Effects of Identity Processes on College Student Self Esteem, Self Efficacy, and Satisfaction with College
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Objectives
- This study investigates how student’s views of themselves both affect and are affected by their initial college experiences.
- Two sociological theories of identity (Role Theory and Social Identity Theory), are used to test the link between identity and self esteem, self efficacy, and student satisfaction.

Hypotheses
- H1: An increase in academic role identity performance and salience will cause increases in self esteem, self efficacy, and satisfaction with college.
- H2: An increase in social identity performance and salience will cause increases in self esteem, self efficacy, and satisfaction with college.
- H3: Changes in academic role identity will have a stronger effect than social identity changes on overall self esteem, self efficacy, and satisfaction with college.

Methods
- An online two wave survey of new college students was conducted at the start of the Fall and Spring semesters of their first year at college.
- 110 responded to the first wave of the survey with 56 also completing the second survey giving us a response rate of 50.9%. Our sample contained 47 females and 9 males, but there were almost no significant gender effects in our models, thus we omit gender from our current analysis.
- Basic demographic questions and control variables from previous research were asked as were self reports on academic outcomes, investments, and attitudes (Role Theory, as well as interactions with non-academic groups (Social Identity Theory)).
- Dummy Variable Multiple Regression is used. In the models, change scores are calculated by subtracting survey answers (on a 1-7 scale) in Fall from answers in Spring, giving change scores ranging from -6 to +6. Change scores are converted into dummy variables where 1=strengthening identity over time, 0=stable or weakening identity over time. Using dummy variables instead of change scores lowers the amount of variance the models explain. While explaining more variance is important, in this case the advantage gained is that any significant effects shown in the model are specifically effects of strengthening identities over time. It also allows for easy interpretation; a coefficient of +1.5 means the those who grew stronger in identity had a mean response on the dependent variable 1.5 points higher (on the 7 point survey question) than other students in the survey.
- A one tailed test of significance is justified by the strong theoretical and empirical findings in the literature. Significance levels reported are for a two tailed test, but a finding shown in the tables at .10 can be interpreted as a .05 level of significance in a one tailed test.

Results
- Table 1 shows that increases in being upset if one’s GPA is lower than expected means that a person is less likely to equate getting a bad grade with being a bad person. An increase in being upset with one’s GPA also makes one more likely to think their ideas are worth little. Clearly, increases in social identity performance are strong and significant. While increases in academic role identity dropped when entered into the models, increases in social identity were strong and significant.
- Table 2 shows that increases in being upset if one’s GPA is lower than expected means that a person is less likely to equate getting a bad grade with being a bad person. An increase in being upset with one’s GPA also makes one more likely to think their ideas are worth little. Clearly, increases in social identity performance are strong and significant. While increases in academic role identity dropped when entered into the models, increases in social identity were strong and significant.
- Table 3 shows that increases in being upset if one’s GPA is lower than expected means that a person is less likely to equate getting a bad grade with being a bad person. An increase in being upset with one’s GPA also makes one more likely to think their ideas are worth little. Clearly, increases in social identity performance are strong and significant. While increases in academic role identity dropped when entered into the models, increases in social identity were strong and significant.
- Table 4 shows that increases in being upset if one’s GPA is lower than expected means that a person is less likely to equate getting a bad grade with being a bad person. An increase in being upset with one’s GPA also makes one more likely to think their ideas are worth little. Clearly, increases in social identity performance are strong and significant. While increases in academic role identity dropped when entered into the models, increases in social identity were strong and significant.
- Table 5 shows that increases in being upset if one’s GPA is lower than expected means that a person is less likely to equate getting a bad grade with being a bad person. An increase in being upset with one’s GPA also makes one more likely to think their ideas are worth little. Clearly, increases in social identity performance are strong and significant. While increases in academic role identity dropped when entered into the models, increases in social identity were strong and significant.

Discussion and Conclusions
- Both increases in academic role identity and social identity did cause increases in self esteem, self efficacy, and satisfaction to varying degrees, supporting H1 and H2.
- Increases in social identity had more significant effects and explained more variance in the models than increases in academic role salience, falsifying H3. Academic role based models explained between 4.2% and 27.9% of the variance in the dependent variables, while the social identity models had higher R² values, showing that they explained from 16.7% to 35.3% of the variance. Thus the social identity based variables in this study are doing on average, a much better job of explaining how first semester experiences impact students self esteem, self efficacy, and satisfaction in their first three months in college.
- Colleges advise students to join groups that interest them (and presumably have like minded people in them), but this advice does not help students who start out thinking people like them are hard to find on campus, nor those whose initial experiences cause them to see fewer people like them at the school after their first semester. It may help if administrators and advisors plan for ways to connect students to others like them outside of currently existing campus groups.
- Perceiving there to be similar people on campus plays a huge part in satisfaction with college overall. Even in a school with a fairly homogenous population this had a strong impact. If this concept alone was used to assess how well people were adapting to school, especially in schools with more diverse populations, it could be helpful in determining which students needed help to find their place. Those who find their place will be more likely to stay at school, graduate, and donate as alumni.

Sources
- Profs helpful Profs
- University

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