THE ENTANGLED STUDENT: IDENTITY CONTROL THEORY AND STUDENT

IDENTITY

By

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A Thesis Presented to

The Faculty of Humboldt State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Master of Arts in Sociology

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May 2018

ABSTRACT

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This study examines the strengths and opportunities in applying the frame of

Identity Control Theory (ICT) to understanding the first-year experiences of students in

higher education. Through thirty-one semi-structured interviews with undergraduate and

graduate students during their first term in the program of study, different components of

the ICT model are explored and tested. Results indicate ICT is modestly effective in

explaining the first term experience for these students, but could be enhanced through

further development in the areas of identity connectedness, identity exploration and

resources/resilience. Recommendations for higher education programming and

suggestions for a potential research agenda for ICT are offered.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Theories are meant to be pushed, revised, and to grow as we gain knowledge and data. New approaches to testing and applying theoretical frameworks reveal opportunities to enhance, revise and confirm the assumptions and assertions of the paradigm. Putting concepts and hypothesized processes into the "wild" of human interactions can show a theory's strengths, as well as demonstrate where it may need refinement and revision. In this work, I examine the explanatory power of one such social psychological theory, Identity Control Theory (ICT), when applied to students transitioning to a new program of study in higher education. Utilizing analysis of interviews with incoming undergraduate and graduate students, I demonstrate where ICT can be a viable framework toward understanding student success and where it needs further development. I offer recommendations aim at improving the ICT model, and a potential research agenda for ICT moving forward, as well as presenting practical suggestions for improving student success programs in higher education based on the result of this study.

Distinctly positivistic in its approach, ICT has most often been tested utilizing laboratory experiments, survey designs, secondary data analysis or highly structured interview formats. Applications to ongoing social problems has been minimal. With this study, I explore the applicability of ICT to a real-world situation: transition to a new college program. This examination is done, in part, with an eye toward understanding how we might be able to apply the insights of ICT to student success in higher education. However, more central to my work is the exploration and understanding of where ICT

might need to expand, refine, and change to more fully represent social reality. I attempt to uncover areas where ICT can inform beyond current approaches and where further research and development might be needed to increase explanatory power and usefulness.

To examine ICT, I focus on the formation of a college student identity (either undergraduate or graduate). Although my research is primarily focused on expansion and refinement of ICT, higher education student success is an important topic of study in and of itself. Obtaining a college degree, for any student, requires not only persistence and continuing effort, but also knowledge and expertise to navigate the complex mix of norms, expectations, and rules in a higher education setting. In the United States, completion of a four-year college degree brings with it a host of social and economic benefits including increased financial autonomy, employment stability and upward mobility not only for current students and graduates but for future generations as well (Tinto 1993; 2012; 2012a; Schafer and Wilkinson 2013). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), for instance, reports the median weekly income for those 25 years or older and hold a bachelor's degree is $1,108, which is 70 percent more than those with only a high school degree ($651) and 43 percent more than those with an associate's degree ($777). Furthermore, the 2013 unemployment rate for those with a bachelor's degree was 4 percent compared to 7.5 percent for those with high school diploma and 7 percent for those with "some college".

College applications have significantly increased over the past thirty years, driving enrollment growth. This growth has occurred across all groups and in all colleges, with the largest growth rates come from traditionally underrepresented groups such as

Hispanic and Black students who attend public institutions. According to the National

Center for Education Statistics (NCES 2017), enrollment in four year colleges has grown

almost a third 2001 to 2011, reaching nearly 21 million students. This growth in college

attendance has not, however, been accompanied by an increase in graduation rates.

According to the NCES (2017), approximately 40 percent of those who start college will

not graduate after six years; this is a rate that has stayed relatively static over the past

thirty years. This means nearly eight million undergraduates who seek a bachelor's

degree will not graduate within six years. These students take on the costs of education,

borrowing an average of $30,100 per student in 2015 (Kreighbaum 2016), without

reaping the rewards of completing a degree.

Several theories have been offered to explain college persistence and graduation

trends. Tinto's (1975, 1993, 2012) theory of student integration has been applied widely

by colleges across the U.S. and has manifested in the creation of student affairs

programming that seek to fully integrate new students to a campus via clubs, support

services, and 'cohort bonding' experiences. For Tinto, students who fully integrate, both

academically and socially, with their new university have a greater chance of graduating.

Responding to Tinto's functionalist style and distinctly hegemonic focused theory of

student success, Rendon (1994) spotlighted the need for students to feel a sense of

validation when attending college. In her validation theory, the ability for students to see

themselves reflected in and valued as part of the campus community is critical to their

success. For example, students of color who do not see faculty, staff, and other students

of color represented at a university may struggle to feel validated and a sense of

belonging, thus increasing their risk of attrition. Finally, a more recent theory of student success put forth by Duckworth (Duckworth 2016; Duckworth and Gross 2014; Duckworth and Quinn 2009; Duckworth et. al. 2007) suggests a person's level of 'grit' is indicative of their ability to succeed. For Duckworth and others studying psychological development in education, a person's approach and perseverance during difficult times is the key factor in their likelihood to succeed. As an example, students who are easily setback by obstacles, distracted by new ideas, or do not complete what they start have less 'grit', according to this approach. The more 'grit' one has the greater the likelihood they will succeed and graduate.

Each of these theories has been applied in different ways to understand and explain student success. In this study, I briefly explore the strengths and limitations of those theories, and explore whether ICT can provide additional insights beyond these frameworks that can drive recommendations for students, instructors and administration in higher education. Additionally, I provide potential points of integration between these frameworks that could expand on ICT and, thus, further its ability to accurately explain the social world.

Research Questions

In this study, I am looking to push the boundaries of Identity Control Theory (ICT). As such, I start with the verification process outlined by ICT as a framework for exploring college student experiences. I examine how the processes and points of the

self-verification process help explain the different experiences of students during their transition into a college program. Specifically, I am examining:

1. What strengths does the ICT framework provide in explaining student transition to a new college program?

2. What recommendations for design of college programs can be gleaned from examining transition to a college program utilizing the ICT framework?

3. How would we apply the strengths and weaknesses of the theory to design a program of research for ICT?

4. Where does ICT need further development to become a more robust theory, particularly when applying to actual social structures/problems?

To explore these questions, I conducted twenty-seven semi-structured interviews with 18 students starting new college programs: eight incoming first time undergraduate students and ten first year graduate students in a terminal master's degree program. Through these interviews, I asked participants to describe self-views, perceptions, emotions and behaviors experienced as part of the role of the student. I also examine perception, acquisition, and utilization of resources such as money, social connections, and emotional strength. To establish context for student self-views and behaviors, I look at the psychosocial development and prior experiences of participants. By looking at these different aspects of student life from the lens of ICT, I attempt to define and push the edges of ICT and examine where it can provide useful insight and where it may need development and refinement to be applied to 'real life'.

In chapter two I outline the theoretical framework of ICT as well as providing an overview of the research completed within this paradigm. Chapter three provides a summary of the current state of higher education in the United States as well as a brief discussion regarding theories of student success in college. The methodology for this study is laid out in chapter four. Results are presented in chapter five focused on the strengths of and opportunities for expanding ICT and next steps for the paradigm. Finally, in chapter six I speak to the implications for higher education as well as a possible research social psychological research agenda for ICT.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW IDENTITY CONTROL THEORY

In this study, I approach the exploration and analysis of student experiences from the framework of Identity Control Theory (ICT). As a theory, ICT builds upon social psychological traditions in sociology focused on understanding how social structures are replicated by, and, in turn guide, ongoing interactions between individuals. It is firmly rooted in a structural view of the world, and places the self as situated within the structures of society. For ICT, there is truly no self without the social and no social without the self.

In its most basic formation, ICT contends individuals have certain self-meanings about different roles they play, groups they belong to, and about themselves as a person that arise from years of socialization within a society and culture. These meanings translate to a set of expectations about how to act in any given situation. Individuals carry these expectations into a variety of social situations where they interact with others who also have self-meanings and expectations. According to ICT, individuals seek to confirm their self-meanings through interaction. As interaction occurs, feedback is provided by others in the situation, and this gives individuals information about how their performance is being received by others. Based on how that feedback is perceived, a person will determine if their enactment is being 'confirmed' or 'rejected'. If it is not, negative emotions will arise and prompt a behavior to try and bring the perceived feedback in line with self-expectations. If instead confirmation is perceived positive, affect is experienced and, likely, the current behavior will continue.

In this chapter I provide a brief overview of the symbolic interactionist foundation for ICT. Following this I examine the concept of *identities* within the ICT framework as well as discussing how this has been studied and measured. Within the discussion on identities I also discuss a handful of important aspects related to identities including: different types of identities, how identities are organized in this self, connections between identities, and identity change. Next, I define and outline the concepts that make up the self-verification process that lies at the heart of ICT. Finally, I present research that provides evidence for the verification process as well as some outstanding questions in this field.

Symbolic Interaction Foundation

The symbolic interactionist (SI) tradition in sociology is generally thought to have begun with the work of Mead (1938, 1934, 1932), Cooley (1902) and, to a lesser extent, James (1904). *Mind, Self, and Society* (1934), a collection of Mead's lectures, outlines his view of individuals and society and set the stage for the birth of sociological social psychology. Mead's (1934) central assertion was that there are no individuals without society and no society without individuals. The interaction between individuals in social situations, mediated through symbols such as language, is what creates structure as well as change in society (Burke and Stets 1999). Social interactions are distinctly human in that, as humans, we can create shared meaning, and see ourselves from the point of view of others in the situation, allowing us to interpret, plan, and act. It is this assumption of

structure and change being rooted in social interactions that is the consistent thread that binds social psychological research in sociology.

Mead's (1934) approach was grounded in the pragmatist tradition of James (1904) and others. In line with this pragmatist foundation, Mead moved the conceptualization of the self away from a primarily internal psychological construct (as favored by psychologists such as Freud (1962), as well as departing from the socio-biological determinism of Spencer (1892) and others, to put the construction of the self squarely in the realm of social interaction. This departure from a more purely biological and psychological view of the self is the foundation upon which all subsequent research in symbolic interactionism has been constructed. The ability for society to operate and maintain itself comes from the constant social interaction of individuals facilitated by symbols, constrained by norms and rules, and empowered by the ability to have shared meanings. This focus of social cohesion and conflict as centered in social interaction set the stage for the development of social psychological frameworks in sociology.

Symbolic interactionism views individuals as occupying and enacting multiple *selves* based on situation, structures, socialization and creativity. James (1904) was an early proponent that humans do not have one *self* but multiple *selves* that fit different situations, roles, groups, and the like. When at work, one may be the role of instructor or business woman, and while at home one may enact the role of partner or mother. Similarly, one might consider herself moral, be a member of an online community and play chess on the weekend with friends. In each case, the individual is occupying and

playing out different *selves*. These different selves come with different norms, meanings and expectations.

The early proponents of the SI tradition developed several important concepts that would become critical to later research and theories within sociological social psychology (SSP). First, the self is a multifaceted composite of a creative and impulsive element known as the *I*, and a socially constructed self that adheres to social norms, rules, and definitions which he termed the *me* (Mead 1934). This dualism of self was popular at the time and is like Freud's notion of the *id* and the *superego* alongside the mediating *ego* (1962). The *I* provides the creative energy that allows for change and innovation, while the *me* facilitates shared meaning and structure among different individuals interacting (Mead 1934). This fundamental divide of the self would, over time, spawn different branches of symbolic interactionism that would emphasize the more creative self (Blumer 1969) or the more structured version of the *self* (Stryker 1980).

Goffman (1978), for instance, would adopt and further develop these points to build his dramaturgical theory of social interaction. Like playacting, individuals live both on stage (*me*) and off stage (*I*), and work to manage how others view them through interaction and their *presentation of self*. Although Goffman's (1978) approach spent considerable time on the structural elements of self-presentation, the underlying notion of a creative agent behind the playacting version of the *self* places the focus more on the constant restructuring of situations, meanings, and self through interaction.

In contrast, Stryker (1980) outlined a framework that diminished the role of the creative *self* in favor of a focus on how structural patterns of interaction and *roles* in

society guide behavior and perception. In this view, the *self* during interaction is attempting to adopt and adhere to a set of rules associated with a *role* that is appropriate to the situation at hand. These situations are, in turn, positioned within larger institutions of society that guide the rules of interactions. The pattern of interactions between roles make up the *social structure* for Stryker. Whereas Goffman spoke of a creative self-taking on different parts in a social play, Stryker sees individuals as part of a structure replicated by and through interaction.

Identity control theory (ICT) was born from the structural symbolic interactionism (SSI) (Stryker 1980) branch of social psychology. The SSI paradigm views individuals as occupying and embodying structurally defined roles in society that greatly influence their interactions with others. Social interaction is predicated on these roles and the shared understandings that are facilitated through symbolic communication. For instance, a person who is a student (role) receives grades (symbols) that are meant to represent an assessment of academic performance (shared understanding). The presentation of these grades (symbolic communication) leads to both emotional and behavioral responses with others and with the environment (interaction). The role of students and all that entails is structurally defined and situated within the institutions of society.

Other schools of thought derived from symbolic interactionist roots emphasize idiosyncratic and creative recreation of situations through agency and interaction (Blumer 1969). SSI, however, focuses more on stable patterns of interactions, and how these structures are formed, perpetuated, and ultimately guide individual interaction. Returning

to the student example, SSI is concerned with how the expectations and meanings infused into the role of a student have been established over time and, more importantly, how expectations and meanings affect the behavior of individuals. Rather than examining how individuals creatively reenact the role of student in their interactions, SSI would ask how the expectations of being a student determine one's understanding and reaction to interaction such as getting grades, joining study groups, and other 'student behaviors'. This focus on the structural patterns of expectations that define roles and influence behavior is my starting point for this research.

Identities

The core component linking structure and the self for ICT is *identity* (Stryker 1980). The concept of *identity* comes in a variety of forms (Burke and Stets 2009). For this study, I limit the definition of *identity* to the set of expectations and self-meanings individual holds that relate to a role they occupy, a group membership they hold, or view of their *self* as a person (Burke and Stets 2009). The *self* has multiple, simultaneous, identities that mutually influence each other (Burke 2003). For instance, an individual likely holds a set of self-meanings about their gender identity may related to what it means to be a mother, child, worker, and other identities they embody.

The conceptualization of identities or *self-views* has been explored by different studies over the years. For instance, Burke and Tully (1977) outlined a methodological approach for determining role-level identities. According to Burke and Tully, definitions of role-identities are best measured in relation to counter identities. Reitzes and Burke

(1980) applied this methodology when defining student role identities. Asking students to rate where, on a continuum, a "student identity" falls between attributes, Reitzes and Burke (1980) could ascertain the meanings participants have regarding the student role. This work demonstrated the underlying structure of multiple identities and demonstrated a method for measuring these self-views. Identities come with set of expectations and meanings about that identity within a given situation (Burke and Stets 2009).

Types of identities

Self-meanings guide how individuals see themselves and what they expect from themselves and others across a variety of situations. There is not one identity that defines a person but rather a variety of self-meanings within a single person. Three types of identities are defined in identity control theory: *role*, *social*, and *person* (Burke and Stets 2009). A *role* identity is an internalized set of meanings and expectation tied a social position that guide people's attitude and behavior (Stets and Burke, 2009: 114). A 'student' or 'worker' would be examples of role identities. *Social* identities are sets of meanings and expectations based a person's identification with a group (Stets and Burke, 2009: 118). As an example, identifying as a woman or as a Latina represent *social* identities. Finally, a *person* identity is associated with seeing oneself as a unique and distinct individual (Stets and Burke, 2009: 124). Seeing oneself as moral or hard-working are examples of *person* identities. These different types of identities reflect the different ways society organizes individuals (see Table 2.1).

2.1 Types of identities

Identity Type	Definition	Examples
Role	An internalized set of meanings and expectation tied a social position that guide people's attitude and behavior (Stets and Burke 2009: 114)	Father, Wife, Son, Worker, Student
Social	Set of meanings and expectations based on a person's identification with a group (Stets and Burke 2009: 118)	Community Member, Club Member
Person	The set of meanings and expectation associated with seeing oneself as a unique and distinct individual (Stets and Burke 2009: 124)	Moral, Funny, Friendly

Identities are not necessarily positive either. Self-views can be *stigmatized* or

spoiled (Goffman 1978, 1976) and carry with them insecurity, anxiety and other

'maladaptive' characteristics. These spoiled identities carry an attribute that is

"discrediting" and are perpetuated through the same underlying process of verification.

As such, when a stigmatized identity is confirmed there is a sense of contentment

theorized by ICT. The nature of the identity (e.g. maladaptive) does not alter the

verification process and this will be important when examining student behavior in

understanding how self-views and confirmation may not always lead to persistence and

goal attainment (e.g. graduation).

Different disciplines and a variety of studies have examined identity types.

Psychologically focused social psychology tends to focus more on the *social* identity

while sociological social psychology speaks most about *role* identities (Stets and Burke

2000). The development of a *person* identity is a relatively new area of research in this

field and continues to sharpen its definition to attempt to remove it from a philosophical

approach or avoid the notion of a "one true self" hypothesis. The research on social identity and role identity, however, is extensive.

For one to socially identify with a group they must be able to see themselves as aligned with the groups norms and prototypes (Van Veelen, Otten and Hansen 2013). Association with the group, in turn, affects attitudes and behavior. For instance, Hogg (2005) utilized social identity theory to understand how association with in-group norms and behaviors reduces uncertainty which, in turn, affects one's ideological worldview (e.g. just world, authoritarianism, etc.). In-group social identity also has been shown to serve a protective function, leading to more positive self-appraisal than when one is not connected to an in-group (Ransom, Cast, and Shelly 2015). Crocker and Luhtanen (1990) go so far as to argue that groups create a collective self-esteem which can enhance individual self-esteem. Group membership can change the way one sees the world, protect oneself from negative feedback, and even potentially enhance self-esteem.

Terry, Hogg and White (1999) examined the influence of social and person identities on intention and behavior towards recycling. The authors found that person identity did relate to future behavior and was not moderated by prior experience. Social identity, on the other hand, did predict intention, but only for those who were strongly identified with a group (e.g. environmental group). Social identity comes with categorization and enhancement of in-group traits in comparison to views of out-group members. Social identity does require a deeper/stronger level of commitment.

Role identity was the favored identity type for Stryker (1980) and continues to be the primary identity type for sociological analysis of interaction (Stryker and Burke

2000). Kerpelman and Lamke (1997) demonstrate how confirmation of one's role identity (e.g. partner/significant other) can affect certainty about life choices (e.g. occupation). Similarly, Li and Kerpelman (2007) showed that confirmation of the child role and congruence with guardians lead to positive emotions and higher levels certainty in career choices. Multiple other studies look at role identities in terms of their relationship with marital dynamics (Stets and Burke 2005), goal attainment (Trettevik 2015), anxiety and stress (Burke 1991), and career exploration (Anderson and Mounts 2012) to name a few.

As mentioned, the work related to person level identities have not been studied to the extent that both social- and role-level identities have been examined. Stets and Carter (2012) examined the "moral identity" and show that by framing interactions with a set of moral rules, individuals will perform differently compared to situations not framed in this manner. This approach fits well with classic psychological experiments that show simply reminding someone of the moral components of situation (e.g. placing an academic code of conduct on top of a test) tends to activate moral identities and lead to behavior that fits the moral frame invoked (Burke and Stets 2009).

Organization of identities

A person's identities are organized in terms of their importance to the individual as well as the likelihood they will be invoked in each situation (McCall and Simmons 1966). Identities exist in a hierarchy, ranked according to their centrality or importance to the individual, or what McCall and Simmons (1966) call *prominence.* Powers (1973) applied these points to conceptualize identities as connected in a hierarchal scheme much

like a computer systems code is organized so that lower level code is guided by higher

order commands. Stryker and Serpe (1994, 1982) demonstrated the higher the importance

of an identity to the individual the higher its placement in the prominence hierarchy.

Every identity has a level of *salience* defining its likelihood to be active in each

situation. The probability that any one identity is active in each situation is known as its

salience (Styker and Serpe 1982). *Salience* and *prominence* are related in that the higher

the prominence of identity, the more likely it is to be invoked in each situation. However,

it is not an exact correlation. For instance, attending college may logically result in the

'student identity' being activated more often than other identities, however, this does not

necessarily mean that being a student is the most important identity for that individual.

Being a family member, partner, worker, or any number of other identities may be higher

in *prominence*, but are not as salient due fewer situations where those roles are needed.

Prominence tends to stay more stable across time and situations while salience is more

contingent on situational context. In short, prominence influences the likelihood of an

identity being activated in a situation but the situation itself also plays an important part.

The *salience* and *prominence* of identities guide how a person sees the world and,

in turn, influence decision making and behavior. For instance, Morris (2013) studied the

role of *salience* and *prominence* (as well as centrality) with college students and found

individuals did not always select their most prominent role in each situation but rather

those that are most salient. The *salience* of an identity was shown to be correlated with its

prominence, however was not an exact match. As such, students chose to play roles and

partake in activities that did not necessarily involve the more prominent identities (e.g.

son, friend, etc.) in favor the more salient roles (e.g. student, worker). Studying only the prominent identities would give inaccurate descriptions of interaction across situations. Those parts of the self that are most important do not always have situations to be activated, but they do constantly influence self-views and behavior. *Prominence* and *salience* are distinct concepts and ways of organizing identities that are correlated, but are not interchangeable. A student sitting in class is not just an academic, but also a worker, a friend, a spouse, and a soccer player. Being a student may not be the most important role in their lives, just the one they need right now while in class.

Connections between identities

Identities do not exist in isolation from other identities. Not only are identities organized in a hierarchy, according to ICT, but they also connected to and influence each other (Smith-Lovin 2007). Some identities have greater influence than other identities due to their consistent and ongoing activation. These diffuse identities are considered master identities, have significant influence on other identities, and are present across multiple situations rather than being specific to a given situation (Stets and Burke 1996). Common examples of master identities are gender (Carter 2014) and race (Burke and Stets 2009). Regardless of situational context, being a black woman or white man influence are interconnected identities that influence social interactions. A person's interconnected and multi-dimensional set of master and non-master identities result in an identity profile for an individual that provides an indication of their likelihood to utilize certain meanings and expectations in each situation.

Identities do not always live harmoniously with each other. When identities work at cross purposes this creates role conflict (Burke and Stets 2009). Students who must also work a job (particularly off-campus) often experience stress and frustration from the conflict between these roles. Similarly, students who move away from close family may also experience a conflict between their student identity and their views on being a member of their family. A related concept, role strain, occurs when the expectations and demands of an identity are overwhelming (Goode 1960). A student feeling overwhelmed by finals, term papers, and other student obligations is demonstrating role strain.

Identity change

ICT contends that the meanings, or *identities,* with which one comes to a situation with are difficult and slow to change. People are much more likely to change behavior in order to modify inputs than to modify self-meanings (Burke 2006). If behaviors do not accomplish balance between standards and appraisals, leaving the situation becomes a preferred option. As an example, changing the definition of the situation and one's role in it is an unlikely response and takes time to occur versus leaving the situation or attempting to align with situational rules and roles. This is perhaps understandable, as identities form over extended years of socialization and interaction with significant others. They are embedded in deep conceptual frames of what the world is and one's place in that world.

Recent research has started to challenge this notion of slow change and transformation by introducing concepts such as *identity certainty* and concentrating on moments of *self-transformation* that might encourage *identity exploration*. Cantwell's

(2011) dissertation explores how the range of expectations and certainty associated with

an identity affects emotional and behavioral reactions and can lead to exploration.

Anderson and Mounts (2012) examined identity certainty and occupational choice in

showing there are moments and individuals that are more open to exploration than others.

Kerpelman and Lamke (1997) examined the role of partner's perceptions and identity

certainty in shaping self-ratings during times of identity disruption. They found that

views of self were correlated with partner views and level of certainty in identities. Many

college students also explore their identities during the years at the university through

experimentation, new relationships, and other avenues. ICT has some difficulty in

addressing this type of exploration and change (see Burke 2006 for a discussion of

identity change).

Self-Verification Process

How one sees themselves sets the stage for how they will interact with others in a

social situation. Burke and Stets (2009) offer a process that connects the different

identities through a process of self-verification. This verification model is the heart of

ICT. As outlined in figure 2.1, for ICT, the meanings a person attaches to a role, group

membership (social), or personal trait define not only the identity for that person in that

situation (Burke and Stets 2009) but also serve as a standard for how to behave and

perceive others in that moment. Based on their *identity standard*, individuals interact with

others which, in turn, evokes a response from others in the environment. The *environment*

is both the localized situation (e.g. other people, materials, etc.) as well as the more

global social environment in which the situation is embedded. Once a reaction occurs, the

individual perceives this as feedback on their identity performance. This perceived feedback is then compared against the standard to see whether one's view of self has been confirmed.

As an example, a student arrives at their instructor's office hours with a set of questions regarding an upcoming exam. In general, this student sees themselves as smart, hard-working, and as a 'good' student. This view of their student self establishes a standard and expectations for how the discussion with the instructor will proceed. During the discussion with the teacher, the student perceives they have, in fact, not fully understood the material. The questions asked by the student receive multiple responses that are perceived as negative by the student. During this interaction, the student identity is not confirmed. This lack of confirmation, as discussed in the next section, results in emotions that drive behavior.

The verification of identities, through a comparison between the standard and perceived *feedback*, is the driving force of the interaction process. According to ICT, when verification occurs individuals experience positive *emotion* such as contentment and happiness and will continue to behave in ways that continue this verification. When verification does not occur, negative affect such as anxiety, anger, sadness, and the like arises which leads individuals to try different behaviors to try to bring *perception* of *feedback* in line with identity standard(s). These behaviors are considered *outputs* in the verification process. When an individual perceives that their enactment of an *identity* is not in line with *feedback* from others they feel bad about this and work to change the perception of feedback from others to be more aligned with their *identity standard*.

Returning to the office hours' example, as the conversation progresses the student may try different behaviors to demonstrate their preparedness and intelligence. They may show their notes or reference material from the class in detail. However, they may also choose to withdraw from the conversation and provide status to the instructor in order to gain confirmation of themselves as a student. The actual behavior invoked to bring about alignment is dependent on several factors, including how important the student identity is to the individual, its relationship to other identities, the level of certainty about the student identity and so on. What is driving the behavior is sense of unease or discomfort with the incongruence between what the student thought of themselves and their perception of how the instructor is viewing them in this situation.

This process is enabled by the fact that individuals have shared meanings and symbols that can be used in interaction. Language is the most often cited and clear representation of shared meanings utilized in an interaction. Individuals from a similar society can communicate due to the use of shared symbols in language. Symbols are more than language, however, and include objects in the environment that have shared meanings among participants in the interaction. For instance, money holds importance due to shared agreement that it can be exchanged for goods and services. Symbols, therefore, are the tools utilized to achieve verification. Individuals have different levels of access to symbols to achieve verification. This access to symbols for verification is how ICT conceptualizes *resources.*

In summary, individuals arrive at situations with a set of meaning and expectations aligned with an identity that is active in a situation. As interaction occurs

with others, individuals perceive the feedback of others by seeing themselves through the eyes of fellow actors. This perception is compared against the standard to check for congruence or verification via a theoretical mechanism called the *comparator*. When a disturbance (incongruence) is detected negative, emotion occurs motivating individuals to correct this 'error' through changing the perceived feedback of others. The goal of interaction is verification of the standard(s) associated with self-meaning(s).

Assumptions of verification process

As this framework is applied to analysis of social situations, such as students in college, important assumptions that underlie this theory should be notated. First, the 'goal' of interaction is verification and congruence between self and others. This is the core of ICT theory; however, other conceptualizations of interaction suggest a different core mechanism. For instance, self-enhancement theory (Harkness 2005; Stets 2005; Ranson et al. 2015) states individuals will feel positive emotion if they perceive they have exceeded expectations. ICT on the other hand, would hypothesize that even positive 'disturbances' will result in negative emotions. Goal attainment theory (Trettevik 2016) similarly contends that not all incongruence results in negative affect and corrective behavior. In goal attainment theory, so long as one is making progress towards a goal discrepancy is acceptable. ICT does not traditionally account for progress towards longer term goals.

A second assumption to highlight is that identities do not change rapidly (Burke 2006). This means in each situation, individuals use behavior outputs and resources in the environment to manipulate perceived feedback to match the identity standard, and do not

simply change the standard to match feedback. For instance, a student is not likely to decide they are not a good student due to feedback, but rather they will try different outputs to create alignment with their self-view. The identity standard should, for the most part, be considered constant when analyzing a situation. Identities can and do change over time, but the process is slow, especially for those identities that are higher in prominence within the self-identity hierarchy. Changes in an environment, such as transitioning to college, may also allow for greater change in role identities (e.g. student) but even then, the process is not completely open to re-configuration and relies on core principles to maintain self-continuity.

The final assumption to discuss is that individuals seek to control the perceptions of feedback and, thus, different feedback may result in different outcomes. Verification should not be considered "objective" but rather mediated through the filter of self-perception. This is important when analyzing and discussing strategies individuals use to achieve verification. If verification is the goal and identities do not change within a situation, then how each person manipulates their perceptions is key to understanding behavior. One might change their verbal and nonverbal behaviors to create verification but may also choose to change perceptions perhaps through discounting feedback by certain others or through or defensive measure that protect the self and maintain the standard (Stets and Cast 2007). One student may perceive feedback from an instructor as in line with their standard and feel positive about themselves, while the exact same feedback to another student could result in negative feelings and prompt corrective action. Now that the basic process and key assumptions of ICT has been outlined I will

turn to a more in-depth look at the main components of the ICT model and how these have been operationalized and measured.

Identity standard

Self-meanings not only determine how individuals sees themselves as a person, a group member or as a role but also set the identity standard that guides interaction and behavior (Burke and Stets 2009). The identity standard has been shown to influence perceptions, emotions, behaviors and interactions with others by setting the baseline for how a person sees themselves. Collett, Vercel, and Boykin (2015), for example, applied this conceptualization of identities and expectations to explain the inequality in parenting, demonstrating the positive reaction to "more involved fathers" is largely based on the expectations of the father role rather than a significant change in equity. The standard for being a "good dad" sets a lower bar than it does for a "good mom" for things such as housework, interaction with children, and other parental duties. When dads perform household tasks such as doing the dishes or playing with the children, they receive feedback that indicates they are in line with expectations and, therefore feel positive emotions. Similar activities by mothers likely do not receive similar feedback and confirmation. The claim that fathers are more involved and take on a larger set of responsibilities related to parenting is a claim based on this father identity standard and not necessarily a shift in the status dynamics in many families.

Trettevik (2016) similarly demonstrated that the identity standard, though not the only factor in determining emotion and behavior, was a critical piece to understanding how individuals perceive feedback and behave in a college setting. In her work, students'

self-views set the stage for the perception of feedback such as grades on exams and comments. Anderson and Mounts (2012) also showed that certainty and clarity around an identity standard influenced the likelihood one would be willing to explore different identities and pursue change. The identity standard has been shown to guide interaction and emotions when placed in a process that includes feedback.

Feedback and reflected appraisals and comparator

Individuals judge their performance of an identity by interpreting the feedback from others in the situation and comparing that against their identity standard. The *comparator* is a theoretical mechanism that evaluates the match between perceived feedback and the identity standard. This interpretation is done by taking the role of the other and seeing oneself reflected in the feedback of others as if they are mirrors (Cooley 1902). Interpretation of feedback, then, becomes the 'input' to the verification system and process. It is important to remember that this feedback is not "objective" and can only be understood from the point of view of the individual not based on some objective external measures.

This notion that individuals 'take the role of the other' is difficult to test given that it is primarily internal to the individual. Cast, Stets, and Burke (1999) however did study this mechanism though the examination of status and power in marriages. Their work demonstrated a lower status partner was influenced by the views of the higher status individual. By showing how marital partners viewed themselves through the eyes of their significant others, the authors demonstrated not only that individuals take the role of the other, but also gave a glimpse into how power dynamics are replicated through the

interaction process. Feedback becomes filtered through individual perceptions of how others see them in the situation. This is then compared to with the standard to see if they have been confirmed or not in that situation.

Being able to manipulate the perceptions of feedback mitigates dis-confirming appraisals. Stets and Tsushima (2001) demonstrated that the different types of identities (social and role) as well as status/power lead to different emotions and coping mechanisms for disconfirming feedback. When speaking to how individuals cope with anger, the authors found that *social* identities were tied to changes in perceptions (e.g. discounting the feedback) while anger related to dis-confirmed *role* based identities resulted in a more behavioral response (e.g. confrontation).

Disconfirming feedback can lead to temporary re-evaluation of self along with negative emotion and corrective behavior. Swann and Hill (1982) demonstrated that when students received feedback that was discrepant from their self-conception this lead to changes in how they viewed themselves temporarily. Trettevik (2015) similarly showed how discrepant feedback is interpreted by individuals in the context of their identities and goals. Students in Trettivik's study mitigated the negative impact of disconfirming feedback if they were able to still perceive they were making progress towards their goal. As an example, a lower grade than expected on the first exam of semester was interpreted as more acceptable if progress was made on future exams and students could see growth in their work. Confirmation of self also effects certainty about choices and direction in life with those who have a high level certainty and confirmation as being more definitive in their choices. (Kerpelman and Lamke 1997). This comparison

of feedback to standard results in emotions in the individual that, in turn, lead to behaviors to address that emotion.

Emotion and behavior (output)

Discrepancies between expectations and perceptions of feedback from others lead to an emotional response. An emotional response is the stimulus for a behavioral response that seeks to eliminate the negative affect or maintain the positive emotions. Burke (1991) demonstrated how the interruption of self-verification leads to 'social stress' and outlines the different ways in which interruption might occur. Stets and Burke (2005) applied this verification frame to understand marital dynamics and show that inability to verify spousal identity endangers the marital relation and challenges identity which leads to attempts to control their partner in order regain self-verification. Anderson and Mounts (2012) similarly applied this frame to understanding different response to discrepant feedback for college students when picking a career. The authors found that the perceived verification of occupational choices lead to solidification of those choices for college students, while disconfirmation leads to negative effect and uncertainty in choosing occupations.

Emotional reactions range based on type of identity being invoked in a situation. Stets and Tsushima (2001) demonstrated that emotions associated with social identities tend to be more intense due to the intimacy of those self-views while role based identities lead to longer lasting emotionality. Furthermore, negative affect associated with social identities tend to lead to a cognitive-perceptual response (e.g. rethinking the situation), while role-based affect leads to behavior (e.g. task completion). As discussed previously,

Trettevik (2016) demonstrated how the type of standard as well as one's perceived

progress towards a goal lead to different emotional reactions to feedback and,

consequently different behavioral responses. In these studies, and others, emotion is

derived from the verification (or lack thereof) of identities. This affective state prompts

action to address the discrepancy. The ability of a person to address a lack of

confirmation is based on their access to *resources* in the environment.

Resources

The ability to confirm self-views is determined by the *resources* one has available

to them in each situation. Resources are defined as "processes that are definable in terms

of sustaining a system of interaction, including verifying the self" (Stets and Cast

2007:518). Freese and Burke (1994) emphasized how shared meanings and signification

are critical to understanding *resources.* Without a symbolic understanding and agreement,

resources would not facilitate the verification of self. For instance, money may allow a

student to buy the computers and books they need to successfully verify my student role.

This is only possible because there is shared meaning that the paper object (money) is fair

exchange for other objects (computers and books). The student pursues these objects

because there exists a shared understanding that they are necessary for successful

enactment of a student role.

Resources are not equally accessible to all participants in a situation. Burke, Stets

and Cerven (2007) showed how individual status, a symbolic resource, link with social

identities (e.g. gender) and role performance (legitimation/task) to allow certain

individuals, particularly males who have been legitimized through role performance, to

verify self while others struggled to be able to do so in that setting. Signification and symbolization are the core of resources in this view. Access to resources is positive feedback loop in that the more resources one has access to the more verification that occurs and the more verification that occurs the more access to resources an individual is provided.

Stets and Cast (2007) contended that individuals control the flow or resources in order confirm their view of self. Verification, in turn, can provide individuals more resources to control having both an immediate and longer-term effect on the interaction. Resources are dynamic or "in motion" either in a situation ("active resources") or as potentially in motion ("potential resources") "…resources have no function until they are in motion in a situation" (519). *Signs* are directed at and indicate active resources. For instance, the feel of a pen used to write or the joy of a new baby. They are immediate and in use in the current situation. Potential resources have been labeled as *symbols*. Potential resources have capacity to sustain the self in future interactions and are referred to through shared symbols. These symbols are shared in so far as the meanings associated with the symbol such as a brand name car, the emotion of love, or other symbol are shared among participants. Resources flow across time and situations and do not remain static. For their analysis, the authors focused only on those resources that are "important, given the culture, in maintaining and improving social actors existence (e.g. status and esteem)" (520). The authors identified three categories of valuable resources: *personal, interpersonal and structural. Personal* resources related to self beliefs that reference the self as an integrated self (e.g. moral, authentic, etc.) and helps one keep going in a

situation. *Interpersonal* resources are based on relationships, such as taking the role of the other. The more one accesses and utilizes this resource the more likely the social interaction will be affirmed and maintained. Finally, *structural* resources allow for more "influence" on a structural level such as with education, occupation, and the like.

  ICT was developed from a rich history of symbolic interactionist frameworks and structural symbol interactionism. While other branches of symbolic interactionist paradigm emphasized creativity and agency ICT focused on the roles and groups one belongs to and their accompanying rules, norms, and the like. Being a college student is a role that many in the United States embody at one point in their lives. Given the growing importance a college degree in modern U.S. society, it is important to understand how the verification process plays out in a student's experience of the university. In the next chapter, I first give a picture of the landscape of higher education in the United States and outline prominent theories of student success before moving laying out my methods and the results of this present study.

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        ┌──────────┐
        │ Identity │              ┌──────────┐
        │ Standard │              │ Resources│
        └──────────┘              └──────────┘
              │
        ┌──────────┐
Perceptions → │Comparator│ → Emotion
        └──────────┘

┌──────┐        Self        ┌──────┐
│Input │ ┈┈┈┈┈┈┈┈┈┈┈┈┈┈┈┈┈┈ │Output│
└──────┘      Environment   └──────┘

Reflected        ┌────────┐        Impact
Appraisals  ←    │Feedback│  ←
                 └────────┘
```
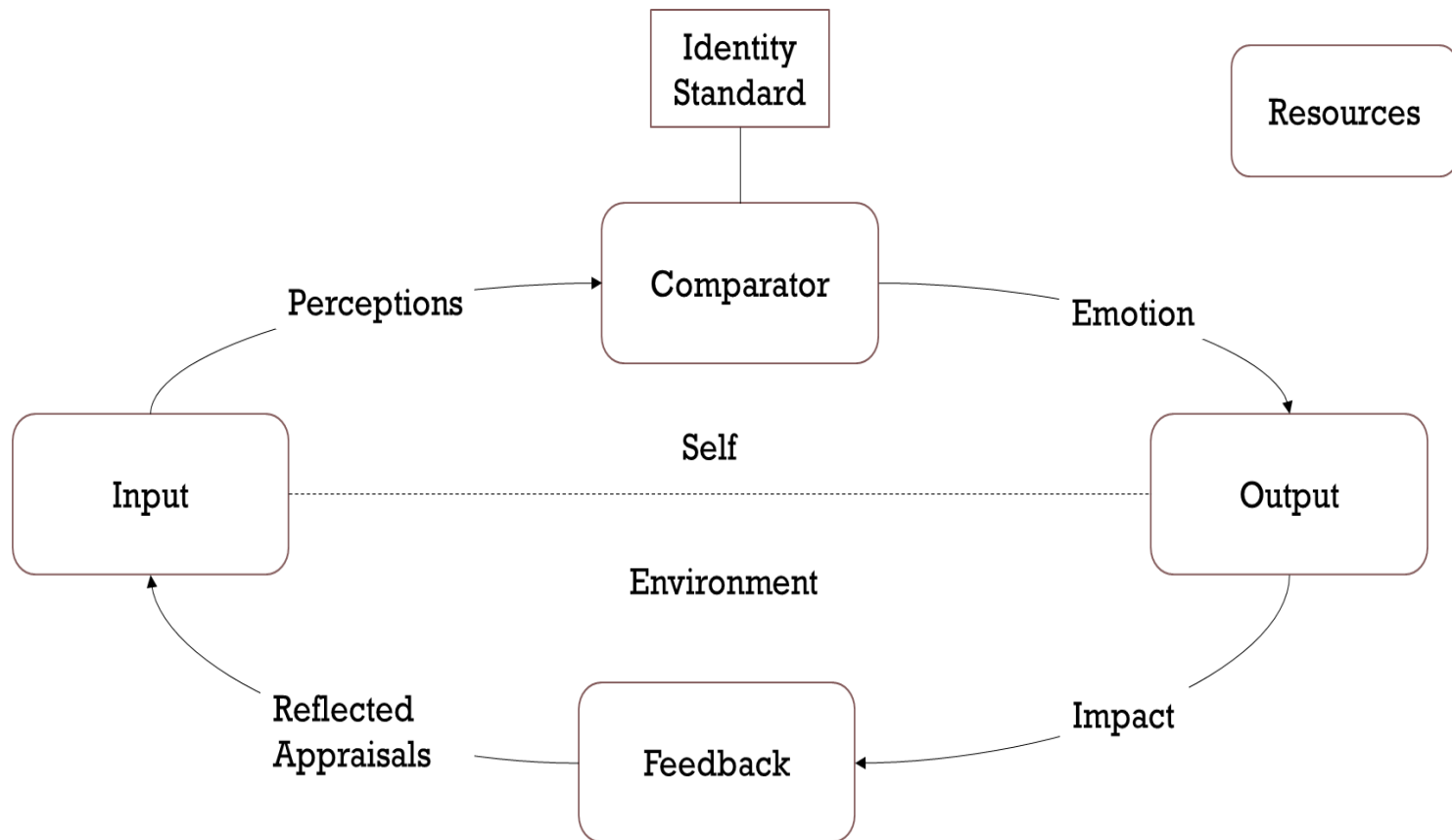
Figure 2.1 Identity control model

CHAPTER 3: STUDENT SUCCESS AND HIGHER EDUCATION

In this chapter I focus in on the current national trends in enrollment and

graduation rates within higher education. This relatively detailed look at postsecondary

data is intended to provide context and illustrate the environment and structural realities

the participant students in this study are confronting when coming to a university. I

highlight several different outcomes for students based on race, ethnicity and gender to

demonstrate how structural identities relate to resources that allow for confirmation of the

self as a student. I also explore, briefly, some of the explanations provided for differential

outcomes across these categories. In particular, I focus on three prominent theories

regarding student success: Tinto's *Student Success Model* (1978, 1993, 2012), Rendon's

Validation Theory (1994) and Duckworth's *Grit* (2016).

Enrollment

Overall enrollment in higher education has increased significantly in the past 20

years. It is estimated that between 2000 and 2015 enrollment in postsecondary education

increased by 30 percent, from 13.2 million to 17 million, and is projected to reach 19.3

million by 2026 (National Center for Education Statistics 2016). An estimated 40.5

percent of college-aged students (18 to 24-year-olds) in the United States were enrolled

in postsecondary education in 2015 (NCES 2016). This is 20 percentage points higher

than enrollment in 1970 when 20.5 percent of college-aged individuals were enrolled in

postsecondary education. Graduate program enrollment has also increased and continues

to rise from 2.1 million students in 2000 to 2.9 million in 2015 (NCES 2016).

Growth rates in undergraduate and graduate college enrollment have not been uniform between men and women over the past three decades. In 2015, approximately 8.8 million men were enrolled in undergraduate postsecondary institutions compared to 11.5 million women. In that same year, an estimated 37.8 percent of men aged 18 to 24-year-old enrolled in a degree-granting postsecondary institution compared to 43.2 percent of women resulting in a 5.4 point variance. Since 1975 the proportion of both men and women aged 18 to 24 enrolling in college has increased, however, female enrollment has increased at a higher rate than men. In 1975, 23.2 percent of college-aged women enrolled in postsecondary institutions compared to 29 percent of men. Since 1975, the percentage of enrollment from college-aged women has grown 20 points while for men it has grown approximately 9 points. Women have, over the past three decades become the majority population in postsecondary institutions. Similarly, women have made up much of the growth in graduate school enrollment as well with a 42 percent increase in enrollment from 2000 to 2010 for women versus 28 percent growth for men. Women, as of 2015, represented 58 percent of enrolled graduate school students.

Looking at race and ethnicity, in 2014 approximately 11.2 million white students enrolled in higher education while 2.8 million Black students, 3.2 million Hispanic students, and 1.2 million Asian students enrolled in postsecondary education (National Center for Education Statistics 2015)[1]. White students made up 58.3 percent of the enrollment, Black students 14.5 percent, Hispanic 16.5 percent and Asian students 6.3

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[1] Race, ethnicity, and gender labels in this study utilize the NCES categorization and naming conventions.

percent. Data indicate that an estimated 41.8 percent of white students aged 18 to 24

years old enrolled in postsecondary education in 2015. The percentage of Black,

Hispanic, and Asian students enrolled in a post-secondary, degree-granting institution

was at 34.9 percent, 36.6 percent, and 62.6 percent respectively. Asian student groups

represented the highest proportional enrollment of college-aged students with a 20.8 point

variance over the next closest enrollment group, white students (41.8 percent). The

percent of Black student enrollment was 6.8 points less than their white student

counterparts and 27.7 points lower than Asian student enrollment. Similarly, the percent

of Hispanic student enrollment was 5.1 point lower than white students and 26 point less

than Asian students in 2015. Graduate school enrollment has seen similar trends in terms

of race and ethnicity. Hispanic student enrollment has increased 119 percent between

2000 and 2015 with Black student enrollment up 99 percent during the same time period.

White student enrollment in graduate school also increased by 23 percent from 2000 to

2010 but then began to decrease by 10 percent from 2010 to 2015.

Overall, white and Asian college-age students enroll at a higher rate than their

Black and Hispanic counterparts though the gap has narrowed over time. Hispanic

student participation in higher education has seen the most dramatic increases in the last

three decades. These data paint a picture of a postsecondary student population that is

becoming increasingly more diverse.

Graduation

According to the NCES (2017), in 2015 approximately 1.9 million bachelor's

degrees were awarded in the United States, representing a 100 percent increase when

compared to 1975 levels at 917,900. Degrees granted to women have increased at a faster rate than for men. Approximately 812,000 men (43 percent) were awarded degrees in 2015 compared to 1.1 million women (57 percent). In 1977, 494,424 men (54 percent) received bachelor's degrees compared to 423,476 women (46 percent).

In 2015, 1,210,523 (66.5 percent) degrees were conferred to white students compared to 192,715 (10.6 percent) to Black students, 217,718 (12 percent) to Hispanic students, and 133,996 (7.4 percent) to Asian students. The distribution of degrees by race/ethnicity has shifted in the past three decades. In 1977, 89.5 percent of bachelor's degrees conferred went to white students with 6.5 percent, 2.1 percent, and 1.5 percent of degrees conferred to Black, Hispanic and Asian students respectively. Similar to enrollment, the most dramatic change in degrees conferred is within the Hispanic population. In 1977, only 18,743 degrees were granted to Hispanic students compared to 217,718 in 2015, nearly a twelve-fold increase (National Center for Education Statistics 2016).

When we examine college completion rates, a clear gap based on race/ethnicity and gender emerges. For this work I use the NCES definition of graduation rate as completion by a student from the first institution attended for the first time, full-time bachelor's degree-seeking students at four-year postsecondary institutions. I focus on students enrolled in public institutions and a six-year graduation rate. In total, 58.5 percent of students who began in the 2008 cohort graduated in six years. This rate has increased in the past twenty years from 51.7 percent in 1996.

Asian students had the highest six-year graduation rate in the 2009 cohort, at 72.3

percent. White students graduated at a 63.3 percent rate while 39.5 percent of Black and 53.6 percent of Hispanics students graduated. Graduation rates have increased for all groups since the 1996 cohort. However, during that same period, the gap between white and Black student graduation rates has increased from 19.2 point difference to 23.8 points. Conversely, the gap between graduation rates for Hispanic compared to white students has decreased from 12.4 points with the 1995 cohort to 9.7 points for the 2009 cohort.

Women graduate college at a higher rate than men. With the 2009 cohort, 56.2 percent of male students graduated compared to 62.1 percent of female students. This 5.9 point gap has been relatively consistent over the past two decades; with the 1996 cohort, 52 percent of men and 58.2 percent of women graduated a 6.2 point variance. Women have, in the past thirty years, enrolled in greater numbers, earned more degrees, and have graduated at higher rates.

The data presented here show that the landscape of higher education has undergone significant change in the past thirty years. As the importance of a college degree for securing employment, increasing life satisfaction, improving access to health care and other advantages has increased (Schafer and Wilkinson 2013; Beaver 2010; Perna 2005) and the policies that govern admission have changed (Kugelmas and Ready 2011l; Hutchenson, Gasman, Sanders-McMurty 2011; Fischer 2007; Perna, Steele, Woda, and Hibbert 2005;) enrollment in postsecondary education has grown significantly. The potential upside from a degree is more significant for groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in higher education such as nonwhite and female

students (Krymkowski and Mintz 2011; Perna 2005). The upside potential in salary, life satisfaction, and other benefits is higher for non-white and women students than it is for white men and this can help explain the difference in growth for these populations. There are gaps in the graduation rates of different groups, and to understand this further we will take a look at three theories of student success in college.

Student Success: Theories and Research

Theories that explain the enrollment trends and graduation rates of students in college are numerous. In what follows I speak to three prominent theories: Tinto's (1973, 1993, 2012) model of student success, Rendon's (1994) validation theory and Duckworth's (2016) conceptualization of grit. In selecting these I focus not only the more widely used theories of student success but also on those that align with ICT and can potentially be synthesized with the ICT model.

Tinto's theory of Student Integration

Perhaps the most influential theorist for college student success in the past thirty years, Tinto (1975, 1993, 2012) utilized an integration-based model to explain determinants for student success. For Tinto, each student, to some extent, must let go of their past identities (both social and academic) and embrace the culture of their new institution. Through academic and social integration students become better able to navigate and succeed in the university. This integration will require a break from their past groups and relationships such as friends, family, and other institutions 'back home'. Tinto emphasized the need for colleges to build programs and processes that fully embed

the student in the university structure and by doing so integrate the student with the university.

The difficulty with this theoretical frame is that it does not adequately address diversity along social characteristics (e.g. race, gender, socioeconomic status) and tends to fit a model of college attendance that assumes on campus residence and homogeneity that no longer aligns with the realities of today's colleges and students. That said, the idea that individuals arrive at college with pre-entry characteristics that allow or impede their ability to socially and academically embrace their experience in college and, therefore, affect motivation, aligns well with identity theory as well as Rendon and Duckworth.

Rendon's Validation Theory

Rendon (1994) spoke directly to the wave of integration focused programs and approaches to student success by demonstrating that not all students integrate in the same ways to the institution. Rendon states:

> "what is needed to transform these students is for faculty, administrators, and counselors to fully engage in the validation of students and to recognize that not all students can be expected to learn or to get involved in institutional life in the same way. Diversity in nature is a strength. So is diversity among college students. The challenge is how to harness that strength, and how to unleash the creativity and exuberance for learning that is present in all students who feel free to learn, free to be who they are, and validated for what they know and believe" (1994: 21).

This theoretical frame places on the responsibility for creating academic and interpersonal connections on the institutional agents of the university. Validation theory breaks away from the more functionalist and "one size fits all" approach of Tinto but does not cross over to the individualized psychological locus of control emphasized by

Duckworth. For Rendon, Success is influenced by the ability to validate self-views through interactions with institutional agents in both academic and non-academic situations. The process and ways that validation occur align with the diversity of the student body, their experiences and their affiliations. Although Rendon's theory is specific to student success and does not utilize identity verification as its frame, the overlap between validation Theory and the overarching frame of identity verification are certainly evident.

Duckworth's Grit

Duckworth (2016) has offered a psychological theory for student success that has gain in popularity in recent years. For Duckworth, grit or "the tenacious pursuit of a dominant superordinate goal despite setbacks" (Duckworth and Gross 2014) is a prime determinant of a student's likelihood to succeed. Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) demonstrated grit accounted for approximately four percent of the variance in student success after controlling for other factors. Duckworth and Quinn (2009) demonstrated that grit is related to occupational stability and educational attainment in that the more grit one possesses the great the occupational stability and level of educational attainment.

According to this theory, grit leads to perseverance in obtaining a goal, such as a bachelor's or master's degree. Duckworth does not speak much to the sources of grit, but does imply individuals can be taught to learn grit. Absent from this approach is an honest discussion of resources, structural barriers, and social factors that might drain one's grit prior to goal attainment. Despite, or perhaps because of, the lack of focus on social-

structural barriers to success, Duckworth has become a popular theoretical voice in education and development.

Conclusion

Research into higher education student success is extensive. The data over the past fifty years indicates a shift in the number of students engaging in postsecondary education and the diversity of the college population (NCES 2016). Additionally, research shows that the likelihood that a person will persist and/or graduate from college is not the same across all groups. Women tend to graduate at higher rates than men while Asian and White students tend to complete college at higher rates. Explanations for these differences range from effects of policies to historical organizational structures down to everyday microaggressions on college campus. Interactions at Universities across the United States have been affected by the changing structure and landscape of postsecondary education.

Although there is no single factor that determines one's success in college, research points to the need to more fully incorporate student identities and experiences in a diverse set of practices for student engagement. Campus climate must be safe and welcoming for the student, while interactions and structures should center the student experience and build ways for students to validate their place in college. The national data on enrollment and graduation, can fit well within the social psychological framework utilized throughout the rest of my work.

Symbolic interactionism generally and ICT specifically have been tested in several ways during the past three decades. Research has looked at how identities are

formulated (Reitzes and Burke 1980), resources (Stets and Cast 2007), relationships

between identities (Burke 2006), as well as the verification process itself (Trettevik 2016;

Anderson and Mounts 2016). The evidence, to date, indicates that ICT has a wide range

of explanatory power but does have areas of limitation particularly with resources, power,

and with short-medium term goals (Trettevik 2016). Furthermore, most of these studies

have utilized a quantitative or experimental design and often do not include nuanced

explanations of outcomes that might be derived from more qualitative designs. In Chapter

Four I outline my qualitative approach to studying student experiences in higher

education within the framework of ICT.

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

As noted previously, research that utilizes structural symbolic interaction often employs quantitative and experimental design to test different components of the theoretical model (see Burke and Stets 2009). By doing so, these works tend to create distance from participants and present a process of verification that is linear, 'objective', and quantifiable. In this work, I utilize a qualitative approach to provide greater nuance, context, and humanity to the participants while remaining within the overall theoretical paradigm. By doing so, my research aims to push Identity Control Theory (ICT) further into the realm of real life applications and to push the boundaries of its explanatory power.

Population

I recruited students from a mid-sized western public university. The Masters' inclusive university is located in a rural environment with approximately 8,000 students enrolled (500 post baccalaureate/graduate students and 7,500 undergraduates). Students who attend this university often come from urban environments and move long distances to attend. Approximately 75 to 80 percent of students who apply to this university are admitted each year. Over 50 percent of students are eligible for Pell Grants which is a marker for lower income levels, and 48 percent of students identify as members of a traditionally underrepresented in higher education (URG students).

For this study, I selected first time, first year undergraduate students from across different academic programs along with first year graduate students enrolled in a Master's level social science program. A student was defined as a person who is enrolled for the current academic year at the university where the research was occurring at the time of initial recruitment. Undergraduate students were defined by their enrollment in courses that are being taken to fulfill requirements for a bachelor's level degree. Similarly, graduate students were identified by their acceptance and enrollment in the graduate program. First year students were defined as undergraduate and graduate students who indicated this was their first year enrolled at the university in their program of study and who had less than 30 units for their course of study completed at the time of interview. A subset of graduate students interviewed had also attended the same university as undergraduates but were included as it was their first year in the graduate program. First time students were students who had not previously attended a postsecondary college or university as an undergraduate or graduate student. This research methodology and related measurement tools received approval from the campus institutional research board (IRB #15-186 and #16-013).

Recruitment

Students were recruited via emails distributed by instructors and advisors, as well as class presentations. To recruit undergraduate students new to their program of study, I focused on courses that had higher percentages of first year, first time, full time, undergraduate students. These course sections were taught in Math, Sociology, Criminology and Justice Studies, Chemistry and Biology. I contacted approximately four

hundred undergraduate students with requests to participate. Fifteen students expressed

interest, with eight undergraduate students ultimately being interviewed. Each

undergraduate participant was provided a $5 gift certificate valid at a campus food

location as an incentive to participate.

In addition to undergraduate students, I recruited graduate students from a social

science program on campus. The program utilizes a cohort model with students

beginning their two-year program together with the intent that they graduate as a group.

This group was selected due to both convenience and availability. I contacted all

members of this first-year cohort and ten students agreed to participate. No incentive was

provided to graduate students.

Undergraduate and graduate students are clearly at different stages in life and in

their academic and/or professional careers. This fact is addressed in the analysis,

however, the primary focus for my research is on the transition to new programs of study

that require a reconsideration of identity. The application of the ICT model of self-

verification and identities should be similar across all groups. The difference in grade

level is therefore not a point of emphasis for analysis.

Interviews

I partnered with a colleague in conducting the graduate student interviews. I

conducted all undergraduate student interviews. Along with my colleague, we conducted

a total of twenty-seven semi-structured interviews using a general guide (see Appendix 1

and Appendix 2) that included approximately 40 questions focused on self-meanings,

interactions, feedback, behavior, emotion, and resources. Interviews were held on

campus, in semi-private locations, and lasted between twenty and fifty minutes. On average, interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes. We recorded audio for all interviews for later review, transcription, and/or analysis.

Each participant was invited to two interviews during their first semester. The first interview session occurred within the first four weeks of the start of their first semester in their program. These discussions focused on students' self-definitions, expectations for themselves as a college student, differences anticipated from their previous academic roles, as well as their background and life-history. The second interview took place within the final three weeks of their first semester and was used to measure any changes from the beginning of the term. Each semester is sixteen weeks long which means approximately ten to fourteen weeks elapsed between interviews.

During the interview I, or my colleague, asked students to provide their perspective on their first-year college experience, including their expectations when they arrived, how those expectations changed and were molded by feedback received, and their plans for their second semester and beyond. Specific questions, especially during the second interview, focused on experiences and feedback each student received during their first semester as well as their current expectations and perceptions regarding being a college student. My methodological design was purposely structured to allow for ample exploration of each stage of the process of identity verification outlined by identity control theory and gave insight into the student journey.

Analysis

I, along with help from additional research assistants, transcribed interviews using the computer program Livescribe and a word processing application. Transcriptions were uploaded to the qualitative analysis software Dedoose for coding. In addition, an online project management software, Trello, was also utilized to code and organize excerpts from interviews. As this research is based on existing Identity Control Theory (as noted in Chapter Two), I coded and organized statements using the concepts of that framework. I categorized responses based on:

1) Socialization

2) Identity Standard (Meanings and Standards)

3) Feedback and Reflected Appraisals

4) Comparator and Confirmation

5) Emotion and Behavior (Output)

6) Resources

I used this coding scheme to organize and bring forth themes in responses that are reflected in the results.

Operationalization

The verification process has several key components discussed in Chapter Two that require operationalization. Table 4.1 provides a summary of how I defined and utilized these components in the interview process. I describe each of these below.

Socialization

Students come to college with a variety of pre-enrollment experiences shaped by their personal history. This history, along with social structure "position" (e.g. socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, gender, etc.) is how I define socialization. The first set of questions focused on getting a picture of the student prior to entering college. This included a discussion about family, hometown, finances, race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and other characteristics. I attempt to get a clearer picture of the life-story of each student as they entered their new program of study. Following these discussions about the student's history, the student was asked to describe their view of and expectations for being a student in their program.

Identities

Identity and self-meanings lie at the core of the ICT process. Participant self-views related to being a student came from asking participants to first describe the image and qualities of a student's generally (including what they are not), then about themselves as students and finally what others thought of them as students. The questions regarding identity started general and allowed for participants to explore the meanings of being a student. Additionally, utilizing the approach suggested by Burke and Stets (2009), participants were also asked to describe what students are not. After I established a general view of students' view of the student role, I asked participants to specifically speak to their own self image as a student. Similar questions were utilized in the second interview session to ascertain student identity. Finally, I asked questions regarding

expectations of performance as a student. This was used to establish a baseline standard for self-evaluation.

Feedback and reflected appraisals

Perception of feedback is considered an input in the ICT process. Feedback in this case was defined by the perceptions students had about the reaction of others to their performance in a given role (in this case being a student). To understand how students received and perceived feedback, I utilized several questions that focused on different situations, such as grades, in class discussion, social feedback from peers and other similar situations. In line with ICT, the focus of the feedback discussions was more on the perception of feedback than any "objective" measure of that feedback. For instance, if a student indicated they received a score of nine out of ten on a term paper it was not assumed that this was a "good" or "bad" mark. The participant's description of that mark was the unit of study, not the grade itself. Through the conversational nature of the semi-structured format students could express their own interpretations of the feedback and therefore give insight into their own verification processes.

Emotion and behavior (output)

Participants were asked to share their perceptions, emotions and response (output) to that feedback. Students were encouraged to explore their reaction to feedback and attempt to describe its relationship to their view of being a student. It should be noted that although feedback and emotionality/output were discussed in both the first and second interviews, most did not have many experiences to speak of in the first discussion due to the lack of early feedback from instructors within the first five weeks of the semester.

Resources

Resources are symbols and signs in the environment that individuals can use to verify their identities. In my study, I operationalized this in a variety of ways, including asking about financial, social, and familial resources. Many of the conversations about resources veered from the set questions, as students spoke of different sources of strength and perseverance.

Change in self-views was analyzed by examining changes in responses from the first interview at the start of the term to the second interview. Individuals were coded using a number system to match responses from one interview to the next. Changes in self-views, expectations, meanings and such were notated and coded.

The semi-structured nature of these interviews allowed for significant room for exploration by myself and participants that went beyond the questions listed here. These foray into other areas provided a robust set of data that provided insight into the transition to college life as an undergraduate or graduate student and highlighted the strengths and limits of ICT. As I move onto results in the next section I will highlight how these data help drive new insight into ICT and the student experience.

4.1 Operationalization of terms

Concept	Operationalization	Example Questions
Socialization	Pre-entry characteristics and life experiences of the student.	Please tell me a little bit about yourself. What did your parents/guardians do for a living? Talk a little a bit where you grew up? What did your parents/guardians do for work? What excites you about the classes? What worries you?

Concept	Operationalization	Example Questions
Identities	Self-views and expectations about what it means to be a student.	When you think about what it means to be a <<undergraduate/graduate>> student, in general, how would you describe that person? What sorts of things do college students NOT do, in your mind? (Is there a difference between what successful and unsuccessful students do?) When you think of **yourself** as a graduate student, how would you describe yourself at this point? Think about other, important people in your life, how do you think **they** would describe you now as a student? How well do you expect to do this semester in your courses?
Feedback / Input	Perceptions students had about the reaction of others to their performance in a given role	Tell me about what types of feedback you receive in your courses? (might be in form of grades, comments on papers or projects, response if/when you speak up in class…) Has that feedback changed your view of yourself as a student? When you received that feedback, how did that make you feel? When you received that feedback, how do you think that <instructor, student, other> saw you as a student? Did you take any action as a result of the feedback?
Resources	Symbols and signs in the environment that individuals can use to verify their identities	What types of challenges or obstacles have you run into during the semester? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 5: VERIFICATION, ENTANGLEMENT, EXPLORATION AND

RESILIENCE

The basic tenets of the Identity Control Theory (ICT) process appear to provide

explanatory power when it comes to understanding student behavior as they enter their

new program of study. Students articulated expectations and self-meanings related to the

role of student formed from their prior experience and personal attributes. Feedback that

confirmed these meanings tended to result in feelings of contentment and the

continuation of the behaviors that lead to confirmation. Disconfirmation however, tended

to lead to negative affect and corrective behaviors to try and achieve verification or at

least to avoid disconfirmation. The level of emotionality correlated with the importance

and centrality of the identity as ICT would predict.

That said, there are areas where ICT fell short of providing a full explanation and

may need further development to truly capture the breadth and depth of experiences

represented in these data. In this chapter, I provide the findings that support ICT as well

as demonstrating where the theory needs refinement and exploration. Students spoke to

expectations of self-performance and experiencing negative emotions when those

expectations did not match their perception of feedback. Behavioral responses matched

emotional reaction in ways that would be predicted by ICT. Students also spoke about

modifying perceptions through different mechanisms and about the importance of

resources in their verification process. Discussions with students about their experiences

did, however, indicated at least three areas where ICT could grow and change as a theory:

identity interconnectedness (or what I call "entanglement"), resources/resilience, and identity exploration.

"It's gonna be hard, but I can do it (I think)": Identities (Meanings and Standards)

Being a student is an identity infused with certain expectations and standards of performance. We learn these meanings and expectations through countless performances as a student. The first premise of ICT is that the roles we play are associated with meanings and expectations and that these form an identity standard. This standard is used to evaluate feedback from others to determine whether we are fulfilling the identity in a situation. Participants in the present study could articulate student role meanings and equated this to a standard by which they judged their own behavior.

Several students, during the first interview, spoke to the meanings and expectations related to being a student. Expectations for their new academic self, in the new program of study, were often couched in terms of being challenging but rewarding. For instance, one graduate student, Lucy[2], stated:

> When I think of a … student, I think of someone that is doing work that they have a deep interest in … And it just requires a lot of dedication and discipline and learning how to create structure for yourself and, I don't know ... When I think of a … student, it's really tough. It's like a really trying time, but it's also very intellectually rewarding, too.

This sentiment about graduate school was echoed by others in the cohort as well. Expectations for undergraduate participants were influenced by their high school

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[2] All names provided are pseudonyms and not real names.

experiences and descriptions from counselors and teachers. As, Shayna, an undergraduate

student discussed:

> It's more of like what everyone else says that it is. Teachers in high school, they say they prepare you and they try to give you a look into what it is so they always told us that it's someone who will just stay in school. They were like, "Oh, you're going to stay up until like three in the morning working on papers and really working to what you want," and they're like, "You ... To set your own schedule, you can choose to go to class and not go to class, but it's up to you how you want to be successful in that class.

Overall students expressed that they felt their new program would be more difficult and

time consuming than their previous educational experiences.

Most participants indicated that they considered themselves above average

students and expected to continue at that level of success. That said, most did not

consider themselves top of their class. As Alexis, and undergraduate student explained:

> My mom always said, "Okay, you're gonna go to college and then you get a job, and that's just what you do." So yeah, I always knew I was gonna go to college, but my ideas on college definitely changed. When I was a Freshman in high school, I'm like "I'm going to (college)…." and then as it went on, I'm like, "that's a lot to go to (college). Not only is it really expensive, but it's hard to get in". So I kinda went down a little bit. I mean I'm never gonna go to (college), maybe for my graduate degree, yeah.

Another undergraduate student, Stacy, expressed her expectations of her student role

performance as: "Yeah, so throughout that I did really good. I had really good grades. I

tried to be involved". There was a clear consensus of cautious optimism about the ability

to succeed in their new roles across both undergraduate and graduate students.

Along with a chance to grow and mature, students voiced expectations that the

workload and standards for excellence would increase in their new role. Dawn, a

graduate student, summarized their expectation as follows:

I don't know, I just think of a lot of work and I think of being really stressed out. A lot of writing, but a lot of research, a lot of looking through literature. Yeah, a lot of analysis.

Many students interviewed considered themselves 'good' or 'above average' students either in High School or as undergraduates but were unsure how (or if) that would translate to success in the new, 'higher caliber', program. Shayna, one of our undergraduate participants explained the transition in this way:

Well, definitely studying wise. I was always told, "Oh it's always going to be harder in college."I think they said like two hours per class or something like that...Yeah and that definitely changes as you go up in difficulty. Definitely lots of studying, more partying I guess, if you live in more of a social aspect. I'm trying to think what else. I don't know, really just the difference to me probably just studying and more expectations of you but also less. More freedom to kinda choose if you want to do it, like if you want to go to class you can. If you don't, that's fine too. No one tells you you have to be there, I mean it affects your grade, but you don't have to go. You're paying for it.

That said, most students also indicated anxiety and uncertainty despite confidence in themselves as students. For instance, Stacy, a high performing undergraduate expressed anxiety and readiness to seek help:

It's not easy. But it's what I expected. I expected to do a lot of writing and most of my classes has some type of writing…they all have you writing a lot. I did expect to do that so it's not easy, but it's what I expected. I expected to do a lot of work...I am worried about it, but I'm just trying to like if it's hard, go to the tutoring like right away.

Another student stated their anxiety as such:

I think expectations are different than from college to high school. How things are run is completely different from college to high school. It seems a lot more relaxed in regards to like ... I don't know, to me, it just seems more relaxed with workloads and stuff like that, but maybe that's just the classes I'm taking.

Students who were the first in their family to attend college expressed higher uncertainty about the college student role. For instance one undergraduate student put it this way:

> No one in my family had ever gone to school so I didn't even really know what I was…doing or getting myself into, it was just kind of something I had to do for high school. No matter which school I would've picked, I don't think I was going to know anything, really. I didn't visit before I came, I just kinda like, I'm supposed to go now.

Overall, most students arrived at their new program of study expecting more work, higher standards for academic excellence and some level of uncertainty about their ability to perform in the new role. That said, nearly all students showed confidence they would be able to complete their program of study within the time-frame they had chosen. In the absence of feedback regarding their student role performance, students relied on experience to determine their new role identity and the standards associated with that identity. This would set a baseline for evaluation of feedback received throughout the semester; in line with expectations from ICT.

The student identity does not only exist as a role level set of meanings but is also associated with membership in a group of individuals. This social aspect of being a student was often a central aspect for participants. For graduate students, their "in-group" status was structured through the program itself through the use of cohorts. Undergraduate students sought social connection through different programs and activities. Alexis discussed:

> There's a lot of things around campus that I enjoy doing and I want to get involved in. I myself, as a person, know I will do better academically if I am involved in things, involved in the school. If I just allow myself to sit at home

along all the time studying, it will be bad for me mentally, it'll be bad for me physically, it'll be bad all around. If I get myself involved in the school, it helps pull me away from more negative aspects of moving away from home, learning to take care of myself, all that. It puts me out there to find new friends and new people and all that. Then, it was just figuring out, hey, what interests me? What do I think I might want to try and do.

Being a student was as much a social identity as it was an academic pursuit. One student discussed how her role as a friend helped determine her student role identity:

One of my best friends transferred up here and when I came to visit her I felt really comfortable because the town was small and we're from a really small town too. All the other colleges I went to are in really big cities and it was kind of overwhelming but everybody here was really friendly.

The social aspect also could create anxiety for some students. The cohort model for graduate students seemed to help drive some of these comparisons and potential anxiety. For instance, Sheila stated:

My professor's like, "You just gotta jump in, get it started," and I was like, "Oh man." And everybody else has pretty specific interests that they're really passionate about so I was like, "Oh, Geez. Gotta get it together."

Finally, being a student and being successful in their program was viewed as indicative of a fundamental perception of self. Entering a new program was not only seen as an opportunity to grow as a student or to gain membership to a certain group, but also as a chance to be a different person; to grow and mature as a human being. Being 'hard working' or 'focused' or able to handle multiple tasks at once were seen as important to the student role and linked to growth as a person. One student described the new role as "Professional. Adult. Focused".

Entry to a new program of study creates a clear point for reconsideration of self-meanings and expectations. The interviews indicated that there is nuance in this

transitional period for students. Uncertainty around the expectations and roles leads to some level of flexibility in role definition, however this not a wholesale change.

Feedback and Reflected Appraisals: "How am I doing?"

Throughout the semester students received a variety of feedback from different sources regarding their student identity. This came in the form of grades, in class discussions, conversations outside of class, feedback from significant others as well as general ideas about how well they should be doing.

Specific questions were presented to students asking them to speak to how they thought others saw them as students. Interestingly, this was a difficult question for many to answer. Also of interest, students' perception of the views of others did not always align with their own self-views and this lead to negative emotions, even when the perceptions of others were seen as positive. As an example:

> I think they would describe me as a really good student because I did bring in good grades, but for me I'm not happy with the results. I want better results, but to them that's really good. For me as their family, they're happy with it. They're content, but for me I want better results.

This is in line with the results that would be expected from ICT. Any discrepancy from one's self view, even it is a more positive view than expected, results in discomfort and resulting behavior to align that standard with the feedback.

Students came to these programs with expectations about their level of rigor and these were not always fulfilled. Undergraduates tended to state that their expectations of increased workload, rigor and stress turned out to be overblown. Alexis stated:

> In a way, yes. They tell us to expect a lot more than what it is. I don't know if it's because I'm still starting in and I haven't really seen the full thing, like how it's going to be in mid terms and finals. As of now, it's going pretty well. You do stay up late, but it's not as much as they say. You do work hard. You do need to read the material, but it's not as much as they said it was going.

Other undergraduate students spoke to the fact that their first term, in general, was 'easier' than expected. Many undergraduates were surprised by different feedback throughout the term whether through a lower than expected grade or through a comment/discussion with an instructor.

The sentiment that the first term was easier than expected was not generally discussed by graduation students. A more common experience for graduate students was a comment or feedback that felt out of line or incorrect. In one incident, a graduate student received a positive grade (A) on an assignment but also a derogatory comment regarding the paper's subject matter. This frustrated the student and they spoke to these negative emotions. However, the student did not address the comments with the instructor as they "didn't see the point" and worried they would be seen as a "whiner". Similarly, one student described and in class discussion with their instructor where their comment and ideas were dismissed. This interaction lead to feelings of anger and frustration. In response to this feedback the student discussed the incident with their peers in the class and through those discussions normalized the incident and decided to not address directly with the instructor. Instead the student chose to reduce and, eventually eliminate participation in the class. Feedback came from a variety of sources and, based on the identity standard, type of feedback and situation students used different strategies to react to the feedback provided.

"That doesn't seem right": Comparator and Confirmation

Given that the comparator is a theoretical mechanism, it can be difficult to study. That said, students spoke to their experiences of confirmation or disconfirmation. Student spoke about how different feedback lead to different feelings and emotions as well strategies to address those comparisons. Students sought confirmation of their own view of self in a variety of ways including comparison with peers or discussions with family and friends or through externalizing the source of the discrepancy onto another person (e.g. 'it's the instructor's test, that's the problem').

As an example of how students utilized different approaches to confirming self, when graduate students received disconfirming feedback they, in many cases, relied on the peers in the cohort to help normalize that feedback. In one case, recounted by nearly all graduate students, an early assignment resulted in several students receiving a grade that was lower than expected. The participants expressed shame and distress at receiving the lower grades, however, when they could interact with their peers and discuss, they discovered that most had received the low marks. This normalized the assessment and allowed for the students to confirm that they were, at least, as much of a graduate student as the others in the cohort. This also resulted in a feeling of ease and restored confidence, however, some anxiety and shame remained and nearly all students outlined corrective behavior to address the discrepancy.

Comparison did not always help normalize performance. One undergraduate student spoke to her initial confidence in her writing abilities that was shaken by comparing her paper with that of a peer. Her perception of her own ability was greatly

diminished and she expressed feelings of shame and reduced level of confidence. As a result, she stated she became introspective and quiet during class for several weeks and only did the bare minimum work. It was only after receiving a series of positive feedback on assignments that she began to feel she could succeed and looked to improve her skills through support services. In this case, a connection with a peer led to a disconfirmation of self for this student and negative emotions. The result was to retreat in a protective fashion until she felt that she had enough resources (e.g. positive feedback) to work towards confirmation of self.

"I feel good, kind-of": Emotion and Behavior (Output)

Students, in line with expectations of ICT, expressed negative affect when receiving what they perceived as disconfirmation of their identity and positive emotions when confirmation occurred. A commons story for students was being challenged by a subject matter that exceeded their ability. When encountering subject matter and course material that was more difficult than expected and exceeded their ability to achieve the level of performance anticipated, students expressed feelings of frustration and defensive behavior. One student, Dawn, described their reaction to a low grade on a set of assignments as:

> I was like, fuck this. I don't understand anything that they're saying. So I didn't do too well on that.

In this case, the student felt frustrated and decided to withdraw from the process rather than pursue. Other students reacted by engaging with the support services or reaching out to the faculty directly during office hours, after class or over email. From the perspective

of ICT, it is important to remember that the objective grade itself is of less importance

than the alignment with meanings and expectations. Another student who received

similar feedback to that of Dawn felt satisfied with her progress, content, and continued

with the behavior (e.g. study habits, engagement, etc.). In each case the fulcrum that

drove emotion and behavior was the match between self-view and perceived feedback

and not the symbol (e.g. grade) itself.

This is not to say that all students had negative emotions all the time. Most

expressed overall feelings of optimism that they would achieve their goals in the

program. For instance, Sheila (graduate student) stated:

> For the most part, I'm feeling really positive about everything that I'm going to
> actually be able to get through this...

Others stated that they were "happy" or "satisfied" with their progress. This translated

into expectations that they would continue on and complete their program of study.

A feeling of confidence and contentment, however did not necessarily mean the

student felt total secure in their future abilities. Sheila spoke of her anxiety as a graduate

student:

> I mean a part of me is still worried that I'm not going to get a <good grade> in one
> of my classes this semester and then I'm going to get kicked out of the program.
> Which I know is ridiculous but this is my anxiety is just in that.

Other students looked inward when disconfirmation occurred such as the case with

Alexis, an undergraduate student:

> I got a little distracted during the semester, a little too distracted. I'm not going to
> say it's my teachers or the work or anything, make excuses like, it was me. I need
> to buckle down some more. Yeah, I didn't take it as serious as I should have. I
> was kind of riding the easy boat, and it was working for me for a long while, and

then out of nowhere it just kind of like blew up. I studied, well I thought I studied well enough, but during the first midterm season, it got crazy. Wasn't expecting that.

In general, students demonstrated negative emotions when faced with disconfirming feedback and feelings of contentment when they perceived their self-views had been confirmed. This confirmation still came with elements of anxiety and worry about the future and did not fully allay fears of failure. Peers, faculty, and student services served as resources that helped students navigate their own experiences and create opportunities to confirm self-views.

Resources

Resources were explored during the interview process. Many students indicated that having 'support' as a determining factor in success in their program. For example, Carter, a graduate student, spoke to their experience and perspective on support:

> I think it has more to do with maybe support and expectations of yourself and like if you're able to, not handle it, but if you are getting the support to be able to handle it and if you're able to like ... I don't know. I don't think it has to do with being, or I mean it could have to do with me being lazy, but I would imagine it's not like, oh, this person is lazy, but they have more difficulty because maybe they didn't have as much support or maybe they don't understand how things work and how the program is supposed to move and what things you should do and where you should go.

When asked what might affect their success in the program many students indicated the availability of time and support. One undergraduate noted family, time and classmates as resources:

> Well, time, of course. Family sometimes. Family stuff happens and you never know. Probably the engagement of the people in my class because it's hard to be engaged when people aren't engaged, which is also probably something different

that I should've mentioned earlier when the difference between the classes is that the undergraduate classes, not everyone's as engaged. You have a lot of people who don't want to be there, who clearly like, why are you here? You don't have to be here. So that, and I feel like that does affect me because then I get distracted by other people and I'm just thinking about wanting to tell them ... But anyways, the engagement of the professors and their excitement level, and probably just having someone that will support me, in the faculty, that I can just go and be like, hey, I'm stressed out or, uhh, I have to complain about this, or this great thing happened. And that's definitely something helpful.

Faculty were noted several times as the key resource for success by both undergraduate and graduate students. Maria, an undergraduate described the role of faculty as such:

So far, I have figured that classes will be a lot more work, but I had not figured that the teachers would be so open to helping us with said work. I went through high school, and at our school, it was 50-50. Half the teachers were like, "Yeah, you can come in, stay during lunch, I'll help you out, do your homework in here, all that," and half the teachers were like, "I don't want to see you. Go away." I was not entirely sure which way that would roll, but by the overall environment of the school, I was at least optimistic that the teachers would be helpful. So far, I've found a lot of them to be very open to helping us out.

Financial resources were discussed by nearly all participants in the study.

Gathering these types of resources was both an advantage and a burden for students. Many needed to take on work outside of school and/or acquire loans to get through school. This took away from their time to engage with their student identity but was also necessary to inhabit the student identity. Cost and ability to pay were important factors in the decision to attend college. Maria spoke to this as an undergraduate:

Just financially and stuff too. It was a bit cheaper than a lot of other places. Not only just the cost of tuition, but just to live here…looking at (other) places to live, it's way too expensive, like a thousand bucks for a room like this size, pretty much like a closet.

The role of money and finances was a clear theme throughout the student interviews. In terms of the ICT model, financial means are allowing for students to confirm their identities; a reality echoed in these data.

Components of the ICT process were evident throughout students' explanation of their experiences. For most, entering a new program of study was seen as a challenge that would help them grow as a human being as well as academically. In general, students viewed themselves as good and hardworking and expected to succeed but also to struggle and be challenged. Being a student was seen as a social role as well as an academic one. When feedback was received, students expressed emotionality related to that feedback. This lead to behaviors to align feedback with expectations or to maintain that alignment. Access to "support" and resources was a vital part of a successful transition. When resources were not available, such as time and access to faculty or money, successful confirmation was more difficult. In this way, ICT was an adequate frame to view students first semester. That said, there are areas where further development may help expand the scope and depth of ICT.

Entangled Identities

At a general level, ICT provides a usable frame to understand some of the experiences facing new students as they begin a program of study. Students arrive to their new roles with expectations about themselves and others. As they receive feedback related to that role performance, there is an emotional reaction that leads to a certain path of behavior. That said, the discussions with students revealed that something else might be at play in becoming a student.

Traditionally, structural symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and ICT define identities as sets of meanings that are ranked in terms of importance and probability for activation in each situation. How one reacts emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally is driven by the relationship between meanings, feedback and perception. Identities then, relate to each other as separated entities that "orbit" near each other in harmony, conflict, and everything in between.

ICT research is philosophically grounded (as is most social psychology), on the individualistic, Westernized, hegemonic notion of self and identity. Self-meanings can be pulled out, discussed, analyzed on their own. An assumption, it seems, of these theories is that we can understand a student, for instance, as a role separate from (though related to) other self-meanings. Resources are signs and symbols that individuals acquire, seek, use, waste, etc. The social world is a constraint on the individualism of the identity (Povinelli 1999). Identities are seen as colliding with each other or as being in alignment. The result of using this frame may be a loss of the view of the self as holistic, nuanced, and inextricably entwined with other identities both internal and external.

The interviews in this study indicated that the connection of meanings in the self is much deeper and critical than ICT analysis may imply. Nearly all students spoke of being a student in terms of other self-meanings and relationships whether that be a guardian, partner, member in a social category (racial, gendered, etc.) or their view of self a as person (e.g. hard-working, smart, etc.). This constant grounding of the student self in terms of relationships to other self-meanings calls into question whether we can really understand an identity absent understanding the depth and breadth of these relationships.

There is no student identity without other self-meanings, therefore we cannot understand the student self without understanding its relationships to other identities. These relationships, I argue, go beyond role conflict, strain, and the like and require a new term. For this, I borrow from quantum physics the term *entanglement*. In physics, entanglement represents a case in which a pair of particles cannot be understood independently but only through their relationship. I suggest identities are like particles and those that are entangled can only be understood through their relationships with other identities and not independent of these. As one example John expressed the deep connection between his student and husband roles as such:

> My wife, she's right there with me, every time I do any work. Every time I think about something I always talk to her about it. She has an understanding, I guess. I don't really talk to a lot of my family about grad school or education. It's just go ahead amigo, go ahead and do it.

Student self-meanings did not only connect to other role identities but also to foundation self-meanings about themselves, as a person. For instance, being a student and being on track to graduation on time was seen as directly connected to a student's financial self and maturity. Alexis, an undergraduate discussed how deeply her role as worker and being financially secure was entangled with her view of self as student and as a person looking to "balance life":

> Now I'm looking at five years and the money I saved up working through high school is pretty much dwindling now. I'm looking at having to get a job and then taking on a heavier load next semester. I'm pretty annoyed, but it's growing up and I really don't have it that bad. To describe myself, I would just say evolved. Just figuring out how to balance life better.

Being a student, and the experiences associated with the student role was seen as deeply connected to social aspects such as friendship as well. Leslie, the undergraduate student who decided to enroll in this college based on her friend's attendance, spoke in more depth about her relationship with her friend and being a student:

> One of my friends, she ... I kind of call her my sister because we get along really well. I started talking to her in ninth grade and she's like, "Why don't you come with me and hang out during lunch?" I started hanging out with her and with her group of friends and I slowly went into their group because I got along with them better.

For another student, the graduate program was as much about building relationships as it was about engaging with the course/subject material:

> I'm gonna build lifelong connections with people and with the material. And that I will do a lot of research and I want to do that so that's why I'm expecting it 'cause it's something I want to do. And that I'm just gonna be really supported because I've heard horror stories from other schools and it's doesn't seem like that here, and I know it's not, just based off the interactions I've had in my undergraduate and the interactions I've had so far.

In these cases, as well as other, what is apparent is although one could get a rudimentary understanding of what it means to be a student by asking for meanings around the academic or college self, this would limit one's understanding of what it means to be a student for that individual. Being a student is as much about being a child, a mother, a Latina, a worker, band member, or a combination of identities as it is about being a student. ICT and other identity theories tend to downplay this or focus on conflict and strain rather that conceptualize the relationship between meanings as the fundamental source of energy and confirmation for individuals.

Take for example an undergraduate student, Alexis, who is attending college on funding they receive from their Aunt 'back home'. When asked about whether they felt they would finish their course of study in the 'standard' four years, Alexis indicated that they would because they felt a deep obligation to do so because of the money from her Aunt. This type of story was replicated in other conversations whether it was about the loans the student or their guardians received or about emotion and logistical support others were giving to allow them to be students. It was a common refrain in the interviews and one that is important in understanding how identities are entangled.

Identity theory would interpret Alexis' case as two identities related to each other (student + dependent) that are high in prominence. Verification of one identity (student) was higher in importance because of its connection to another identity. I would contend that the data presented here suggest it goes deeper than that; these identities are entangled. The state of one identity cannot be described or understood without the other identity (or identities). Without understanding the relationship with her Aunt, we cannot understand the experience of Alexis as a student. When Alexis does well in class, it is a confirmation of that relationship with her Aunt as much as it is a confirmation of the role of student.

The implications of reframing the ICT in this way could be profound. For instance, future studies would focus less on the meanings attached to single identity and, instead, seek to understand the level and type of entanglement identities have with each other. Instead of asking participants to do twenty statements test where they generate a list of self-statements about who they are and what is important to them, we might ask

them to create mind-maps or produce a narrative. Interviews might be favored over surveys and experiments to allow for explorations that might not be easily obtained through more unobtrusive methods. Focusing on relationship between identities can lead to a new set of designs that can add greater depth to our understanding of the self and interaction.

Identity Exploration

Speaking with individuals in semi-structured format during a period of transition lends itself well to exposing the role of entangled identities. If one assumes we cannot understand an identity without also understanding the level of entanglement the identity has with other self-meanings, then it would follow that when those other meanings are in flux due to physical and emotional transitions the importance of those relations will become far more visible. One undergraduate student, Chester, who ended up leaving the University after the first interview, expressed the difficult reality of leaving home and establishing new relationships:

> It's been a very hard transition for me to be honest. I've been trying to take things in stride with regards to being able to move out and be more independent, and stuff like that, but it's really hard. I'm having a hard time making that transition 'cause I'm not use to the independence. I'm not use to having to rely on myself to do things and stuff like that where I've never even thought about doing that before in my life.

When individuals enter a period of exploration and transition, existing relationships between self-meanings will likely change. For instance, exploring might include physically moving away or ending a romantic relationship. It might result in changes in other relationships or membership in clubs, churches, organizations and the

like. One student spoke about her desire during the first interview to return 'back home' after a year at college to be with her partner. At the end of the term however, this student, had established new relationships with other students and friends she had decided to end her relationship with her partner and stay at college for the full four years. As she put it, "I just felt I didn't need to be that person anymore". This type of experience is recounted many times when individuals come to college or transition to new positions, roles and locales. How the 'stretching' of relationships and the establishment of new ones influences verification may be a fruitful area of exploration in the future.

The impact of identity exploration is seen in this study where relationships do not change significantly. An undergraduate who lived within driving distance of the college (note only about eight to nine percent of students at this University are considered "local") spoke about her struggles to create a new sense of self and identity alongside "guilt that I want to". For her, the experience of going to college was "less special than what I see for others" because of her close proximity to friends and family. New relationships established while in college were judged negatively by those at home and difficult to manage alongside perceived obligations to "come home every weekend and be with the family". In this case, the student was seeking to both maintain old identities and establish new identities. Connected identities (e.g. child and student) were being 'stretched' and reconfigured. In this case, and other cases of exploration, it might be a better approach to look at how the area between identities (new and old) is changing and reconfiguring than it would be to ask about verification and identity process.

As the type and power of relationships between identities are lessened or severed altogether, new entanglements likely form. As discussed below, changes in relational dynamics occurring in the areas between identities can provide different resources and resilience for individuals. For now, it is enough to recognize that the moment of identity exploration may expose the entanglement between the student identity and family self-view and it is not simply that the standards for each identity have been modified or disconfirmed, but rather that the *relationship between the self-meanings has been altered and that is critical to understanding how the person is behaving, emoting, and perceiving*. Only focusing on the self-meanings associated with student identity we might understand a portion of student behavior and emotionality. Perhaps, studying the entangled identities and their relationships would create a more holistic, predictive, and complete picture of each student and provide greater explanatory power.

Resources and Resilience from Entanglement

One area that ICT has struggled with, at times, has been the notion of resources (Freese and Burke 1994). The importance of resources and the difficulty in adequately explaining their impact on student using the ICT model was evident in this study. Most students referenced a variety of resources they utilized in their academic careers. The ICT framework seemed to come up short in explaining and conceptualizes this resource importance. However, if we reframe the process as rooted in the space between identities, and their entanglement, we may be able to better define resources and understand how resilience arises.

Rather than understanding identities as conflicting with other identities and not allowing for confirmation, we might rethink this to say it is the relationship between identities that provide the ability (energy) for any identity to be confirmed or not. Entanglement is resource and energy. The space between selves can provide avenues to confirm self and work at resisting self-confirmation. Returning to the previous example of Alexis, she displayed a level of distress not because of her performance as a student but because the relationship between student and niece roles added pressure and expectations about school. Role conflict may be sufficient to explain this dynamic, however, I argue that role conflict would state that you can still understand the student absent of niece identity; I am suggesting this may not be possible. The participants are neither a student nor a niece, they are both/and.

Chester, who struggled in his first semester, discussed how the lack of additional areas of confirmation, such as with his parents and friends, was 'draining' and lead to him feeling 'unsure if he can do this and stay'. In another case, a graduate student spoke highly of the reassurance and feeling of connection they received from others in their cohort. "It really helps to have others going through this that you can reach out to…" Energy is not infinite; it can be drained and needs replenishment. Confirmation of relationships can energize the self and overtime these confirmations provide sources for building resilience. In the absence of energizing relationships and where other relationships drain, it becomes difficult to persevere. In the case of one student, Cara, who wanted to return to her partner instead of completing college, it was clear that not receiving confirming feedback from her relationships was utilizing the resources that

might otherwise be used to confirm her academic identity. "It's just hard when they are so far away and worried and checking up on me…". Cara, and others, expressed that difficulty related to other identities was draining on her student role performance.

Less dramatically, nearly all students (undergraduates and graduates) spoke about the constant logistical needs of completing their program and how that drained resources. Whether this was about constant paperwork, misinformation from advisors/administration, lack of organization in classes, faculty inattention to details or countless other administrative functions the work to address these was "tiring", "distracting" and "pulls me from what I want to do". Universities often think about all they ask of their students, but do not necessarily view this as directly related to student academic performance. If instead of thinking about these logistical activities as isolated from student self, colleges thought of them more related to the educational identity then further efforts might be made to minimize these non-education related activities. Each activity that requires an assertion of the self and does not receive confirmation can drain a student's resources. Submitting a form and being told it is incorrect, receiving erroneous information about financial aid or scheduling, or having to navigate a variety of policies to submit an assignment all represent activities that have little to no potential for self-confirmation (all examples cited by participants). As such, these activities, which students are asked to performance countless times reduce the availability of resources for performing and confirming the student self. The administrative processes are typically needed for a variety of reasons; therefore, colleges should consider how to build

verification into these procedures and reduce the complexity required to navigate the halls of academia.

This is where grit as a concept falls short as something individualized and that can be obtained through learning, willpower and perseverance. It ignores the energy between self-meanings and how relationships create or wear down grit. Grit assume individualistic model of success (e.g. boot straps model) and missing how the ability to succeed and persevere is deeply interconnected with our connections with others. Entanglement is about individuals enwrapped in relationships; grit is about individuals and, as such, does not account for the influence of how the self is entangled with other selves. Relationships need to sustain perseverance and grit. Resources are necessary to maintain self and relationships. Grit, in the end, is about resources more than it is about personal fortitude

Conclusion

These data demonstrate students arrive to their new program of study with expectations that set some standards for performance that are confirmed or not through perception of feedback from others. These perceptions lead to negative or positive affect and then, subsequently, behavior to address those emotions. That said, the data here also indicate that the ICT model (as well as the student success theories) are incomplete and do not account for important elements of the self and interaction. I argue that research would be enhanced through conceptualizing self-meanings as fundamentally entangled. This entanglement requires we study the space and energy that make up the fluid space between self-meaning rather than the meanings themselves. To do so can help us understand identity exploration and transition, further the conceptualization of resources

in the social psychological realm and give a frame for understanding how to promote goal attainment, in this case for student success.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

This study examined the effectiveness of using the Identity Control Theory (ICT) model for explaining student experiences during the first term of a new academic program in higher education. The results from twenty-seven interviews demonstrated that, in many ways, ICT is a useful framework for telling the story of new students. Participants spoke about their own views of self and expectations for performance as a student and how when their expectations of themselves were not aligned with feedback from others that they felt negative emotions and attempted to create alignment. That said, this study indicated there were three areas were ICT could use further development: interconnections between identities (entangled identities), identity exploration, and resources/resilience.

The first term in a new academic program is an important moment of identity transition and fluctuation. Viewing this time through the lens of the ICT model can provide important insight into the student experience. The benefits of using ICT to guide student success should be understood and pursued further. These data indicate that accounting for student self-meanings, understanding their perception of feedback can provide and important perspective for understanding the emotional experience of students and how these drives behaviors such as retention in higher education. Furthermore, understanding the underlying process of verification that drives emotion and behavior can give educators a foundational process from which one can design and build programs and services with students. Giving early feedback on performance, designing avenues for

self-verification outside of the academic identity, insuring access to symbolic and tangible resources for all students, and design programs focused on adjusting expectations appropriately could be examples of applications of ICT to college programming.

Recommendations for Higher Education

One important aspect of this study was to understand how insights from utilizing the ICT model could be used by leaders in higher education to better address student need and enable success. I will outline a few recommendations, based on this study that Universities may consider.

1. Gathering student expectations and meanings as they arrive to a new program of study. This may be done through a simple survey that asks for students to reflect on their expectations related to being a college student. Some universities already utilize a similar approach through programs that attempt to identify potentially "at risk" students. This is done through surveys and by gathering data on early student behaviors and academic performance.

2. Recognize and give space for students to verify other non-academic identities. As discussed, the data here suggest that a student role is one of many identities wrapped up in going to college. Designing and implementing specific programs that allow students to connect with both their past identities (e.g. child, high school friends, etc.) and create new identities can boost the positive emotions of the student. Cohort based

models of student 'onboarding', as is used with graduate students in this study, is one example of a structured program to create space for self-verification for students. Similarly, providing access to hometown connections through travel resources or virtual forums can also serve as avenue for verification.

3. Provide early and consistent feedback to students to allow for calibration to the students' standard. Identities require consistent and ongoing feedback to appropriately adjust and align with expectations. The absence of this can cause anxiety or misplaced trust in one's performance. Early feedback in the form of short exams, papers, quizzes and the like can assist students in modifying their own self-views and help regulate their emotional output over time. Additionally, late feedback reduces the resources available to students to verify identity. Creating a situation where students cannot verify their student self due to a lack of feedback may result in withdrawal.

4. Give students resources (not only financial) where they can verify their self-meanings. In addition to financial resources, which are crucial to successful self-verification, colleges could also provide other tools and resources for self-verification. These include many of the programs already offered by many institutions such as tutoring, supplemental instruction, writing/math centers, and other services. Additional resources could also include modification to curriculum to be more reflective of the

student body. Diversity in curricular design to reflect the diversity of the

student body can provide a sense of belonging and allow students to verify

themselves as a member of higher education group (social identity). A

lack of representation in curriculum may lead to a sense that a student

does not belong.

5. Reduce administrative activities and build confirmation processes as part

of each interaction with a student. Whether submitting a form, receiving

academic advising, or any number of other processes on campus, students

should be given proactive and direct feedback that can allow for

verification of self in all situations. This might be in the form of a simple

email that lets the student know they are on track or a computer program

that confirms their class choices will get them to their goal on time.

Mostly this recommendation entails that universities think of each

interaction as an opportunity to give confirmation to students and build

their supply of resources to be used in confirming their student selves.

With these recommendations colleges may see a higher rates of persistence, student

satisfaction and graduation rates while also helping students explore, grown and mature

into their next stage of life.

Research Agenda: ICT

Although ICT can serve colleges well in designing student success programs, data

collected in this research indicates more can be done with ICT to expand its explanatory

reach and power. I have highlighted three related concepts that could use further

development in ICT: entangled identities, identity exploration, and resources/resilience. Each of these concepts have been addressed in some form by identity theory but I am suggesting that a clearer focus on these concepts can help ICT's ability to accurately describe the social world(s).

First, research can further explore how to define, measure and integrate entangled identities into the ICT model. A more precise definition about what it means to have identities so thoroughly connected as to be 'entangled' is needed. Research could be done to determine how to measure which identities are entangled and to what level. Measurement of entanglement between self-views is needed to appropriately assess the impact of interconnected identities. Furthermore, theoretical distinctions between concepts such entanglement, diffuse identities, intersectionality, and prominence/salience is need to understand how they differ.

Once this is established, understanding how entanglement does or does not modify the process of verification would need to be studied. For instance, do those with higher levels entanglement to other identities have a greater or lesser chance of verification? What type of process occurs when verification of one entangled identity occurs and not the other(s)? Future research, when focused back onto students, could and should incorporate Rendon's (1994) notion of validation, the deep connections that students hold with their families (however defined), and the power that seeing those relationships reflected in the institution can have for the student. Elsewhere, it might be useful in explaining how difficulty in one area of the self might be influential on others. As an example, students who are attending college with money from family may have

trouble in their family identity which, in turn, directly effects their student performance. In this case, without understanding the family identity, the student identity behaviors and emotions become opaque.

This shift in focus moves from understanding individuals as a set of static self-views that are connected in clear ways and more towards seeing the world and self as in in constant flux. The self will become more about the relations between meanings then about the meanings themselves. Not unlike moving from a view of the universe as planets and stars in orbit to one that focus on the fluctuating relationships between deeply connected particles; moving to an entangled identity control theory can reframe the way we see the world.

Second, future studies can further examine identity exploration and moments of transition. As one moves from a set of identities and relations to another how does the verification process change and adapt? Students clearly indicated that there is a level of experimentation and searching that came along with their new student roles. In these moments, one must ask what identity is seeking verification. A deeper understanding of these moments of transition where relations and self are in flux would add to the ICT framework.

Exploration and entanglement can be linked theoretically and should be tested via research. As the relationship between identities that are deeply connected is altered, such as when a student moves away from home and family, this can leave an opening for new relationships to form. If research focused on the relationships between identities and how those get modified over time, would the process of change seem more clear and obvious?

It seems that being able to gauge connectedness between self-views could give further insight into change.

Finally, more research should be done to understand the relationship between entanglement, verification, resources and resiliency. Duckworth's (2016) theory has tapped something important in the student experience but is limited in its individualistic, "boot straps" approach. Interviews conducted here seem to indicate there is a connection between the relationship between identities, verification, and resilience. Future research should interrogate these relationships. Where does resilience fit in the ICT model? Does confirmation of an entangled identity (e.g. being a mother) build resilience for its related identity (e.g. student)? Similarly, what effects does disconfirmation have on related (entangled) identities?

Conclusion

Returning to one of my original questions, can ICT help explain student experiences in their first term of college? The answer is yes, to a degree. ICT may need some further development to more completely and accurately tell the story of the student experience. The verification process can serve as the foundational base for understanding how students interact and navigate the social environments of school. However, to be complete it could use expansion into conceptualizing the relationship between identities, exploration, and resources/resilience. Student success theories can provide direction and data on how to integrate these areas into the existing ICT framework. The story ICT tells is well tested and robust one and as it grows in theoretical reach, new chapters will be written as researchers grapple with interconnections, change, and resilience. As this is

done, perhaps more and more applications for ICT model to inform design and

implementation of programs will become evident and it can serve as a foundational piece

in telling the story of self and society.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview guide – first interview

1. Please tell me a little bit about yourself.
    a. From where did you get your undergraduate degree/high school diploma?
    b. Did you move to come to school at HSU?
        i. If so, from where did you move?
    c. Tell me a little bit about your family.
        i. What did your parents/guardians do for a living?
    d. Are you one of the first people in your family to attend college? Graduate school?
    e. What was your neighborhood like where you grew up?
        i. Talk a little a bit where you grew up?
        ii. What did your parents/guardians do for work?
    f. Where do you currently live? (On campus? If not, where?)
    g. How did you end up at Humboldt State?
    h. Can you talk about what your thoughts are regarding the classes you will be taking?
        i. What excites you about the classes?
        ii. What worries you?

2. What are some reasons that you are pursuing your graduate degree?
    a. What are your long-term plans for using your degree?
    b. How about shorter-term plans?

3. Do you plan to be done in 2/4 years?
    a. How confident are you that you will finish up in that time frame?

4. When you think about what it means to be a student, in general, how would you describe that person?
    a. What are their qualities? What are they like?
    b. How do you imagine they spend their time?
        i. Do you see them as having leisure or free time? What types of things do they do in their down time?
        ii. Do you think they socialize a lot?
        iii. What type of relationship do you think they have with other students from their program?
        iv. How about with faculty?
    c. Where do you think these ideas about being a college student come from?

5. How do you anticipate being a graduate student is different than being an undergraduate? / College student different than a high school student?
   a. Academics?
   b. Social?

6. What sorts of things do college students NOT do, in your mind? (Is there a difference between what successful and unsuccessful students do?)
   a. What makes you think that those are differences?
   b. Figuratively speaking, what does a successful graduate student look like to you?

7. When you think of yourself as a graduate student, how would you describe yourself at this point?
   a. What are your qualities?
   b. How do you spend your time? What about your free time?
   c. <If different than #3> Explain a little more about <notate the difference>

8. Think about other, important people in your life, how do you think they would describe you now as a student?
   a. <If different than #3 or #6> Talk a little bit about <the differences>

9. When did you first start thinking about going to graduate school?
   a. What influenced you to pursue your Master's degree? Bachelor's degree?

10. Is the graduate school experience / college experience that you are having now what you expected?
    a. Why? Why Not?
    b. What expectations did you have that are not being met? (if any?)
    c. Talk a bit about the orientation – how was that?

11. Have you attended any classes yet?
    a. If so, how has that experience been?
    b. What has surprised you?

12. How well do you expect to do this semester in your courses?
    a. If you had to guess on your grades this semester what do you think those would be?
    b. How important are grades to your view of yourself as a student?
    c. What do you think might be affecting how well you will do – positively or negatively?
    d. How does this match with how well you did in undergraduate school?

13. Are there experiences that you are looking forward to?

     a. Socially?
         i. How important is the social aspects of being a student for you?
     b. Academically?

14. Are there experiences that worry you?
     a. Socially?
     b. Academically?

15. Have you decided on an area to concentrate on at this point? / Major?
     a. What is that concentration?
     b. Why that area of concentration?
     c. How confident are you in your choice?
         i. Why or why not?

16. How likely do you think it is that you will stay at HSU?
     a. How likely do you think it is that you will receive your degree at this college?

17. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B: Interview guide - second interview

1. How is the semester going so far?
    a. Can you talk a bit about how your classes are going so far?
    b. Any surprises from the classes? Can you talk about those?

2. Looking at those around you, in your cohort and other cohorts, (classes or other classes) when you think of a student, in general, how would describe that person now?
    a. What are their qualities? What are they like?
    b. How do they spend their time?

3. Where do you think these ideas about being a college student come from?

4. A similar question, when you think of a student how would you describe what they are not, in general?
    a. What sorts of things do graduate/undergraduate students NOT do, in your mind? (Is there a difference between what successful and unsuccessful students do?)

5. When you think of yourself as a college student, how would you describe yourself at this point?
    a. What are your qualities?
    b. How do you spend your time? What about your free time?
    c. <If different than #2 and #3> Explain a little more about <notate the difference>

6. Think about other, important people in your life, how do you think they would describe you now as a student?
    a. <If different than #3 or #5> Talk a little bit about <the differences>

7. Think back to when you first started thinking about going to graduate school / college and the image you had of yourself as a graduate student – has that changed?

8. How has your image of what it means to be a graduate student changed?

9. How are you doing, overall, in your first Semester?
    a. What was are your grades so far on papers and such?
    b. Did you do as well as you were expecting to do?
    c. How did that make you feel?

10. When completed, how well do you expect to do this semester in your courses?

     a. If you had to guess on your grades this semester what do you think those would be?
     b. What do you think might be affecting how well you do – positively or negatively?

11. Tell me about what types of feedback you receive in your courses? (might be in form of grades, comments on papers or projects, response if/when you speak up in class…)
     a. Let's talk about a few examples…. (for instance, positive/negative feedback…)

12. Has that feedback changed your view of yourself as a student?
     a. In what ways?

13. When you received that feedback, how did that make you feel?

14. When you received that feedback, how do you think that <instructor, student, other> saw you as a graduate student?
     a. How about others? Friends, family, other students?
     b. Did you tell anyone you had gotten that feedback? Or did you keep it to yourself?) Why or why not?
     c. What type of reaction did you have to that feedback?
          i. Do you recall any emotions you might have had?

15. Did you take any action as a result of the feedback?
     a. Why or why not?
     b. Do you think you are the type of graduate you student you thought you would be?
          i. Why or why not?

16. What types of challenges or obstacles have you run into during the semester?
     a. Tell me about those
     b. How did you address those obstacles?
     c. Were you expecting these obstacles when you started college?

17. Do you believe you have access to everything that you need to be the type of student you want to be? Such as books, help with coursework, and the like?
     a. Why or why not?

18. Have you used any of the services available on campus such as the tutoring center, advising, counseling center or the like? (which ones)
     a. Why or why not?

19. Tell me a bit about how you think your program is working?
    a. What are some of the positive aspects of the program?
    b. Where do you think it can improve?

20. I'd like to talk a bit about some of the things that students can experience while at college that are difficult. I would like to understand your experiences with any of these …
    a. Do you ever not buy required class materials like books or software programs because of cost? (Explain a bit)
    b. Do you have a reliable form of transportation? (Talk about that a bit)
    c. In a normal week, do you feel you have enough to eat? Do you ever have to skip meals because you don't have enough money?
    d. Do you have a stable place to live? (or are you living from house to house? Or in a car?)

21. How likely do you think it is that you will come back to HSU in the Spring?
    a. How likely do you think it is that you will receive your degree at this college?

22. Is there anything else you would like to add?