Dynamics of Homophily: How Similarity in Enacted Identity Shapes Social Ties*

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September 28, 2023

This is a working paper. The most recent version can be found here.

Abstract

Homophily is a fundamental principle that orders and structures social ties. Existing work conceptualizes homophily as a static phenomenon. In the commonly studied case of gender homophily, for instance, two individuals either share the same gender, or they do not. However, a core insight in the identity literature is that identities are dynamically enacted as a function of social contexts and interactions. Integrating this insight, I maintain that homophily is also a dynamic, contextualized, and interactional process. Building on prior work, I theorize that similarity in enacted identity predicts tie existence and strengthens existing ties. I further deconstruct enacted identity similarity into its intra-relational and extra-relational components. That is, for each pair of individuals, I distinguish between identity enacted within and outside of the purview of their relationship. Under the contextualized view of identity, intra- and extra-relational enacted identities should diverge, and only intra-relational enacted identity similarity should strengthen social ties. Finally, I contend that the effect of intra-relational enacted identity similarity is amplified when enacted in private contexts, as privacy renders the enacted identity more authentic and intimate. By applying word embedding models to a corpus of proprietary Slack communication records, I develop a novel approach to measuring enacted identity and its similarity. Combining this approach with responses from a network survey, I find consistent support for my hypotheses. Together, these findings reconceptualize homophily from a static, unitary phenomenon to an enacted, contexualized process.

*I thank Amir Goldberg, Sameer Srivastava, and Glenn Carroll for invaluable comments and feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. Direct all correspondence to Lara Yang: larayang@stanford.edu

Homophily, the tendency to associate with similar others, is a fundamental principle in social life. It is ubiquitous in the social world, and acts as a rule-like gravitational force that guides interpersonal relationships (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001; DiMaggio and Garip 2012; Leszczensky and Pink 2019; Lawrence and Shah 2020). Homophily can operate along various dimensions and attributes, such as gender, race, attitudes, and experiences (see McPherson et al. 2001 for a review). On a macro scale, homophily shapes important social issues, such as segregation, polarization, and inequality (Ertug, Brennecke, Kovács, and Zou 2022; McPherson et al. 2001). It is particularly consequential in work organizations. Through guiding decisions in hiring, promotion, and everyday interactions, it can lead to segregation, inequality, and affect organizations' ability to reap the performance benefits of diversity (Ertug et al. 2022).

In conceptualizing homophily, past work defines "individuals as similar to the extent that both hold some characteristic or attribute in common" (Lawrence and Shah 2020, p. 523). The majority of work on homophily conceptualizes similarity as the mutual possession of the same categorical identities such as gender, ethnicity, or political ideology. For example, when studying racial homophily, two individuals are deemed racially similar if they are members of the same race, and not racially similar otherwise.

Recent work in homophily has moved beyond binary conceptualizations of similarity. Several papers find that the impact of similarity in ascriptive characteristics is moderated by identity strength, demonstrating that the strength of a given identity magnifies the degree to which similarity in this nominal identity leads to relationship formation (Leszczensky and Pink 2019; Mehra, Kilduff, and Brass 1998; Reagans 2005; Mollica, Gray, and Trevino 2003). Instead of selecting an identity of interest a priori, Ingram (2023) goes one step further to conceptualize similarity as overlap in all self-reported identity elements. He finds that similarity in identity predicts tie formation, and mediates the link between identity multiplicity and the likelihood of professional tie formation.

However, a key assumption in existing work is that identity is a unitary and stable construct. Identity is treated as a self-defining attribute (or a set of such attributes) that manifests in all social exchanges. This assumption is at odds with decades of research on identity in sociology, which views identity as a multifaceted product of intersecting social situations (Callero 2003; Cerulo 1997; Ramarajan 2014; Lahire 2011).

The idea that identity is socially constructed and interactionally enacted traces its origins to the foundational work by Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934), and is later elaborated by

Goffman (1959). This line of work argues that identity is enacted and results from ongoing interactive performances put on for specific audiences in given contexts (Owens, Robinson, and Smith-Lovin 2010; Lahire 2011; Fine 2012; Stets and Burke 2003; Deaux 1993). As identity varies as a function of audience and context, there is no single true self (Ramarajan 2014). Consequently, perceptions of similarity between two individuals should depend on how their identities are situationally enacted through social interactions.

For example, to understand homophily in political ideology, the dominant existing approach would survey individuals on whether they self-identify as Liberals or Conservatives. To assess whether there is homophily in political ideology, one would estimate whether individuals who identify similarly are more likely to form relationships with each other than those who identify differently. Integrating the contextually enacted view of identity, I would argue that whether one's political identity shapes relationships depends on its enactment. In professional settings, for example, political ideology is a sensitive issue. Some individuals may thus never enact their ideological identity, especially if it is believed to be socially undesirable. For others, their political identities can manifest through conversations on world events, new initiatives at work, or explicitly political issues. Moreover, these linguistic manifestations will likely vary in frequency and intensity by individual, context, and interaction. To fully understand how homophily operates, one thus needs to examine similarity in enacted identity.

Accounting for the contextual and dynamic nature of identity requires a measurement approach that can capture identity as it is enacted in everyday interactions. Existing research predominantly uses self-reported surveys, which, by construction, cannot encapsulate how identity is enacted. To overcome this methodological challenge, I draw from recent advances in natural language processing to develop a language-based model of enacted identity.

Combining prior work conceptualizing identity as self-referential meanings with research demonstrating that identity is reflected in pronoun use, I operationalize enacted identity as the semantic meanings associated with the usage of the first-person singular pronoun "I" (Stryker and Burke 2000; Stets and Burke 2003; Mead 1934; Ivanič 1998; Tang and John 1999; Yang, Goldberg, and Srivastava 2023). To represent word meanings, I employ a class of models known as word embedding models that place words in a high-dimensional vector space (Mikolov, Sutskever, Chen, Corrado, and Dean 2013; Pennington, Socher, and Manning 2014). To measure enacted identity for each person, I train a company-wide word embedding model, and then adapt it to the individual level using a finetuning algorithm

(Dingwall and Potts 2018). Subsequently, I operationalize enacted identity similarity between individuals as the semantic similarity between their "I's, quantified as the cosine distance between word embeddings of the words "I." Conceptually, it represents the degree to which two individuals converge on the same set of enacted self-referential meanings.

I apply my language-based model of enacted identity to a corpus of anonymized Slack communications data collected from a non-profit firm based in the United States. In addition, I match these records with personnel data and responses from a roster-based network survey. Using these datasets, I show that enacted identity similarity predicts the existence of a tie, even when controlling for homophily in nominal, ascriptive categories. Conditional on the existence of a tie, I find that enacted identity similarity positively relates to tie strength.

Subsequently, to demonstrate that enacted identity similarity is not simply a linguistic reflection of underlying similarity in static self-definitions, I decompose this measure into its intra-relational and extra-relational components. Namely, for each pair of individuals, I distinguish between identity enacted within the relational context of the dyad, and that which is enacted outside. I demonstrate that these components are only weakly correlated, providing empirical support to the idea that identity is enacted differently across social interactions and relationships. More importantly, I demonstrate that intra-relational enacted identity similarity, but not extra-relational enacted identity similarity, positively predicts strength of ties.

Disentangling intra- and extra-relational enacted identity requires detailed documentation of all social interactions in which individuals are embedded. As the organization from which data is collected operates virtually, most naturally occurring social interactions take place on Slack. Consequently, this organization is the perfect setting for testing my theory.

Finally, I demonstrate that the effect of intra-relational enacted identity similarity is moderated by the extent to which it is enacted in private. As seasoned audience members of others' identity performances, individuals may seek to evaluate the degree of performativity in others' enacted identities. Thus, the effect of intra-relational enacted identity similarity has an especially pronounced effect on tie strength when identity is enacted in more private contexts, where identity enactments are assumed to be more authentic and intimate.

Methodologically, this paper contributes to existing work on identity by developing a new measurement approach that examines enacted identity directly. This measure reflects the multifaceted, contextual nature of identity. It can also reveal facets of identity that people

may be unable or unwilling to express in a survey, an approach that dominates existing work on identity. More importantly, taken together, these findings lend empirical support to the idea that identity is enacted interactionally, and that identity as enacted in social interactions drives homophily. This work thus reconceptualizes homophily from a stable, static phenomenon to a dynamically, contextually enacted process. Static self-referential meanings are thus incomplete operationalizations of homophily.

Enacted Identity Homophily

Homophily operates in a variety of social settings (McPherson et al. 2001). Marriage-based ties demonstrate substantial homophily, especially in terms of race, ethnicity, and religion (McPherson et al. 2001). Friendships in schools also tend to be homophilous, especially along the dimensions of race and gender (Shrum, Cheek Jr, and MacD 1988; Joyner and Kao 2000; Stehlé, Charbonnier, Picard, Cattuto, and Barrat 2013). Furthermore, homophily influences social ties in voluntary associations (McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1987). Although the theory proposed in this paper is generalizable, I specifically examine homophily in work organizations, an especially important context for understanding homophily given that a large proportion of non-kinship ties of adults are formed at work (McPherson et al. 2001). Homophily is consequential for these organizations, as it can lead to both positive outcomes by improving coordination and communication, and negative outcomes by reducing diversity in perspectives and knowledge (Ertug et al. 2022). Homophilous ties at work have also been found to form among many dimensions, such as gender (Ibarra 1992), tenure (Reagans 2005), and nationality (Rhee, Yang, and Yoo 2013).

Amongst the many dimensions along which homophily has been documented, research on homophily in ascriptive characteristics, especially gender and race, has dominated the field (McPherson et al. 2001; Lawrence and Shah 2020). These categories have been shown to structure social relationships across social contexts. The argument for why pervasive homophily exists along these dimensions is that people who share categorical membership tend to also share attitudes, values, and behaviors that are rooted in common language and experiences (Leszczensky and Pink 2019), which lower potential frictions and increase potential rewards in social exchanges. Implicit in these arguments is the influence of identity, as the impact of these categorical memberships on attitudes, values, and behaviors depends on whether they are self-defining (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Stets and Burke 2000). In other

words, the degree to which similarity in nominal categories matters for tie formation should depend on whether these categorizations are central to one's identity.

The role identity plays in homophilous processes has been explicitly articulated and tested. Bringing extant theories of identity into homophily research, several papers demonstrate that similarity in ascriptive categories affects relational outcomes to the extent that individuals identify with them (Leszczensky and Pink 2019; Reagans 2005; Mehra et al. 1998; Mollica et al. 2003). Rather than assuming a priori which nominal identities matter for homophily, Ingram (2023) takes a holistic view of identity by taking into account the unlimited set of possible elements that define individuals and influence their actions. He formalizes the tendency of individuals with similar identities to associate with each other as "identity homophily," and finds that it predicts the formation of new professional ties.

However, the way in which prior work conceptualizes identity belies the complexities of identity as a construct. Existing work implicitly assumes that identity, and by extension similarity, is stable and unitary. For example, Ingram (2023) conceptualizes identity similarity as the degree of overlap in a set of identity elements. To operationalize identity similarity, he asks individuals to write down a list of identity elements that define them, and then measures the degree of semantic distance in these elements between individuals.

This assumption is contrary to extensive work that maintains that identity is rarely fixed; instead, it is enacted as a function of social contexts and interactions (Callero 2003; Cerulo 1997; Ramarajan 2014; Lahire 2011). Erving Goffman's now classic work, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, is foundational to this idea. In his work, Goffman articulates his thesis that the self is a social process that emerges out of social interactions and exchanges (Goffman 1959; Lawler 2015). In his dramaturgical metaphor, identity rises out of the performances one orchestrates. These arguments imply that what leads to identity homophily is not necessarily identity in a vacuum, but its enactment in action. Thus, I henceforth theorize on enacted identity homophily, or the tendency for two individuals with similar enacted identities to associate with one another.

The insight that identity is dynamically enacted in social interactions and contexts adds nuance to how enacted identity homophily may function. Insofar as interactions and contexts vary, the self will not be a singular, unified entity, and instead is multifaceted and contextual (Goffman 1959; Lawler 2015; Cerulo 1997). This idea is the central thesis put forward by Lahire in *The Plural Actor* (2011). As implied by the title, Lahire argues that each person intersects a plurality of identities, each instantiated through interactions.

Integrating these insights, enacted identity homophily should not only consider similarity between two individuals' enacted identity overall, but also take into account the contextual nature of identity enactments.

More concrete examples might help illustrate how my theory departs from existing work. In prior work, if two individuals both self-identify as Liberals, they would be seen as possessing similar identities, and, therefore, more likely to form a strong relationship. My theory, however, argues that whether this similarity predicts tie formation depends on how the Liberal identity is enacted. In work settings, for example, individuals might be less likely to enact their political identities.[1] Depending on the social context within work settings, such as in exchanges with long-time colleagues at intimate social events or when asked to provide feedback on diversity and inclusion programs, one's political identity might more likely be enacted and expressed. My theory would suggest that two individuals are more likely to form a bond only if their Liberal identities are enacted.

Consider the even more complex identity of "woman." While "woman" is a category that people can self-identify with, it is also a social role with a certain set of meanings and behavioral expectations. In professional settings, some women leave this identity behind. Others enact this identity through how they interact with their peers or manage their subordinates. Simultaneously, other women engage in behaviors traditionally associated with masculinity, such as the use of profanities and aggression. This variety of possibilities exemplifies that the identity of a woman is not simply a box someone checks off in a survey, but also an interactional achievement that an actor brings to life.

In line with theoretical arguments underlying existing work, similarity in enacted identity should increase the likelihood that a meaningful social tie exists. Similarly enacted identities promote interpersonal attraction as it provides a common ground and a shared language (Byrne 1961; McPherson et al. 2001). This attraction serves as an incentive for relationships to form. Thus, I form the following expectation:

Hypothesis 1a: *Enacted identity similarity is positively associated with the likelihood of a tie nomination.*

Conditional on the existence of a tie, enacted identity similarity should also predict tie strength. In organizational networks, whether two individuals are connected is often more a

[1] A survey conducted by The Harris Poll shows that 60% American working adults believe that discussing politics at work is unacceptable.

function of task- and role-based constraints than individual preferences (Lincoln and Miller 1979). In these settings, tie strength should be more reflective of individual compatibility and preferences, key to the "choice" in choice homophily. Thus, going forward, I only focus on the relationship between similarity and tie strength.

The relationship between similarity and tie strength is less frequently studied than that between similarity and tie existence. Nevertheless, several studies have shown that similarity in various dimensions is positively related to tie strength (Friedkin 1993; Reagans 2011; Reagans, Argote, and Brooks 2005; Marsden 1988). That tie strength is predicated on the similarity between two actors is also central to Granovetter's strength-of-weak-ties thesis, where he argues that the redundancy that results from strong ties is due to the fact that those who are connected by strong ties, but not weak ties, tend to be more similar to one another (Granovetter 1973).

Enacted identity similarity should strengthen existing ties. Similarity breeds attraction and eases interpersonal communication (Byrne 1961; McPherson et al. 2001). As self-definitions are central to how individuals view and interact with others around them, shared identity is particularly valuable for building strong connections (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Reagans 2005; Ingram 2023). Enacted identity similarity should make it more rewarding for people to communicate and interact, as they are more likely to resonate and emotionally connect with each other. In particular, enacted identity similarity should also facilitate intimate exchanges, as it provides common ground and aids the development of trust over time. These intimate and repeated exchanges are the key to strengthening social bonds (Granovetter 1973). Thus, I predict:

Hypothesis 1b: *Enacted identity similarity is positively associated with tie strength.*

Separating Enacted Identity Similarity into its Intra-Relational and Extra-Relational Components

Key to understanding the contextual nature of identity homophily might be a change in perspective, from that of the researcher to that of the individuals under study. Most studies on homophily conceptualize similarity from the perspective of the researcher, defining it based on whether individuals in the dyadic relationship possess a characteristic in common (Lawrence and Shah 2020). This approach, however, is incomplete in that it leaves out the

perspective of the individuals under study and the self-centric social world in which they are embedded. Adopting this perspective highlights the fact that individuals can only engage with the identities their partners enact in their presence.

When an actor attempts to ascertain, either explicitly or implicitly, how similar her identity is compared to that of her alters, she can only rely on the identity enacted by her alters within her purview. Given the contextual nature of identity enactments, these enacted identities can and likely will diverge from those enacted outside of their purview. In other words, for the individuals under study, their impression of whether their identity is similar to that of another individual is necessarily constrained by the interactional context they share and co-inhabit. The rest of their alters' identity enactments should feature minimally in their perception of identity similarity with their alters.

Thus, I compartmentalize enacted identity similarity into intra-relational and extra-relational enacted identity similarity. I define intra-relational enacted identity similarity between two individuals as similarity between ego's enacted identity and alter's identity enacted in interactional contexts where both individuals are present. I define extra-relational enacted identity similarity between two individuals as similarity between ego's enacted identity and alter's identity enacted in interactional contexts where ego is not present. As such defined, within a given dyad, intra- and extra-relational enacted identity similarity are both asymmetric constructs. This asymmetry traces to the fact that, from the perspective of the ego, she is cognizant of her enacted identity across all social interactions and contexts, but is only aware of her alters' enacted identities within her purview.

Intra-relational enacted identity similarity should be positively associated with tie strength. In order for the benefits of enacted identity similarity to accrue to a relationship, said identity needs to be performed and interactionally achieved. Liking, trust, and intimacy that build from interacting with others with similar identities should hinge on identities enacted within the context of the relationship. On the other hand, extra-relational enacted identity similarity should have a much more subdued influence on tie strength. Under the assumption that identity enactments are varied and multifaceted, identity enacted external to a relationship should diverge from identity enacted within. Alters' extra-relationally enacted identities cease to exist from the perspective of the focal actor, and thus do not factor into her perceptions of similarity or dissimilarity. Thus, I hypothesize that only intra-relational enacted identity similarity contributes to the development of strong ties.

Hypothesis 2: *Intra-relational enacted identity similarity is positively associated with tie*

strength.

This hypothesis differs meaningfully from predictions of extant theories of identity homophily. If identity were stable and unitary as assumed by prior work, there would be no difference between identity enacted within and outside of a relationship. Continuing my earlier example, while prior work predicts that two individuals who both include "Liberal" as an identity element will have a strong tie, I would predict that the strength of their tie depends on whether this identity has been enacted within the confines of their bond.

Privacy of Context Moderates the Effect of Intra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity

While similarity in intra-relational enacted identity should on average positively influence tie strength, this effect is not necessarily universal. The context in which one's identity is enacted should matter for its impact. A core distinction in sociological discourse might be particularly relevant and useful for the analysis here: the public versus private distinction (Bailey 2000; Brewer 2005; Slater 1998; Weintraub and Kumar 1997). Broadly speaking, private refers to "areas of social life which are protected from anything other than personal or domestic gaze" (p.384), separating a domain of experience from what is public and open to surveillance and control (Bailey 2000). Although this distinction is posed as a dichotomy, in reality, what is private and what is not is more ambiguous and often a question of degree (Brewer 2005).

This distinction is particularly illuminating in unpacking when the effect of intra-relational enacted identity similarity is expected to be amplified or muted. Specifically, identities enacted in a relatively private realm should be perceived to be much more authentic, intimate, and convincing than those on display for all. Lay beliefs of identity contrast an authentic identity with a performative identity, with the latter seen as a case of pretension or acting (Lawler 2015). When an enacted identity is perceived as performative or insincere, it is likely to be discounted. In addition, private realms facilitate the development of intimacy (Bailey 2000). Therefore, identities enacted in a private context can more effectively create a sense of trust and intimacy. In other words, identity enactment is viewed as all the more convincing when it occurs privately.[2] This enactment should then have an amplified

[2]Goffman (1959) argues that, when analyzing performances, instead of drawing the line between true

effect on tie strength when it serves as the basis from which intra-relational enacted identity similarity is inferred.

Taken together, I thus predict that the effect of intra-relational enacted identity similarity on tie strength should be moderated by the degree to which alters' identities are enacted privately. In other words:

Hypothesis 3: *The effect of intra-relational enacted identity similarity on tie strength is more positive when such similarity is inferred from private contexts.*

METHODS

Empirical Setting and Data

To test my hypotheses, I employ Slack communication data, personnel records, and self-reported survey data collected from a midsized non-profit organization in North America.[3] The data used in this study span from July 2022 to July 2023. A noteworthy feature of the organization under study is that it has transitioned to full distributed and remote work since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Slack is a popular messaging platform that serves as the primary mode of communication among employees in this organization. Thus, the vast majority of social interactions and exchanges that occurred during the study period are documented in the Slack data used for analysis.

The Slack communications data contains both the meta-data of Slack data (e.g., timestamp and sender ID) as well as the anonymized and de-identified content. To protect employee privacy and organizational confidentiality, I hashed or otherwise transformed raw message content and identifying information about employees. This data is used to measure enacted identity and infer enacted identity similarity, my main independent variable, which will be discussed in detail in the following section. In addition, I also use the frequency of Slack communications as a measure of tie strength in a robustness check. Between July 2021 and July 2022, the dataset contains 7.57 million messages and 148.94 million word tokens in total.

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or false performances, a more analytically useful distinction is between a convincing and an unconvincing performance (Lawler 2015).

[3]This data collection effort is achieved collaboratively by myself as well as several other colleagues as a part of a unrelated research project we have been working on. This paper is indebted to their collaboration in data collection, as well as the gracious support of the organization.

Measures of tie strength come from a network survey conducted in this organization in July 2022. This survey began by asking individuals to nominate alters with whom they have exchanged a meaningful interaction in the last three months. Typically, potential alters in network studies can be elicited using either network rosters (i.e., names of all potential alters are provided) or name generators (i.e., respondents are asked to generate the names of alters). The current network survey uses a network roster method, as past research has demonstrated that name-generator methods can suffer from issues of faulty recall(Agneessens and Labianca 2022).[4]

Subsequently, respondents are shown several questions on the strength and content of the relationships they have with the alters they have previously nominated. However, given the size of this organization (around 1050 full-time employees when the survey was conducted), employees can have a large number of network alters, which renders responding to additional name interpreter questions quite time-consuming and burdensome for respondents. Thus, based on the suggestions presented by Stadel and Stulp (2022), each respondent is asked to provide answers on tie strength for a subset of at most ten randomly selected alters. Tie strength is measured using a closeness scale, based on prior literature that suggests that affective closeness is the best conceptualization of tie strength (Marsden and Campbell 1984).

Finally, personnel records provided by the organization include both sociodemographic variables (i.e., gender and race) and job-relevant characteristics (i.e., tenure and department). These variables allow me to statistically control for endogeneity and structurally-induced homophily as much as possible. In addition, I use these variables to provide empirically estimates of and control for ascriptive homophily.

Tracing Enacted Identity in Language

To test my theory of enacted identity homophily, I need a new approach that can measure enacted identity directly. I propose to do so via language. Language is the primary channel through which identity is enacted and expressed (Howard 2000). Much existing work has

[4]Given the size of the organization, the roster of the whole organization cannot be displayed at once. Specific survey procedures are as follows. Employees are first provided the names of all individuals in their own department from which they can make selections. Then, they are presented with a list of departments and are asked to select all departments with whom they have interacted. They are then presented with a list of individuals in each department and asked to make tie nominations. Finally, employees have the opportunity to include additional colleagues in an open-ended response.

looked at tracking identity using language, either as a metaphor (Stets and Burke 2003; Callero 2003) or as a methodology (Ashokkumar and Pennebaker 2022; Pennebaker 2011; Yang et al. 2023; Snow and Anderson 1987). The symbolic interactionist literature on identity, in particular, contends that language plays a central role in the "construction, negotiation, and communication" (Howard 2000, p. 371) of identity in social interactions.

Inspired by two separate strands of work in sociology, I measure enacted identity through the meanings people associate with their first-person singular pronoun "I." First, sociological work on identity places semantic meaning at the root of its conceptualization (Stets and Burke 2003; Ramarajan 2014; Stryker and Burke 2000). Most notably in Identity Theory, identity is defined as a set of self-referential meanings (Burke and Stets 2009). Separately, other scholars have highlighted that identity inheres in the use of first-person pronouns. In the early twentieth century, Mead (1934) used "I" and "me" as a discursive metaphor for identity. More recently, linguists have underscored the role of first-person pronouns in self-presentation in written texts (Ivanič 1998; Tang and John 1999). Furthermore, Yang et al. (2023) use first-person pronouns as a measure of group identification by tracking the semantic distance between self-identity represented by the first-person singular pronoun "I," and group identity, represented by the first-person plural pronoun, "we." Synthesizing prior research, I contend that enacted identity can be operationalized as the semantic meanings of the pronoun "I." Accordingly, I measure enacted identity similarity between two individuals as the semantic similarity between their first-person singular pronouns.

Compared to existing approaches, this measure has several advantages. The most important advantage is that it explicitly captures identity as dynamically enacted in social contexts, allowing it to vary from one social interaction to another. This approach to measuring similarity also addresses recent critiques of measurement strategies that underlie existing homophily research (Lawrence and Shah 2020). Analyzing language produced by individuals in naturalistic settings provides a way to adopt a person-centric (instead of a researcher-centric) perspective to understanding and measuring homophily, as my measure of identity reflects social cues used by individuals in their everyday interactions when ascertaining the identity of others.

Furthermore, a language-based measure allows me to hone in on the role relational context plays in homophily, which necessitates a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the social interactions in which all individuals are embedded. This is nearly impossible to do with self-reports, as it would require participants to report and describe all of their

social interactions. Digital communications, particularly in virtual organizations, provide a reasonable alternative. By examining the structure of communications data and the content of language use, I can precisely identify the initiators and audience members of all social interactions.

Finally, the analysis of naturalistic archival data is less prone to the social desirability bias that plagues self-reports and can lower the response burden of participants (Donaldson and Grant-Vallone 2002; Paulhus, Vazire, et al. 2007; Goldberg, Srivastava, Manian, Monroe, and Potts 2016). It also scales more easily to many employees and multiple organizations, which can be beneficial in assessing the generalizability of one's theory and findings.

Measuring Enacted Identity Similarity Using Word Embeddings

To measure the meanings people attach to their first-person singular pronouns, I use a class of machine learning models called word embeddings. Word embedding models quantify word meanings by representing each word as a continuous, multidimensional vector (also referred to as a word embedding) (Mikolov et al. 2013; Pennington et al. 2014). These vectors are generated based on the distribution of words. Words that have similar contexts, or similar neighboring words, are positioned close together in the vector space, and words with different contexts are positioned far apart. Distances between word vectors thus correspond to their semantic differences. A common distance metric used to compare vectors is cosine distance, or cosine of the angle between the vectors.

To measure enacted identity similarity between two individuals, I compare the semantic meanings attached to their first-person singular pronouns. Formally, my operationalization of enacted identity similarity between two individuals is the cosine similarity between word embeddings of their respective "I." Intuitively speaking, my proposed measure of enacted identity similarity reflects the degree of convergence in the semantic meaning people attach to their first-person singular pronouns. Compared to using Large Language Models, such as BERT (Devlin, Chang, Lee, and Toutanova 2019) and GPT (Brown, Mann, Ryder, Subbiah, Kaplan, Dhariwal, Neelakantan, Shyam, Sastry, Askell, et al. 2020), which are the state-of-the-art models in linguistic tasks but behave like a black box, this approach is guided by theoretical understandings of identity. In doing so, my approach melds theoretical insight with quantitative rigor.

An additional complication of the operationalization is defining the boundaries of what is intra- and extra-relational. To define intra- and extra-relational enacted identity similarity, I first need to identify which Slack messages are intra- and extra-relational. I do so by identifying the set of Slack channels in which both parties of the dyad are active over the observation window, where active is defined as having sent a message, replied to a message, or reacted to a message at least once. I use "channels" generically to refer to any Slack grouping where a set of individuals is intended to simultaneously receive all messages sent in that grouping, which can include public Slack channels, private Slack channels, and direct messages to one or multiple individuals. I assume that messages sent in any channel in which both parties of the dyad have been active are within the confines of their relationship and that all messages sent outside of these channels are not. The channels in which both are active thus delineate the relational context.

While the boundary of relational context is symmetric (defined based on the channels in which both members of the dyad are active), intra- and extra-relational enacted identity similarity are asymmetric. As discussed previously, this is because the person engaging in identity enactment is aware of the entirety of their enacted identity, but can only assess and interact with other's enacted identity within their purview. As these measures are asymmetric, an ego (henceforth referred to as u) and and alter (henceforth referred to as v) are necessitated. For each directed dyad with members u and v, I define u's intra-relational similarity to v based on the similarity between u's identity enacted in all messages and v's identity enacted in messages v sent in all channels in which u and v are both active. In other words, from the ego's perspective, her intra-relational enacted identity similarity to an alter should be based on the comparison between all her messages and the messages the alter sent within the confines of their relationship.

To compare word embeddings between individuals, one would typically need to train a set of word embeddings for each person on the texts she generates. However, most word embedding models, such as Word2Vec or GloVe, require large amounts of training data to generate high-quality word embedding models. To provide some context, the most compact version of Glove was trained on roughly a billion words (Pennington et al. 2014). The amount of data available per person in most datasets social scientists use, including the one in the current study, is decidedly thin in comparison.

To overcome the issue of small amounts of training data, I follow the word embedding finetuning approach taken by Yang et al. (2023). To develop individual-time-specific

word embeddings and address the dataset size limitations of doing so, Yang et al. (2023) combines the GloVe word embedding model with a retrofitting-based finetuning technique called Mittens (Dingwall and Potts 2018). Specifically, the Mittens algorithm starts with pre-trained GloVe word embeddings and then finetune these embeddings on domain-specific data. In doing so, one can take advantage of high-quality word embeddings trained on thick, domain-free but also incorporate domain-specific information to develop domain-specific word embeddings.

Taken together, six sets of messages and their respective six sets of word embeddings are needed to compute enacted identity similarity, intra-relational enacted identity similarity, and extra-relational enacted identity similarity for each directed dyad. They are: 1) all messages sent by u, 2) all messages sent by v, 3) u's messages intended for v, or messages u sent in channels where u and v are both active members, 4) v's messages intended for u, or messages v sent in channels where u and v are both active members, 5) u's messages not intended for v, or messages u sent in channels where v is not an active member, and 6) v's messages not intended for u, or messsages v sent in channel where u is not an active member.

To train word embeddings on these sets of data, I implement the word embedding procedure as follows. I first train a set of word vectors on the full corpus of Slack data sent by all employees during the study period using the GloVe algorithm, which I will refer to as $W_{company}$ (Pennington et al. 2014).[5,6] Subsequently, I finetune company-wide word embeddings on each of the six sets of data. Respectively, I arrive at six sets of word embeddings, 1) word embeddings of u, W_u, 2) word embeddings of v, W_v, 3) word embeddings of u's messages intended for v, $W_{u\to v}$, 4) word embeddings of v's messages intended for u ,$W_{v\to u}$, 5) word embeddings of u's messages not intended for v, $W_{u\not\to v}$, and lastly, 6) word embeddings of v's messages not intended for u, $W_{v\not\to u}$.

To measure enacted identity similarity, I compare the word vector of "I" in all messages sent by u, referred to as $w_{I,u}$, to the word vector of "I" in all messages sent by v, referred

[5]Given the hashed nature of the message content (each unique word in the entire Slack corpus is converted to a unique 8-bit hash using the MD5 hashing algorithm), I cannot use pre-trained GloVe vectors as those vectors are defined for unhashed English words.

[6]The hyperparameters of the word embedding model I trained is as follows. I chose a window size of 10 and an embedding dimension of 50. 50 is chosen as the embedding dimension given the relative sparsity of the data. Mittens mincount parameter is set to 50. All other GloVe and Mittens hyperparameters are set to the default values.

to as $w_{I,v}$, and calculate the cosine distance between the two vectors. I define u's intra-relational enacted identity similarity to v as the cosine distance between the word vector of "I" in W_u, $w_{I,u}$, and the word vector of "I" in $W_{v \to u}$, referred to as $w_{I,v \to u}$, and vice versa for v. Finally, I operationalize u's extra-relational enacted identity similarity to v as the cosine similarity between $w_{I,u}$ and $w_{I,v \not\to u}$, and vice versa for v.

Figure 1 provides a schematic overview of the word embedding training process.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Variables

Using the directed dyad as the unit of analysis, the key independent variables are enacted identity similarity, intra-relational enacted identity similarity, and extra-relational enacted identity similarity. The main dependent variables of interest are tie nomination and tie strength. Importantly, similarity is computed on texts preceding the collection of the dependent variables. Privacy of context is used as a moderator to test Hypothesis 3. Gender, race, department, tenure, and number of tokens are included as control variables. Gender, race, department, and linguistic similarity are included to control for other forms of homophily.

Dependent Variable

Tie Nomination: The dependent variable used in testing Hypothesis 1a is tie nomination, a binary variable of whether u has nominated v as an alter. Provided a network roster of all possible alters, employees are asked to select names of other employees with whom they have interacted in a meaningful way. Tie nominations are unidirectional.

Tie Strength: The main dependent variable of interest is tie strength, operationalized as a subjective measure of closeness. Closeness is both the most frequently used measure of tie strength in previous work, and the most reliable and valid measure of tie strength available Marsden and Campbell (1984). Employees are asked to indicate how close they are with each named alter using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from really not close (1) to very close (5). As nominations are unidirectional and not necessarily reciprocated, the resulting ties are directed. As such, tie strength is a directed and asymmetrical measure.

Independent Variables

Enacted Identity Similarity: Enacted identity similarity is defined for each dyad symmetrically. For each dyad with members u and v, u's enacted identity similarity to v is defined as the semantic similarity between the word vector of "I" trained on u's messages and the word vector of "I" trained on v's messages. Semantic similarity is operationalized using cosine similarity, a commonly used distance metric for word embeddings.

$$\text{Enacted Identity Similarity}_{u,v} = cossim(w_{I,u}, w_{I,v}) \tag{1}$$

Intra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity: Intra-relational enacted identity similarity is defined for each dyad asymmetrically. For each dyad with members u and v, u's intra-relational enacted identity similarity to v is defined as the semantic similarity between the word vector of "I" trained on v's messages sent to channels where u and v are both active and the word vector of "I" trained on all of u's messages. Semantic similarity is again operationalized using cosine similarity.

$$\text{Intra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity}_{u,v} = cossim(w_{I,u}, w_{I,v \to u}) \tag{2}$$

Extra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity: Extra-relational enacted identity similarity is also defined for each dyad asymmetrically. For each dyad with members u and v, u's extra-relational enacted identity similarity to v is defined as the semantic similarity between the word vector of "I" trained on v's messages sent to channels where u is not an active member (v is definitionally an active member) and the word vector of "I" trained on all of u's messages.

$$\text{Extra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity}_{u,v} = cossim(w_{I,u}, w_{I,v \not\to u}) \tag{3}$$

Moderator

Privacy of Context: This variable measures the degree to which the context of enacted identity similarity is private. This moderator is used to test Hypothesis 3. I proxy privacy of context using a Slack-specific channel-level property. This property specifies whether messages sent in a channel can be browsed by all users of the organization (applies to public channels), or a pre-specified set of users (applies to private channels or direct messages). Specifically, I

operationalize the degree to which Intra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity$_{u,v}$ is private as the proportion of word tokens v sent to u that took place in a private Slack channel or direct message.

Control Variables

I include demographics as controls, as they could simultaneously affect enacted identity similarity and tie strength. Demographic variables included are self-identified gender and ethnicity of both u and v. In addition, I also control for formal department and organizational tenure to account for unobserved heterogeneity across formal subunits and tenure that could affect both enacted identity similarity and tie strength. Tenure is logged given its right-skewed distribution. Finally, as enacted identity similarity is measured using language, I also control for the total number of tokens u and v have sent in the study period. The amount of text one sends could be related both to enacted identity similarity, as it dictates the volume of data available for training word embeddings, and tie strength, as those who send more texts could presumably have stronger relationships. This variable is also log-transformed.

Other Forms of Homophily

To assess whether the effect of enacted identity similarity holds independent of other kinds of homophily, I include several dimensions of homophily in my modeling strategy. First, I include gender and ethnicity similarity as indicators of ascriptive, nominal homophily, both of which could influence relational outcomes. Gender and ethnicity similarity are both dummy variables, taking on the value of one when there is an exact match between the self-identified gender (or ethnicity) of u and v.

Furthermore, I also account for induced homophily via the inclusion of department similarity. Department similarity is a binary variable that takes on the value of one when u and v are in the same department. In this organization, department is quite a granular variable—there are a total of 81 departments of various sizes. The inclusion of department similarity thus leads to a significant reduction in statistical power. However, including this variable is vital to hold constant the effect of induced homophily as much as possible. Individuals in the same department could develop stronger ties with one another given their shared focus (Feld 1981), and share similar identities that influenced their selection into certain departments and roles.

Because enacted identity similarity is inferred from language, one might be concerned that its effect on social ties is driven by the fact that people who interact with one another tend to discuss similar topics and converge in linguistic styles (Kovacs and Kleinbaum 2020). To account for this possibility, I include linguistic similarity as a control. As identity is enacted through language, enacted identity similarity and linguistic similarity are inevitably interlaced. An individual who defines oneself through the lens of masculinity might be more likely to swear or curse. A new immigrant might use more sad and neurotic words due to a sense of displacement and alienation. These linguistic signals reflect a sense of identity, which individuals can match on when forming relationships. Furthermore, empirically, I measure enacted identity through language. Thus, linguistic similarity also reflects similarities in response tendencies. In survey research, this is akin to similarity in baseline survey response preferences (e.g., a tendency to consistently respond neutrally to survey questions).

Although I contend that linguistic similarity is enmeshed with enacted identity similarity theoretically and methodologically, I try to isolate the effect of enacted identity similarity from that of linguistic similarity. I compute a continuous measure of linguistic similarity using the widely established LIWC lexicon (Linguistic Inquiry Word Count) based on prior work on this topic (Kovacs and Kleinbaum 2020; Goldberg et al. 2016; Srivastava, Goldberg, Manian, and Potts 2018; Pennebaker, Francis, and Booth 2001).

Analytical Strategy

I estimate linear regression models of tie strength on the covariates described above. I measure enacted identity similarity using Slack data collected in the one-year period before the collection of survey responses on tie strength to try to account for reverse causality. While this structure can help address some potential endogeneity concerns, I emphasize that model estimates are not definitively causal. As the unit of analysis in these models is the dyad, observations are not independent, as the same individual can appear multiple times in different dyads. This can lead to correlated standard errors in the models. Thus, I correct this issue by simultaneously clustering the standard errors by both ego and alter.

RESULTS

Validation

Although my proposed measure of enacted identity and enacted identity similarity is informed by theoretical understandings of identity, validation of the measure is still needed. I do so in two complementary sets of analyses that together provide some validation to my linguistic measure of identity.

First, I demonstrate that the linguistic measure of enacted identity can predict one's gender and ethnic identity. As a measure of identity, the word embedding of "I" should be able to predict one's self-reported gender and ethnicity. Gender and ethnicity are both important components of one's identity; while gender identity and ethnic identity differ in salience across individuals, on average, they should at least partially inform the construction of one's identity. To test the relationship between my linguistic measure of enacted identity and gender and ethnic identity, I use random forest classification models. Random forest models are especially suitable for this task as they can model flexible, nonlinear relationships between predictors and outcome variables. To correct for data imbalance issues that can bias the results, I use the Balanced Random Forest algorithm.[7] Specifically, I binarized gender identity into Male versus Female and racial identity into White versus Non-White as the outcome variables, and used all 50 dimensions of the word vector of "I" as predictors. With cross-validation, the model predicts gender with an F1 score of 0.71, and race with an F1 score 0.65.[8] These results demonstrate that gender and race identity are encoded in the word embedding of "I" but not perfectly so, which is expected given the variance in the importance of race and gender identity to one's self-definitions across individuals.

In addition, at the dyadic level, I demonstrate that enacted identity similarity is associated with gender and ethnicity similarity. Using Spearman's correlation, I find that enacted identity similarity is correlated with both gender and ethnicity similarity at $\rho = 0.093$ ($p < 0.001$) and $\rho = 0.073$ ($p < 0.001$), respectively. To provide a baseline for comparison, I also selected the top ten most frequently used function words to test how similarity in the word vectors of these function words relates to gender and ethnicity similarity. Function words are selected as these words are as frequently used as first-person singular pronouns but

[7] This algorithm was implemented in Python. See source package here.

[8] As a baseline, a random forest model predicting 1 randomly on a balanced dataset would generate a F1 score of 0.5.

are assumed to not carry any identity-relevant information. See Figure 2 for a correlation matrix between linguistic similarity of various words and sociodemographic similarity. As shown in this correlation matrix, similarity in "I" has a significant and positive association with gender and ethnic similarity. Similarity in function words, on the other hand, is weakly correlated with gender and ethnic similarity at best.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Qualitative Analyses of the Word Embedding of "I"

In this section, I provide some qualitative understanding of the measure by unpacking the dimensions of the word embedding of "I." Dimensions of word embeddings are generally difficult to interpret; their positions are meaningful relative to one another but are not inherently meaningful in an absolute sense. Fortunately, recent advances have sought to overcome these issues and open up the black-box of word embedding models.

I employ a model called SPINE, or SParse Interpretable Neural Embeddings, (Subramanian, Pruthi, Jhamtani, Berg-Kirkpatrick, and Hovy 2018), which uses denoising k-sparse autoencoders to generate interpretable word embeddings from dense word embeddings like Word2Vec and GloVe. Using this method, one can investigate the top words from dimensions in which a given word is most active to get a sense of the different dimensions of meanings of this word. In Figure 3 below, I list some of the top dimensions in which "I" is most active and the top words associated with these dimensions. I labeled these dimensions with my interpretation of what each of these dimensions reflects for the readers' ease of understanding. Through this procedure, one can visually examine some of the dimensions encoded by the word embedding of "I."

An interesting dimension that emerged from this analysis is one that I am labeling as "Race and Racism." Words from this dimension seem to suggest that, in this organization, employees' racial identity is front and center in how they define themselves. But in addition, this dimension also encodes a salient antiracist identity. That is, embedded in how people think about and express themselves in this organization is both their racial identity as well as their stance towards racial issues. This dimension highlights why enacted identity homophily is an important construct. If one were to use existing categorical approaches to measuring homophily, antiracism is hardly a category one would come up with a priori. Furthermore, these words suggest that one's identity as an antiracist is enacted through

discussing matters like systemic racism and anti-Asian attacks, highlighting the significance of identity enactment.

Other dimensions that this analysis highlights include a family-role dimension, a social-orientation dimension, and a place-based dimension. Some of these dimensions have been discussed in prior work as important dimensions of homophily (Lois and Becker 2023), while others are more ambiguous and amorphous. Collectively, these dimensions demonstrate the all-encompassing nature of identity and the abductive nature of this approach, as different forms of interpersonal similarity can all emerge in that of enacted identity similarity.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Main Results

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics for key variables of interest. Table 2 reports Spearman's rank correlations among the main variables of interest. The correlation between intra-relational and extra-relational enacted identity similarity is quite weak, at $\rho = 0.162$. This suggests significant contextual variation in how individuals enact their identities, providing support for the interactional and contextual view of identity and highlighting the importance of studying enacted identity homophily.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The results of Hypothesis 1a are reported in Table 3. All models are logistic regression models, with coefficients exponentiated and standard errors clustered by both the ego (nominator) and the alter (nominee). In Model 1, I include only the key variable of interest, enacted identity similarity. In Model 2, I then add all individual-level control variables, including sociodemographic variables (gender and ethnicity), job characteristics (department and tenure), and linguistic control (logged number of tokens). In Model 3, I then add in ascriptive homophily, same gender and same ethnicity. Model 4 then adds in same department to control for structurally induced homophily. Finally, I add linguistic similarity in Model 5 to control for similarity in linguistic styles. Across all models, enacted identity similarity positively and significantly predicts tie nominations. A one-standard-deviation increase in

enacted identity similarity leads to a 17% increase in the likelihood that ego will nominate alter as a meaningful interaction partner, holding constant similarities in gender, ethnicity, department, and language.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Hypothesis 1b is tested in Table 4 with linear regression models. Control variables are entered in the same order as Table 3. In Models 1 to 4, enacted identity similarity is positively and significantly related to tie strength. H1b is consistently supported, except when including linguistic similarity as a control in Model 5. As discussed above, this is perhaps unsurprising as there are reasons to expect that enacted identity similarity and linguistic similarity are correlated.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Table 5 reports the models that test Hypothesis 2. Model 1 includes the key variable of interest, intra-relational enacted identity similarity, and all the control variables that are previously included in Model 5 of Table 4. Model 2 is set up in a similar fashion, replacing intra-relational enacted identity similarity with extra-relational enacted identity similarity as the key variable of interest. Finally, Model 3 includes both intra-relational and extra-relational enacted identity similarity alongside the controls. In all models, intra-relational enacted identity similarity is positively and significantly associated with tie closeness, providing consistent support for H2. A one-standard-deviation-increase in intra-relational enacted identity similarity is associated with a 0.219 standard-deviation increase in tie closeness ($p < 0.001$).

Note that linguistic similarity is included as a control in all models in Table 5. The fact that intra-relational enacted identity similarity predicts tie strength even when controlling for linguistic similarity, when enacted identity similarity does not, highlights the importance of accounting for the contextual and interactional nature of homophily.

Across these models, there does not appear to be a statistically significant relationship between extra-relational enacted identity similarity and tie closeness, lending additional credence to the idea that identity is contextually enacted. If identity were instead fixed as assumed in prior homophily research, we would anticipate that whether enacted identity occurs within or outside the confines of a given relationship should not change its effect on tie strength.

[TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

Finally, models in Table 6 test Hypothesis 3 and examine how the effect of intra-relational enacted identity similarity varies as a function of the degree to which the context of one's identity enactment is private. These tables demonstrate that the effect of intra-relational enacted identity similarity is amplified by the privacy of the context, lending support to Hypothesis 3. The interaction term between intra-relational enacted identity similarity and privacy of context, operationalized as the proportion of tokens sent in a private channel, is positive and significant across all four models. A one-standard-deviation increase in the proportion of private tokens increases the effect of intra-relational enacted identity similarity by 0.089 standard deviations ($p < 0.001$).

[TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE]

Robustness Checks

I assess the robustness of my findings by replicating them using a different measure of tie strength. While tie closeness has been shown to be the best measure of tie strength, tie frequency and tie duration are also commonly used measures of tie strength (Friedkin 1993; Reagans 2005). In particular, these measures reflect time spent in relationship, and thus capture different aspects of tie strength than does tie closeness. Thus, I rerun all the analyses in Tables 4, 5 and 6 and use the number of Slack direct messages ego sent to alter during the study period as the dependent variable.[9] This measure is log-transformed given the right-skewed distribution of the variable.

As shown in Tables 7, 8, and 9, my results are robust to this alternate tie strength specification. The patterns in these tables are quite similar to those in the main analyses. This is remarkable given that these two tie strength measures are based on completely different forums of data (self-reported survey versus archival data) and types of response (Likert scale ratings versus count of naturally exchanged messages). These measures are correlated at $\rho = 0.52$ ($p < 0.001$), which is neither trivially small nor significantly collinear, pointing to substantial divergence in what these two measures of tie strength capture. Taken

[9]The number of direct messages is used as it is difficult to infer to whom messages are sent in public and private channels. In analyses carried out in a different study, I found that direct message ties most strongly correspond to subjectively nominated ties in the network survey, lending support to the idea that direct message ties are most meaningful and substantive.

together, these tables demonstrate the consistency of my findings and provide additional support for Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3.

[TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE]

[TABLE 8 ABOUT HERE]

[TABLE 9 ABOUT HERE]

DISCUSSION

Synthesizing extant research on homophily and identity, this paper advances a contextual and dynamic theory of homophily. I first formalize an argument of how similarity in enacted identity predicts tie nomination and tie strength. Integrating the contention that identity is contextually enacted, I argue that enacted identity similarity should also vary by context, and only intra-relational enacted identity similarity should strengthen relationships. Lastly, I further hypothesize that the impact of intra-relational enacted identity similarity on tie strength is moderated by the extent to which it is enacted privately.

Adapting existing natural language processing techniques, I measure enacted identity similarity by comparing the semantic meanings people attach to their first-person singular pronoun "I." I apply this measure to digital trace data, collected from a midsized American organization. Combined with responses from a network roster survey, I find support for my theory.

Contributions

This paper makes several contributions. First, this paper makes a distinct methodological contribution. Building on Yang et al. (2023), I argue that enacted identity manifests in and therefore can be measured via language. Drawing on prior work that contends that identity can be concretized as self-referential meanings and that first-person pronouns reflect identity, I use word embedding models to measure enacted identity through semantic meanings associated with one's first-person singular pronoun "I." Extending this measure dyadically, I operationalize enacted identity similarity as the degree of overlap in semantic meanings of "I." Compared to self-reports, which are commonly used in existing work, this approach

of measuring identity more accurately reflects the contextual nature of identity and better captures the signals individuals rely on when drawing inferences about others' identity.

By highlighting the enacted nature of identity, disentangling it into intra-relational and extra-relational components, and showing how privacy of context moderates homophily, I demonstrate the dynamic and contextual nature of homophily. Existing work on homophily treats similarity as a stable attribute: two individuals are either similar on a specific dimension or dissimilar. The current paper, however, illustrates the intricacies and complexities of similarity. Similarity is a dynamic, interactive, and interpersonal process. In social interactions, individuals enact certain aspects of their identity in front of others, who are simultaneously processing these identity manifestations and evaluating the degree to which they are performative or authentic.

Relatedly, for decades, sociologists have theorized profusely on how identity arises out of and is shaped by social contexts and interactions. Empirical support for this proposition is, however, much more limited. Research supporting this idea comes primarily from qualitative work that rely on interviews and ethnographic approaches. Quantatitive evidence of this insight is far and few in between. This gap can be traced to the inherent measurement predicament of tracing identity across contexts that has long been noted (Gecas 1982; Demo 1992). Equipped with my methodological innovation, I demonstrate that enacted identity does indeed vary by context. In doing so, I contribute to this literature by providing both quantitative evidence and a readily extendable measurement approach.

Finally, by viewing similarity through the lens of the individuals under study, I demonstrate that contextual variation in enacted identity serves as an important constraint in how homophily operates. I highlight that similarity needs to occur within the confines of a relationship for it to be fully brought to life and influence downstream relational outcomes. I demonstrate that intra-relational enacted identity similarity predicts tie strength, while extra-relational similarity does not. In doing so, I address the call for more research on unpacking "how choice homophily operates in practice"(DiMaggio and Garip 2012, p. 111).

Future Directions

An immediate extension of this work is to investigate how convergence and divergence in identity enactment shape relational outcomes. This paper has demonstrated that intra-relational enacted identity similarity shapes tie strength. Given the low correlation between

intra- and extra-relational enacted identity similarity, one can explore how differences between these two forms of similarity relate to tie strength. For example, when intra- and extra-relational identity enactments of others diverge significantly, does enacted identity similarity lose its sway on social relationships? In addition, the degree of convergence and divergence in intra-relational enacted identity can also vary between people. The degree of variance in how one expresses oneself could possibly affect the strength of relationships one forms.

Extending it beyond the dyadic level, the concept of enacted identity similarity may have interesting implications for group-level outcomes. Identity convergence among organizational members could make it easier for individuals to collaborate and coordinate. It may also adversely impact the organization's innovation capabilities. Lastly, tracking identities of group members could be an illuminating analysis in unpacking how organizations construct, manage, and uphold their own identities.

Conclusion

The breadth of the construct of homophily is astounding. It underlies a variety of structural phenomena, is documented along numerous dimensions, and characterizes relationships between entities as diverse as primates, humans, teams, and organizations (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Rawlings 2021; McPherson et al. 2001). This paper seeks to add depth to homophily by describing the complexities of how it operates. Through integrating research on homophily and identity, I show that, insofar as identities are enacted and performed, homophily also occurs contextually and interactionally. Deviating from the portrayal of homophily as an static, objective phenomenon, I reimagine homophily as a dynamic, intersubjective process.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Enacted Identity Similarity	0.95	0.02	0.83	1.00
Intra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity	0.94	0.02	0.88	1.00
Extra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity	0.96	0.02	0.87	1.00
Proportion of Private Tokens	0.61	0.36	0.00	1.00
Linguistic Similarity	2.59	0.27	1.30	3.72
Tenure (Days)	2456.67	1703.68	40.00	11899.00
Number of Tokens	89133.50	86989.27	494.00	601978.00

Table 2: Correlation Matrix

	EIS	Intra-Relational EIS	Extra-Relational EIS	Proportion of Private Tokens	Linguistic Similarity	Tenure (Days)	Number of Tokens
Enacted Identity Similarity (EIS)	-						
Intra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity	0.179***	-					
Extra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity	0.925***	0.163***	-				
Proportion of Private Tokens	0.055***	0.086***	0.036*	-			
Linguistic Similarity	0.423***	0.140***	0.406***	0.095***	-		
Tenure (Days)	0.009***	-0.120***	0.028+	0.102***	0.086***	-	
Number of Tokens	0.095***	-0.262***	0.182***	0.125***	0.269***	0.342***	-

+p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001
Variable names abbreviated for readability

Table 3: Tie Nominations on Enacted Identity Similarity

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Enacted Identity Similarity	1.530***	1.463***	1.455***	1.314***	1.177***
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.015)
Same Gender			1.066**	1.040+	1.025
			(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Same Ethnicity			1.330***	1.363***	1.340***
			(0.027)	(0.031)	(0.030)
Same Department				87.938***	84.626***
				(2.251)	(2.176)
Linguistic Similarity					1.392***
					(0.017)
Gender	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ethnicity	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Department	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tenure	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of Tokens	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Num.Obs.	700074	700074	700074	700074	700074

Tenure and number of tokens are logged
Standard errors clustered by dyad
$^{+}$p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 4: Tie Closeness on Enacted Identity Similarity

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Enacted Identity Similarity	0.092***	0.111***	0.107***	0.069***	0.013
	(0.024)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.020)
Same Gender			0.045	0.033	0.030
			(0.041)	(0.035)	(0.035)
Same Ethnicity			0.090**	0.106***	0.096**
			(0.033)	(0.031)	(0.030)
Same Department				0.802***	0.785***
				(0.045)	(0.045)
Linguistic Similarity					0.164***
					(0.020)
Gender	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ethnicity	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Department	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tenure	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of Tokens	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Num.Obs.	4486	4486	4486	4486	4486

Tenure and number of tokens are logged
Standard errors clustered by dyad
$^{+}$p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 5: Tie Closeness on Intra-Relational and Extra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity	0.215***		0.219***
	(0.026)		(0.026)
Extra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity		0.002	-0.029
		(0.024)	(0.024)
Same Gender	0.057	0.062	0.056
	(0.051)	(0.051)	(0.051)
Same Ethnicity	0.080*	0.094*	0.083*
	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.038)
Same Department	0.311***	0.409***	0.310***
	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.055)
Linguistic Similarity	0.128***	0.173***	0.137***
	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.025)
Gender	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ethnicity	Yes	Yes	Yes
Department	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tenure	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of Tokens	Yes	Yes	Yes
Num.Obs.	2602	2602	2602

Tenure and number of tokens are logged
Standard errors clustered by dyad
$^{+}$p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 6: Tie Closeness on Intra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity by Private Communications

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Intra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity	0.184***	0.182***	0.180***	0.165***	0.148***
	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)
Proportion of Private Tokens	0.221***	0.309***	0.310***	0.292***	0.284***
	(0.029)	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.029)	(0.030)
Intra-Relational Enacted Similarity X Proportion of Private Tokens	0.056*	0.095***	0.093***	0.095***	0.089***
	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Same Gender			0.055	0.054	0.052
			(0.052)	(0.051)	(0.051)
Same Ethnicity			0.088*	0.091*	0.086*
			(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.037)
Same Department				0.226***	0.231***
				(0.053)	(0.054)
Linguistic Similarity					0.108***
					(0.024)
Gender	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ethnicity	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Department	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tenure	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of Tokens	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Num.Obs.	2602	2602	2602	2602	2602

Tenure and number of tokens are logged
Standard errors clustered by dyad
$^{+}$p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 7: Tie Frequency on Enacted Identity Similarity

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Enacted Identity Similarity	0.152***	0.144***	0.143***	0.104***	0.068***
	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Same Gender			0.033**	0.018+	0.014
			(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Same Ethnicity			0.050***	0.063***	0.057***
			(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Same Department				1.030***	1.026***
				(0.020)	(0.020)
Linguistic Similarity					0.107***
					(0.006)
Gender	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ethnicity	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Department	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tenure	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of Tokens	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Num.Obs.	115857	115857	115857	115857	115857

Tenure and number of tokens are logged
Standard errors clustered by dyad
$^{+}$p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 8: Tie Frequency on Intra-Relational and Extra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity	0.456***		0.459***
	(0.025)		(0.025)
Extra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity		0.047+	-0.022
		(0.026)	(0.024)
Same Gender	0.090+	0.100+	0.090+
	(0.051)	(0.053)	(0.051)
Same Ethnicity	-0.022	0.001	-0.020
	(0.038)	(0.042)	(0.038)
Same Department	0.438***	0.640***	0.438***
	(0.058)	(0.063)	(0.057)
Linguistic Similarity	0.129***	0.205***	0.136***
	(0.023)	(0.028)	(0.025)
Gender	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ethnicity	Yes	Yes	Yes
Department	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tenure	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of Tokens	Yes	Yes	Yes
Num.Obs.	2538	2538	2538

Tenure and number of tokens are logged
Standard errors clustered by dyad
$^{+}$p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 9: Tie Frequency on Intra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity by Private Communications

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Intra-Relational Enacted Identity Similarity	0.295***	0.375***	0.375***	0.357***	0.343***
	(0.027)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Proportion of Private Tokens	0.511***	0.576***	0.576***	0.556***	0.547***
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Intra-Relational Similarity X Proportion of Private Tokens	0.147***	0.105***	0.104***	0.106***	0.101***
	(0.026)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Linguistic Similarity					0.093***
					(0.021)
Same Gender			0.089+	0.090+	0.089+
			(0.050)	(0.049)	(0.049)
Same Ethnicity			-0.005	-0.001	-0.006
			(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.033)
Same Department				0.287***	0.291***
				(0.052)	(0.052)
Gender	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ethnicity	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Department	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tenure	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of Tokens	-	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Num.Obs.	2538	2538	2538	2538	2538

Tenure and number of tokens are logged
Standard errors clustered by dyad
$^{+}$p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

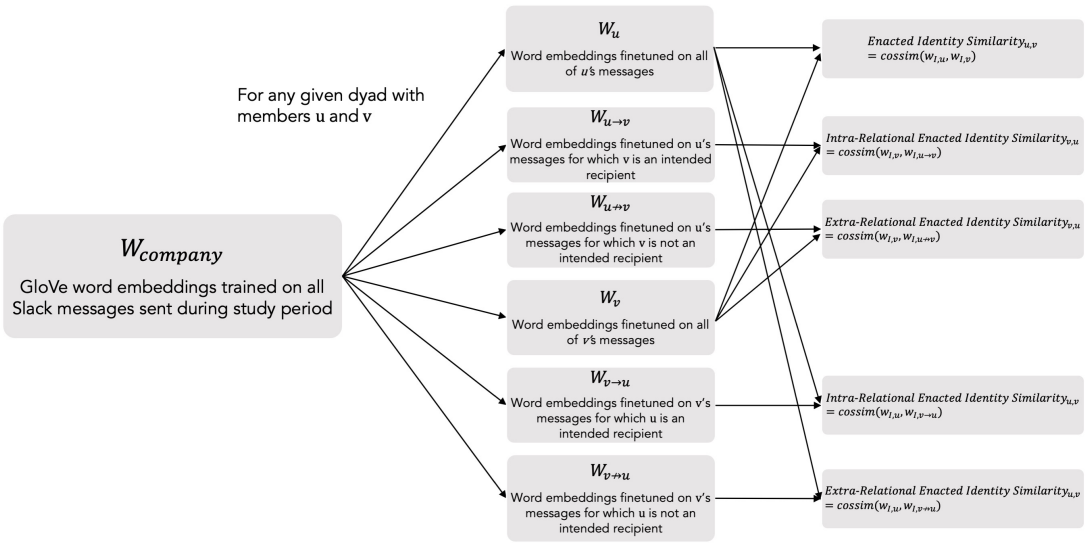

Figure 1: Measuring enacted identity similarity.
This figure provides a visual overview of the steps I took to compute enacted identity similarity, intra-relational, and extra-relational enacted identity similarity for a given dyad.

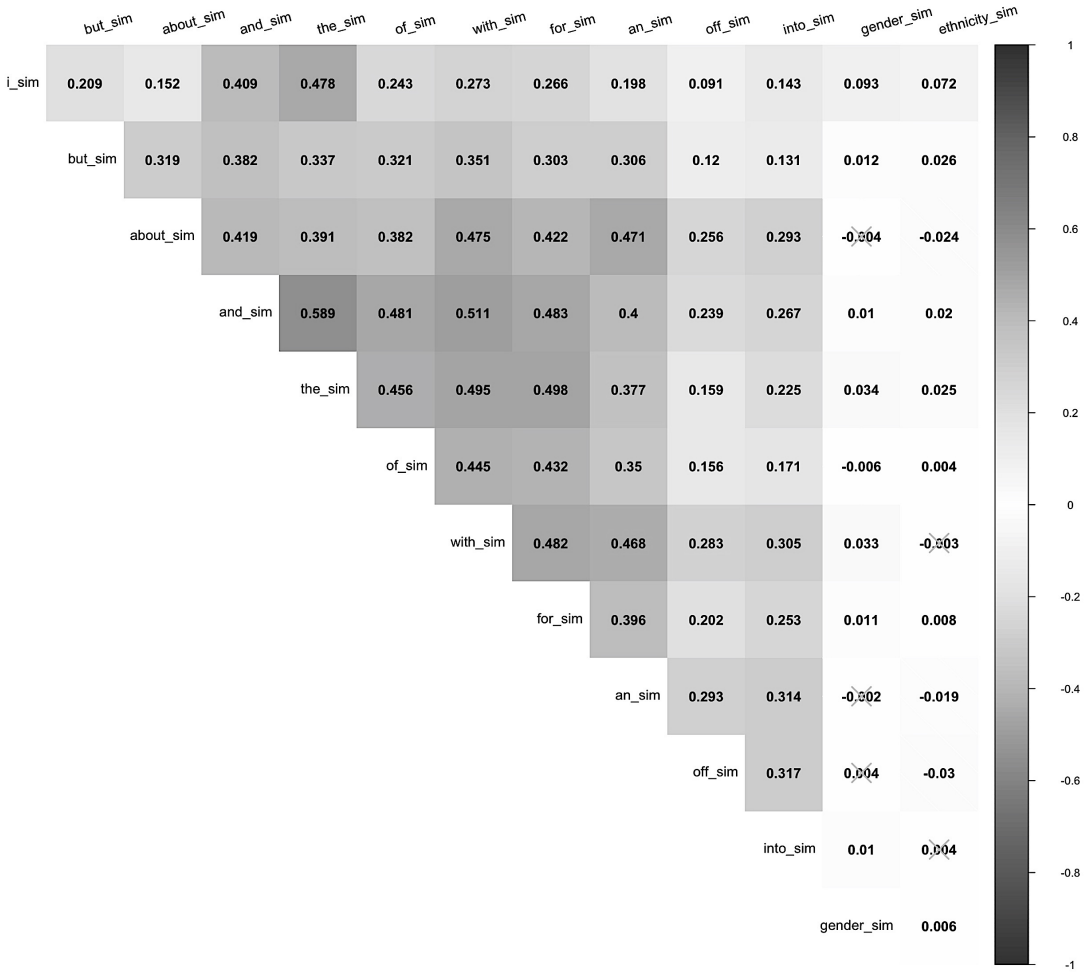

Figure 2: Correlation matrix of linguistic similarity and sociodemographic similarity.
This figure shows the correlation matrix between similarity in "I," similarity in various function words, and similarity in gender and ethnicity. Correlation coefficients are Spearman's ρ with significance values of $p \leq 0.001$. All coefficients that are statistically insignificant are crossed out. This matrix demonstrates that similarity in "I" (enacted identity similarity) is positively and significantly associated with gender and ethnicity similarity, while similarities in function words are weakly correlated with gender and ethnicity similarity across the board.

Dimension	Words									
Race and Racism	Systemic	Racist	Anti	Oppressive	Rituals	Latin	Racism	Blackness	Attacks	Asian
Life	Sitter	Parents	Oiled	Bike	Cousins	Cute	Sister	Baby	Boys	Neighbor
Socializing	Tempt	Toll	Nitty	Insider	Gossip	Jingle	Tricks	Cries	Bombarded	Outrage
Thinking	Pondering	Recalling	Wasting	Procrastinating	Debating	Waffling	Deliberating	Picturing	Noodling	Eliminating
Extremes	Overly	Exceedingly	Vitally	Duper	Extremely	Sorely	Awfully	Abundantly	Brutally	Doubly
Negativity	Achy	Catching	Procrastinating	Nauseous	Died	Stomach	Dizzy	Heache	Foggy	Feeling
Growth	Grow	Agility	Outcomes	Vision	Collaboratively	Effectively	Develop	Mission	Thinkers	Improve
Place	Urban	#City Name	#City Name	#City Name	NW	Ave	Vista	City	Penn	#District Name

Figure 3: Top Dimensions of Word Embedding of "I"
This figure shows the top words associated with some of the dimensions in which "I" are most active. These dimensions are labeled based on my own interpretation of what they capture and represent.