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Identity Dynamics of Minority College Students

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By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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ABSTRACT

Identity salience hierarchy is the idea that individuals hold their important identities on a metaphorical scale—activating them when the right situation calls for it. Moreover, the hierarchy is related to the notion of commitment, otherwise defined as the number of people and meaningful relationships associated with an identity. For most college students, their salience hierarchy shifts over time as their commitment to the student identity typically increases. When a shift in hierarchy occurs, there is a transformation in identity. However, for racial, ethnic, and religious minority students, their capacity to develop an identity independent of their minority background raises questions about how their salience may or may not have shifted during their college experience. This thesis investigates the intersection of identity salience hierarchy, minority college students, and the college environment through in-depth interviews of former minority college students. The findings of the study identify the major junctures that minority students experienced that shaped their identity salience, in addition to analyzing distinctions across minority groups.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The title of "college student" is one that for much of American history was exclusive to a small segment of groups. From the seventeenth to eighteenth century, a colonial college education was reserved only for religious sects (Thelin 2004). While much of the nineteenth century saw little substantive moves away from that standard, the early twentieth century saw the rise of institutions that began to serve groups that were previously barred from a college education, including women and black Americans (Goodchild and Wechsler 1997).

Today, there are roughly twenty million students that come from all walks of life to enjoy the peregrination of the college experience (Hanson 2022). For most students, the benefit of an education is primarily related to greater occupational opportunities and general increase in knowledge. Moreover, the benefits of the experience itself is conventionally linked to greater social experiences such as parties, entertainment events, and finding a life-long partner. Yet, one benefit that is often overlooked and not explicitly mentioned in college brochures or websites is how the experience changes who people are. That is, how students identify themselves goes through a transformational process where they are constantly negotiating who they believe they are, versus what they believe others view them as.

In the 1989 film *Dead Poets Society*, a professor remarks to his students that "They're [Students] not that different from you, are they? Same haircuts. Full of hormones, just like you. Invincible, just like you feel." The question posed by the

professor illuminates the phenomena of identity in two ways. It brings up the idea of how closely related students are to one another, both inside and out—whether they recognize it or not. Additionally, the quote captures the complexity of how students may struggle with identity. Given numerous other films and movies about the complexities of youth identity, it is no wonder why the "confused" college student attempting to "find themselves" throughout their college experience is a persistent adage.

In my personal experience, the college journey has certainly forced me to confront how similar I truly was to other students and figuring out my important identities. When first arriving at my university campus, I had already formed the idea that I stood out among most students. I figured my unique background, and how I presented myself, made me special, giving me an unearned sense of superiority in some respect. This idea, however, did not stand the test of time. In fact, it was at the end of my first year that I came to acknowledge that I was just another face in the crowd; another student cheering on the hockey team, filling in a desk, turning in assignments, and struggling to make it to class every day. Thereafter, the rest of my undergraduate career was in search of what truly made me special. That search included joining social groups and taking part in social events that were beyond my usual comfort zones. By the end of my journey, I believed that I indeed understood my important identities and why they were important to me.

Identities play a significant part in how people behave and feel relative to situations they encounter. For countless students first entering the college sphere, a lack

of self-understanding regarding their identities is the conventional thought. The title of athlete or musician may be predetermined for some students; however, the title may be meaningless to them without developing a greater commitment over time. Thus, such titles do not become self-identified by students unless very specific situations draw it out. College students oftentimes establish a general student identity with the conventional meanings and behaviors that are recognized throughout their campus (Kaufman 2014). As a result, sociological theory on identity posits that students will come to rearrange their identity salience hierarchy contingent on shedding their older social roles for newly formed ones. Moreover, when this occurs it can be considered a transformation in identity. Among one segment of college students, their identity development within the college space is seemingly inescapable without being wed to their ascribed status as minority individuals (Ghavami et al. 2011). As a result of this, the capacity for minority college students to take on new social roles becomes constrained. Whereas for nonminority students, the transformation of their identities is not hindered by their racial, ethnic, or religious background.

Returning to my personal experiences as a student, I clearly recall many people in my life that expressed the idea that my status as a college student was praiseworthy because I came from a minority background. Not only was I just a college student, but a *black* college student. That ascription came with its own set of meanings and expectations when I became immersed in the higher education environment. For instance, it meant that I could be viewed as a success story and should expect hardships during my studies that non-black students would not. In contrast to my minority friends on campus, I noticed

how limitless the aspirations of non-minority students were to take part in new experiences. Regarding the close minority friends I had, there was an unspoken rule about voluntarily being associated in predominantly white spaces. Such a rule entailed a constraint on social experiences that were arbitrarily deemed unfit for minority individuals.

Given the difference in identity dynamics, it draws to consideration whether there is something special about the college environment that induces a static identity development for minority students. To investigate how minority students transform their identities and the major junctures during their college experience that simultaneously occurred, this research will utilize the lived experiences of former racial, ethnic, and religious minority college students. The broader purpose of the research is to add to the growing body of literature on the intersection of minority college students and identity development. Furthermore, and to a lesser extent, to investigate the degree to which minorities of different backgrounds share or differ in their experiences of identity development during their college years.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To make sense of the dynamics of identity transformation among minority college students, the following review of literature synthesizes different strands of sociological theories. The synthesis of scholarship explains how individuals may hold identities, but from different avenues, including role taking or group association. Moreover, explaining the processes that shape behavior and perception because of developing an identity. The two avenues of identity development are categorized as role-identities and social identities respectively. The theoretical frameworks (identity and social identity theory) used to describe the categories are woven together to provide a greater reflection regarding the nature of identity development on college campuses. No single theoretical framework could adequately illustrate the identity dynamics of college students.

Theoretical Framework

Identities are meaning structures that describe specific parts of the self, group affiliations, and structural positions (Stryker 1980). Moreover, an identity results from internal perceptions, self-reflections, and external characterizations marking individuals as role players and group members (Stets and Burke 2000). Social psychological literature on identity has examined relationships among identities, behavior, and how identities function as part of the self-concept (Burke and Stets 2009; Jenkins 2014; Tangney and Leary 2003). Research studies in those areas have focused on how

individuals self-categorize their identities by immersing in roles and attaching themselves to group affiliations (Morris 2013).

Role identities represent how individuals visualize themselves as an occupant of a social role (McCall and Simmons 1978). In addition, this type of identity assimilates the meaning and expectations recognized by that role into the self (Burke and Tully 1977; Thoits 1986). A role can be defined as social attributes and expectations that guide behavior for individuals, or groups, relative to other individuals or groups (Hughes and Kroehler 2008). Once a role identity is formed, a cognitive self-verification process takes place in which a person begins seeing themselves in terms of the role as embodied in the self (Burke 1991; McCall and Simmons 1978). Additionally, as a result of the self-verification process, individuals try to align their behavior with a mental representation of meanings and norms the individual attributes to the role (Burke 1991; Swann 1983). Common examples of a role identity include college student and college professor.

Social identities, on the other hand, represent an individual's identification with group membership, signifying that an individual belongs with others, coupled with meaningful significance regarding group membership (Hogg 2003; Tajfel 1974). While role identities are defined in relation to some complementary counter-identity such as student to professor, social identities are defined by shared meanings with others (Brekhus 2008; Carter 2017). Parallel to self-verification within the framework of a role identity is the process of depersonalization. According to Russell Spears (2011) this process denotes an individual's conformity to perceived group norms once a social identity is formed and acts in fulfillment of those norms. Spears (2011) also

conceptualizes this effect as replacing one's own subjective and objective reality in favor of group uniformity. Common social identities include one's identification with an ethnic group or being a fan of a sports team. It is important to make clear that individuals may simultaneously occupy a role and social identity (Stets and Burke 2000), but the prominence of one or the other is contingent on the concept of identity salience hierarchy (Stryker and Serpe 1994). Furthermore, how an individual arranges their more important identities among the multiple identities they hold is tied to the concept of commitment (Stets and Burke 2003).

According to Stryker (1980), separate identities may be thought of as ordered in a salience hierarchy. Salience refers to the likelihood that a given identity will be active across multiple situations (Morris 2013; Stryker and Serpe 1994). As individuals become more committed to a certain role or group, that identity will assume higher salience. Moreover, the degree of commitment can be predicted by two factors (Callero 1985). The first is intensiveness, referring to the deepness, or significance, of ties to others that share a certain identity (Callero 1985). The second is extensiveness, which essentially refers to the number of individuals that share that certain identity (Callero 1985). The probability of invoking a particular identity over another, whether intentionally or not, illustrates identity salience and reflects commitment to that identity (Greer and Egan 2012).

Although salience hierarchies tend to be stable, individuals sometimes rearrange their identities' relative salience in light of dramatic changes to their lives (Vryan et al. 2003). When such rearrangement occurs, a transformation in identity has taken place. This phenomenon can be clearly illustrated in the experience of camp staff members,

where individuals are moved from one social world to another and forming new roles that lead to new identities (Waskul 1998). Transitioning to a college student is another example of where an identity rearrangement and subsequent transformation is possible. For many students first coming to campus, it is their first time away from the "nest." This experience entails encountering a new atmosphere, unfamiliar people, and places. Most importantly, research has indicated that the social environment of colleges is fertile grounds for identity development (Kaufman 2005).

Overall, identity theory frameworks advance the idea that identities are shaped by role taking and group association and in turn shape behavior. Moreover, the new identities formed by new role taking and group association rearranges identity hierarchy based on the salience of that identity. In other words, individuals will weaken their identity based on older social roles and the newer ones climb higher in prominence. This is especially true considering the degree of commitment an individual engages in with respect to that newer identity. The college environment is fertile grounds to experience a shift in the salience of their identities, thus giving great indication that all individuals will transform their identity based on their new student roles. However, as the coming section lays out, by taking a broader look at how identity dynamics play out on campuses there is a difference in how segments of students experience identity transformation.

Identity Dynamics on Campus

In his work on class-based identities among college students, Peter Kaufman (2003; 2005) illustrated two key facts relative to identity. The first fact was that most new

students are essentially moving through a developmental stage into adulthood when they first enter campus. The second fact is that many students do not have a solid self-awareness of their own identities. It is not long after their arrival on campus, however, that such students build an identity around their student status (Kaufman 2014). This should come as no surprise as their commitment to their student identity grows due to being in greater contact with more college students, but in addition college students start off as unfamiliar faces but grow to become prominent persons. Due to this formation of a new identity, college students, namely first year students, come to rearrange their salience hierarchy thus transforming their identity. Their once proud identity as a high school student at X high school becomes almost meaningless and the increasing day-to-day roles and group identification as a college student at X college climbs to the top. It would be remiss not to mention the expansion of opportunities that college campuses offer for students to take on new social roles and groups. Thus, in effect expanding the possibility of attaching new identities to the self.

In his book *Inside Greek U: Fraternities, Sororities, and the Pursuit of Pleasure*, Alan D. DeSantis (2007) uses evidence from focus group sessions and personal interviews to capture how first-year students conform to many, if not all, of their Greek chapters group member characteristics. DeSantis (2007) saw that Greek organizations generally hold recruiting events in which potential new members are evaluated by active members, and vise-versa, to assess if there is the possibility of extending a trial period of membership called “pledging.” It is in this period, often one semester long, in which pledges increasingly classify themselves as a Greek chapter member until eventually

becoming an active member themselves (DeSantis 2007). It was shortly after becoming an active member, DeSantis (2007) elucidates, that a majority of new active members reported aligning their behavior with what they perceived to be the chapter's standard behavior. One fraternity president interviewed remarked plainly that “It was maybe a month or so after joining that I noticed myself becoming a lot more aggressive in many ways and participating in things I never imagined I would do in a million years, especially in high school. But at the time it did not worry me because that sort of stuff was what we were known for”
(DeSantis 2007:109). The study illuminated that numerous individual accounts from his interviews conveyed a difficulty of not being able to compartmentalize their “chapter behavior” from the “regular behavior” elsewhere on campus. As one student remarked, “After being an active member for like a year, I think I really started to embrace and take on the stereotypical frat guy look and tough guy act...like even before then people would always question why I didn’t look like a frat guy so at some point I just really wanted to shut them up you know?” (DeSantis 2007:91).

In “The Identity Career of the Graduate Student: Professional Socialization to Academic Sociology,” elements of self-verification in graduate school are provided by accounts of students going through a process of professional socialization. For instance, during their time in graduate school, some students worked to become academic professors by taking on a teaching role while simultaneously engaging in research obligations (Adler and Adler 2005). Moreover, Adler and Adler (2005) highlight that

some students also used their mentors as models for approaching certain roles, such as a "scholar role" that required the development of a dissertation.

Between the research of Kaufman (2003; 2005; 2014), Adler and Adler (2005), and DeSantis (2007), it is evident that the college experience provides students with numerous options to form a new identity based on social roles or group identification. Additionally, it enables students to rearrange their identity hierarchy based on the emerging and increasingly important student role. As they transform into their new role and group identities on campus, a shift in behavior and perception occurs as a result of the process of depersonalization (Spears 2011) and self-verification (Burke 1991; McCall and Simmons 1978). What also allows for a greater potential of identity transformation on campus is that most students are unaware of the degree to which they will take on new roles and memberships, thus giving them more room to explore and figure out the answer to that question. For minority students, self-awareness of their identity coming into college is largely recognized due to their ascribed status. Consequently, their scope of identity transformation is dependent on factors different from non-minority students.

Identity Dynamics of Minority Students

Thus far we have seen through a theoretical framework how identities develop, namely through being formed as part of the self vis-a-vis a role or group association. Subsequently, certain processes take shape after an identity is established; namely that individuals will begin to behave in a manner they recognize as accompanied with roles and with that of a group they occupy with others. Theoretical literature has also highlighted how individuals make sense of their multiple identities through a salience

hierarchy that is underlined by the degree of commitment. The development, subsequent process, and salience of identities is fittingly illustrated in research pertaining to the college arena among students. That is to say, after students first arrive on campus, they gradually occupy a student identity based on the recognition of roles and groups associated with that label. They then act and think in ways that are perceived to be consistent with those roles or groups such as attending class or acting more aggressively after joining a fraternity. For a certain category of students, self-awareness of their identity when they arrive on campus is high—racial, ethnic, and religious minorities.

An empirical analysis by Ghavami et al. (2011) on identity structures of minority college students paints a unique portrait on the matter. Ghavami et al. (2011) findings include the idea that while minority students are also going through a developmental stage, they possess a great deal of self-awareness regarding their identity. Ghavami et al.'s (2011) study asserts two other major implications. One, that minority college students have generally believed their status as a student was always coupled with their minority backgrounds, typically ascribed by their peers and teachers. The second is that minority students have internalized their minority student label (i.e., "Muslim student" or "Latino student") as early as the sixth grade which increased their self-awareness much more than their nonminority student counterparts as time went on (Ghavami et al. 2011). While these findings suggest that minority students greatly understand their ascribed status when arriving to their college campuses, whether their minority identity is undoubtedly high on their salience hierarchy is not quite certain. Having a great self-

awareness of one's identity does not necessarily imply that an individual has great commitment to it.

Religious, Ethnic, and Racial Minority Students

What is more certain is that qualitative research has highlighted the unique patterns of identity development among minority college students. In a study of religious students on college campuses, Peek (2005) drew data from Muslim-American students who frequently invoked the notion of being extremely visible on campus. According to Peek (2005) this belief in visibility hindered the way Muslim-American students interacted with their campus peers, oftentimes limiting their motivation to build meaningful relationships. Moreover, several interviewees stated that they indeed looked forward to branching out and exploring ventures largely outside their usual religious standards but encountered great difficulty. For instance, a respondent mentioned how they wanted to join a college republicans club but felt self-conscious after notifying their other Muslim friends on campus. As one participant in Peeks' study (2005: 228) explained. "Most of them felt like the republican party is antithetical to us practicing our religion. I ultimately decided not to join because I did not want to upset them." Peeks' respondents answer demonstrates how their identity as a Muslim student highlights a conformity to his group's standard and how the Republican party is viewed directly in conflict of practicing his religious identity.

For racial and ethnic minority students, many of the same patterns regarding self-perceived visibility on campus are similar (Pyne and Means 2013). In a study on student

organizations, racial and ethnic minority students were found to join social clubs primarily based on their racial or ethnic background (Mesues 2008). More importantly, they chose to join such groups due to the view that associating themselves with their ethnic or racial co-members would preserve their identity, whereas associating themselves with different groups would influence them to lose critical aspects of their race or ethnicity (Mesues 2008). This opinion is shared among black students who attended historically black colleges and universities far from their hometown, having noted the fear of not being able to fulfill the meanings and expectations of being a student from a predominately white institution (Gilbert et al. 2011; Mobley 2017).

These studies demonstrate that the ascribed status of minority college students opens the path to more easily occupy identities that are consistent with the roles recognized with their minority background. Conversely, their ascribed status creates barriers to forming identities inconsistent with the recognized roles associated with their minority background. In both cases, without the effects of self-verification or depersonalization taking place. However, this leaves room for questions such as, during their college experience does their commitment to their racial, ethnic, or religious minority background shift, thus transforming their identity? And if so, what were the major junctures in their college experience that may have caused a shift in their commitment and salience? Moreover, are there major differences across minority student groups in how their identities transformed during their college experience? The forthcoming chapter dives into the methodological framework to provide an empirical answer to that question.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The following chapter delineates the process this research study took to investigate the identity dynamics of minority college students. Due to the broad and open-ended nature of the research question in focus, this study utilized the lived experiences of six individuals from a minority background through one-to-one interviewing. All individuals served as study participants and were former college students within the prior two years of when their interview took place. Interviews took place virtually over Zoom for an average of forty-eight minutes with their identities concealed with a pseudonym. Using a grounded theory design, this study analyzed the responses of participants as data to construct a central thesis surrounding their college experiences.

Recruitment

Beginning in the early days of spring 2022, participants for the study had begun being recruited to take the interviews. A social media outreach message (see Appendix A) was posted requesting volunteers for upwards of an hour-long interview regarding identity change amongst minority college students. After each respondent to the outreach post was followed up with and screened, qualified candidates were sent an email containing more information about the study and an attached consent form for their review. Upon return of their signature on the consent form (see Appendix B), participants were contacted again to set up a time to take the interview.

Interview Structure

Each interview was conducted by a standardized approach. All the participants were given the same questions in the same order using the same wording from schedule (see appendix C). The logic behind this approach is that it will ideally produce responses that will turn out comparable (Babbie 2007). In examining how minority college students experienced issues relating to identity, being able to compare responses sheds enormous light on possible significant similarities or differences across gender, race, religion, and ethnicity. In addition, the standardized approach generally allows for researchers to have assumptions about what they will potentially uncover (Flick 2006; Merriam 2001; Schwartz and Jacobs 1979). Theoretical and analytical literature regarding identity has indicated that minority college students may form role and group identities but are largely confined to their ascribed status as a minority.

Taking the literature into account, the assumption underlying the interview questions centered around how respondents interpreted interactions on their college campuses that influenced an identity transformation. Lastly, the standardized interview was employed to maintain simplicity but be concise enough where information may be gathered from respondents that is related to nearly all the study's subject matters (Berg and Lune 2012). The interview questions were centered on three main categories which were campus social environment, identity salience, and role/group identification. Each category was constructed to take certain assumptions drawn from theoretical and analytical literature and apply them to a comprehensive list of subject matters that could ultimately formulate a theory from the ground up.

Participants

The requirements for individuals to participate in the interview was to be a recent college graduate, namely within the last two years, from the Midwest and identify as coming from a racial, ethnic, or religious minority background. The reason for requesting a recent graduate was to ensure that a participant could more readily recall their past experiences during their college years. To be considered as coming from a minority background, I asked participants to confirm if individuals who shared their racial, ethnic, or religious background on their college campus made up less than 50% of the student body population. The other requirement for individuals to take the interview was that they attended the same institution for at least four consecutive years. This requirement was to avoid gaps in the college experience that may disrupt accurately recalling their college experience. Three categories of groups were studied, with a man and woman representing each category thus making six respondents in all. The sex composition of the interview was intentionally designed to note potential gender differences across and between categories. The participants ultimately chosen for the study were (using their pseudonyms):

- Larry: A self-identified Buddhist male and 2020 college graduate from a state school in Wisconsin. Religious representation.
- Asha: A self-identified Sikh female and 2021 college graduate from a university in Minnesota. Religious representation.
- Emmanuel: A self-identified African-American male and 2021 college graduate from a university in Minnesota

- Rosa: A self-identified American-Indian female and 2021 college graduate from a university in North Dakota
- Sung: a self-identified Korean-American male and 2020 college graduate from a university in Minnesota
- Reyna: a self-identified Pakistani-American female and 2021 college graduate from a university in Minnesota

Each interview took place one-to-one via Zoom for an average time of forty-eight minutes. Interviews were recorded with the participants consent and subsequently transcribed into text following completion using Zoom's Cloud audio software feature. During the interview, each participant was addressed using a pseudonym to conceal their identity. Zoom was the intended method of interviews due to ongoing social distancing measures some individuals might still have been following. Additionally, virtual spaces provided a more convenient means to meet given that respondents could have been recruited from any four-year college in the Midwest.

Grounded Theory Analysis

Owing to the nature of the research question, this study implemented a constructivist grounded theory approach to provide new information on the subject matter. The central quality of this approach is two-fold. First, it allows the researcher to construct a theory from emerging data (Ramalho et al. 2015). Second, its main objective is to better comprehend social phenomena and create theories from the ground up with an iterative data collection process (Ramalho et al. 2015). Given this research sought to explore the experiences of former minority college students, this particular qualitative approach provided a greater opportunity to include nuance in the analysis (Charmaz

2014). In addition, constructivist grounded theory operates mainly through an inductive analysis of data drawn from individuals than pre-existing theories which made it highly compatible for the purposes of this research. In carrying out a grounded theory approach, this study followed the open, axial, and selective coding process that eventually generated a uniform theory of minority college students and identity.

After interview transcripts were uploaded into NVivo 12, the data was first investigated by open coding. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990) open coding can be thought of as "the analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered" (1990:101). In this phase of the process, transcripts were read over to discover the significant areas of the responses relative to the research question. In addition, each of the responses to the questions were individually separated and made distinct through certain codes that labeled them largely through combining key quotes. For instance, in relation to the interview question "How would you best describe the climate of the campus to students of your background?" multiple participants used certain key phrases such as "hostile" or "welcoming" that were labeled separately to denote the distinct descriptions. This form of coding enabled the data to be compared and contrasted repeatedly.

After the open coding phase, transcripts were further analyzed using axial coding. Axial coding is "the process of relating categories to their subcategories termed 'axial' because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions" (Strauss and Corbin 1990:123). In axial coding, codes formed in the prior phase were evaluated to determine their relevance to the research question

then were grouped into abstract categories. This was done by first linking connections between the codes and their underlying context then condensed into broader categories that encompassed the code linkages. After axial coding, the last step in the process was selective coding. In this phase, all categories established in the prior phase were merged around a singular core category that produced the principal concept. Moreover, a concept that expounded a new theory of identity dynamics among minority college students.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the information discovered and developed through six participant interviews. Beginning with the most significant finding, a core category that encapsulates a social process generated from the lived experiences of the participants. In addition, this chapter highlights a few features of this core category. This core category may also be considered a broad concept built from four different subsidiary categories. Labeled as "subcategories," these dynamics help explain the intricate details associated with the core category process.

Core Category

The central concept that illustrates the identity dynamics of minority college students given the narratives of six former minority students is best understood as identity fluctuation. This core category is conceptualized as a process in which an individual with an ascribed identity is constantly negotiating between how their identity is viewed among students who share their identity and students who do not. In addition, this process is underscored by sometimes dramatic and sudden events but largely occurs over the entire span of one's college career through a series of consequential interactions. The concept of identity fluctuation was formulated based on four subcategories that emerged from the procedure of grounded analysis. These subcategories represent broader themes and ideas that encapsulate the process of identity fluctuation (see figure 1 below). Two for example are agency counter and environment transition.

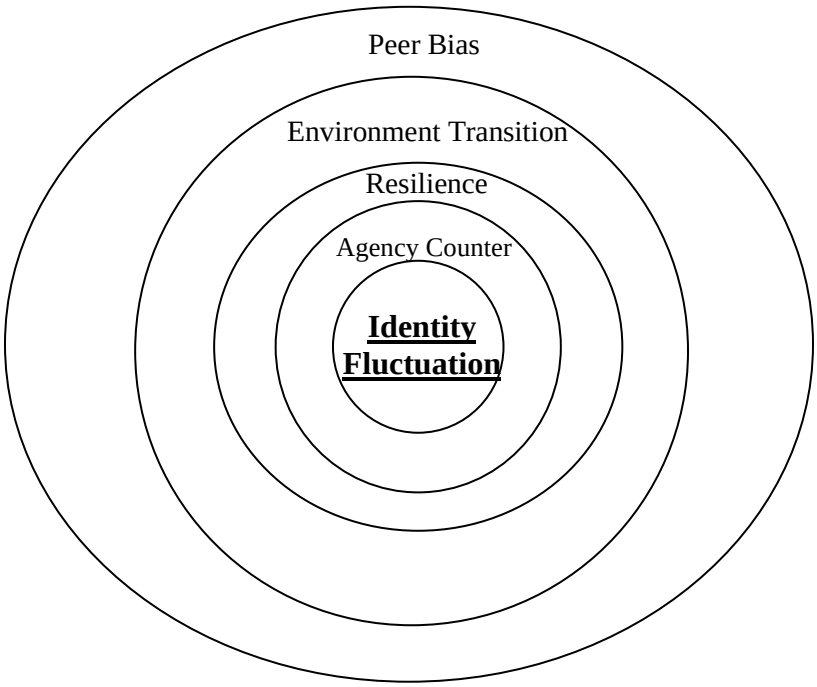

Figure 1: Spheres of Identity Dynamic

Agency counter emerged as a subcategory through coding a repeated pattern of experiences participants relayed that signaled autonomy over their identity in some fashion or another. Moreover, this subcategory represents a common narrative among participants regarding the rejection of certain expectations due to their ascribed status as minorities. Often repeated phrases and terms such as “control” and “my choice” were used to describe their campus experiences. Finally, this subcategory plays a key role in the process of identity fluctuation for students as there comes a need to internally negotiate what power they have to shape the role of a minority student in the eyes of minority and nonminority students alike. The major themes that were discovered from the data relating to environmental transition largely centered around concerns participants

had coming to their first year on campus. Participants relayed their stories about their high school years or the summer before college and the many questions they had leading up to their first semester. Those questions were disguised as concerns that their minority identity would be unfavorably challenged or even changed. The other two subcategories that were developed followed the same formula, by explicating the accounts provided by participants to subsume a larger pattern.

Three features of identity fluctuation were discerned from the subcategories of identity fluctuation. These features were also coded themes that were not completely isolated but also did not carry enough validity to help elucidate the process. They are:

1. Identity fluctuation does not result in identity transformation.
2. Identity commitment of minority students increases over time and is the highest at the end of college.
3. The surrounding environment outside of campus plays a role in how minority students perceive their treatment within campus.

Beginning with the first feature, while participants demonstrated clear negotiations of their identity, there was no indication a transformation of their identity took place. Two main findings delineate that point. First, participants did not seek to change the ascribed facets of their minority identity. That is to say, participants did not find it worthwhile to try and change the perceptions other students assigned to their minority identity. This point was especially evident in how participants described the social interactions they had between minority and nonminority students on campus. In a succinct example by Sung, he noted that “you can only really change the way other people see you to an extent and for me it was more important to have a clear understanding of who I was on the inside...what it meant to be a Korean-American

student." Sung's opinion was raised by another student using much of the same language. As Asha stated, "other students definitely, I am sure, had their thoughts or whatever about us but we [Sikh students] understood that it was more important for us to feel good about our identity regardless of them, you know? Their thoughts were meaningless compared to how we thought about one another."

The second finding regarding this feature is that while they were students, participants felt as if they were always performing the role of a minority college student. The feeling of being not only just a student but a minority student and all the behaviors and attitudes attached was present in the back of their minds and carried out to a large degree. For a majority of participants, the idea of taking on the role of a minority college student was one that appealed to them for several reasons. Suggestive enough through their responses, they did not need to drastically adjust how they practiced the role performance they associated with their minority student identity. Reyna's point of view regarding her campus's social environment was that "It was just natural being myself on campus, easy doing the things I did before college like getting good grades [laughing], or even wearing a saree to class. I could not imagine myself when I was in college trying to be anything else, it would be too hard." This perspective was shared by Rosa who had strong feelings about the topic "it would have been almost a slap in the face of my deceased ancestors to hide my tribal identity…even if some of the things I liked or took part in on campus was stereotypical for Indigenous people, it was still for me to decide how I wanted to embrace things." For Sung, Asha, Reyna, and other participants their minority college student identity was ultimately not up for grabs for anyone but

themselves.

The second feature concerns the processual nature of identity commitment. All participants in the study revealed that coming to college, they took into consideration their minority identity in comparison to their other identities which signaled the start of an increase in identity commitment. In other words, in the stage after high school but before college, participants detailed how important they believed their minority identity would be as a college student compared to their gender, generation, or other identities. Moreover, their answers pointed towards a) their eagerness to build upon their minority identity and b) a prediction that their minority identity would not conflict with other identities they held. As Larry puts it, "I understood there was more to me than my religion, but I really looked to college as a chance to build relationships with other students who might have shared my faith. You know, just as an opportunity to feel more connected I would say." In the interview Larry went on to elaborate that at the final stages of his college career, he had indeed established greater relationships with other Buddhist students on campus. Relationships that he stated, "strengthened his faithfulness." Larry's experience demonstrates how the identity of a minority student may oscillate but generally in the direction of greater commitment to that role. As explained eloquently by Sung:

> Looking back from my freshman year to when I graduated, I would say I got a lot of new Korean friends and let me say they were the ones who really pulled me through some tough times…just being surrounded by more people that came from my community made me feel closer to my heritage and definitely got me more

involved in issues that Korean-American students face on campus.

The third facet is directly attributed to half of the participants repeatedly mentioning their college towns as a source of their on-campus perceptions. For participants, their view on their campuses' social climate was in relation to the city or town their college was located. This was a topic not directly asked to participants but still generated somewhat of a substantial narrative. Over the course of coding each interview during the axial phase, the interview responses brought to light a noticeable pattern. The data showed that participants were highly aware of the socioeconomic status of their college towns and allowed that to guide their perceptions and interactions on campus. Two of the respondents that mentioned the role of their college town environment stated that it was overall welcoming which helped shape their perspective of a favorable campus climate. The other said their surrounding college town was “hostile” and seeped into campus. As Emmanuel stated, “My university was in a deep red district which was the complete opposite of my hometown.” Emmanuel went on to explain:

> The students, I would say as a whole were pretty cool but like I knew most of them came from that area and carried a lot of backwards opinions honestly. I remember our campus used to hold events for numerous republicans and I remember thinking to myself like damn…they want to ruin campus for all of us like their city? I really did feel like they wanted to treat minority students like how the little republican politicians they followed so near and dear.

In sum, the process of identity fluctuation captures the central phenomena in the intersection of minority college students and identity dynamics in different areas of their campus life. The notion of identity fluctuation as a grounded concept begins with minority students entering their first year with a minor but increasingly developing identity commitment. During such a stage, incoming minority students have tremendous concern about transitioning into college for a few reasons relating to identity disruption. Those concerns are greatly reduced after their first year but must still continue to negotiate their identity on campus between minority and nonminority students. Over time their identity salience will increase, thus peer bias and commitment are byproducts that increase as well. However, the rise in peer bias does not completely eliminate the agency for minority students as they try to manage how those who do not share their background view the roles associated with a minority student identity. By the end of the college journey, minority college students hold an immense feeling of autonomy over how they want to be viewed, especially in light of the identity challenges they encountered in their experience.

Subcategories

Four subcategories were developed from the data analysis process that helps to inform the core category of identity fluctuation. Subcategories emerged from coded transcripts that keyed in on specific phrases, language, and word choice. For instance, the subcategory peer bias was partly constructed from the words “pressure” and “conform” being repeated multiple times by a majority of participants. These subcategories are important to note because they each highlight key points in time during the participants'

college career where their minority identity underwent a development. In this section, subcategories will illustrate how those developments converge to explain the overall identity dynamics of minority students.

Agency Control

"Reclaim", "took control", and "my choice" were three of the most commonly used phrases that participants sought to gain power over their identity. For a majority of participants, there came situations on their campus where they felt their identity may have been put into question or even threatened. Moreover, some situations also saw participants declare autonomy away from their identity when faced with a difficult choice. The biggest indicator of whether participants described agency in such situations is through how connected they felt with their identity at the time. For example, Rosa explained, "people, students I should say, and I guess professors definitely viewed me through my indigenous identity and honestly for good reason; I wore traditional Ojibwe garments on campus because, well that was a majority of my wardrobe."

Rosa further elaborated on a circumstance in her ethnic studies course her senior year: "In a course I was taking about American Indians, pretty sure it was an ethnic studies class, I remember taking it with my two other friends who were indigenous. I remember feeling great for most of the semester, it felt great to share experiences of my background to the other students." Rosa additionally explains, "There were times where those other students would try to challenge me or my friends on certain topics like American Indian sports mascots being racist, and my friends and I would be pretty bitter about some of the stuff they believed in." I replied with the follow up question "how did

you approach a solution?" and Rosa's response was:

> You know, my friends and I…we kind of really were not so vocal about it, because really for two things. One is that we kind of already heard it all, I mean we were seniors at the time and at the end of the day we felt like those students who thought those things wanted a reaction out of us, to be angry or lash out but we decided we were not going to give them that satisfaction. We knew it was our choice and we understood best how other indigenous people feel and think about that.

The course Rosa took and her plan of action to resolve disgruntled feelings towards the views of her classmates demonstrated an effective use of her agency. Rosa chose how she viewed social issues surrounding her racial identity by her own accord. In addition, Rosa's decision was buttressed by the thoughts and feelings of close people who shared her indigenous roots. In chronicling the experiences they had with students outside their ethnic identity, both Sung and Reyna provided analogous personal philosophies. Sung stated, "I felt like for the most part, I had control over how I wanted to be viewed as a Korean-American student. Like for example whenever I wanted to like, be in that intellectual role I would do it without worrying about how others might think, regarding stereotypes." Likewise, Reyna said:

> I like to think that I am a person made of many different identities, I think we all do of course, but with my Pakistani background it obviously stood out but like I only made it my, how I would describe it, primary identity I guess, when I

> allowed it. So like, I felt I had control over how my Pakistani background could be seen by others.

For Sung and Reyna, their agency perspective centered on how non-Korean or non-Pakistani students would view them through their ethnicity. Among other participants that sentiment also rang true, however using agency to shape the perspective of others was a little more difficult for students that shared their identity. Asha, for instance, emphasized that other Sikh students boxed her into a narrow way of thinking and behaving in some respects. She noted that other Sikh students would question her commitment when she would participate in campus activities that other Sikh students would not. As Asha explains, "A lot of times, in support of my friends who were of a different religion, I would attend a festival or info meetings about things relating to their religion. Like this one time, my Muslim friend was hosting a henna artwork booth on campus because Eid, which was a Muslim holiday, was coming up so I like went to support and get some awesome henna on my hands." Asha went on to say "that was one of the times where a lot of my Sikh friends would be like are you serious? Do you just hate being Sikh or something? And let me tell you it was incredibly frustrating."

The same experience of doubt and legitimacy surrounding their identity was expressed by Emmanuel in response to the question "Whether it was a student organization or outside of campus, what were the most important social groups you joined during college?" Emmanuel stated that:

> Probably, no most certainly, black male leaders club because it let me be who I really was. But let me tell you one big thing I appreciated about that club was that

> it was the one place really on campus I was accepted as fully Black. Even like other students on campus would say I am a "mixie" or "mulatoo" but man at the club it was my choice how I wanted to be viewed and they helped me realize that late in college.

What Asha and Emmanuel described was a sense of autonomy or determination that even with students that shared their identity, it was solely up to them as individuals how they practiced their racial and ethnic social roles. In addition to a pattern of agency concerning their identity on campus, implicit in the participants responses is the underlying rejection of an ascribed treatment. Ascribed identities often entail a prescribed set of expectations regarding behavior, attitudes, and perceptions of individuals who hold a particular identity. For nearly all the participants, at least one point in their college experience they denied certain expectations attached to their identity whether that be among students who shared their identity and those who did not.

Terms and phrases that denoted agency in their college environment were strongly tied to experiences they shared about the tail end of their college careers. Here it is important to highlight that all participants answered either a "9" or "10" to the question of how strongly they identified as a _____ person when they left college. This pattern is consistent with the ideas of Greer and Egan (2012) that identity commitment increases over time and gives room for individuals to shape their identity. In sum, it can be said that participants' minority identity fluctuated at a time when their salience was high on their hierarchy; thus as they felt very connected to their minority identity they were more sensitive to situations that perhaps threatened it which in turn is where their sense of

agency took hold.

Environment Transition

The subcategory of environment transition was developed through a pattern of responses that denoted a sense of worry, confusion, and anxiousness among participants pertaining to moving away from home and into their first year of school on campus. This transition contributed to a fluctuation of their minority identity by a largely sudden shift in intensiveness and extensiveness of their close peer group on campus. All but one participant conveyed that they intentionally sought out new friends on campus that shared their minority background before their first day of classes. Among those participants, all of them stated that their friendship circle looked increasingly different not only after their first year but throughout their college journey. In addition, participants relayed that research about their college campus environment was done during their high school years to understand more about the social climate.

I asked Reyna "How would you best describe the climate of the campus to students of your background? That is, how would you describe the treatment of Pakistani American students?" Reyna replied, "That is something I thought about a lot even before I was a student there." She also noted "My cousins were telling about some incidents that happened with them, I guess some jerks tried to taunt them on their way to class every morning when they lived on campus." She went on to say "I looked up information about the schools, what did you say? Climate? Yeah climate. About how other Pakistani or nonwhite students felt about it, if it was a nice campus to them and whatnot." In her response, Reyna also mentioned how her research put her a little at ease but that her

biggest worry was also fitting in with other Pakistani Americans. Although she had what she described as a “small but solid group of Pakistani buddies” before college, her concern centered around being too “Western” among other Pakistani students. Her experience with worrying about the transition was not being able to perform the role of what she believed to be an authentically Pakistani student.

Larry shared a comparable experience to Reyna himself with a different question “Think of people that shared your religious background on campus. Could you explain how important it was to you to try and build a relationship with them?” expressing that “I would say aside from the religious obligation I had being a Buddhist, wanting to always be spiritually connected with all beings especially with my Buddhist brothers and sisters, I definitely found it important especially early on in college.” Moreover, Larry adds “I definitely did my research on how the campus I was going to would support my faith and looking back yeah I would say I did good enough research because there was definitely worries I had, some stories I heard about people being kinda mistreated there when I was in high school.”

Most revealing in his account was his statement that “I was honestly kind of concerned that with such a small Buddhist student population, which looking back I am not sure why I expected there to be a big or even decent sized population, that I would need to conceal my religion a bit. Things like my wardrobe and certain rituals I would need to limit just to kind of conform and avoid annoying questions from others.” Larry’s experience, like Reyna, signaled an aspect of worry and concern about their campuses and their transition away from home regarding their identity. However, unlike Reyna’s

worry about not being able to fit in with students of her own minority background, Larry was more concerned about being able to fit in with students outside his religious identity. In both respects, their minority identities were put into question when recalling their pre and early college years.

Aside from Larry and Reyna, the other participants who shared a level of worry, anxiousness, or concern about moving into a new environment were Sung, Emmanuel, and Asha. With Emmanuel and Asha in particular, they expressed how early in their college careers they vigorously tried to make new friendships with their fellow Black and Sikh students respectively. For Emmanuel, his goal was to help smooth his transition into the university environment:

> So I had pretty much mostly Black friends growing up, in school and out of school. All my schools K-12 were mostly, like I mean mostly Black. It hit me the summer before I came to campus that I would be at a school, for like the first time in my life, with mostly people that were not Black so I made it like a priority to make friends with Black people but like I would say not just Black American students but other people I, we, would consider Black I guess [laughing].

When probed as to why this was, Emmanuel responded:

Man, I could not tell you how nervous I was feeling like I was about to have no Black friends and would need to you know be friends with mostly White people or just non-Black people in general. On top of that I would think to myself like man [long pause] what if I am a totally new person after college? Like everything that made me Eman back

home just disappears? That stuff was definitely in the back of my mind.

For Emmanuel, his transition to college entailed a potential identity change, one which implicitly was expressed as unfavorable. Asha relayed many of the same sentiments communicated by Emmanuel, especially in relation to why she sought out friendships mainly based on her religious identity: “To me, it was pretty simple. If I hung out with other Sikh’s most of the time it would make practicing my faith easier and honestly just more enjoyable. I remember going to summer camp every year when I lived at home growing up and being the only Sikh there made it miserable.”

In Emmanuel, Asha, Sung, Reyna, and Larry’s experiences, much of the worry, anxiety, and concerns they had been calmed by the end of their first year of school. For Emmanuel and Asha, their mission to surround themselves with identity sharing students helped tremendously to ease the burdens of transitioning. In sum, it can be addressed in this subcategory that the role of intensiveness and extensiveness with respect to identity salience was at play here for a majority of participants. Participants looked to seek out identity sharing students whether it be out of desire to make the transition easier or fear of losing touch with their identity. For those participants that did indeed build increasing and meaningful relationships, it was not without the swaying of their minority identity.

Resilience

For nearly all participants, their on-campus experiences presented obstacles that challenged aspects of the minority identity. These challenges were not strictly confined to social settings as academic issues played a role. In reflecting on their campus social environment, participants felt that exceptional school performance was an ascribed

characteristic of their minority identity. One example given by Sung was that “as an Korean-American college student, you are guaranteed to be labeled an intelligent person.” Sung went on to explain, “But honestly that label runs so deep it feels like you are not even truly Korean if you are not making the Dean’s list every semester.” In a similar sentiment, Reyna echoed Sung’s feelings on the matter: “Parents and friends definitely make it feel like you are trying to be another race or something; they will say stuff like ‘Why are you not doing good in school? Do you want to be like those hillbilly rednecks when you grow up?’ and things like that.” When probed further about the subject and if it had implications specifically for her college years, Reyna replied “Yes, 100% because it does feel personal, like my pride in my Pakistani identity hinged on my grades and I definitely thought about that a lot.”

For Sung and Reyna, academic obstacles tested their identity. It can be inferred that the salience of their minority identity was external in these circumstances. They still felt wholly Korean and Pakistani on the inside but understood that others, particularly within their minority group, might question how important they valued their background. What highlighted these challenges as a marker of resiliency was recalling moments of self-reflection at the end of their college careers. As Sung noted, “I remember the night before my graduation ceremony how I had this overwhelming sense of accomplishment for all I went through like finishing cum laude with my bachelor’s but maybe more importantly being seen as a hero to my community. I think that feeling is what kept me motivated throughout my time in school.” For Reyna, she highlighted her time as an intern during her second to last semester in college: “I remember getting my stipend at

the end of the internship and thinking about how I would be graduating and getting a job soon after. When I got the stipend it really felt like college was worth it even though for someone like me, like my background, who had to go through some tough times."

Aside from academic pressure, various on-campus experiences were linked to areas of identity conflict. In particular, yearly school events that took place became a source of challenge. Emmanuel remarked about pride week events every year on his campus that culminated in a large outdoor celebration on campus. He stated that during his freshman year he thought about attending the celebration until he informed his peers that shared his race. He relayed that although the idea was not a strange one to him, his peers insisted that "it ain't something our people support." However, Emmanuel wrestled with this idea nearly every year he was a student. "Man, it really felt dumb sometimes that I stopped myself from going. Just being scared of what other Black people I knew thought about it." Emmanuel eventually got over this fear through a conversation with a professor:

> The last celebration was like 2-3 weeks away from graduation and I was chatting it up with one of my professors one day about it and she asked me if I would suddenly wake up not Black anymore if I went to any events and it kind of hit me right then and there. It was really bogus that I was held back from feeling truly Black…you know, whatever that even freaking means, but at least I knew who I really was on the inside so that is what mattered to me ultimately.

Similarly, Rosa mentioned a particular yearly campus event that presented an identity challenge. On her campus, there were auditorium celebrations for Christopher

Columbus Day every school year. As a student campus event planner employee, Rosa worked to help set up events for her fellow students including guest registration, set up/take down, and more. Among the events were the celebrations for Columbus Day which she described as being a trying hurdle:

> I remember my mom and dad demanded my boss excuse me from helping set up the event. It was sort of an internal struggle for me honestly. On the one hand I certainly did not like the idea of my campus celebrating this monster but I also remember back when I was in college worrying about fitting in so that I would not have to confront anyone or anything. I just kind of held my head up when I worked on the events and pushed through.

Akin to the students interviewed by Peek (2005), Emmanuel exhibited a sense of conflict regarding their minority identity and their own unique self-interests. Unlike the students in the Peek (2005) study, however, Emmanuel confronted this conflict and eventually found solace in attending the final celebration of his college career. For both Emmanuel and Rosa, how they approached their conflicts underscores how their minority backgrounds weakened in salience within their identity hierarchy. Put differently, their minority identity became less significant to making certain decisions when it was challenged on campus.

Religious minority participants largely conveyed a lack of communal bond on campus due to the low number of students that shared their faith. This underwhelming communal bond was highlighted as the biggest obstacle to their identity. As Asha

remarked, “Yeah there were sometimes where I would not fulfill my religious obligations because there was nobody really at my school to hold me accountable.” Asha went on to explain, “Doing all the required things for a Sikh was a little bit demanding in college, I think if I had more support from friends who were also Sikh would have helped me.” Asha’s experience illuminates that internal grappling that minority students undergo when the intensive and extensive relationships to those who share their background is decreased. Larry shared a related experience, revealing that over the course of four years during college his religiosity shrunk. Larry also pointed to how his religion was a tremendous source of pride during his first semester of school, especially since he was, at least to his knowledge, one of the few numbers of Buddhist students on his campus. Yet, this source of pride from being numerically unique turned into negative isolation:

> Worshiping became sort of a chore by the time I was late in my junior year. It was more of a let-me-get-it-done-and-move-on deal. But looking back I am glad I did not totally lose my religious self. Those four years were a trial and I like to think I won the case overall.

Peer Bias

Another subcategory that helps put into perspective the fluctuating nature of identity among minority college students is bias towards their peers who share their minority identity. Participants largely were in uniform in that among the different identities they held in college, their minority background mostly guided their social interactions. Two questions evoked a detailed response from a majority of participants on how certain decisions and attitudes were formed by way of favoring their groups. The

first question revolved around negotiating conflicting identities per example in this particular interview:

> Nabil: Tell me about a time your identity as a Black college student conflicted with other aspects of your identity? How were you able to negotiate or work your way through that conflict?
>
> Emmanuel : Um [long pause] well man I remember, must have been my second year or so there was this comic book convention thing on campus and one thing about me man is that I am a nerd whether anyone likes it or not [chuckling] but anyway there was this convention or whatever that was on the same day as rehearsal for CAAS [Council of African American Students] because we had an event coming up soon so I guess there was this kind of conflict of my nerd side and my black side [laughing].
>
> Nabil: How were you able to negotiate or work your way through that conflict?
>
> Emmanuel : Man honestly at the time it seemed more important to like, you know, invest in being social with other Black people, other Black students because I knew they thought the same. Also, like, in the back of my mind the convention probably would be back next year but who knew if I would be a part of the event next year so basically my nerd side had to take a back seat, man.

Part of Emmanuel's response highlights the theoretical assertion by Spears (2011) that social identities entail depersonalization; in his case he conformed to his group's

perceived norms by expressing that “it seemed more important to invest in being social with other Black people because I knew they thought the same.” Emmanuel’s response also illustrates how two of his identities had to oscillate, until reaching the conclusion that his Black identity was indeed more salient: “so basically my nerd side had to take a back seat, man.”

The second question asked, “On your college campus, would you say there was a noticeable diversity of behavior and thought among ____ college students or was there a general behavior or ways of thinking that were common to most members?” to which four out of six respondents used both the word “pressure” and “conform” in their narrative relating to their group biases. For instance, Rosa articulated that among American Indian students she generally believed there was an unspoken belief that “no matter the tribe we might have came from, we feel really united here on campus.” Moreover, Rosa also added that “there was some diversity of thought I would say. I think I remember one day I was talking politics with some of my American Indian friends, and I was actually surprised to learn how different everyone’s political views.” When probed about any conflicts regarding varying political opinions, Rosa noted “None that I could remember, there really is no pressure to conform to his or her perspectives. That even goes for things like spirituality which is near and dear to many American Indian students.”

On the flip side of Rosa’s experience pertaining to this question, Sung stated:

> There was a lot of pressure to have certain beliefs about our culture and family life which a lot of it came from our parents. One of them is to look at Korean people more favorably than others, sort of as a communal gesture to put it best. But many Korean students I knew back in college held those beliefs too because there is such a tremendous pressure to follow what your parents teach you outside of the classroom.

Sung went on to expand that "personally, when I was a student and away from family I wanted to do my own thing. Seeing other Korean students follow their parents' 1950s style of life was crazy to me honestly but in the presence of them I would conform to most of those behaviors or thoughts or whatever you want to call it." Sung acknowledged that partly out of respect and partly out of fear of ostracization he tried to fit a stereotypical Korean-American college student "mold" as he put it. Between Rosa and Sung, "conformity" and "pressure" were experienced on opposite ends. In Rosa's experience, there was no conformity or pressure to act or think the same among American Indian students even when there was the belief of being united notwithstanding tribe differences. Sung's experience demonstrates how "conformity" and "pressure" created a peer bias among Korean-American students to favor one another.

Perhaps the most striking answer to this question came from Reyna: "No, I don't remember there really being a diversity of thought or behavior as you put it, honestly. I think about every Pakistani student I knew and how we were all in this tight-knit community where we lived by each other and did basically everything together."

However, Reyna also explained:

> But definitely sometimes in our Pakistani student club we would have debates about social issues you can call it. One time we had a debate about marriage and whether it was right for our parents and even each other to pressure each other to get married after college, you know? [laughing] I would be yelling "No way!" from the top of my lungs in those debates but even myself after a few of them I knew deep down I would conform like the rest of them and eventually marry so I don't get left behind [laughing].

Here, despite the laughs Reyna elucidates how her Pakistani student peers influenced post-college decision to eventually get married. Reyna's experience mirrors Sung's in that the role of parents and peers influence a biased decision or behavior. Conformity and pressure to act or think in certain ways due to peer bias is a pattern in the experiences of minority college students for a number of reasons. Peer biases influences behavior and perceptions whether that be through fear of social sanctions such as being ostracized, mutual respect, parental influence, or perceived norms. It should be noted that peer bias is subjective as to whether it is truly harmful or beneficial to the individual, since for some participants peer bias did not seem to lead to any real harmful outcomes such as Sung's split approach to other Korean-American students. Overall, in a majority of responses peer bias was a phenomenon that swung around the pendulum of their identity as college students, as in the case of Emmanuel's identities fluctuating early in college when it came time to make a choice of what part of him he wanted to uphold.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was able to distinguish multiple patterns across different people and perspectives. From feelings of concern and worry before setting foot on campus to graduating with reinvigorated pride and power, minority college students undergo a fluctuation pertaining to their identity. This research also combined the experiences of minority students from different backgrounds as a way to create a generalizable theory of identity dynamics among minority college students, primarily through linking the similarities found in the participants' responses. However, their responses drew striking differences that should be addressed.

One of the most glaring differences across interview responses was how men and women in the study mentioned the role of gender in various respects. Two themes in particular stood out- the first is that two out of the three women participants explicitly remarked about how their experiences as women on campus was just as impactful as being a minority with respect to agency and environment transition. Meanwhile, no males in the study spoke about their gender being an influence in their campus experiences. The second theme that stood out was found within the category of “identity salience” in the interview schedule. Many of the responses by female participants clearly demonstrated the enormous role their women friends had in increasing the salience of their minority identity. Two of the female participants even brought up unsavory conversations they had with their minority male counterparts. Again, this experience was not shared by any males in the study.

Other glaring outliers that came up over the course of data analysis was that religious participants, according to their responses, appeared to have gone through less conflict with their identity in contrast to their racial and ethnic counterparts. This conclusion was largely arrived at through the coding process where both Larry and Asha transcripts demonstrated significantly less empathic language to describe their identity conflicts. Additionally, both respondents did not indicate feeling upset in any way towards students who may have made them feel like their identity was being threatened or challenged. For nearly all other participants, there were clear examples of these unpleasant experiences. Perhaps the best possible explanation is that a religious identity can be easier to conceal than ethnic or racial identity and in turn limits the degree of conflicts.

Across all major demographics in the study only among Emmanuel and Sung, African-American and Korean-American students respectively, did their universities have more than a 9% share of students from their background. For every other participant there was 1% or less in the total student body population on their campus. This is important to note due to how the number of additional potential relationships could have been made for the other participants, thus likely having a greater influence on their identity salience and commitment. It is no surprise that Emmanuel and Sung also stated they had made countless friends of the same race/ethnicity on campus and expressed their minority backgrounds as the most meaningful of all their identities by the time they graduated.

The findings in this study are partly thanks to theoretical and analytical literature on identity. The theoretical literature, stemming heavily from symbolic interactionist scholarship, helped crystallize the nature of how identities are formed, maintained, and upheld. Analytical research on the other hand provided accounts on forming, maintaining, and upholding an identity among college students and minorities in general. However, both frameworks were limited in highlighting identity dynamics among minority students. As a result, what this research provided was a multifaceted research design using different minority student populations to expand on the shortcomings of the literature. Yet, this study is not without its own limitations.

Limitations

One of the pressing limitations of this study was dissecting the intersectional identities of respondents. Although respondents were informed ahead of time that only one of their identities would be put into focus for the interview, their responses drew out experiences that could not neatly extract out the multiple identities they viewed as having. This was especially true of female participants in contrast to male participants. One participant, Larry, was a white Buddhist who mentioned in his interview how hard of a time he had at certain points of his college career; noting that his racial background put his religious faith into question. Larry stressed that most Buddhists on his campus were Chinese-American students and presented an equal amount of dispute to his religious authenticity in comparison to non Chinese-American students. A fair point to make with this research design is that it cannot be said with absolute certainty that the findings can be generalizable to all minority college students in the United States. A more honest and

logical assumption would be that the findings elucidate the identity dynamics of minority students in the Midwest.

In conclusion, the identity dynamics of minority college students is predominantly a story of fluctuation. A linear sequence that is marked by a growth in how connected they feel within their minority identity as a student. Partly as a result of conflicts and challenges that require negotiation. Moreover, a sequence that leaves minority students with a strong recognition of the agency surrounding their identity they developed within their campus environment. The broader significance of this study is intended to build upon prior knowledge of how identity operates in social institutions that have underrepresented populations. For minority college students, their identities are ascribed with associated behaviors and attitudes, some of which being nothing more than stereotypical. The findings of this study may help put into perspective how social institutions such as college campuses, may create an unhealthy process for identity development among minority individuals. Digging a little deeper, it may also help detail how social structures guide the interactions that dictate how social relationships are formed and create the overall climate within campuses.

A future direction for a study of this nature may need to adjust for certain variables to arrive at more conclusive findings. For instance, if a researcher wishes to gain more uniformity, they may need to ensure that the colleges associated with participants are similar in terms of size and demographics. However, if a researcher would like to gain more diverse perspectives, a larger pool of participants and minority

backgrounds would be ideal. A suggestion for a future research study would be to interview first year minority students, or incoming minority students, and then interview graduating or newly graduated minority students with the same schedule and compare their answers on a host of topics relating to their student experience. Moreover, utilizing a research design to see how they feel in the moment and not ask them to recall experiences from years ago. In another manner, those interviews can be compared with answers given by individuals from the dominant racial, ethnic, or religious group on campus. Either way, a study that compares narratives from different populations is key to discovering undiscovered information.

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

I am asking you to participate in a research study titled "The Identity Dynamics of Minority College Students." I will describe this study to you and answer any of your questions. This study is being led by Nabil Mohamed, Department of Sociology and Corrections at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The faculty advisor for this study is Dr. Dennis Waskul, Department of Sociology and Corrections at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

What The Study is About:
The purpose of this research is to investigate how the identity of individuals who identify as a racial, ethnic, or religious minority had changed over the course of their college career. This research study is designed to use personal experiences to better understand how minority students transition into a new identity within the college environment. Additionally, this research seeks to understand the differences in identity transformations between minority groups during their college experiences.

What I Will Ask You to Do:
I will ask you to think back on your college experience and answer questions relating to three main topics in an interview format. The first topic will inquire how you viewed various aspects of the social environment of your campus. The second topic is related to how certain identities you developed became increasingly or decreasingly important to you during your time as a student. The third topic will examine the nature of your group affiliations and different roles you took on campus. The interview will also ask you to answer demographic questions about yourself including but not limited to age and gender. You will be asked to take the interview for up to 45 minutes in length through an audio and video format.

Risks and Discomforts:
In general, interviewees may run the risk of experiencing discomforting in recalling their college experience. As with any subject that asks individuals about their racial, ethnic, or religious identity, interviewees may feel uncomfortable sharing stories where a negative event on campus took place. This may include instances of being harassed, alienated, or threatened. To minimize this risk, the interviewer will request the interviewee to decline answering any questions that put the respondent in such a position. If the respondent wishes, they may also skip the question entirely.

Benefits:
While this study does not present any direct benefits, a possible indirect benefit of participating in this research is the opportunity to critically engage with personal experiences that shaped how you view yourself today. Broadly speaking, this research will contribute to a growing knowledge of body on how minority students experience the college environment and how that influenced their sense of self-understanding. In

addition, I hope to learn more about how individuals think about their most important identities and the consequences of identity transformations.

Signature _____ Date _____

Compensation For Participation:

Participants for this study will be compensated with a 20-dollar electronic gift card from Visa following the conclusion of the interview. Participants will be compensated even if they decide to skip some questions.

Audio/Video Recording:

Participants will be interviewed via an audio and video recording platform such as Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom. The method for this research was designed to limit face to face contact with individuals considering the spread of COVID-19. After recording, the interview will be transcribed into text for data analysis. Following the data analysis and full completion of research study, the video and audio recording and subsequent text transcription will be destroyed.

Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview recorded on video and audio format followed by text transcription. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

- **I do not want to have this interview recorded.**
- **I am willing to have this interview recorded:**

Signed: _____
Date: _____

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security:

The real names of participants will be replaced with a pseudonym intended to protect the identity of all interviewees and this will occur during the recording-to-text transcription phase. Signed consent forms will be kept separate from interview data to distance identifying information from research findings. All transcripts will be electronically held with no physical documents being made. To keep the transcripts protected, the transcripts will be placed within the security of the software program NVivo. Only the researcher will have access to identifying information of participants, which will only be found on this consent form.

Please note that email communication is neither private nor secure. Though I am taking precautions to protect your privacy, you should be aware that information sent through e-mail could be read by a third party.

Your confidentiality will be kept to the degree permitted by the technology being used. We cannot guarantee against interception of data sent via the internet by third parties.

Signature _____ Date _____

Sharing De-identified Data Collected in this Research:
De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance science and health. We will remove or code any personal information that could identify you before files are shared with other researchers to ensure that, by current scientific standards and known methods, no one will be able to identify you from the information we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

Voluntary Notice:
Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate before the study begins, discontinue at any time, or skip any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. You may choose to not participate if you are uncomfortable with those conditions.

If You Have Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Nabil Mohamed, a graduate student at Minnesota State University, Mankato. If you have questions later, you may contact Dennis Waskul at dennis.waskul@mnsu.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Participants at 952-818-8877 or access their website at https://research.mnsu.edu/institutional-review-board/.

Statement of Consent:
I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature_____ Date_____

Your Name (printed)_____

Signature of person obtaining consent_____ Date_____

Printed name of person obtaining consent_____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for five years beyond the end of the study.

APPENDIX B: SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH MESSAGE

Salutations!

I am seeking and inviting voluntary participants for a research study I am conducting as part of my graduate studies program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I would like to interview individuals who identify as a racial, ethnic, or religious minority and previously enrolled in college for at least four years.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how minority students from those backgrounds experienced an identity transformation during their college years. The interviews are set to take upwards of 45 minutes on a video/audio format such as Zoom or Google Meet. Participant's identity will be concealed with a pseudonym and following the full completion of an interview, they will be compensated with a $20 Visa e-gift card.

If you or someone you know would be interested in taking part in this research, please email me at nabil.mohamed@mnsu.edu so that I may detail you or them more information. Furthermore, after detailing more information and wish to proceed, I will send you a consent form to review, sign, and return. If you can, please share this message so that more people can be informed of this opportunity. Please note that a response to this research participation does not guarantee an interview.

Thank you!

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Participant	Date	Interview Category and Questions
		1. <u>Demographic Questions</u> • How old are you? • How long did you attend college? When did you start and finish? • What is your self-identified race/ethnicity/religion? • What is your self-identified gender? **0. <u>Campus social environment</u>** • On your campus, what was the most common way people identified you as? That is, do you think most people saw you through your race, gender, or perhaps something else? • How would you best describe the climate of the campus to students of your background? That is, how would you describe the treatment of _____ students? • Could you describe how you were expected to act or think in a certain way on campus solely due to your identity as a _____? Could you perhaps describe an example or two? **0. <u>Identity salience</u>** • Think of people that shared your _____ (racial/ethnic/religious) background on campus. Could you explain how important it was to you to try and build a relationship with them? • Think of those people from your ____ background who were important to you. How often did you stay in contact with them during your college experience? And after your time in college? Why was that the case?

		• On a scale of 1-10, how strongly did you identify as a _____ person when you first arrived on campus? And how about when you left? - Because it _____ (increased/decreased) could you tell me about some of the specific experiences that caused the change? • Tell me about a time your identity as a _____ college student conflicted with other aspects of your identity? How were you able to negotiate or work your way through that conflict? **0. <u>Role/Group Identification</u>** • Whether it was a student organization or outside of campus, what were the most important social groups you joined during college? • What words come to mind when you think of a _____ college student (fill in for their background)? How many of those words did you see yourself embodying during your college career? • On your college campus, would you say there was a noticeable diversity of behavior and thought among ____ college students or was there a general behavior or ways of thinking that were common to most members? • Could you list 2-3 of the most important social groups you identified with during your college experience? Why do they stand out as the most important? • Did you ever feel like you could not join certain social groups on campus because it would conflict with your identity as a _____? **<u>Concluding Questions</u>** • Is there anything that I did not ask you that you would like to let me know? During your time in college, what else could you share with me that details your experience identifying as a minority student? • Do you have any final comments, questions, or concerns?