, when an organization's reputation is widely disseminated through extensive press or media attention, then the organization's reputation in the minds of others is likely to be highly correlated with the construed external image of the organization by insiders. However, most organizations, despite their public media campaigns and the creation of pseudo-events (planned events for the explicit purpose of being reported [Boorstin, 1961]), are unable to align fully outsiders' beliefs about an organization (i.e., reputations) and insiders' readings of these beliefs (i.e., construed external images). Organizational members sometimes have a distorted impression of what others believe (either believing their organization is perceived in a more positive or a more negative light than outsiders see it). For example, Ginzel, et al., (1993) describe how top management at Dow Corning Wright tried to control the reputational damage to their firm that had come about from the continued production and sale of silicon breast implants. As their attempts at impression management with external audiences created new reputational crises (e.g., as a production problem became a problem of organizational integrity and honesty), top management seemed unaware of the degree of reputational damage that had occurred.

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[1] Dutton and Dukerich (1991) used the term organizational image in their original paper to refer to what organizational insiders believe outsiders think is distinctive, central, and enduring about the organization. However, to clarify and distinguish whose beliefs are of interest, we use the term construed external image.

In this case, the construed external image (by top management and perhaps members more generally at Dow Corning) was more positive than the firm's actual reputation. This inconsistency between reputation and construed external image possibly delayed the firm's crisis response, and contributed to the interpretive conflict that top management experienced in trying to manage the firm's reputation in the minds of a broad array of sympathetic and antagonistic audiences (Ginzel, et al., 1993).

The earlier example of Exxon's executives' struggle with social contact at cocktail parties illustrates the power of construed external images of an organization as social reflectors that members use to assess the value of their affiliation with an organization. Where the construed external image of an organization is positive (i.e., members believe the image contains attributes that distinguish the organization in positive socially valued terms), the construed external image increases the strength of individuals' organizational identification. Such a claim assumes that individuals wish to maintain a positive public identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1985) because of the self-gratifying social opportunities that a positive identity creates for individuals (Brown, 1969), the heightened social prestige that a positive public identity confers on individuals (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Chatman, Bell and Staw 1986; Cheney, 1983a, 1983b; March and Simon, 1958; Perrow, 1961), its facilitating effects on social interaction (Foote, 1953), and the social credits and enhanced sense of personal and collective self-esteem that a positive identity creates (Crocker and Luhtanen, 1990; Pierce, Gardner, Cummings and Dunham, 1989). The degree to which the construed external image strengthens the level of member's identification depends on the attractiveness of the construed external image, and the degree to which a member is visibly affiliated with the organization.

Attractiveness of the construed external image. The strength of a member's organizational identification depends on how favorable of an impression a member can create through his or her organizational affiliation. When members construe the external image as attractive--meaning that the members believe that this image contains elements that others are likely to value--then a member's organizational affiliation reflects positively on his/her social identity (Tajfel, 1982). For

example, Vardi, Werner and Poppa (1989) found that members in an organization that produced a product for the military market in Israel more strongly identified with their organization than members in a matched firm, producing a similar product for a commercial market. The firm's positive social role as a manufacturer of products for the military market--a market that is socially valued in Israel--could explain these findings: members working in the first organization viewed the construed external image of the firm as attractive which thereby strengthened their identification.

The construed external organizational image summarizes a member's beliefs about how persons outside of the organization are likely to view the member through his or her organizational affiliation (Rosenberg, 1979). This information has two parts: the substance or descriptive information about what is distinctive about this organization (e.g., this organization is environmentally responsive), and a judgment of the value of these distinctive attributes (environmentally responsiveness is either good or bad). The construed external image provides important information about how others are likely to appraise an individual's character based on that individual's affiliation with the organization (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991).

If a member's conception of the external organizational image is attractive (i.e., the member believes the image contains socially valued attributes), it enhances his/her sense of competence or self-worth. Thus, a member's sense of how outsiders view the technical or financial performance of the organization is likely to affect that individual's competency-based self-esteem (Gecas, 1982). A construed external image that contains socially-valued attributes which infer that outsiders' will view organizational members as competent enhances members' self-esteem by helping individuals believe that they can act efficaciously in their environments (Hall, 1971). Alternatively, members' perceptions of how outsiders view the organization in terms of moral integrity or virtue is likely to be tied to an individual's self-worth or self-esteem based on virtue. For example, Greenberg (1990) has argued that organizations which are construed as "fair" develop members who are more strongly identified with the organization. Given that individuals want to maintain a positive self-concept (Turner, 1978), and where these reflected appraisals allow

an individual to define and evaluate themselves positively, members are motivated to identify strongly with the organization. This assertion leads to the following propositions:

P3a. The greater the attractiveness of an organization's construed external image, the greater the strength of member identification.

P3b. The more positive a member's construed external image (e.g., in terms of moral integrity or competence), the greater the attractiveness of the organization, and the greater the strength of member identification.

<u>Visibility of member's organizational affiliation and degree of organizational identification.</u> Opportunities for individuals to use their organizational membership as a reference point for others to draw conclusions about their character depend upon the level of visibility of their organizational affiliation. If a member is visibly associated with an organization, then outsiders can easily use a member's organizational affiliation to define and interpret the behavior of the organizational member. A member's visible affiliation with an organization (i.e., the visibility of one's organizational membership to outsiders and insiders): 1) directly increases the potency of the organization as a source of self-definition and potentially gratifying or degrading opportunities (Brown, 1969), 2) creates expectations from others about how that member is likely to behave and the types of attitudes the member is likely to hold, and 3) heightens his or her awareness of membership in the organization and the motivation to impress others by managing how others see the organization (Tetlock and Manstead, 1985). Thus, visible affiliation with an organization activates a member's organizational identification through both self-perception and impression management processes.

When a member is visibly affiliated with an organization, self-perception processes heighten the member's awareness of the perceived organizational identity. One's visible affiliation with an organization acts as a type of mirror--reflecting back ideas and evaluations about oneself. It lights up pieces of a member's self that otherwise might not be salient. "Praise, and by implication, criticism of an organization to which I belong may reflect directly or indirectly upon me, depending on how I perceive my relationship with the organization" (Cheney, 1983b:146). When a member's association with an organization is outwardly visible then his/her membership in

the organization as social group is accessible and salient (Turner, 1982). Public organizational roles serve as "vivid reminders" of an organizational membership (Charters and Newcomb, 1952). Thus, visible affiliation with an organization makes very salient an individual's ties to the organization as a social group (Stryker and Serpe, 1982). One's visible affiliation with an organization "increases the frequency of explaining and justifying one's role and standpoint", as it increases the level of role-person merger (Turner, 1978, p. 15) and as applied here, the level of member identification with the organization. One's visible affiliation with an organization activates social cues and "switches on" this particular social identity (Turner, 1982) for both the member and for outsiders to the organization.

The visibility of one's affiliation with an organization is affected by a variety of means including structural position, organizational dress and other behaviors that display or hide a member's organizational affiliation. For example, individuals who are in boundary spanning roles are constantly reminded of their membership in organizations. For boundary spanners, the routine completion of their tasks requires displaying their affiliation with an organization (e.g., introducing themselves as representatives of an organization or speaking on behalf of the organization). Similarly, individuals in leadership positions are often the spokespersons and managers of meaning for insiders and outsiders of the organization (Salancik and Meindl, 1984; Pfeffer, 1981; Staw, McKechnie and Puffer, 1983). Organizational leadership roles make members public spokespeople in terms of displaying and creating an organization's reputation (Gioia and Thomas, 1991). The heightened public affiliation and accountability of leaders for the organization's reputation and performance mean that leaders bear the stigma or the halo created by negative or positive organizational reputations (Sutton and Callahan, 1987). By communicating more often with others about the organization, managers or leaders enhance the degree to which they are visibly affiliated, and the probability that they will strongly identify with the organization (Cheney, 1983a). Structural position in the organization affects the degree to which a member must represent and act on his or her organizational affiliation. Thus, structural position in an organization and organizational roles can amplify or diminish a member's visible affiliation with an

organization, increasing or decreasing the effect of the attractiveness of construed external image on the member's level of organizational identification.

Given a particular structural position, members can use a variety of other tactics to enhance the visibility of their organizational affiliation. For example, the use of uniforms or organizationally specified dress (e.g., the IBM blue pin-stripe suit) is an important vehicle for visibly affiliating an individual with an organization (Rafaeli and Pratt, 1993). Dress, hair styles and other role behaviors (Banton, 1965) are examples of what Turner (1978) calls conspicuous role signs that others use to infer the "self" behind someone's role execution. Cialdini et al., (1976) found that students managed others' impressions of their organizational affiliation by wearing university-related clothing, particularly after successful sports events. If the reputation of an organization is attractive, then the visibility of one's association with an organization helps to increase the achieved status that is obtainable in a social situation (Sarbin and Scheibe, 1983). The preceding arguments lead to two additional propositions.

> P4a: The more a member is in boundary spanning positions or in leadership roles and the more he/she physically displays their organizational affiliation, the greater the visibility of that member's organization affiliation.

> P4b: The greater the visibility of a member's affiliation with an organization, the stronger the relationship between the attractiveness of the construed external image, and the strength of organizational identification.

CONSEQUENCES OF ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

Organizational identification is consequential for individuals' beliefs and behaviors. We will discuss three ways that strength of organizational identification shapes individual beliefs and behaviors. First, we describe more formally how strong identification shapes its antecedents in a manner consistent with Ashforth and Mael's (1989) original proposition. Second, we develop arguments that link strength of identification to expectations about organizational actions. Our final set of consequences focuses on how strength of organizational identification shapes members' social interaction.

Strengthening the Antecedents of Organizational Identification

Individuals who strongly identify with an organization are likely to believe that the organization is producing valued outputs. Self-affirmation processes (Steele, 1988) and self-justification processes (Staw, 1980) indicate that individuals attempt to preserve a sense of integrity and self-worth. These beliefs about the self are sustained by positively evaluating the groups with which one identifies--with the organization being no exception. As mentioned earlier, one consequence of organizational identification is the strengthening of its antecedents. As individuals increase the level of identification with the organization, their beliefs about the organization, and particularly the degree of attractiveness of the organization identity and construed external image are likely to increase. The feedback loops in Figure 1, connecting strength of organizational identification to attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity and the construed external image, depict the effect of organizational identification on its antecedents.

> P5: The greater the strength of organizational identification, the more that member will evaluate the perceived organizational identity as attractive, and the more attractive they believe outsiders will evaluate the organization over time (a more attractive construed external image).

Strong member identification with an organization affects behavior in ways that also strengthen the antecedents of organizational identification. Self-perception and impression management logics help to explain this reinforcing cycle.

Individuals are motivated to maintain consistency between their self-perceptions and behavior (Festinger, 1957). We posit that individuals who strongly identify with an organization will seek more contact with the organization. More contact with the organization, in turn, enhances the sense of stability of one's self-concept. As argued earlier, individuals value and strive to achieve this sense of self-coherence. For example, in Kunda's (1992) account of the behaviors of the strongly identified engineers at Tech, he noted how they worked to increase their contact and submersion in the organization by depicting themselves as Tech members. One memorable example of these efforts was described as the case of Mary:

> Mary is unmarried. Over the desk, where others keep family there is a glossy picture of her at a trade show with colleagues. A row of ribbons and name tags

from various such events are pinned to the wall next to it. Above it is an "I love Tech" bumper sticker. On a shelf there is a golf section with a few trophies. 'Most Improved Golfer' from Golfer's Digest and a Tech trophy. Next to it a color print of a sailing boat with a large Tech logo in the billowing sail. An orderly row of beer bottles, and mugs with a Tech logo, all with their handles facing left (p. 194).

These arguments suggest another proposition that links strength of organizational identification to one of its antecedents.

> P6: The greater the strength of organizational identification, the more a member will seek contact with the organization.

From an impression management point of view, an individual's visible display of connection to a social group facilitates others' predictions about and understanding of his/her behavior. Individuals who strongly identify with an organization feel compelled to behave in ways that are consistent with their perceived organizational identity in order to maintain a stable public image of themselves in the eyes of others. Actions inconsistent with organizational identity can confuse outsiders' impressions of a member--a result that most people wish to avoid, particularly if the perceived organizational identity is positive and socially valued.

Thus, while it is difficult to specify exactly what the behavior will be, this logic does suggest that:

> P7: The greater the strength of organizational identification, the more a member will act in ways that are consistent with the perceived organizational identity.

Expectations About Organizational Actions

Members' assumptions about the organization's identity shapes their expectations about how the organization will probably act in different situations (Turner, 1982). Interpretation of organizational actions is used to discern the organization's identity, and is also one way members assess the integrity and consistency of behavior of the group to which they belong. For example, if organizational members view their employer as a socially responsible, environmentally-sensitive institution, then members may have well-developed expectations about how the organization will react to legal or regulatory changes concerning the environment. These expectations were clearly a

factor in the level of excitement that the members of EC Tech felt when they began to take seriously the company's actions with respect to the environment (Mylonadis, 1991). This company considered itself to be socially responsible as based on the organization's founder's vision and values. Thus, its recognition of "the natural environment" as a strategic issue, and its choice of responding with environmentally-sound actions, affirmed members' sense that social responsibility was central to their beliefs about the organization's collective identity (Mylonadis, 1991). Members of the organization who identified strongly with the organization, had strong expectations that EC Tech would pursue actions in the arena of socially responsible environmental actions. Thus, if members who identify with an organization observe a strong consistency between expected organizational actions (tied to their sense of what is distinctive, central and enduring about the organization) and actual organizational actions, the level of attractiveness of the personal organizational identity is likely to increase, further strengthening a member's level of organizational identification.

However, a different set of responses is likely to occur when members identify strongly with an organization and perceive major inconsistencies between expected and observed organizational actions. There are two kinds of inconsistencies which prompt member actions. One is the situation where the organization acts in a more desirable way than one would expect based on beliefs formed from members' sense of the perceived organizational identity. For example, if an organization which engages in a business that is questionable in terms of its responsibility to the natural environment (e.g., Chemlawn Corp.) opens a new unit that develops and markets new non-hazardous lawn products (Gupta, 1992), these new competitive moves may be inconsistent with members' expectations. On the other hand, a member may see an organization's actions as inconsistent with members' expectations, but in a direction that is the opposite of the one just cited. When an organization does not respond in the direction or with the intensity that a member expects, balance theory (Heider, 1958), self-perception theory (Bem, 1967), and cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), suggest that the member works to resolve this inconsistency in some way (Turner and Oakes, 1986).

There are several different paths individuals can follow to resolve this inconsistency. First, members may choose cognitively to reduce the significance of these inconsistent organizational actions by offering excuses and justifications for the apparent inconsistencies (Bies & Sitkin, 1991). In this case, the imbalance between what members expect the organization to do and their observations of organizational actions is resolved by downplaying or justifying the organization's observed behavior, with no major change in levels of member identification. Thus, when organizations are accused of illegal actions, such as insider trading, members might rationalize to themselves that other organizations also engage in these illegal acts, or that no one was hurt by these actions.

Members display a very different resolution strategy when they revise the perceived organizational identity and re-evaluate the attractiveness of the identity. This revision can occur in one of two possible directions. First, the inconsistency in expected versus observed organizational actions may prompt members to revise beliefs about the perceived organizational identity in a direction that enhances its attractiveness, strengthening levels of member identification. For example, in the study of the Port Authority there was evidence that the radical actions taken by the Port Authority to try to resolve the homelessness problem (e.g., building more drop-in centers than any other agency in the city of New York within the shortest time period) surpassed members' expectations about what the organization would do in response to this vexing strategic issue (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). As one respondent expressed: "I think we are at the cutting edge of what a transportation agency can do with this problem. I think our approach at the Bus Terminal was enlightened and I think it goes with this sort of notion of doing things first class, because what we did was unusual" (Facilities Manager). Members' observations of these organizational actions in light of their expectations compelled them to revise some of their beliefs about what was distinct about their organization, in particular, making the altruistic and first-class identity elements more central. When such a change in the perceived organizational identity occurs increasing the distinctiveness of the personal organizational identity, enhancing its self-esteem potential, or

further aligning the identity with an individual's self-concept, then the attractiveness of the personal organization's identity increases, and organizational identification should get stronger.

Second, the discrepancy between expected and actual organizational actions may also induce members to revise their beliefs about the perceived organizational identity in ways that reduce its attractiveness, and subsequently, the strength of their organizational identification. For example, many members of P & G believe that their organization is distinctive based on its environmental consciousness. For many members, this perceived organizational identity had positive social value, and was accordingly seen as highly attractive. However, when P & G employees learned of the organization's lobbying efforts to stop the distribution of government-sponsored brochures designed to educate consumers about the environment (Swasy, 1991), these actions most likely affected members' assessments of the attractiveness of their perceived organizational identity. Based on this logic, we would predict that to the degree that these actions became common knowledge in the organization, the strength of members' identification with P & G would diminish.

This prediction may explain some of the results of a series of studies by Brockner, Tyler and Cooper-Schneider (1992). These researchers showed that individuals who were more committed to an institution than were others were more negatively affected by perceptions that the institution treated them unfairly. An explanation for social identity theory might state that the individuals who were more organizationally committed had self-definitions that closely matched the organization's salient attributes, and therefore were personally troubled when the organization exhibited unfair actions. Unfair organizational actions implied that individual members were unfair. In an attempt to restore a positive self-concept these individuals reduced their level of attractiveness of the organization, which thereby weakened their subsequent organizational identification and commitment. Both examples suggest that members monitor and use organizational actions to form and modify their perceived organizational identity. These arguments lead to three additional hypotheses:

P8: The greater the strength of a members' organizational identification, the stronger the expectations that the organization will act in identity-consistent ways.

P9: The greater the observed consistency between the way members believe an organization will act and observed actions, the greater the perceived attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity, and the greater the strength of member's organizational identification.

P10: The greater the observed inconsistency between the way members believe an organization will act and observed actions, the greater the change in level of attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity, and consequently, the greater the change in the strength of member's organizational identification.

Patterns of Social Interaction

Strong identification with the organization keeps members attuned to the future viability of the organization. When individuals strongly identify with the organization their sense of survival is tied to the organization's survival. This link has at least two effects. One effect involves interpersonal dynamics: strong identification prompts intense cooperation with organizational members as part of the organizational group. Secondly, members direct additional effort toward tasks that contribute to co-workers and to the organization.

When a member's level of organizational identification is strong, his or her sense of self as an organizational member puts into motion a set of ingroup and outgroup dynamics. While Ashforth and Mael (1989) emphasize how these dynamics play out between units within an organization, they can also explain differences in members' behavior across organizations. In early studies of intergroup discrimination, Tajfel, Flament, Billig and Bundy (1971) designed an experimental situation where subjects were separated into groups by random criteria, and were told only about their group affiliation. Even under this stripped down condition, now known as the minimal group paradigm, subjects discriminated in favor of ingroup members and against outgroup members. Social identification theory explains that the perception of a shared categorical identity creates an ingroup bias, which leads to intragroup cohesion (Kramer, 1991; Turner, 1978). Intragroup cohesion is created through the accentuation of perceived similarities with other group members (Hogg and Abrams, 1988), and through the resulting positive attitudes toward these in-group members (Turner, 1978, p. 28). Strong identification with an organization makes

cooperative behavior toward other organizational members likely because of a heightened sense of in-group (organizational) trust and reciprocity, heightened social attraction toward in-group members and presentation of a favorable image of the organization to self and others (Kramer, 1992). At the same time, increased social identification with a group creates negative attitudes towards outgroup members (e.g., seeing them as less trustworthy, less honest and less cooperative than ingroup members (Brewer, 1979; Brewer and Silver, 1978 as cited in Kramer, 1991).

For organizational members, the salience of various outgroups may depend upon the organization's competitive situation. For example, in a competitive environment, members of competitive firms serve as relevant social comparison referents. In less competitive markets, but in industries dominated by norms of customer service and highly differentiated products, customers may be the salient outgroup members. No matter who the outgroup members are, this logic leads to two additional hypotheses about how organizational identification affects members' behaviors.

> P11: The greater the strength of organizational identification, the greater the level of members' cooperation with other members (ingroup cooperation) of the organization.

> P12: The greater the strength of organizational identification, the greater the level of member's competitive behavior toward persons who are not organizational members.

Along with cooperation between members, other patterns of interaction are also likely to change. As individuals strongly identify with the organization they are likely to focus on tasks benefitting the whole organization rather than in purely self-interested, instrumental tasks.[2] The empirical studies by O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) which show a positive correlation between attachment based on internalization and identification and levels of extra-role behavior indirectly support this assertion. Even though O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) defined and measured the two forms of attachment (identification and internalization) in ways that differ from identification strength, the logic underlying the proposed relationship to extra-role behavior is very similar. As individuals become more psychologically attached to an organization, the nature of their relationship to the organization changes, resulting in systematically different behavioral displays of

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[2]The authors thank the editor for this suggested link.

psychological involvement. We suggest that effort directed toward preserving and improving the organization proceeds naturally from a congruence between self-definition of a member and the organization. While members who are strongly identified with an organization may not have higher motivation levels than other members, the effort that they do expend is likely to be directed differently. Thus we propose:

> P13: The greater the strength of organizational identification, the more that members will direct efforts toward tasks that contribute to the success of the coworkers and the organization as a whole (e.g., spending time helping newcomers, working on organizational goals, long-term projects, providing ideas for achieving).

DISCUSSION

As employees, individuals often categorize themselves as members of a social group called organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). As a psychological entity, the organization shapes the meaning applied to the individual as an organization member. In this paper we assert that images of organizations shape how members define themselves as individuals. When members define themselves with attributes that overlap with the attributes they use to define the organization, they are strongly identified with the organization. Strong identification with an organization is also apparent when the social identity of an organization member is more available and salient than other social identities.

This model of organizational identification adds value to organizational theorizing in several ways. It explains how constructs such as organizational culture and competitive strategy affect member behavior. Assuming an integration view of culture (Meyerson and Martin, 1987), culture can be defined as the set of implicit, often taken-for-granted beliefs, values and norms that characterize an organization (Trice and Beyer, 1993). An organization's corporate strategy can be defined as a shared theory amongst an organization's decision-makers about how to compete effectively in the business in which an organization operates. The organization's culture and its competitive strategy provide the raw material from which members construct a perceived organizational identity. Through stories, rituals, and practices (e.g., strategic planning processes,

benchmarking, competitor analysis) members form beliefs about what is distinctive, enduring and central to their organization. Depending on its level of attractiveness, this perceived organizational identity, in turn, shapes a member's self-concept. We have articulated several principles and conditions that contribute to the attractiveness of the perceived organizational identity. Where the perceived organizational identity is attractive, members strengthen their identification with the organization, resulting in a predictable set of outcomes (e.g., more cooperation with other organizational members, more contact with the organization, more effort-directed toward long-term, organizationally-centered tasks). Thus our model describes one psychological pathway by which organizational culture and competitive strategy link to a member's beliefs and behaviors.

The psychology of social identity theory is powerful and appealing because it implies that members may change their behavior by merely thinking differently about their employing organization. If members believe that the perceived organizational identity has been altered either in content (e.g., in what attributes distinguish this organization) or in its evaluation (making it more or less attractive), their members are likely to modify their behavior. This change in member behavior neither requires interaction with others, altering employees' jobs and rewards, nor changing bosses. Rather, when members simply think of their employing organization differently (by changes in the perceived organizational identity or construed external image), they will behave differently. Thus this model suggests that the images of organizations that insiders have themselves or they believe that others have, contribute to the level and type of cognitive connection that members have with their employing organization. Members who strongly identify with an organization define themselves on organizational terms, with predictable results. They act and believe in ways that tend to strengthen the attractiveness of these images. They act directly on the organization's behalf, and they interact with others in predictable ways.

· At a micro level, this paper suggests that models of the self in organizations must extend beyond social comparison processes to understand the ways that individual know, evaluate and change themselves in response to their membership in social groups. In this paper we have argued that organizational images shape the strength of member identification with the organization. The

perceived organizational identity and the construed external image serve as important cognitive reference points that either connect or disconnect a member from the organization. Where these images are attractive they draw individuals into self-definitions that more closely approximate the group. In this way the images that individuals have of their employing organizations are vital sources of members' self-construction. From this viewpoint, organizations do more than create the "self" of organizational members by providing rewards, punishments, or evaluative information. By providing members with images of the social group to which they belong (in the form of perceived organizational identity and construed external image) organizations provide vital input for members' self-definition.

Some researchers have construed the linkage between organization and members' self-concepts as coercive and potentially dangerous, and as evidence of organizations exerting control and domination over their members' lives (Kunda, 1992; Schwartz, 1987). Alternatively, others may see this linkage as a source of possibility and members' self-rejuvenation. Via this link, organizational membership can be a starting point for individuals to expand, revise and recreate themselves in the context of organizations. Holders of either perspective would agree that a member's self-concept is "not an object that has inherent meaning but is a construct that is given meaning through actors' choices" (Fine, 1993, 199). Thus, an important contribution of our paper is to articulate how individual members construct meaning for themselves by viewing their employing organization in different ways and by anticipating and forming impressions about what outsiders believe about the organization.

The model in this paper contributes to conversations in several literatures in the organizational studies. First, the model offers another application of social identity theory to understanding individual behavior in organizations (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Kramer, 1991; Lobel, 1991). However, we use social identity theory to answer two questions that other researchers have thus far neglected: 1) What is the relationship between members' beliefs about the organizational identity and construed external image and the strength of identification? 2) How does the strength of organizational identification affect what members

believe and do? By addressing these questions we have attempted to add to the model (Ashforth and Mael, 1989) of antecedents and outcomes of social identification with an organization.

A second literature that our model addresses focuses on organizational efforts to create a particular impression. Researchers have looked at organizational impression management in at least three ways. Some research has looked at organizational accounts for success and failure using a traditional attribution theory model (Salancik and Miendl, 1984). Others have empirically examined and conceptually proposed models of how organizations construe actions and events to maintain a positive image in the minds of key stakeholders (Elsbach and Sutton, 1992; Ginzel et al., 1993; Sutton and Kramer, 1990). Other research in this area focuses on content and the effectiveness of organizational image management (Elsbach, 1993). This research all testifies to the effort that organizations and their leaders invest in creating organizational images, and the fact that the substance and form of these images seem to make a difference to outside stakeholders and to their judgments of an organization's legitimacy. What this literature typically ignores, however, is how these images affect organizational insiders--the members who are associated with these images as part of their everyday work behavior. Our paper suggests that researchers interested in social psychology of organizational impression management need to consider how the images created for outsiders shape the experience, attachments and the behaviors of insiders. Our paper also indicates that the images which individuals have about what is enduring, central and distinct about their organization (perceived organizational identity) and how what these members believe outsiders think about their organization (construed external image) are particularly potent images for shaping individual members' self-concepts and behavior. Thus, our framework does not treat all organizational images that have currency in an organization as equal. It singles out perceived organizational identity and construed organizational image as particularly important and worthy of empirical study.

We also address the research literature on commitment and various forms of individual attachment to organizations. Our model emphasizes that cognitive attachment of individual members and their organizations occurs as a predictable part of the social identification process. It

suggests that we can predict the strength of this attachment, in part, by understanding members' beliefs about the organization--what they think distinguishes the organization, and how they think others see it. Perceptions of the distinctiveness of the organizational identity, its continuity with the self-concept and its self-esteem enhancement all make the perceived organizational identity more attractive. Thus, our work adds to research on how early job experiences shape members' psychological attachments to the organization (Chatman, 1991; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). Through our model we encourage other researchers to consider how the construed external organizational image affects the level of "fit" between individuals and their organizations. We further inject the insight of symbolic interactionists into considerations of individual "fit" in organizations. Symbolic interactionists assert that organizational members come to know themselves through the impressions of others, and that these anticipated impressions (the looking glass in Cooley's (1956) classic account) shape the everyday behavior of individuals. This assertion suggests that there are attachment consequences (e.g., either defining oneself more clearly or more distinctly from the organization) of believing that outsiders see the organization in a particular way. Thus, by examining the relationships between construed external image and social identification, we recognize that individual-organizational fit is more than an intrapersonal phenomenon. Members' degree of cognitive attachment (e.g., strength of identification) to the organization is also linked to the anticipated reflected appraisal by others, making the process social and interpersonal as well.

FUTURE RESEARCH

There is much work still to be done which extends the conceptual underpinnings of the model presented in this paper. These extensions can move in several possible directions.

·At a very basic level, the thirteen propositions need to be empirically tested. Testing the propositions requires operationalizing strength of organizational identification. There are at least three possibilities for measuring this variable. Mael and Ashforth (1988) have developed a scale-based measure of strength of organizational identification that is both reliable and empirically

distinguishable from concepts such as organizational commitment and involvement. However, like O'Reilly and Chatman's (1986) operationalization of identification (based on Kelman's (1958) original definition), these scales or factors tap into a broader concept of psychological attachment to an organization than what we intend by organizational identification (involving more than the cognitive connection between a member and their employing organization). The measures used by these researchers include assessments of how individuals feel about the organization (e.g., when someone praises the organization, it feels like a personal compliment). Thus, the researchers working with cognitive-based versions of social identity theory offer three additional means of measuring strength of organizational identification.

One measurement approach has members make judgments about the degree to which various social identities accurately describe them as individuals. So, for example, Hoelter (1981;1985) asked individuals to rate the degree to which various identities described them in his measure of identity salience. Using this procedure, strong organizational identification would be evident when an individual rated their organizational identity highly in its applicability as self-description and other social identities were rated less highly. Thus, in the ideal, strength of organizational identification is measured by the salience of one's social identity as organizational member relative to the salience of other social identities.

The level of an individual's identification with particular groups can also be assessed in a open-ended format known as the "Who are You" (WAY) questionnaire (Kuhn and McPartland, 1954). This measure asks respondents to generate a list of 15 or 20 ways that they would answer the question "Who am I?" Respondents then rate the importance of each to defining themselves. The WAY test has most often been used in lab studies of self-concept or as a pretest to separate respondents into identity groups before administering further measures (e.g., Malanchuck, 1990). To the best of our knowledge this method has not been used to date in organizational research, although in completing this task respondents typically generate categories based on organizational memberships.

Finally, one could assess the level of overlap between characteristics or attributes that a member believes typify him or her as an individual and the characteristics or attributers that typify (or are enduring, central and distinctive) the organization. High levels of overlap indicate strong levels of organizational identification. Whatever the measurement approach taken, future researchers would need to establish the validation of this construct in terms of both convergent and divergent validity.

In addition to effectively operationalizing the variables used in the propositions, future research should consider extending the range of organizational images that may affect member attachments to an organization. In this paper we have considered only members' images of the organization at the present (via perceived organizational identity and construed external image). However, psychologists and organizational researchers provide compelling evidence that future-based images of the organization (what Gioia and Thomas (1991) call the mythical organization, or what Whetten, Lewis and Mischel (1992) call the desired organization image), also shape individual behavior in organizations. The concept of "possible selves" as discussed by Markus and Nurius (1986) provides a rich avenue for exploring how these future images of organizations shape member behavior by affecting the content and evaluation of possible selves. This concept describes individuals' ideas about what they might become and what they are afraid of becoming, and can provide a conceptual link between self-schema and motivations (Markus and Nurius, 1986, 954). Further research would help to clarify how concepts such as organizational mission and organizational vision shape individuals' behavior in organizations through their effect on the strength of organizational identification and other alterations in how individuals think of themselves in an organizational context. Thus, one research question might be: How does the content and process of organizational vision creation affect members' perceived organizational identities, and how do these images in turn, affect individuals' sense of possible selves? And do members' possible selves affect the strength of organizational identification?

The model proposed here suggests numerous opportunities for research in both the macro and micro areas of organization theory. The field of macro organizational theory could benefit

from conceptual development and factors that influence both perceived organizational identity and construed external image for organizational members. For example, recent research has explored how organizations use objects such as art exhibits to create and sustain a particular organizational identity which, in turn, "forges a stronger link between the employee and the organization" (Joy and Baba, 1991, p.15). Their research supports Alvesson's (1990) claim that these symbolic management activities are increasingly important in places (sectors and industries) where the core activities of organizations are ambiguous or complex. Future research should examine how a whole range of organizational variables (e.g., structural and cultural) shape individuals' images of the organization, and how these images in turn, relate to the strength of organizational identification.

Another aspect of our model that may stimulate research in micro organizational behavior concerns how changes in the conditions characterizing an organization alter an individual's strength of identification and the behaviors that result. For example, changes or challenges to members' conceptions of the organization's identity, such as those induced by a change in organization performance, a change in an organization's boundaries, or changes in an organization's competitive strategy, become crucial for understanding members' beliefs and actions. Changes in performance may encourage members to re-evaluate the attractiveness of the organization's identity or construed external image. We propose that the redefinition will have significant psychological and behavioral consequences for individual members. For example, a decline in organizational performance can lower the perceived attractiveness of the organization's construed external image, reducing the level of organizational identification for individual members. Other challenges to perceived organizational identity include changes in what constitutes the organization, such as those which occur through mergers and acquisitions. These competitive moves often alter both the boundaries and the content of a member's perceived personal organizational identity. For example, when the retail discount giant, KMart, bought the upscale and highbrow Borders bookstores, employees' sense of the perceived organizational identity changed, as did the construed external image (Bridgeforth, 1992). Some employees believed that the basis for the distinctiveness of

Borders--its ability to attract "readers with discriminatory tastes" would be compromised by its association with a large discount store (Bridgeforth, 1992, C1). In light of our model we could use this observation to predict that a subset of individuals from Borders would weaken their level of organizational identification, resulting in fewer displays of affiliation, less extra-role behavior, less cooperative behavior with inside members and a host of other outcomes. Alternatively, the model suggests that if the personal organizational identity does change and Borders members spend a large amount of time seeing themselves as part of this changed social group (a KMart Borders), then, over time, members may alter how they see themselves.

Changes in an organization's structure may also affect the strength of member's organizational identification. The organization's structure may create separate and distinct subgroups (such as SBUs), or it may create ties with groups represented by other organizations (such as physicians who work in several networked hospitals). Organizational structures can ease or make more difficult the extent to which members use the perceived identity of the organization to help define their self-concept. The structures make different levels of social identification more salient (e.g., unit or organizational, Kramer, 1991) with attendant effects on the degree to which individuals are likely to define themselves in organizational terms.

We have assumed in this paper that perceived organizational identity and construed external image are critical reference points members use as a basis for self-classification. However, as Kramer (1991) reviewed in a recent paper, there are several social psychological studies showing that individuals are motivated to claim distinctiveness based on their membership in other primary and other relatively smaller groups as well. Thus, an important task for future research will be to determine the contextual conditions that strengthen organizational identification relative to the alternative social identities available to organizational members. For example, it may be that identification with the organization is more prominent when individuals are members of organizations that have a unique status, competitive strategy or culture relative to other organizations that are operating in a particular setting. Thus, future researchers are challenged to

discern how the environmental context of an organization, and the distinctiveness of an organization within this context, shape members' strength of organizational identification.

There are numerous assumptions embedded in the model that require further examination. We have assumed that strength of identification is affected in an equivalent fashion by increases and decreases in organizational attractiveness. However, psychology provides some empirical evidence that self-enhancements are experienced and responded to differently than self-damage (Feather, 1969; Weiner, 1974; Weiner et al., 1971). Thus, another challenge for future research is to assess the equivalence of the relationship between increased and decreased image attractiveness and strength of organizational identification.

All of these research questions require empirical investigation of the stability of organizational identification. A critical goal for future research is to establish the stability of a member's level of identification with an organization. As Markus and Nurius (1986) describe, within social psychology there has been considerable debate about this assumption. For organizational scholars, it would be important to know what conditions alter the strength of organizational identification. Implicitly our model assumes that modifications to an individual's self-concept happen quite frequently and with relative ease. More empirical work with the concept of organizational identification would contribute importantly to this debate.

Since we have provided a relatively limited set of outcomes associated with strong identification with an organization, there seems a need for more research to uncover both the desirable and undesirable outcomes associated with strong organizational identification. For example, Ashforth and Mael (1992) present a study in which they found that strong levels of organizational identification were associated with tyrannical behavior of managers toward their subordinates (e.g., belittling of subordinates, and increased use of non-contingent punishment). Their results are very disturbing and add credence to their warnings and the warnings of others (Schwartz, 1987) that there may be a dark side of organizational identification. Thus, further research should continue their initiative to examine the broader range of behaviors associated with strong organizational identification.

Finally, we must encourage researchers to explore the generalizability of our simple model of organizational identification in different national or societal contexts. Underlying our model is a conceptualization of the self assumes that individuals wish to become "independent from others and to discover and express one's own uniqueness" (Markus and Kitayama, 1991, p. 226). It is this assumption about how an individual's self is organized that undergirds the links that we hypothesize between perceived organizational identity, construed external image, strength of organizational identification and individual-level outcomes. However, such an assumption may be limited in its cultural generalizability. For example, Markus and Kitayama (1991) explain how an alternative view of self--one that is built on the "fundamental connectedness of human beings to each other" (p. 227), and one that is typically associated with non-Western cultures--may elicit very different connections between an organization and individual's beliefs and actions. Thus, an important research agenda for the future is to articulate how an individual's culture and self-system affect the antecedents and outcomes of organizational identification.

Current research and theory on the relationship between individuals and their organizations needs to move beyond a model that emphasizes only the economic transactions between members and their employing organization. A major premise of our paper has been that members' self-definitions are actually linked to their beliefs about what distinguishes the organization (perceived organizational identity) and to how they believe others see the organization (construed external image). The model we have set forth is distinctly cognitive. It emphasizes the fluid relationship between members and their employing organization that members' "read" of these organizational images creates, and the fluidity of self-definitions against the backdrop of changing organizational images. Rather than seeing such fluidity as conceptually or practically problematic, we see it as an important reminder of the lifelong process of self-construction. Our paper reminds researchers to take seriously the role of organizations as vital aspects of the context that gives individuals meaning. We hope our model has moved us one step closer to understanding how this meaning creation process works.

FIGURE 1: Linking Perceived Organization Identity and Construed
External Image to Strength of Organization Identification
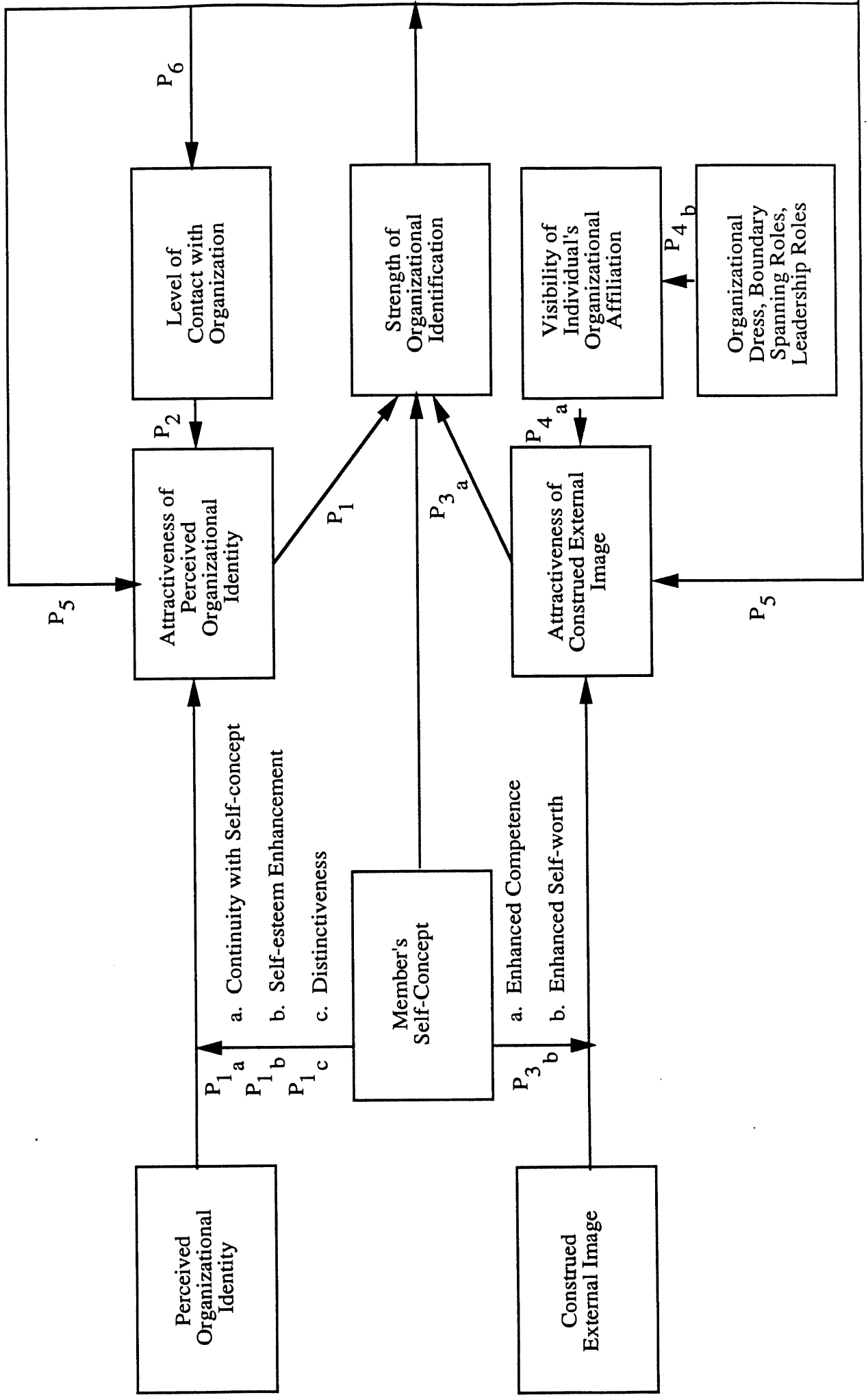
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