

# 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

Standardized regression coefficients. \* = < .10, \*\* = < .05, \*\*\* = < .01, \*\*\*\* = < .001

Table 1: Role Identity Effects on Self Esteem

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Upset if GPA is lower than expected	.172	-.174	-.343	-.390*	-.346	-.419	-.383	-.628*
Grades are a high priority	.326	.362	-.154	-.719	-1.173***	-.107	-.134	-.369
Talk about grades with others	-.094	-.021	-.167	-.064	-.299	-.093	-.300	-.356
Study rather than go out	-.136	-.095	-.285	-.348	.030	-.133	-.156	-.282
Intercept	5.030	4.758	5.103	4.184	5.526	5.683	5.450	5.969
R <sup>2</sup>	.089	.042	.062	.185	.200	.022	.054	.051
Likeable person								
Bad grade/bad person								
Flaws								
Ideas worth discussing								
Happy with self								
Ashamed of mistakes								
People want to spend time with me								
Highly critical of self								

Table 2: Social Identity Effects on Self Esteem

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Important to connect to people	-.381	1.162***		.819	.045	.572	.370	.644
Hard to find similar people	-.135	-.321	.071	.343	-.113	-.699*	-.142	-.477
Join group	.196	-.094	-.249	-.327	.899**	.246	.143	.307
People like me	.033	.837	-.433	-.560	-.300	-.763*	-.023	.307
School has people like me	-.037	-.283	.076	.322	.661	-.140	.329	-.413
Went home when could	.068	1.219**	.082	.341	-.368	-.141	.323	.041
Intercept	5.071	2.131	4.093	4.684	5.184	4.734	4.980	5.448
R <sup>2</sup>	.106	.266	.051	.098	.249	.167	.114	.050
Likeable person								
Bad grade/bad person								
Flaws								
Ideas worth discussing								
Happy with self								
Ashamed of mistakes								
People want to spend time with me								
Highly critical of self								

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 discussing. Increases in grades being a high priority decreases happiness with self.

Table 2 shows that increasing in feeling an importance to connect to people increases the thinking that getting a bad grade means you are a bad person. If it is seen as harder to find similar people there is a decrease in being ashamed of mistakes. Increases in joining groups increased happiness with self and increases in joining groups with people like me increases being ashamed of mistakes. Going home whenever one could increased the belief that getting a bad grade means being a bad person.

Table 3: Role Identity Effects on Self Efficacy

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Upset if GPA is lower than expected	.307	.112	-.285
Grades are a high priority	-.800**	.071	.654
Talk about grades with others	.234	-.250	.542
Study rather than go out	.187	.090	-.724*
Intercept	5.849	6.750	3.436
R <sup>2</sup>	.179	.063	.159
Make own decisions			
Will graduate			
Say something don't do it			

Table 3 shows that increases in grades being a high priority lead to decreases in making one's own decisions. Increases in studying rather than going out lead to decreases in saying something and not doing it.

Table 4 shows that increases in importance of connecting to people increases the perceived likelihood to graduate. It also shows that increases in going home whenever one could caused decreases in making one's own decisions.

Table 5: Role Identity Effects on Satisfaction with College

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Important to connect to people	.010	-.223	.019	-.124	-.309	-.015
Hard to find similar people	-.608	-.830*	.291	.084	-.528	-.482
Join group	.203	.302	.423	.086	.644	.490*
People like me	-.455	.276	-.471	-.077	.250	.116
Went home when could	.219	.586*	.373	.404	.856	.861***
Intercept	5.730	5.190	5.528	5.322	4.276	5.280
R <sup>2</sup>	.133	.238	.171	.126	.201	.303
Classes interesting						
Satisfied with classes offered						
Prof helpful						
Knowledgeable						
College living up to expectations						
Satisfied with University						

Table 6: Social Identity Effects on Satisfaction with College

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Upset if GPA is lower than expected	1.330***	.099	.794**	.470*	.941*	.376
Grades are a high priority	-.095	-.118	-.160	.164	.261	-.017
Talk about grades with others	-.547	-.485	-.101	-.012	-.792	-.488
Study rather than go out	-.069	-.375	.252	.202	.420	-.247
Intercept	4.572	6.079	4.729	5.412	4.666	5.921
R <sup>2</sup>	.279	.089	.136	.077	.137	.101
Classes interesting						
Satisfied with classes offered						
Prof helpful						
Knowledgeable						
College living up to expectations						
Satisfied with University						

Table 6 shows that increases in being upset if GPA is lower than expected was the only independent variable that had a significant impact in this table but it impacted four of the six dependent variables. Increases in being upset if GPA was lower than expected caused increases in thinking that class were interesting. Increases in being upset if GPA was lower than expected also caused increases in thinking that professors were helpful, professors were knowledgeable, and college is living up to expectations.

## 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 R<sup>2</sup> 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

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