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Source: *Organization Science*, Nov. - Dec., 2002, Vol. 13, No. 6 (Nov. - Dec., 2002), pp. 618-635

Published by: INFORMS

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3086084>

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# Members' Identification with Multiple-Identity Organizations\*

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## Abstract

In the field of organizational identity, theory development has far outpaced theory testing. Specifically, several researchers have proposed identity-based models of organizational identification but few have operationalized and tested them. Furthermore, virtually no research has explored how members identify with multiple-identity organizations. This study addresses these gaps and makes three specific contributions to identity theory. First, we operationalize and test a model in which a member's organizational identification is conceptualized in terms of an identity comparison process, i.e., a cognitive comparison between what a member perceives the identity to be and what they think it should be. Second, we extend current thinking by operationalizing organizational identification in terms of multiple and competing identities. Third, as a theory-building exercise, we explore the possibility that a similar identity comparison process operates at the organizational form level of analysis, affecting members' identification with the encompassing form or social institution. We test our model via a survey of members of rural cooperatives—a prototypical “hybrid” identity organizational form, embodying elements of both “business” and “family” identities. Results of the analyses show that organizational identity congruence has a significant effect on member commitment, and form-level identity congruence has significant effects on both cognitive and pragmatic legitimacy, lending support for the use of identity as a multilevel construct. These results provide empirical support for current identity-based models of organizational identification and expand their generalizability to include multiple-identity organizations.

*(Organizational Identity; Identification; Identity Conflicts; Multiple Expectations)*

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Organizational identity has grown over the past decade to become an established means of analyzing many aspects of organizations. Identity is essentially the set of beliefs or meanings that answer the question, “Who am I?” (Mead 1934), or in the case of an organization, “Who

are we?” Since Albert and Whetten's (1985) seminal paper, a steadily growing volume of research has demonstrated the utility of the identity construct, employing it in a variety of ways to explore and explain a range of organizational phenomena. For example, organizational identity has been used to show how organizations and their managers interpret issues (Dutton and Dukerich 1991), identify threats (Elsbach and Kramer 1996), perceive and resolve conflict (Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997), establish competitive advantage (Fiol 1991), manage change (Reger et al. 1994), and frame strategies or responses (Fiol and Huff 1992).

Furthermore, organizational identity has been combined with social identity theory to shed light on the process whereby individuals identify with organizations (see Pratt 1998 for a review). Beginning with Ashforth and Mael's (1989) influential synthesis, a number of researchers have employed the connections between identity and identification to explain a variety of organizational processes and behaviors, including cooperation and citizenship (Dutton et al. 1994), loyalty (Mael and Ashforth 1992), control practices (Barker and Tompkins 1994), and commitment (Whetten et al. 1992).

In spite of the volume and expanse of the research noted above, there remains much to be sharpened and clarified regarding the application of identity theory to the study of organizations. First and foremost, while there has been significant *theoretical* development on this subject, much less progress has been made *empirically*. In this paper, we examine the identity-based models of organizational identification that several researchers have proposed (e.g., Ashforth and Mael 1989, Dutton et al. 1994, Whetten et al. 1992). Although there is considerable convergence in the makeup of these models, there have been few efforts to operationalize and test any of them (see Mael and Ashforth 1992, 1995 for exceptions). This paper is an effort to provide such an empirical test.

A second key issue that demands further clarification is the problem of multiple and competing identities. While scholars recognize that certain kinds of organizations have multiple identities, only recently have researchers begun to consider how these organizations or their members resolve contradictions and conflicts that arise from competing identity claims (e.g., Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997, Pratt and Foreman 2000, Pratt and Rafaeli 1997). More specifically, several identity scholars have suggested that the process of organizational identification may be complicated by the presence of multiple organizational identity claims (Ashforth and Mael 1989, Cheney 1991, McCall and Simmons 1978). For example, a physician may work for a medical clinic that claims to be both a "health services provider" and an "investor-owned business," each of which has its own set of norms and expectations. If this physician reported having a moderate level of identification with her clinic, does that mean she identifies positively with one component of the clinic's identity but negatively with the other component? Or, does she moderately identify with both components? Or, does she moderately identify with one and ignore the other? These alternative explanations underscore the need for further research regarding how members identify with multiple identity organizations.<sup>1</sup>

A third relatively unexplored area in identity theory is the degree to which identity can operate as a "multilevel" construct. Identity has been operationalized at several levels of analysis—including the individual, group, organization, industry, institution, and society. However, although the identity construct holds the possibility of spanning or integrating multiple levels of analysis, virtually no research has attempted to establish such multilevel linkages. In this study, we take existing models of members' organizational identification and propose an analogous process explaining members' identification with an encompassing organizational form. As such, this research seeks to extend identity theory by connecting the organizational and institutional levels of analysis.

## Theoretical Background

### Organizational Identification as Identity Congruence

Past work exploring the process of organizational identification has drawn heavily on social identity theory (see Pratt 1998 for a review). Scholars in social identity (Tajfel 1982, Turner 1982) begin with the premise that people classify themselves and others based on various social or demographic groups, e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, religion, occupation, and so on. This social classification scheme provides individuals with a means of defining themselves through a sense of oneness, or identification

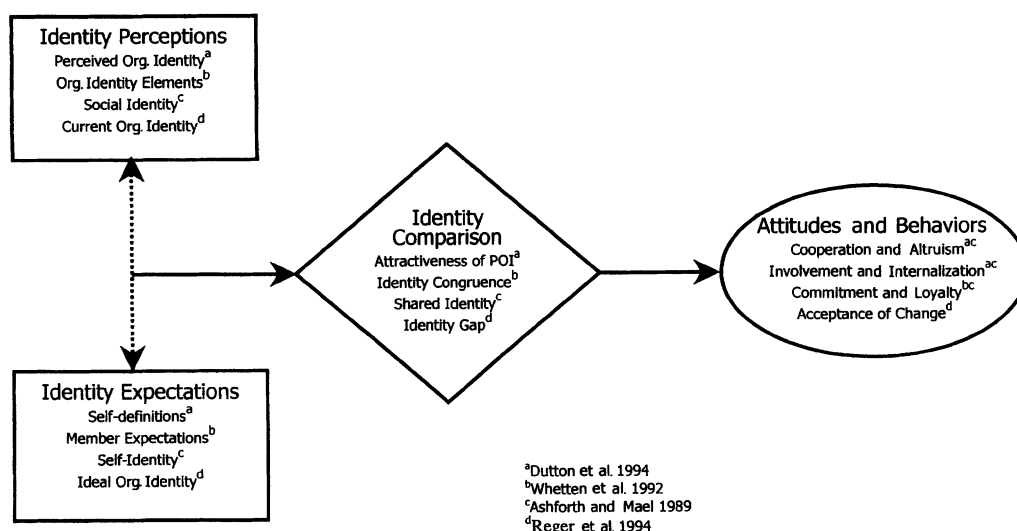
with a particular group. By way of extension, as Ashforth and Mael (1989) and others have argued, organizational identification can be seen as essentially a subtype of social identification. For example, Dutton et al. (1994) state that organizational identification is "the degree to which a member defines himself or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization" (p. 39).

Unfortunately, as Pratt (1998) notes, the question of how organizational identification occurs has received very little attention. One possible explanation is that cognitive comparisons drive a member's identification—i.e., identification stems from a member's assessments of the fit between their categorizations of their organization and their self-categorizations. Several researchers have proposed that members make various kinds of "identity comparisons," and that these comparisons affect their attitudes and behaviors towards their organization (Ashforth and Mael 1989, Burke 1997, Dutton and Dukerich 1991, Dutton et al. 1994, Reger et al. 1994, Whetten et al. 1992). In this study, we follow the lead of these and other scholars and operationalize organizational identification as a type of identity comparison process engaged in by organizational members. The higher the levels of congruence resulting from this identity comparison process, the higher the level of a member's identification.

This identity comparison process has been operationalized in at least two ways: (1) as a member's evaluation of the organization's identity based on their own self-identity (Ashforth and Mael 1989, Dutton et al. 1994) or (2) as a comparison between a members' perceptions of what the organization's current identity is with what they would prefer the identity to be (Reger et al. 1994, Whetten et al. 1992). The first approach captures the self-categorization mechanism described by Pratt (1998) above. In the second approach, the "preferred," "expected," or "ideal" organizational identity essentially acts as an extension of the member's self-identity.

In all of the aforementioned identification models, the implied or explicit identity comparison process involves an evaluative component, the intent of which is to help group members reduce dissonance between perceptions regarding "who I am" and "who we are." Furthermore, these models propose that an underlying desire or pressure for congruence, or "fit," shapes certain attitudes and behaviors. In cases where the perceived "identity comparison gap" is too great, congruence-enhancing responses will be triggered. These responses might include reassessing one's core beliefs, pressuring the organization to make changes in their core practices, or reevaluating one's relationship with the organization.

As shown in Figure 1, we have taken the second approach described above, conceptualizing organizational

**Figure 1 A Composite Model of Organizational Identification**

identification as a comparison process between what a member perceives the identity of the particular organization to be and what that member thinks the identity should be. Thus, identification is the level of congruence between members' identity perceptions and identity expectations. Using the terminology of Reger et al. (1994, p. 575), we propose that a member compares his or her perceptions of an organization's *current identity* (beliefs about the existing character of the organization) with his or her expectations for its *ideal identity* (beliefs about what is desirable, informed by the member's sense of self); and the resulting *identity gap/congruence* (the cognitive distance between the current and ideal identity claims) significantly affects a member's level of involvement with the organization.

### Consequences of Organizational Identification/Congruence

As shown in Figure 1, scholars have argued that various forms of identity comparisons affect important member attitudes and behaviors, e.g., internalization, cooperation, acceptance of change, commitment, satisfaction, and turnover (Ashforth and Mael 1989, Dutton et al. 1994, Reger et al. 1994, Whetten, et al. 1992). In this study, we examine the effects of identity congruence (identification) on the construct of *organizational commitment*. Commitment has been defined in a variety of ways, not all of which are complementary or compatible (Becker 1960, Meyer and Allen 1984, Mottaz 1989, Mowday et al. 1982, O'Reilly and Chatman 1986, Wiener 1982). Furthermore, scholars have offered an array of views regarding the construct's bases, foci, antecedents, and consequences (see

Becker 1992, Mathieu and Zajac 1990, Randall 1990). In spite of this conceptual complexity, definitions of organizational commitment generally fall into one of two main categories: *attitudinal* or *behavioral*.

The attitudinal view, championed by Porter and colleagues (Mowday et al. 1982), focuses on the emotional attachment members have for their organization. From this perspective, organizational commitment is essentially a psychological state, and it is measured with a self-report scale that taps into the affective content of the member's relationship with his or her organization (e.g., Meyer and Allen 1984, O'Reilly and Chatman 1986). The behavioral view, derived largely from Becker's (1960) side-bet theory, emphasizes a person's commitment to specific patterns of behavior in their relationship with the organization. This view argues that the investments that a member makes in the organization (in terms of time, effort, relationships, political capital, knowledge, experience, etc.) constitute for them sunk costs or side bets, and thus raise the stakes involved in leaving. Therefore, commitment is largely a structural phenomenon, and measurements of the construct focus on the member's investments in, exchanges with, and/or dependence on their organization (e.g., Hrebiniak and Alutto 1972, Mottaz 1989).

Among organization scholars today, there is a growing consensus that commitment is a multidimensional construct and should be assessed with at least an emotional, or affective, component and a behavioral, or calculative, component (Mathieu and Zajac 1990, Meyer and Allen 1997). We specifically chose to use the constructs and measurement scales of *affective and continuance commitment* developed by Meyer and Allen (1984), primarily



because they have been widely adopted and well validated in the literature. Many of the alternative conceptualizations of organizational commitment have displayed questionable validity and/or reliability (see Mathieu and Zajac 1990, Meyer and Allen 1997). In the words of Meyer and Allen (1997, p. 11), affective commitment reflects the degree to which a member "wants" to remain in the organization, while continuance commitment captures the degree to which the member "needs" to stay. Affective commitment focuses on a member's positive feelings about their involvement in the organization, as well as their expressed sentiments of loyalty and desire to help the organization be successful. Continuance commitment focuses on a member's likelihood of remaining with the organization, given current opportunities and options to leave.

As implied by the distinction between affective and continuance commitment, although a member may want to leave an organization, they are not always free to act on their preferences. In this respect, the behavioral view of commitment sharply contrasts with the attitudinal view, in that a member's relationship to his or her organization is less of a function of identification and attachment and more a product of resource dependence. Therefore, research comparing the effects of identification on affective and continuance commitment must take into consideration various dependencies moderating the relationship between members' cognitions and actions. Specifically for this study, it seems likely that a member's level of identification is more directly reflected in his or her expressed affective commitment than in his or her continuance commitment.

### Multiple- (Hybrid-) Identity Organizations

It is commonplace for scholars to speak of people (Mead 1934, Feldman 1979, Thoits 1983) and organizations (Albert and Whetten 1985, Ashforth and Mael 1996, Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997) as having multiple identities. Although the notion of multiple-identity organizations is prevalent in our literature, the lack of consensus regarding its meaning compromises its utility as a construct. For example, we have no agreed-upon criteria for determining whether an identity statement containing several different elements (descriptors, identifiers) constitutes a complex but singular composite claim, or an aggregate of independent claims. Our strategy for sidestepping this conceptual morass is as follows. It is sufficient for us to posit that some organizations are constituted as a particular type of multiple-identity organization. Following Albert and Whetten (1985), we will refer to these organizations as *hybrid-identity organizations*, defined as

... an organization whose identity is composed of two or more

types that would not normally be expected to go together. . . . [I]t is not simply an organization with multiple components, but it considers itself (and others consider it), alternatively, or even simultaneously, to be two different types of organizations (p. 270).

Furthermore, we follow the lead of Albert and Whetten in considering a particular type of hybrid-identity organization, namely those that are constituted according to two seemingly incompatible value systems (Parsons 1956, Etzioni 1961): a *normative* system (emphasizing traditions and symbols, internalization of an ideology, and altruism), like that of a church or family; and a *utilitarian* system (characterized by economic rationality, maximization of profits, and self-interest), like that of a business. Their example of this type of hybrid-identity organization was the modern research university. They argued that contemporary universities "inherited" a strong normative orientation from European monastic orders and a strong utilitarian orientation from the National Science Foundation (and other research funding institutions). This study examines rural cooperatives, an organizational cousin of the research university, in the sense that both organizational forms are constituted as normative-utilitarian hybrids. The dualistic nature of rural co-ops provides an ideal context for examining the effects of multiple organizational identity claims on member identification.

*Identity Comparisons and Organizational Commitment.* We propose that an ongoing identity comparison process influences member attitudes toward their co-ops, whereby members assess the degree to which their perceptions of the organization's current identity are congruent with their expectations of its ideal identity. In addition, in hybrid-identity organizations, we expect that members conduct an identity congruence assessment for both the normative ("like a family") and the utilitarian ("like a business") components of the organization's identity. We further propose that the resulting normative and utilitarian organizational identity congruence gaps significantly affect a member's commitment to his or her cooperative. Thus, the following hypotheses are tested:

HYPOTHESIS 1. *The greater a member's normative organizational identity gap, the lower his or her affective commitment to his or her local co-op.*

HYPOTHESIS 2. *The greater a member's utilitarian organizational identity gap, the lower his or her affective commitment to his or her local co-op.*

HYPOTHESIS 3. *The greater a member's normative organizational identity gap, the lower his or her continuance commitment to his or her local co-op.*

**HYPOTHESIS 4.** *The greater a member's utilitarian organizational identity gap, the lower his or her continuance commitment to his or her local co-op.*

Although these four hypotheses are presented as a logical set, we anticipate that the empirical support for Hypotheses 1 and 2 will be stronger than for Hypotheses 3 and 4. This is because, while there are relatively few exogenous factors influencing members' emotional attachment towards one's organization (affective commitment), there are significant personal and organizational dependencies affecting one's behavioral choices (continuance commitment).

### Examining Identification at Multiple Levels of Analysis

As an extension of current theory, we propose that organizational members may hold multiple identifications that stem from thinking about and relating to their organization at multiple levels of abstraction. In the self-identity literature, Feldman (1979) argues that a person's identities are "nested," or arranged in a hierarchical fashion, so that, for example, an aspiring young diva may see herself as a student in the conservatory, a voice major, an opera singer, a mezzo-soprano, or a protégée of Professor Smith. As such, an individual may have very different and potentially competing identity expectations across these levels of identity. Similarly, researchers in self-categorization theory claim that contextual and circumstantial factors influence whether people think of their identity at the level of their self, group, organization, or social culture (Turner et al. 1994). By way of extension, we propose that organizational identity can be conceptualized at multiple levels of abstraction. Specifically, we posit that members are likely to identify not only with their local organization, but also with its encompassing *organizational form*. It then follows that identification, in terms of identity congruence, can be measured at both levels of analysis.

**Institutional Theory and Organizational Forms.** Institutional theory describes and explains the prevalence of *institutions* in society: what DiMaggio and Powell (1991) have defined as "those social orders or patterns that take on a rule-like status in social thought and action" (p. 9). In other words, an institution is a set of widely shared and persistent beliefs about what constitutes proper practice for specific purposes. When applied to organizational studies, institutional theory argues that to enhance their ability to acquire scarce resources or garner constituents' support, organizations typically adopt relevant institutionalized norms, practices, and structures that extend

from their environment (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Organizations within a given sector adopt similar institutionalized practices, and this isomorphic process leads to the institutionalization of the broader organizational form (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Scott and Meyer 1983), resulting in the form itself being considered as "taken-for-granted" (Zucker 1983) and as having an identity of its own (Douglas 1986).

In this paper, we attempt to break new theoretical ground by examining the relationship between the perceived identity of an organizational form and constituents' evaluations of the appropriateness of that form. We borrow from the organizational identity comparison models outlined above and propose an analogous organizational form-level identity comparison process, wherein similar kinds of cognitive comparisons affect members' attitudes towards an organizational form—specifically, its degree of legitimacy. In this way, we propose to demonstrate the utility of identity and identification as multilevel constructs.

**Institutions and Legitimacy.** Organizational legitimacy has traditionally been conceptualized as being derived from the degree to which the organization's goals and activities are congruent with broader societal norms, beliefs, and values (Parsons 1956, Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). Similarly, in terms of an organizational form, its legitimacy is a function of the congruence between the form's logic and structure and its encompassing social context (Barron 1998, Dacin 1997, Ruef and Scott 1998). Furthermore, it is possible for the legitimacy of an established, "taken-for-granted" organizational form to be questioned if the form's structures or practices are deemed to be out of step with changing conditions in the broader societal environment. Specifically, Haveman and Rao (1997, p. 1613) state that

[The] legitimacy of organizational forms requires congruence between the institution embodied by a particular organizational form and the normative, cognitive, and regulatory character of a wider society.

For the purposes of this study, we extend this logic to argue that the legitimacy of an organizational form is partly a function of the degree to which that form's key identifying characteristics are congruent with its surrounding institutional environment and the associated norms and expectations of its constituents. Using the language of this paper, we posit that the more that members perceive that the current identity claims of co-ops in general are substantially out of line with the expectations they hold for that type of organization, the lower they will rate the legitimacy of the co-op organizational form. Although we are making this identity congruence argument more

explicit than previous scholars, the inherent logic has been conceptualized in several ways before. For example, Scott (1995, p. 47) states that

To adopt an orthodox structure or identity in order to relate to a specific situation is to seek *the legitimacy that comes from cognitive consistency*. (italics added)

Despite the centrality of legitimacy as a construct in the institutional theory literature, there is little agreement on how it is defined and/or measured. In general, legitimacy is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct, and several typologies have been put forth (e.g., Aldrich and Fiol 1994, Barron 1998, Dacin 1997, Ruef and Scott 1998, Scott 1995, Suchman 1995). We chose to use what Suchman (1995) calls *cognitive* and *pragmatic legitimacy*. Cognitive legitimacy is defined as the degree to which a form or practice is seen as being necessary or inevitable, i.e., taken for granted (Baum and Oliver 1992, Zucker 1983). Pragmatic legitimacy, on the other hand, captures the degree to which an entity represents its constituent's self-interests, or provides them with favorable exchanges, vis-à-vis alternative forms or structures (Ashforth and Gibbs 1990, Barron 1998).

To explore the potential effects of organizational form identity congruence on legitimacy, we assessed members' identity perceptions and expectations regarding the agricultural co-op organizational form. At this higher level of abstraction, we chose to frame hybrid identity more symbolically than at the organizational level, and current and ideal identities are compared in terms of where co-ops in general lie on a normative-utilitarian continuum, i.e., being more like a "family" vs. a "business." We propose that organizational form-level identity gaps will have significant effects on pragmatic and cognitive legitimacy as follows:

**HYPOTHESIS 5.** *The greater a member's organizational form-level identity gap, the lower his or her cognitive legitimacy rating of the co-op organizational form.*

**HYPOTHESIS 7.** *The greater a member's organizational form-level identity gap, the lower his or her pragmatic legitimacy rating of the co-op organizational form.*

## Research Design and Methods

### Context: Rural Cooperatives as Hybrid-Identity Organizations

Rural co-ops have a strong hybrid identity, deeply rooted in their pluralistic mission and normative and utilitarian value systems. One definition of a co-op (Groves 1985) states: "A cooperative is a group of persons pursuing common economic, social, and educational aims by

means of a business." Embedded within this definition is the genetic code of a hybrid organizational identity: Co-ops are constituted to operate in accordance with multiple, seemingly incompatible, organizing logics. Because co-ops are organized to accomplish business objectives (e.g., market products, buy supplies, obtain credit), they have an avowed utilitarian mission. Clearly, members expect some economic benefit from their participation. However, one of the distinctive features of co-ops is their unique way of doing business. In particular, co-ops were founded on principles of social solidarity and egalitarianism, reinforced by equal voting rights and equal rates of return on investment (Barton 1989). Additionally, co-ops have historically sought to reinforce the traditions and values of agrarianism through educational and social interventions. Indeed, for many members these normative goals of a co-op have been preeminent.

However, the institutional environment surrounding rural co-ops is undergoing radical change. Demographic shifts and economic forces are creating sweeping transformations in rural society, affecting people's values, preferences, ideals, and expectations (Johansen and Fuguitt 1984). Indeed, many agricultural economists see co-ops as an anachronistic symbol of a bygone era of farm life (Royer 1992, Schrader 1989). They argue that because co-ops are out of step with the new business conditions, they must either redefine themselves or face extinction. This view has not been well received by co-op supporters, because it challenges the identity of a well-established institution in a venerated segment of society. Rural sociologists, in particular, have argued that there is still considerable support for the values and traditions of rural life (Dalecki and Coughenour 1992, Willits et al. 1990), including those signified in the rural co-op movement. These challenges to the identity of co-ops provide us with an excellent opportunity to examine how members identify with hybrid identity organizations.

### Sample

We conducted a survey of 2,000 members of rural co-ops in a midwestern state. The sample was drawn from the list of customers served by a rural electrification co-op that provides power for more than 90% of rural residents in a five-county region. This sampling frame was chosen for several theoretical and methodological reasons. Because this electric co-op serves an overwhelming percentage of rural residents, we expected to obtain a representative sample of the members of the various co-ops in this region. Furthermore, because much of the meaning and significance of rural co-ops is tied to agriculture, we wanted a sample containing both farmers and nonfarmers, and one that included a range of support for and involvement in co-ops. Using membership lists of farm-related



co-ops only obviously would have given us a censored sample, excluding nonfarmers and those farmers who do not support co-ops. Using the electric co-op's customer base as a sampling frame provided us with the best opportunity to capture a full range of views and experiences across a variety of co-ops.

Approximately 800 completed surveys were returned after two mailings, for a response rate of 42%. After removing surveys with significant amounts of incomplete information, there were 670 useable surveys, for a 37% effective response rate. Although this is a respectable response rate, especially given the nature of the survey and the sample, it leaves open the possibility of sample bias and nonresponse bias. Accordingly, we performed several comparison tests to check for these biases. First, using current agricultural census data, we were able to check for demographic differences between those survey respondents who were active farmers (45% of the sample) and the overall population of farmers in the five-county region.<sup>2</sup> In sum, our farmer respondents were representative of the population at large, thus reducing the possibility of sample bias. In addition, because the mailings were a month apart, we were able to compare the responses of these two nearly equal subsamples in terms of various proxies for commitment-related response bias, e.g., distance to, volume of business with, or years of membership in their co-op. There were no significant differences between the two groups for any of these proxies or for the outcome measures of commitment and legitimacy.

All of the respondent households were members of the rural electric co-op, and 74% of the respondents were members of at least one additional co-op. These other co-ops were all agriculture related, either for marketing grain, supplying seeds and chemicals, or providing financial credit. More than half (52%) of the respondents were active in farming, and almost 80% were receiving income from farm-related activities. Because much of the meaning and importance of rural co-ops is derived from the institution of farming, we included in all regressions an indicator of whether or not farming was the respondent's primary occupation. In addition, because many respondents were members of only the electric co-op and not any other co-op, we included an indicator to control for this factor.

### Survey Design and Measures

Before constructing the survey, we held several focus groups to aid us in developing appropriate survey items, and we conducted two small pilot studies to check the external validity of the survey items. Using Albert and Whetten's (1985) "extended metaphor analysis," we attempted to identify metaphors or analogies that would

capture the tension between the dual identities inherent in the co-op organizational form. After lengthy discussions with co-op managers and members, we chose the metaphors of "family" and "business" (these metaphors were also frequently mentioned in trade journals and other co-op literature).

*Identification with Organizational Forms.* To assess identity congruence with respect to the organizational form, we used single-item scales measuring members' evaluations of the *current and ideal identity of the co-op form*. Then, due to the lack of well-validated measures of legitimacy, we developed our own multi-item scales to assess the *legitimacy* of co-ops as an organizational form. From the focus group discussions, we constructed 18 items assessing the degree to which members saw cooperatives as viable and taken for granted in today's rural society (*cognitive legitimacy*) and how effectively co-ops met widely held expectations for businesses in rural society (*pragmatic legitimacy*); see Appendix A. An exploratory factor analysis of the data resulted in a six-item scale for cognitive legitimacy and a seven-item scale for pragmatic legitimacy. Confirmatory factor analyses of these items resulted in a significantly better fit for a two-factor vs. one-factor model (CFI = 0.935 vs. 0.878), with reliabilities (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ) of 0.820 for cognitive and 0.922 for pragmatic legitimacy.<sup>3</sup> (See Table 1.)

*Identification with Multiple-Identity Organizations.* The second section consisted of items assessing members' attitudes about their involvement with a particular co-op. We asked respondents to check off (on a comprehensive list) all cooperatives in which they were members, and we then used a randomization scheme to assign one of these co-ops as the focal organization for this section of the survey. Those respondents who were members of only the electric co-op subsequently responded to the questions in terms of their relationship to that organization.

To measure the *normative and utilitarian identity comparisons*, we asked members of the focus groups to identify particular aspects of co-ops that are prototypically normative or "family-" like, and utilitarian or "business-" like. From these discussions, we selected five items that represent each of the two types of organizational identity. These 10 items were used to assess the member's perceptions of the relative strength of each identity element in their co-op (*current organizational identity*) and what the member felt the strength of that identity element should be (*ideal organizational identity*); see Appendix B. Confirmatory factor analysis of the two identity scales showed that a two-factor model (separating normative and utilitarian identity items) had a significantly better fit



than a one-factor model for both current (CFI = 0.944 vs. 0.868) and ideal (CFI = 0.953 vs. 0.719) organizational identities. These four scales also had a strong degree of reliability, ranging from  $\alpha = 0.875$  to  $\alpha = 0.932$ .

This section of the survey also included scales measuring a member's commitment to their specific co-op. These measures were derivatives of Meyer and Allen's (1984, 1997) well-validated *affective and continuance commitment scales*. We selected four of the eight items in the affective commitment scale, particularly intending to capture effects of the member's identification with and attachment to his or her local co-op. The four items selected to measure continuance commitment were intended to assess the effects of availability of alternatives and personal disruption on a member's decision to stay with his or her co-op. Confirmatory factor analyses of the scales resulted in a stronger fit for a two-factor model (separating affective and continuance commitment) vs. a one-factor model (CFI = 0.948 vs. 0.852). Furthermore, the reliabilities for affective ( $\alpha = 0.763$ ) and continuance ( $\alpha = 0.838$ ) commitment were comparable with median reliabilities of the scales as reported in past research (Meyer and Allen 1997, p. 120).

*Moderating and Control Variables.* Researchers have posited several factors besides identity that may affect members' attitudes of legitimacy and/or commitment. In particular, many agricultural economists claim that differences in commitment are based on socioeconomic status or structural factors (such as farm size or the availability of business alternatives). To control for socioeconomic status, we used *education*, measured as the number of years of education the respondent had completed (up to a maximum of 18). In addition, we used two variables as proxies for the degree of resource dependence in a member's relationship with a local co-op (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). First, we included a measure of the *total number of co-op memberships* that the respondent claimed to have as an indicator of the degree of dependence the member had on any specific co-op. Several members had noted that they purposefully had memberships in multiple co-ops to give them greater flexibility and to "keep their options open." Furthermore, we included an indicator of whether respondents were *electric co-op members only* (i.e., not members of any other co-ops). Obviously, members of a utility co-op have few (if any) alternatives to their relationship with the co-op. Farm size was not used because many respondents did not currently own or rent a farm.

Rural sociologists have demonstrated that sociodemographic variables such as *age* and *generational ties* are major factors in shaping rural people's attitudes about

their community and organizations (Goudy 1990, O'Brien and Hassinger 1992). Furthermore, researchers have documented key differences in attitudes towards rural life and farming based on *gender* and *farming status* (Moore 1989, Willits et al. 1990). Therefore, we included continuous measures of a respondent's age and the number of generations of co-op membership in their family, and we used nominal indicators of female and full-time farmer status. In addition, Salamon's work (1992) documents a strong difference in attitudes about rural life based on *religion* and *ethnic heritage*. In particular, she observed that residents of German Catholic communities held more communal and family-centered beliefs and values as compared to British Protestants, who tended to be more individualistic and utilitarian. Hence, we controlled for effects of German heritage and Catholic affiliation.

### Analysis

The effects of identity comparisons on members' attitudes were assessed via a series of hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions, with the identity comparison terms entered after the set of control variables. At the level of the organizational form, the pragmatic and cognitive legitimacy of co-ops were regressed on members' form-level identity comparisons. At the organizational level of abstraction, affective and continuance commitment were regressed separately on normative and utilitarian organizational identity comparisons. List-wise deletion was used to correct for missing information, resulting in all regressions having an *N* of 630.

*Measuring Congruence: Alternatives to Difference Scores.* Assessing identity comparisons and their effects on legitimacy and commitment, as outlined in this study, involves measuring the degree of congruence between current and ideal identities. In organizational research, such congruence is often measured using difference scores, such as the simple difference, absolute value of the difference, or squared difference. However, several researchers, most notably Edwards and his colleagues (Edwards and Parry 1993, Edwards 1994), argue that there are significant methodological problems with using difference scores as predictors. They have demonstrated that using a composite difference score, such as those noted, often masks important differences in the effects for each term comprising the composite score. For example, using a simple difference score of *A* minus *B* to predict *C* might conceal the effects that *A* and *B* have on *C* independent of one another. Furthermore, using composite difference scores often accounts for lower overall explained variance than using the component terms themselves.

To correct this problem, Edwards and his colleagues

**Table 1 Means and Correlations of Key Variables**

	Mean	S. D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Age	56.48	14.912														
2. Education	12.94	2.522	-0.262													
3. # of Co-op Generations	1.58	1.509	-0.031	0.027												
4. # of Co-op Memberships	1.68	1.098	0.064	-0.031	0.362											
5. Current Institutional ID	3.39	1.271	-0.010	-0.015	-0.122	-0.077										
6. Ideal Institutional ID	3.99	1.540	-0.059	-0.097	-0.116	-0.169	0.219									
7. Pragmatic Legitimacy	4.34	1.287	0.138	-0.068	0.001	-0.053	0.128	0.029	(0.922)							
8. Cognitive Legitimacy	4.61	1.261	0.083	-0.039	0.009	0.104	0.129	0.031	0.505	(0.820)						
9. Current Normative Org. ID	4.78	1.414	0.172	-0.155	-0.028	0.025	0.132	0.095	0.481	0.366	(0.885)					
10. Ideal Normative Org. ID	5.34	1.344	0.124	-0.120	0.042	0.041	-0.058	0.227	0.284	0.221	0.616	(0.875)				
11. Current Utilitarian Org. ID	5.53	1.359	0.188	-0.103	-0.046	0.040	0.016	-0.034	0.439	0.379	0.722	0.389	(0.932)			
12. Ideal Utilitarian Org. ID	6.38	0.869	-0.015	0.078	-0.045	0.027	-0.170	-0.011	0.158	0.121	0.339	0.498	0.438	(0.917)		
13. Affective Commitment	3.57	1.479	0.184	-0.173	0.046	0.165	0.147	0.047	0.322	0.394	0.367	0.219	0.319	-0.025	(0.763)	
14. Continuance Commitment	4.17	1.852	-0.025	0.044	-0.203	-0.369	-0.015	0.084	0.120	-0.002	0.058	0.045	0.038	0.124	0.009	(0.838)

Note. Correlations > 0.080 are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Correlations > 0.100 are significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

Reliability measures (Cronbach's alpha) are on the diagonal.

provide an alternative approach, using hierarchical polynomial regression equations. Specifically, they suggest that the researcher first enter the linear form of the difference score (i.e., the two separate terms that make up the difference measure) into the regression equation. Then, subsequent regressions should be run that include the quadratic form (i.e., the square of each term and the product of the two terms) and, if necessary, the cubic form of the difference score. Edwards and colleagues demonstrate that, if entering these higher-order (quadratic and cubic) terms results in effects that are more significant and an increase in explained variance, then there is support for a congruence effect. Thus, for each regression, we hierarchically entered first the set of control variables, then the current and ideal identity terms, and then the square of each identity term and their cross product. Cubic terms did not result in any increased explained variance and thus are not reported here.

As might be expected, there was some degree of multicollinearity among these identity terms, particularly after the quadratic forms were entered into the regressions. Multicollinearity among independent variables inflates standard errors, leading to very conservative significance tests of the coefficients (Hanushek and Jackson 1977). To control for the effects of multicollinearity, we followed Cronbach's (1987) approach, and converted all of the current and ideal identity measures into deviation scores from the mean (see Edwards and Parry 1993).

## Results

Our results can best be summarized in terms of three broad conclusions. First, the results provide support for the proposed identity comparison model. As hypothesized, identity gaps have significant effects on members' assessments of organizational commitment and organizational form-level legitimacy, accounting for as much as

two-thirds or more of the explained variance. Specifically, the terms corresponding to the quadratic form of organizational identity congruence have significant effects on affective commitment, supporting the contention that members make a cognitive comparison between current and ideal identities, and this comparison influences their attitudes toward their organization. However, identity comparisons do not have strong effects on a member's level of continuance commitment. Instead, this form of commitment is best explained by members' social and economic dependencies.

Second, the results provide support for our extension of current models of identification, wherein we include multiple organizational identities. Specifically, the analyses show that the normative and utilitarian identity comparisons are separate and distinct constructs and both the normative and utilitarian identity gaps have significant effects on members' affective commitment and account for the majority of the overall explained variance.

Third, the results also suggest that a similar identity comparison dynamic affects a member's evaluations of an organizational form, lending support for the use of identity as a multilevel construct. Form-level identity congruence has, as hypothesized, significant effects on both cognitive and pragmatic legitimacy. Moreover, the identity congruence terms accounted for the vast majority of the explained variance in both of these outcome variables.

### Organizational Identity Comparisons and Commitment

In regressions predicting *affective commitment*, both the normative and utilitarian identity comparisons accounted for almost two-thirds of the total adjusted R-square in their respective regressions (see Tables 2 and 3), supporting the predictions of Hypotheses 1 and 2. Socioeconomic status, measured by education, had a negative effect in both regressions, but the significance of this effect decreased when the identity comparison terms were added. Age had a highly significant and positive effect in both regressions, which, like that of education, decreased after adding the identity comparison terms. In addition, affective commitment was marginally significantly higher among women. None of the other sociodemographic variables had significant effects. In terms of the resource dependence variables, the number of co-op memberships had highly significant positive effects. It is possible that this result is capturing a "familiarity effect"—i.e., those members who have a positive relationship with their co-op are more likely to join additional co-ops, and vice versa.

In terms of the identity gap variables, both the current

identity and cross-product terms had significant and positive effects. The ideal identity term had a significant and negative effect in the utilitarian identity regressions only. Thus, the overall pattern of the two identity congruence equations shows that a member's perceptions of his or her organization's current identity and the interaction between their current and ideal identities affect that member's commitment to his or her organization. Furthermore, following Edwards' suggestion (Edwards and Parry 1993), we examined surface plots of the regression equations, and the convex surfaces indicated that there are squared difference congruence effects for both normative and utilitarian identities.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of *continuance commitment*, the identity comparison terms accounted for only a small and statistically insignificant increase in variance beyond the control variables, thus failing to support Hypotheses 3 and 4. Although some of the individual identity coefficients were statistically significant, the  $\Delta F$  statistic was insignificant, and the results clearly show that the two structural variables measuring resource dependence had the most significant effects on members' continuance commitment. Those respondents who were members of only the electric co-op were obviously "stuck" in terms of their available options for their power supply needs. Thus, in Meyer and Allen's (1997) terms, these members "needed" to stay with their co-op. Similarly, those individuals with fewer memberships in other co-ops had correspondingly fewer alternatives and less flexibility in their dealings with the particular focal co-op, thereby increasing their degree of continuance commitment to that organization.

### Organizational Form Identity Comparisons and Legitimacy

The strongest predictor of both the *cognitive and pragmatic legitimacy* of the co-op organizational form was the form-level identity gap, increasing the adjusted R-square value by four or more times the effects of the control variables and thereby supporting Hypotheses 5 and 6 (see Table 4). As suggested by past work in sociology, the age of the respondent had a positive effect on both types of legitimacy. Interestingly, being German had a significant effect and being Catholic had a marginally significant effect on cognitive legitimacy as Salamon's (1992) work suggested. The number of co-op memberships also had a highly significant effect on cognitive legitimacy. This could be a reflection of resource dependence, consistent with the variable's intended use. However, similar to its effect on affective commitment, this variable may also be capturing an experience effect, reflecting the degree to which a member sees co-ops as a taken-for-granted organizational form: The more an individual views co-ops

**Table 2** Hierarchical Regressions of Affective and Continuance Commitment on Normative Organizational Identity Congruence and Other Selected Independent Variables

Variable	Affective Commitment			Continuance Commitment		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	3.208*** (0.477)	3.209*** (0.451)	3.210*** (0.450)	3.534*** (0.536)	3.534*** (0.535)	3.531*** (0.534)
Age	0.014** (0.004)	0.009* (0.004)	0.009* (0.004)	0.010* (0.005)	0.009† (0.005)	0.008† (0.005)
Education	−0.067** (0.025)	−0.043† (0.024)	−0.041† (0.023)	−0.006 (0.028)	0.000 (0.028)	−0.002 (0.028)
Farmer (1,0)	0.209 (0.149)	0.210 (0.141)	0.219 (0.141)	−0.082 (0.166)	−0.075 (0.166)	−0.074 (0.166)
Female (1,0)	0.236 (0.148)	0.242† (0.139)	0.263† (0.139)	−0.156 (0.164)	−0.156 (0.164)	−0.185 (0.164)
German (1,0)	0.049 (0.120)	0.035 (0.113)	0.029 (0.113)	0.073 (0.134)	0.070 (0.134)	0.079 (0.133)
Catholic (1,0)	0.084 (0.162)	0.114 (0.153)	0.105 (0.152)	0.017 (0.180)	0.029 (0.180)	0.042 (0.180)
Elec. Co-op (1,0)	0.028 (0.144)	−0.012 (0.136)	0.013 (0.136)	1.622*** (0.161)	1.612*** (0.161)	1.590*** (0.160)
# Generations Co-ops	−0.021 (0.043)	−0.018 (0.040)	−0.022 (0.040)	−0.008 (0.048)	−0.011 (0.048)	−0.008 (0.048)
# Co-op Memberships	0.183** (0.063)	0.172** (0.059)	0.176** (0.059)	−0.266*** (0.071)	−0.270*** (0.071)	−0.272*** (0.071)
Current Normative ID		0.366*** (0.050)	0.288*** (0.061)		0.046 (0.059)	0.152* (0.072)
Ideal Normative ID		−0.018 (0.053)	0.035 (0.069)		0.063 (0.062)	−0.032 (0.082)
Current ID **2			−0.038 (0.031)			0.072* (0.036)
Ideal ID **2			−0.057† (0.031)			0.044 (0.037)
Current ID * Ideal ID			0.111** (0.041)			−0.121* (0.048)
<i>F</i>	5.820	12.303	10.313	25.695	21.450	17.533
Sig. <i>F</i>	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.078	0.181	0.191	0.276	0.280	0.289
Adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.065	0.166	0.173	0.265	0.267	0.273
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> Change	0.078	0.102	0.011	0.276	0.005	0.009
Sig. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> Change	0.000	0.000	0.048	0.000	0.139	0.054

Note. Unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses below.

† =  $p < 0.10$ .

\* =  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ .

\*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$ .

as the accepted means of doing business in rural America, the more co-ops that person will be involved in, and vice versa.

With respect to the impact of identity congruence, both the current identity and cross-product terms had signifi-

cant and positive effects, and the square of current identity had a significant and negative effect. Thus, the data suggest that members' assessments of cognitive and pragmatic legitimacy are significantly driven by the interaction between their perceptions of the current identity of



**Table 3** Hierarchical Regressions of Affective and Continuance Commitment on Utilitarian Organizational Identity Congruence and Other Selected Independent Variables

Variable	Affective Commitment			Continuance Commitment		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	3.208*** (0.477)	3.228*** (0.454)	3.137*** (0.454)	3.534*** (0.536)	3.662*** (0.537)	3.631*** (0.539)
Age	0.014** (0.004)	0.008* (0.004)	0.008† (0.004)	0.010* (0.005)	0.010* (0.005)	0.009† (0.005)
Education	−0.067** (0.025)	−0.048* (0.024)	−0.044† (0.024)	−0.006 (0.028)	−0.010 (0.028)	−0.009 (0.028)
Farmer (1,0)	0.209 (0.149)	0.153 (0.141)	0.177 (0.141)	−0.082 (0.166)	−0.089 (0.166)	−0.101 (0.166)
Female (1,0)	0.236 (0.148)	0.296* (0.140)	0.267† (0.140)	−0.156 (0.164)	−0.148 (0.164)	−0.164 (0.165)
German (1,0)	0.049 (0.120)	0.075 (0.113)	0.073 (0.113)	0.073 (0.134)	0.055 (0.134)	0.057 (0.134)
Catholic (1,0)	0.084 (0.162)	0.010 (0.153)	0.162 (0.153)	0.017 (0.180)	0.007 (0.180)	−0.007 (0.180)
Elec. Co-op (1,0)	0.028 (0.144)	0.067 (0.138)	0.088 (0.137)	1.622*** (0.161)	1.567*** (0.162)	1.553*** (0.162)
# Generations Co-ops	−0.021 (0.043)	−0.006 (0.040)	−0.009 (0.040)	−0.008 (0.048)	−0.003 (0.048)	0.003 (0.048)
# Co-op Memberships	0.183** (0.063)	0.196** (0.060)	0.203** (0.060)	−0.266*** (0.071)	−0.282*** (0.071)	−0.281*** (0.071)
Current Utilitarian ID		0.406*** (0.047)	0.380*** (0.064)		0.015 (0.055)	0.129† (0.075)
Ideal Utilitarian ID		−0.320*** (0.073)	−0.246* (0.117)		0.158† (0.086)	0.088 (0.138)
Current ID **2			0.017 (0.028)			0.052 (0.033)
Ideal ID **2			−0.092 (0.076)			0.098 (0.089)
Current ID * Ideal ID			0.171* (0.074)			−0.149† (0.087)
F	5.820	12.150	10.232	25.695	21.563	17.398
Sig. F	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
R <sup>2</sup>	0.078	0.179	0.190	0.276	0.281	0.288
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.065	0.164	0.172	0.265	0.268	0.271
R <sup>2</sup> Change	0.078	0.101	0.011	0.276	0.006	0.006
Sig. R <sup>2</sup> Change	0.000	0.000	0.039	0.000	0.089	0.144

Note. Unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses below.

† =  $p < 0.10$ .

\* =  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ .

\*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$ .

the organizational form and their preferences for its ideal identity. Surface plots of the regression equations, like those mentioned above for commitment, support our contention that there is an identity congruence effect on legitimacy.

### Conflicting Expectations Within Members

Before concluding our discussion of the study's results, we want to highlight some interesting contrasts between the means of the three current and ideal identities (see Table 1), which illustrate the complexity of members'

**Table 4** Hierarchical Regressions of Pragmatic and Cognitive Legitimacy on Institutional Identity Congruence and Other Selected Independent Variables

Variable	Pragmatic Legitimacy			Cognitive Legitimacy		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	4.405*** (0.423)	3.982*** (0.425)	4.059*** (0.422)	3.888*** (0.410)	3.759*** (0.411)	3.797*** (0.393)
Age	0.012** (0.004)	0.012** (0.004)	0.012** (0.004)	0.011** (0.004)	0.011** (0.004)	0.011** (0.003)
Education	−0.031 (0.022)	−0.030 (0.022)	−0.028 (0.022)	−0.010 (0.022)	−0.006 (0.022)	0.001 (0.020)
Farmer (1,0)	−0.164 (0.133)	−0.131 (0.133)	−0.167 (0.131)	−0.149 (0.129)	−0.109 (0.128)	−0.168 (0.122)
Female (1,0)	0.179 (0.131)	0.159 (0.132)	0.154 (0.130)	−0.033 (0.127)	−0.067 (0.127)	−0.079 (0.120)
German (1,0)	0.079 (0.107)	0.086 (0.106)	0.084 (0.105)	0.206* (0.103)	0.216* (0.102)	0.220* (0.097)
Catholic (1,0)	0.104 (0.141)	0.090 (0.140)	0.121 (0.138)	0.206 (0.137)	0.189 (0.136)	0.246† (0.129)
Elec. Co-op (1,0)	0.078 (0.128)	0.100 (0.127)	0.075 (0.126)	0.078 (0.124)	0.101 (0.123)	0.079 (0.117)
# Generations Co-ops	0.033 (0.038)	0.042 (0.038)	0.040 (0.037)	−0.004 (0.037)	0.007 (0.036)	0.004 (0.034)
# Co-op Memberships	−0.019 (0.055)	−0.019 (0.054)	−0.018 (0.054)	0.123* (0.053)	0.128* (0.053)	0.136** (0.050)
Current Inst. ID		0.134*** (0.041)	0.095* (0.042)		0.142*** (0.040)	0.078* (0.039)
Ideal Inst. ID		−0.014 (0.035)	0.015 (0.035)		0.016 (0.034)	0.054† (0.033)
Current ID **2			−0.058* (0.024)			0.052* (0.023)
Ideal ID **2			−0.012 (0.019)			0.042* (0.017)
Current ID * Ideal ID			0.091*** (0.021)			0.160*** (0.019)
<i>F</i>	1.934	2.571	3.636	2.347	3.228	7.813
Sig. <i>F</i>	0.045	0.003	0.000	0.013	0.000	0.000
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.028	0.045	0.079	0.034	0.056	0.155
Adj. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.014	0.028	0.057	0.019	0.039	0.135
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> Change	0.028	0.017	0.034	0.034	0.022	0.099
Sig. <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> Change	0.045	0.005	0.000	0.013	0.001	0.000

Note. Unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses below.

† =  $p < 0.10$ .

\* =  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ .

\*\*\* =  $p < 0.001$ .

identification with multiple-identity organizations. As a whole, members perceived their specific co-op as having a stronger utilitarian identity than a normative one ( $t = 17.40$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). However, they wanted their co-op to be significantly *both* more normative ( $t = 11.69$ ;  $p <$

0.001) and more utilitarian ( $t = 16.51$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, the relative difference between the current and ideal terms was significantly greater for utilitarian than normative identities ( $t = 5.73$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). In other words, members expected their local co-ops to be both

more like a "family" and more like a "business," but they put their utilitarian concerns ahead of their normative ones. In contrast, when thinking about co-ops as an organizational form, members expected them to be significantly more normative than they currently perceived them to be ( $t = 8.37; p < 0.001$ ). Thus, these data suggest that members hold competing identity expectations for co-ops, wanting the local co-op to be more business oriented and yet expecting co-ops as an organizational form to be more family focused.

## Discussion

In general, the data strongly support the core propositions derived from organizational identification theory. Organizational members cognitively compare their identity perceptions and expectations, and the resulting level of identity congruence significantly affects their level of organizational commitment. Furthermore, the evidence here supports our argument that a similar identification process, based on an identity congruence construct, operates with respect to a member's relationship with an organizational form. In this concluding section, we discuss the limitations of this study, the significance of these findings with respect to their contributions to the literature, and the implications of the results for subsequent research.

## Limitations

Although this study provides significant empirical and theoretical insights, there are several limitations worth addressing here. First and most significantly, although we operationalized and measured the hybrid identity of co-ops as two separate and distinct aspects at the level of the organization (normative and utilitarian), we chose to assess the corresponding duality at the organizational form level as an identity continuum (family vs. business). As noted, this was done mainly to capture the symbolic tension between these two very powerful metaphors that co-ops and their members embody. We recognize that the difference in how we operationalized hybrid identity between the two levels of analysis limits our ability to compare the results of these two identity comparison processes. Clearly, future studies of identification in hybrid-identity organizations need to measure the organization's dual identity both as separate components and as a tension between these two components.<sup>5</sup>

Second, as we noted in our discussion of the survey sample, there is the possibility of sample and response bias. The active farmers in our sample appear to be similar to their counterparts at large, but they are slightly older and operate somewhat larger farms. We were not able to make similar comparisons with the nonfarming co-op

members in our sample due to the lack of a defined comparison population. Thus, our findings may be open to some form of sample bias with respect to these nonfarming families. In addition, we compared the responses of early and late respondents in terms of various proxies for commitment-related response bias, and there were no significant differences between the two groups in either these proxies or the outcome measures of commitment and legitimacy. However, due to confidentiality restrictions, we were not able to obtain data from nonrespondents for any of the proxies listed above.

Finally, as with all correlational designs, the data from our survey do not allow us to necessarily predict causality.<sup>6</sup> Longitudinal studies, however, may be able to shed light on whether identity comparisons influence commitment or vice versa. Some research in organizational communications suggests that there is actually a reciprocal relationship between identity and commitment (e.g., Barker and Tompkins 1994, Cheney 1991).

## Contributions to the Literature

This study makes several significant empirical and theoretical contributions. First, as noted earlier, this study is one of a very few empirical tests of organizational identification theory. As such, the findings provide support for the core proposition of this paper—that identity congruence has a significant effect on members' relationships with their organizations. Second, the sizable portions of explained variance accounted for by these identity comparisons suggest that identity-based models may be a powerful means of explaining many aspects of member-organization relationships. Third, we extend the current identity-based models of identification by examining the case of multiple identity organizations, something that has been unexamined empirically. While the conceptual literature on organizational identity has long recognized the reality of multiple identities in organizations, quantitative studies of the phenomena have not followed. In sum, this study provides valuable empirical insight that is long overdue.

This study also makes two provocative and significant theoretical contributions. First, our findings appear to have implications for the broader body of scholarship pertaining to multiple expectations in and of organizations (Tsui et al. 1995). The foundational premise in this area of research is that differences in expectations exist *between* constituents. However, our findings suggest that in some organizations this type of conflict also resides *within* individual members (Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997). It appears that many members of a hybrid organization identify with both aspects of its dual identity, and thus find themselves embracing competing goals and

concerns associated with distinctly different identity elements.

This study makes a second related contribution to organizational identity theory. In the theory-building component of this study, we extend current identity-based models of identification to include multiple levels of identity abstraction. Specifically, we propose an "organizational form-level identification" construct analogous to that of organizational identification. The preliminary evidence analyzed here supports this theoretical extension of identity as a multilevel construct. With increasing demand for cross-level constructs and theories, identity theory offers one such framework. Because identity theory already links the individual, group, and organization, extending the construct to the level of the organizational form provides a unique and parsimonious means of conceptualizing the full range of relationships that an individual has in and with organizations.

These two theoretical contributions share a common theme: using the construct of organizational identification to expand the current conception of conflicting expectations in organizational members. The insights from this study provided both a horizontal and a vertical expansion of the conflicting expectations phenomenon. The horizontal dimension connotes the conflict emerging from members identifying with different parts of a hybrid-identity organization. The vertical dimension refers to the potential for conflict between a member's expectations of a local organization and its encompassing organizational form. As demonstrated in this study, identity theory offers a parsimonious and holistic means of framing these multiple horizontal and vertical dimensions of member expectations.

### Implications and Directions for Future Research

The results of this study have several implications for organizational theory and practice. First, the large percentage of explained variance due to identity congruence suggests an array of issues and questions regarding the generalizability and robustness of these findings. For example, are there certain kinds of organizational identities that evoke stronger emotional responses than other identities? Do the same identification results hold for mono-identity organizations, or is identity fit more salient in hybrid identity organizations? Does the multilevel utility of identity suggested by this study also hold across other levels of analysis (e.g., between organization and group)? Do the results for the family-business dual identity studied here hold for other types of hybrids (e.g., the profession-business duality of medical clinics)? Are there archetypal hybrid-identity combinations in which identity congruence is a more salient and powerful force? Schol-

ars need to examine these and other factors to determine the boundaries and constraints of the identity congruence model of organizational identification.

Furthermore, research needs to investigate whether identity congruence has similar effects on other consequences of identification besides commitment—such as loyalty, satisfaction, cooperation, and so on. Specifically, although we illustrate the significant relationships between multiple identities and a member's *attitude* toward his or her organization, our survey data did not assess a member's *behaviors*. There is a significant body of research that shows that attitudinal constructs such as organizational commitment are correlated with behaviors in organizations (Mathieu and Zajac 1990, Meyer and Allen 1997), thus implying that a member's identity comparisons affect his or her behavior. However, future studies should explicitly include measures of commitment-related behavior (such as absenteeism, tardiness, turnover, and so on), as well as other behavioral indicators of a member's relationship with his or her organization.

### Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the helpful comments and suggestions of Blake Ashforth, Huseyin Leblibici, Michael Pratt, Rhonda Reger, Randy Westgren, Editor Kaye Schoonhoven, and several anonymous reviewers on earlier versions of this paper. The authors also thank the Center for Farm and Rural Business Finance at the University of Illinois and the Eastern Illinois Cooperative Association for funding this project.

### Appendix A. Confirmatory Factor Loadings for Cognitive and Pragmatic Legitimacy Scales

Scale Item	Factor Loadings	
	1 Factor	2 Factor
<b>Cognitive Legitimacy</b>		
In general, I believe that co-ops . . .		
1. Are the lifeblood of the rural community	0.66	−0.58
2. Have outlived their usefulness ( <i>R</i> )	−0.40	0.77
3. Have forgotten how important their members are ( <i>R</i> )	−0.36	0.64
4. Are of little value to the large farmer ( <i>R</i> )	−0.33	0.70
5. Are of little value to the small farmer ( <i>R</i> )	−0.39	0.71
6. Are struggling to find their niche in agribusiness ( <i>R</i> )	−0.19	0.47
<b>Pragmatic Legitimacy</b>		
Compared with similar businesses, co-ops, in general . . .		
7. Have staff and managers with superior professional skills	0.76	0.77
8. Offer greater opportunity for customers and members to influence the way things are done	0.78	0.78



9. Are more innovative in developing new products and services	0.81	0.81
10. Better understand their customers' needs and concerns	0.89	0.90
11. Are more supportive when members and patrons have financial problems	0.75	0.75
12. Are better managed and operated	0.73	0.72
13. Have a friendlier and more helpful atmosphere	0.75	0.74
Model Fit (CFI)	0.878	0.935

R = reverse-scaled items.

## Appendix B. Confirmatory Factor Loadings for Organizational Identity Scales

Identity Perceptions: Please indicate your perception of the importance that this co-op's management places on each of the following aspects of the co-op:

Scale Item	Factor Loadings	
	1 Factor	2 Factor
<b>Utilitarian Identity</b>		
1. Price of products or services	0.74	0.75
2. Customer service	0.88	0.89
3. Professionalism/expertise of staff	0.85	0.87
4. Quality of products/services	0.87	0.90
5. Value of products or services	0.86	0.85
<b>Normative Identity</b>		
6. Member ownership and control in the co-op	0.70	0.76
7. Social relationships with other members	0.56	0.70
8. Community involvement	0.69	0.80
9. Agricultural education and training	0.73	0.77
10. Commitment to the traditional co-op ideals	0.78	0.84
Model Fit (CFI)	0.868	0.944

Identity Expectations: Now indicate how important you feel they should be

<b>Utilitarian Identity</b>		
1. Price of products or services	0.78	0.80
2. Customer service	0.87	0.88
3. Professionalism/expertise of staff	0.84	0.84
4. Quality of products/services	0.87	0.90
5. Value of products or services	0.79	0.79
<b>Normative Identity</b>		
6. Member ownership and control in the co-op	0.54	0.76
7. Social relationships with other members	0.39	0.75
8. Community involvement	0.51	0.83
9. Agricultural education and training	0.55	0.72
10. Commitment to the traditional co-op ideals	0.56	0.80
Model Fit (CFI)	0.719	0.953

## Endnotes

\*This paper is a revised version of a paper presented at the Academy of Management Meetings (1994).

<sup>1</sup>Although there have been studies of multiple identities in organizations (e.g., Cheney 1991, Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997, Pratt and Rafaeli 1997), we found no peer-reviewed studies that *empirically examine organizational identification with multiple identity organizations*. However, a few interesting unpublished papers have been presented that explicitly or implicitly explore this issue (Golden et al. 1995, Van de Ven et al. 1997).

<sup>2</sup>A series of chi-square tests showed that the farmers in our sample were not significantly different from the farming population at large in terms of several relevant characteristics, including whether they owned or rented their farmland and whether they farmed full time or part time. A test of the age profile of our sample showed a significant difference ( $X^2 = 22.87, 7; p = 0.002$ ), but when the youngest age category (under 35) was excluded, our sample was not significantly different ( $X^2 = 7.448, 6; p = 0.281$ ). To control for the possible effects of age-related bias, we included a binary variable in all regressions, indicating whether or not the respondent was age 35 or under. This variable had no significant effects whatsoever in any of the regressions, and thus it is not included in the results presented in this paper. Also, while a *t*-test of mean farm size indicated only a marginally significant difference ( $t = 2.131; p < 0.035$ ), a comparison of size distributions showed that our sample had significantly more farms in the 500–1,000 acre range ( $X^2 = 32.39, 5; p = 0.000$ ). As noted in the text, we did not use farm size in any of the regressions because it would have excluded the non-farmers in our sample.

<sup>3</sup>In this study, we use EQS (Bentler 1995) to estimate confirmatory factor analysis structural equations and Bentler's Comparative Fit Index (CFI) to evaluate goodness of fit, primarily because the CFI has been shown to be the most robust and least biased estimator of model fit with respect to violations of normality or specification errors (Bentler 1990, West et al. 1995).

<sup>4</sup>Surface plots of all regression equations are available upon request from the first author.

<sup>5</sup>Interestingly, the data from another survey we conducted on members' associations with hybrid identity organizations (work in progress) indicate that a member's identity preference as measured on a continuum is highly correspondent to the relative emphasis he or she places on two separate sets of identity attributes.

<sup>6</sup>Of course, covariance structure analysis (CSA) offers researchers a method of using cross-sectional data to test causal models. Although we used CSA to validate our measurement models, the number of variables that would be involved in testing the causality of the identity comparison models would require two to three times as many observations as we have in our data set for the results to be reliable.

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