

IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AND UNIVERSITY ADJUSTMENT

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ABSTRACT

Colleges and universities across the U.S. continue their efforts to enroll students from diverse backgrounds. Those students from lower socioeconomic (SES) backgrounds and first in their family to attend college have been found to experience a great deal of challenges once enrolled. Individuals from different class backgrounds have been shown to experience a different form of socialization, which may influence their experiences in higher education both positively and negatively. There is limited research, however, on how the presence of internal and external characteristics influence the way in which students make sense of themselves within these new environments. This is particularly true when these experiences are viewed through the lens of SES background and first-generation status.

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CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

As colleges and universities across the U.S. continue their efforts to recruit, accept, and hopefully graduate a more diverse student body (Baum, Kurose, & McPherson, 2013; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012a), a focus should be on understanding who those students are and how the institutions can accommodate their differences to ensure their success. Two areas of interest in this regard are the experiences of students from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds and first-generation students. These individuals, once enrolled, have been represented in the existing literature as experiencing a plethora of challenges and difficulties adjusting to the new environment (Gofen, 2017; Hinz, 2016; Hoyer, 2017; Padgett, Johnson, & Pascarella, 2012; Stephens, et al., 2012a), and SES discrepancies have been found to influence how students perform academically (Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel, 2011; Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014a; Stephens & Townsend, 2015b). Although colleges and universities are accepting more students from more diverse backgrounds, the odds of earning a degree still tend to favor those from middle class and upper class backgrounds (Hoyer, 2017).

Stephens, Brannon, Markus, and Nelson (2015a), have described the challenges and difficulties facing these students during the transition into and during the university experience as involving two factors: (1) individual factors, which encompass skills within the individual involving academic performance, and (2) structural factors, which encompass the institutional environments. Both individual and structural factors can hinder students' ability to perform and adapt to their surroundings to their fullest potential (Stephens, et al., 2015a). Lower socioeconomic status (SES) and first-generation students often experience a sense of mismatch between their pre-campus and on-campus lives in both of these areas, and many institutions fail to create or provide an environment that ensures success for all students regardless of their

backgrounds (Phillips, Stephens, & Townsend, 2015; Stephens, et al., 2012a; Stephens & Townsend, 2015b; Stephens, Townsend, Markus, & Phillips, 2012b).

One area that could potentially shed light on how lower SES and first-generation students navigate the college and university experience is identity processing. However, there is a lack of research how these students deal with identity related issues in the face of their new environment and its accompanying stressors. The aim of the current study was to better understand the relationship between cultural mismatch and identity processing during the college experience in college for lower SES and first-generation students.

Literature Review

For quite some time, higher education has been the gateway to a better life with endless opportunities to achieve upward social mobility (Ridgeway & Fisk, 2012; Stephens et al., 2015a). Recent research shows that, based on 2015 enrollment figures, 62 percent of students from middle income quantiles and 52 percent of students from the lowest income quantities were enrolled in higher education immediately following high-school graduation (Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016). First-generation students in particular tend to come from lower income quantiles, from working class families, and/or from minority families, and have been found to be less academically prepared when transitioning into colleges and university (Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, & Durón, 2013). Although students from a variety of different social classes are pursuing a college degree, they are not all completing that degree at the same rate. In fact, only about 58 percent of all students who began at a four-year institution completed within six years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The Pell Institute found that only 11 percent of first-generation, lower income students will do the same (The Pell Institute, 2016). Similarly, while students from higher income groups have seen their completion rates go up over the past

decade, the completion rate for lower income students has remained lower (Baum, Kurose, et al., 2013; Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013).

For North Dakota State University (NDSU), where the data were collected, completion rates follow suit with the trends across the U.S. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), NDSU completion rates for first-time, full-time students, 38% complete their degrees in 4 years and 57% in 6 years. With the completion rate being considerably low, researchers and other stakeholders often question what impedes a student from completing their degree in 4 years, if at all. However, it is often difficult to assess the retention and completion rates reported by different datasets. Students who do not return or finish their degrees are typically not represented in these datasets as the reasons why they left.

The National Center for Education Statistics completion rates only represent students who begin and end at the same institution; there is no data on the number of students who complete their degrees after transferring to another school. Research suggests that students from lower SES backgrounds are more likely to attend multiple colleges and universities (Goldrick-Rab, 2006), so completion rates may not be adequately represented in the NCES figures. The combination of higher mobility and lower chances of completion for these students, however, may further illustrate Stephens' (2012a) view of ideologies surrounding higher education, in which institutions are failing to create environments that allow all students to feel they belong.

Difficulties for these students have often been found to stem from varying experiences with family upbringings and having faced a variety of adversities in life (Kinzie, Gonyea, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008). These students often lack family support in regards to financial means, feel emotionally disconnected from family, and experience more depressive symptoms overall (Jenkins et al., 2013). There is an extensive body of literature looking at how these students

adapt to the new college environment in terms of their psychosocial adjustment to the new environmental norms, as well as overall academic performance and feelings of belongingness (Stephens, et al., 2012a; Stephens, et al., 2014a; Stephens & Townsend, 2015b; Stephens, et al., 2012b). Despite the difficulties, students of various backgrounds, including lower SES and first generation students, are motivated to attend due to the belief that a degree will provide them with higher income and better work opportunities (Brand & Xie, 2010). While the literature shows that these students are more likely to face challenges, it also suggests that they are among the students who benefit the most when they do complete their degree (Brand & Xie, 2010). Given this motivation and level of benefit in the face of the relatively low completion rate, colleges and universities could greatly benefit from adapting more efforts to better understand these students' backgrounds (Kinzie et al., 2008; Tinto, 2007).

More specifically, a key component of the difficulties these students face can be found in the institutional norms that colleges and universities utilize, which are often challenging for students of diverse economic backgrounds (Ostrove & Long, 2007). These institutional norms can be understood in the concept of "institutional habitus," where certain norms and class order are favored in ways that often create class differences in adjustment within environmental contexts (Thomas, 2002). This phenomena stems from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1987) in which he conceptualized the habitus as individuals' way of reacting, perceiving and the systematic approach to make judgements and engage in various social interactions regarding environmental contexts (Lizardo, 2013). Others have taken his conceptualizations and created variations in understanding how the habitus interacts and occurs within the context of higher education, as well as the interplay with familial upbringing influences (Atkinson, 2011). The work is not without limitations, these limitations stem from work of others that argue Bourdieu's

notion as being subjective and encompass complex and difficult to understand properties (Atkinson, 2011). It does, however, provide another way to understand what students may be experiencing when the institutional norms of higher education do not match with norms of the lower social class students. If colleges and universities have a tendency to favor a certain philosophy surrounding teaching and success, then individuals from different backgrounds may face varying degrees of pressure to fit the mold of these new norms (Stephens, et al., 2012a; Stephens, et al., 2014a; Stephens & Townsend, 2015). This can create potentially lasting negative consequences if they cannot/do not (Phillips et al., 2015).

Cultural Mismatch Theory

Cultural mismatch theory can help explain the impact of institutional expectations and established norms that differ from those with which students are accustomed (Stephens, et al., 2012b). The theory can shed light on what some students may encounter, specifically those who are first in their family to attend college or who are from low SES backgrounds. Cultural mismatch theory focuses on socially and culturally self-constructed norms intertwined with instilled norms from institutions such as universities or colleges; the organization and promotion of norms that make underrepresented students feel they do not fit the typical student mold creates a mismatch between the student and the institution (Stephens, et al., 2012a). Cultural mismatch, when presented within this context, has been found to fuel inequality (Stephens & Townsend, 2015) and contradicts the belief that higher education, as a whole, provides equal opportunities of success for students of all backgrounds (Stephens, Markus, & Phillips, 2014b).

Most of the current research on cultural mismatch theory has been conducted on university and college campuses (Stephens, et al., 2012a; Stephens & Townsend, 2015; Stephens, et al., 2012b), and has focused on the issue of independence vs. interdependence.

Although these issues exist outside of the university context, and arguably take place within all American contexts (Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012), they are perhaps better understood within the context of higher education institutions (Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel, 2011b). In focusing on independence vs. interdependence, cultural mismatch theory argues that colleges and universities focus on independent norms, values, and motives, and that these values are typically a match for individuals from higher social classes (Stephens, et al., 2012a). Working class and lower income individuals, in contrast, are more likely to endorse more interdependent norms, values and motives, creating a mismatch between themselves and the higher education environment (Stephens, et al., 2012a; Stephens & Townsend, 2015b).

Individuals raised in lower and working class environments typically focus on their relationships with others and the external environment, while middle and upper class individuals tend to have fewer external constraints and are more likely to focus on their own internal states, goals, and emotions (Kraus & Stephens, 2012). In the university environment, students from upper and middle class families are more likely to express acceptance and adaptability to independent ideologies, whereas students from working class and lower class families find it challenging to adjust to these independent notions (Stephens, et al., 2012a). Stephens and colleagues argued that simply pursuing a degree is a way to pursue independence, and this comes naturally to those who grew up in predominately middle and upper class families. Higher social class status is associated with more material resources and freedom to pursue goals, such as a college education with greater ease and less difficulties (Kraus & Stephens, 2012). Those from lower social classes, as noted by Kraus et al. (2012), have fewer material resources, which may result in them relying on others for help and having less freedom in terms of their goals due to financial and social constraints. Despite the challenges lower social class presents, these students

emphasize following the rules, making connections with others, and wanting to give back to their community (Stephens, et al., 2012a). These students are also more apt to follow what is expected of them and more likely to refrain from voicing their opinions to authority figures such as professors (Phillips et al., 2015). Consequently, these characteristics do not necessarily align with what is promoted and expected within higher education institutions. The expectation of independence in work creates a great deal of stress, which may hinder academic performance and influence negative mental health outcomes (Stephens, et al., 2012b). Independent motives have been linked to lower GPAs and continue to undermine overall academic performance (Phillips et al., 2015). These negative outcomes associated with lower class students may be better understood through students' desire to think about others before themselves, to not practice independence in their lives because it may go against their beliefs and values (Kraus & Stephens, 2012).

Given what is seen as a foundational emphasis within higher education on independence, Stephens and colleagues note (Stephens, et al., 2012a) that there is a need for more research on cultural mismatch, to shed light on how it pertains to different areas of students' lives. As Kohn's work has established (1963), the differential socialization of children in working class and low SES families provides many opportunities for other areas of potential cultural mismatch. Kohn's work revealed that working class parents typically have different values for their children than their counterparts in middle and upper class families (Kohn, 1963). Furthermore, Kohn found middle class mothers favored values within their children such as imagination, curiosity and creativity—values that are consistent with typical college and university institutional norms, which favor not only independence but also optimal room for exploration in many avenues of the student's new life (Stephens et al., 2015a). As a result, the transition to the university may be

much easier for those who have been socialized to values that support such exploration. Students who are underrepresented are faced with having to adapt to a new environment with norms that differ from what they are accustomed to (Stephens & Townsend, 2015b). The transition into and the overall experience of college may present them with great challenges, making it necessary for campuses to offer supports that empower students of all backgrounds to feel confident in who they are (Stephens, et al., 2014a).

Identity Development

A possible area of overlap with cultural mismatch theory is identity development. First conceptualized by Erikson (1963,1968), identity development encompasses the way that individuals make sense of themselves with relation to the environment (Torres et al., 2009). Erikson proposed three different levels of identity which represent inner, unconscious thoughts (ego), important attributes that relate to beliefs, values and goals in life (personal), and how one identifies themselves within a group setting and where they belong in a social context (social) (Kroger, 2017). Erikson first proposed that identity development occurred in the adolescent stage of life, where the transition into adulthood would result in an identity crisis (Arnett, 2015). Research that followed most commonly stemmed from Erikson's work, with new components added to fit societal changes (Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005). One example of this is Marcia's identity status model (1966), which further elaborated on Erikson's ideas and created four different statuses: identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure and diffusion (Kroger, 2017). Marcia's conceptualized identity statues have been used in a great deal of research that has examined behaviors prominent in each status (Kroger & Marcia, 2008). Achievement has, for example, been associated with a concrete sense of self and more positive personal relationships (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Krettenauer, 2005; Schwartz, 2005; Schwartz, Zamboanga,

Luyckx, Meca, & Ritchie, 2013), while moratorium has been linked to being open to searching for sets of goals and values (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2006; Schwartz, 2005; Schwartz et al., 2013). Foreclosure, on the other hand, demonstrates commitment to identity status without any further exploration with self-satisfaction (Schwartz, 2005; Schwartz et al., 2011, 2013). Finally, diffusion entails identity issues in regards to no sense of direction and low self-esteem (Schwartz, 2005).

Marcia's' four statuses were elaborated further by Berzonsky and Barclay (1981), which involved three different identity-processing styles: informative, normative, and diffuse avoidant. These three processing styles provide elaboration on the process that occurs when individuals experience conflicts or decisions regarding their identity (Berzonsky et al., 2013). Each process has been characterized to represent different social cognitive preferences in engagement or avoidance of maintaining an already existing sense of identity or the construction of a new sense of identity (Berzonsky, 2008). First, those who possess an informative processing style take on identity issues with an open mind and are interested in learning and exploring new self-relevant information (Berzonsky et al., 2013). Those who work to keep their existing identity structure and the view of the world adhere to the normative identity processing style (Berzonsky et al., 2013). Instead of dealing with identity issues, those who utilize a diffuse-avoidant processing style avoid and put off any identity-related decisions or issues that arise (Berzonsky et al., 2013).

The use of each of the processing styles has been linked to both positive and negative dimensions of well-being (Berzonsky & Ciecuch, 2016). Throughout a variety of studies, diffuse avoidant processing styles capture the most negative well-being components such as low psychological well-being (Berzonsky & Ciecuch, 2016; Crocetti & Shokri, 2010; Veleioras & Bosma, 2005), low self-esteem (Berzonsky & Ciecuch, 2016; Beaumont & Zukanovic, 2005),

lack self-awareness and self-discipline (Berzonsky & Ciecuich, 2016; Berzonsky, 2011). Overall, Berzonsky (2016) concludes that possessing a diffuse avoidant processing style has been shown to produce negative outcomes in a variety of domains. More specifically, these students experience a negative impact on their academic performance, they lack strong interpersonal relationships, and they consume alcohol and drugs more often. As for the informative processing style, Berzonsky (2016) defines these individuals as adhering to more independent norms, having a great sense of purpose, and being interested in personal growth. They have more positive interpersonal relationships, as well. Finally, the normative processing style characterizes individuals who work hard to conserve their views and possess a strong sense of purpose and self-acceptance, but who have also been found to be against anything contrary to their views or beliefs (Berzonsky & Ciecuish, 2016; Berzonsky, 1990, 2011).

Identity processing has not been examined in the context of students who experience cultural mismatch during their college experience. Exploring these processing styles and understanding their relation to various student backgrounds and mismatch issues can help researchers to understand how students navigate unfamiliar environments such as the university. Erikson's work (1950,1968) argued that the development of identity was a crucial component of one's life that should be at the forefront during the transition into adulthood (Schwartz et al., 2011). At the time that Erikson developed his theory, however, society had stricter adult roles that individuals were expected to follow upon completion of high school. Today, in contrast, adolescents in western society follow a more unpredictable path (Arnett, 2000). The limitation of identity development to adolescence, then, is questionable, and there may be many different identity crises that occur as individuals enter into adult roles (Ritchie et al., 2013). This view has been furthered by the emergence of the concept of emerging adulthood as a period of life

between adolescence and adulthood which involves individuals ages 18-25 in most westernized societies (Arnett, 2000).

Arnett (2000) proposed that with the increasing acceptance of diversity in life choices made by individuals leaving high school, there is a need for an in-between developmental stage. In this stage, one is not quite fully an adult but is not still an adolescent; the individual is still in the process of taking on adult roles and experiencing various changes. Arnett (2000) refers to this stage as emerging adulthood. During this time, individuals seek identity, experience instability, focus on various aspects of self and experience feelings of being lost and in-between, while obtaining the belief that life has many possible pathways to take (Arnett, Kloep, Hendry, & Tanner, 2011). In 2015, 70 percent of university students were between the ages of 18 and 24 years old (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017); the overwhelming majority of them are in Arnett's newly defined stage. In addition, Arnett (2014) has proposed that identity is more than a process within the self, but also represents how the self identifies within contexts, such as higher educational institutions.

Arnett (2016) notes the importance of taking social class into consideration when studying emerging adults. Important social class differences were found in rates of feeling depressed and access to financial support for education, for example. Successful resolution of identity processes provides a number of benefits, such as positive self-esteem and social relations, productive coping mechanisms that are not negatively internalized or externalized (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Beyers, & Vansteenkiste, 2005; Schwartz, 2005; Schwartz et al., 2011; Zimmer-Gembeck & Petherick, 2006). With increasingly new freedom and differing paths, emerging adults can experience additional strain as they seek out purpose for their lives, make meaning, find who they are supposed to be, and create relationships (Ritchie et al., 2013).

The university environment can influence students' identity processes, making this transition an optimal time to reconfigure a sense of self in many different domains (Arnett & Tanner, 2008). With the strong influence of the environment on identity processes, it is important to explore whether or not these environments are promoting optimal identity development as Erikson first proposed (Kroger, 2017). Optimal identity development encompasses a stable and concrete sense of self in relation to an individual's larger context (Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2013). First-generation students are more likely to lack a sense of belonging within higher education institutional environments (Stephens et al., 2015), which can result in less optimal identity development and interfere with degree completion (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Obtaining a sense of belonging may stem from Erikson's (1968) theory involving a concrete sense of identity that allows individuals to adapt and handle stressors within various environmental contexts. Students who lack a sense of belonging report high levels of stress and difficulty finding their place within the university (Phillips, Stephens, Townsend, 2015; Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel, 2011; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Phinney & Haas, 2003; Stephens et al., 2012a, Stephens, et al., 2012b; Stephens, et al., 2014a; Terenzini et al., 1994; Thayer, 2000). For students to flourish, they need to see other students succeeding and fitting in within the university so they can obtain the belief that they too can be successful (Stephens et al., 2015a).

Identity Development, Social Class, and Higher Education

Although there is a variety of research on the relationship between social class and other developmental and familial variables (Thomas & Azmitia, 2014), the relationship between social class and identity in the context of higher education is one that deserves more attention (Torres et al., 2009). The available literature is contradictory. For example, Thomas and Azmitia

(2014) found that social class played an important role in the everyday lives of students that was greater than ethnicity or gender identities. In contrast, Aries and Seider (2007) found that lower SES students reported their social class identity was not as important in comparison to other social classes within the same university. Ostrove (2007) found that working class women enrolled at a university felt their social class made them feel out of place in comparison to other students of different social classes (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Additional findings suggested that social class and identity is greatly influenced by the type of university. Students of lower SES enrolled in an elite university were found to experience more disconnect and face more challenges (Johnson et al., 2011a).

Other studies presented more practical findings regarding the influence social class has on education, such as entering without adequate college preparation, having fewer financial resources, and engaging in less social and extracurricular activities (Stephens et al., 2015a). These disadvantages come at great cost for students who already enter the university lacking necessary tools to be successful. For instance, students who lack financial resources are faced with more packed schedules to make ends meet, and may not have as much opportunity to engage in identity exploration activities such as self-expression (Arnett, et al., 2011). Indeed, financial resources and appropriate academic skills are crucial to success. These needs should be coupled with helping these students find a sense of self within the academic context (Stephens, et al., 2012a). Freeman et al., (2007), found that students' sense of belonging within the university is linked to better academic performance and motivation (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007). However, more research is needed to better understand what helps students from different backgrounds foster that sense of belonging.

While the existing literature provides important information on identity and social class, it is reasonable to suggest there is a need to explore further the influence social class has on students' identity development processes, especially those who may experience cultural mismatch. Linkages have been found for students in general between the new demands of college and poorer sleep (Sladek, Doane, Luecken, & Eisenberg, 2016; Lund, Reider, Whiting, & Prichard, 2010;), higher consumption of alcohol (Sladek et al., 2016; Carter, Brandon, & Goldman, 2010), and an increase in suicidal thoughts (Sladek et al., 2016; Wilcox et al., 2011). These issues can be more pronounced for lower SES and first-generation students due to the additional pressures created by a cultural mismatch in norms and expectations. For these students, who most commonly come from underrepresented groups and whose upbringings are predominantly working and lower class families (Stephens & Townsend, 2015b), the new institutional norms and expectations create increased stress and lack of confidence in academic ability and work (Stephens, et al., 2012b). Available research shows that these social class disparities exist and continue to hinder working class and first-generation students' success throughout their educational experience (Phillips et al., 2015). With the lack of findings linked to the different identity processing styles, it is beneficial to explore further the identity-processing styles of students enrolled in the university, and whether the presence of cultural mismatch influences the way students handle identity related issues.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

With these points in mind, the purpose of this study was to expand on the existing literature involving identity processes and social class, focusing specifically on the transition into college. By combining what is known about the mismatch of institutional norms, social class, and identity, this study aimed to better understand the experience of lower SES and first-generation students. I was specifically interested in the following questions:

- Do first generation and lower SES students report different styles of identity processing than students not in either of these groups?
- How do different identity processing styles influence the levels of *belonging* experienced by both first generation and non-first generation?
- Do first generation and lower SES students report different levels of *belonging* than students not in either of these groups?
- What is the relationship between identity processing styles and *motives* for attending?
- Do first generation and lower SES students report different *motives* for attending than students not in either of these groups?

CHAPTER TWO. METHODS

Participants

Participants were recruited through North Dakota State University classes and listserv advertisements via campus email. In addition, first-generation students were recruited via email through the help of Student Support Services. A total of 272 undergraduate students participated in the current study. Participants ranged in age from 18-28 years ($M=20.58$, $SD=3.55$), 75% were female, and 93% were white. A total of 87 participants identified as first in their family to attend college. In addition, 39 participants indicated they grew up in working-class or poor families. All participants were enrolled in college full-time, and 114 were first-year students.

Procedure

Participants were given a link to access an online survey constructed through Qualtrics. The survey consisted of basic demographic questions, as well as three different instruments to measure belongingness, motives for attending, and identity processing styles.

Measures

Demographic questions are presented in Appendix A. They are all standard questions, with the exceptions of first generation status and social class. For first-generation status, students are considered to be first generation if neither of their parents has a four-year degree (Padgett et al., 2012; Philips et al., 2015; Stephens, et al., 2012a). Social class can be difficult to assess in a straightforward manner. Because this survey was only administered to students, assessments of subjective status were used. Participants were asked to classify their family's social class and their parents' careers/professions, providing a view of how they interpret their upbringing regarding SES.

Motives. Participants' motives for attending college were assessed using a 12-item scale (See Appendix B for a copy of the instrument) developed by Stephens et al. (2012a). Six items measure independent motives, and six measure interdependent motives. Sample items include "I want to expand my knowledge of the world" and "I want to become an independent thinker" (independent motives), and "I want to show that people from my background can do well" and "I want to give back to my community" (Interdependent motives). Participants indicated their endorsement of each item using a binary scale (Yes=1, No=0). This instrument was originally developed by asking university administrators (e.g., deans, provosts and directors of academic programs) about perceived motives of students for attending college and about the kind of expectations they have for their students. Administrators also identified what their universities endorse most for students. Results indicated that 69% of the universities endorsed independent expectations (Stephens, et al., 2012a).

Stephens et al. did not report any validity or reliability information in their study. However, Stephens conducted several studies based on first generation students, social class inequalities within the university, and the overall experience disadvantaged students face within higher education using the instrument, all with positive results (see, for example, Stephens et al., 2015a; Stephens, et al., 2014a; Stephens, et al., 2014b; Stephens & Townsend, 2015b; Stephens, et al., 2012b). Although, no other studies have specifically used this measure of motives, it seems that this measure is useful to capture basic perceived motives of the student.

Belonging. Student's sense of belonging within the university was captured using Freeman et al.'s (2007) adaptation of Goodenows' (1993) *Psychological Sense of School Membership (PSSM)*. Goodenow (1993) originally developed the scale to assess middle school students' subjective sense of school membership. Overall, the goal of this assessment is to

understand how students feel within their academic context. Freeman et al., (2007), made adaptations to the original PSSM to capture a general sense of belonging for college students.

Goodenows' PSSM consists of 18 items that assess perceptions of belonging and engagement in school for youth ages 12-18 (See appendix C for copy of instrument). The PSSM has shown reliability with alpha score of .88. Goodenows' (1993) original questionnaire items asked questions such as "I feel a part of my school" and "Teachers here are not interested in people like me" Freeman et al., (2007) adjusted similar questions with the words university instead of school and professors instead of teachers. All items were scored based on a 5-point Likert scale (1= Not true at all to 5= Completely true). The scores were summed into an overall total belonging score within the university context. Some reverse scoring is necessary for items such as "It's hard for people like me to be accepted at my school" and "Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong here." Items 9, 12, and 16 were reverse coded, as well. Freeman et al., (2007) found adequate reliability with alpha scores ranging from .77 to .90.

Identity Processing Style. Assessment of how students deal with various identity related issues was measured with Berzonsky's (2013), *Identity Style Inventory ISI-5* (See Appendix D for a copy of instrument). The ISI-5 assesses three different identity-processing styles (diffuse avoidant, informative, and normative). Diffuse avoidant orientation consists of avoidance of any identity related conflicts or decisions for extended periods of time. The behavior of the individual will depend on the situation at hand and will involve external reasons for the experiences that occur. This style also reflects difficulty in making commitments and is related other problem behaviors. A normative style is associated with being self-disciplined, possessing a strong sense of commitment, and internalizing the views of others in regard to goals and expectations. This style also consists of a need for certainty, structure, closure and a need to

work to preserve self-views. An informative style includes being self-disciplined, self-reflective in terms of learning new things, and open to new ideas. Additionally, an informative style involves the willingness to accommodate self-views even when conflicting views are present and has been shown to represent cognitive complexity, problem-focused coping, and being open minded.

The ISI-5 was created to be content neutral, not to side with any specific values, or relate to any specific religion or political views. It captures how one might explore, commit or avoid types of goals, values, and beliefs, as well as how one might deal with personal problems that occur. This scale has been updated throughout the years and used widely within the field. The ISI-5 has shown significant levels of reliability and validity. Test-retest reliability over a two-week interval captured scores ranging from .77 to .89. Overall, the scale has shown alpha levels ranging from .74 to .86 (Berzonsky, Soenens, Luyckx, Smits, Papini, & Goossens, 2013). Responses were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree), and each processing style measure consists of nine items.

CHAPTER THREE. RESULTS

Analyses

For statistical analyses, SPSS Version 24 was used. To investigate the effects of first generation and SES status, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and multiple regression models were used. To address research questions one (RQ1), three (RQ3), and five (RQ5), a series of separate univariate ANOVAs were conducted. First generation status, indicating neither parent has a four year degree (Padgett et al., 2012; Phillips et al., 2015; Stephens & Townsend, 2015), and participants subjective SES were independent variables. Dependent variables (DVs) were identity processing styles, which consisted of informative, normative and diffuse avoidant styles. Multiple regression models were used for research question 2 (RQ2), and a separate linear regression was used for research question four (RQ4), to determine how different identity processing styles influence levels of belonging, as well as the relationship between identity processing styles and motives for attending college.

Results

For RQ 1, 2x2 ANOVA's were used to capture the impact of first generation status and SES on identity processing styles. No significant effects were found for either variable or for their interaction. See Table 1.

Table 1

Analysis of Variance for First-Generation and SES Status on Identity Processing Style

<i>DV</i>	<i>IV</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Informative	First Generation	0.21	1	0.65
Normative		0.11	1	0.74
Diffuse Avoidant		0.19	1	0.66
Informative	SES	1.50	1	0.22
Normative		1.75	1	0.19
Diffuse Avoidant		0.45	1	0.50
Informative	First Gen X SES	2.58	1	0.11
Normative		0.97	1	0.32
Diffuse Avoidant		0.39	1	0.53

Multiple regression was used to examine the relationship between the different identity processing styles and levels of belonging experienced by both first generation students and non-first generation. Belonging was entered as the dependent variable for each model. In the first step, first generation status was added as the predictor variable. The second step included controlling for first-generation status and adding each of the processing style as predictors (RQ2). Results indicated that belonging was significantly predicted by diffuse avoidant ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .00$), informative ($\beta = .16$, $p = .01$), and normative styles ($\beta = .12$, $p = .05$) after controlling for first-generation status.

Table 2

Multiple Regression Analyses for Identity Processing Style on Level of Belonging

<i>DV</i>	<i>IV</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
¹ Belonging	First Generation	-.11	.09	-.06
² Belonging	First Generation	-.10	.09	-.06
	Diffuse Avoidant	-.27	.06	-.27*
	Informative	.24	.08	.16*
	Normative	.13	.07	.12*

NOTES: * $p < .05$ $R^2 = .11, p = .01$

To examine differences in levels of belonging (RQ3) between first-generation and lower SES students, 2x2 ANOVA's were used. No significant differences in sense of belonging were found for either variable or for their interaction. This contradicts most of the literature on first-generation students, which tends to show that these students lack a sense of belonging in their new environments (Stephens et al., 2015a). See Table 3.

Table 3

Analysis of Variance for First-Generation and SES Status on Level of Belonging

<i>DV</i>	<i>IV</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Belonging	First Generation	0.45	1	0.50
Belonging	SES	0.72	1	0.40
Belonging	First Gen X SES	0.00	1	0.99

Separate linear regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between identity processing styles and motives for attending (RQ4). Results revealed that diffuse avoidant ($\beta = -.18, p = .00$), informative ($\beta = .19, p = .00$), and normative styles ($\beta = .37, p = .00$)

significantly predicted interdependent motives after controlling for first-generation status. See Table 4. Students who scored higher on diffuse avoidant style were lower on interdependent motives.

Table 4

Linear Regression Analyses for Identity Processing Style on Interdependent Motives

<i>DV</i>	<i>IV</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>β</i>
Interdependent	First-Generation	.21	.10	.13
Interdependent	First-Generation	.22	.09	.13
	Diffuse Avoidant	-.19	.06	-.18*
	Informative	.29	.09	.19*
	Normative	.44	.07	.37*

NOTES: * $p < .05$

For independent motives, only informative style was a significant predictor ($\beta = .437, P < .001$). This indicates that students who were high on information seeking also had more independent motives for attending college. See Table 5.

Table 5

Linear Regression Analyses for Identity Processing Style on Independent Motives

<i>DV</i>	<i>IV</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Independent	First-Generation	.04	.07	.03
Independent	First-Generation	.07	.07	.06
	Diffuse Avoidant	-.03	.05	-.03
	Informative	.50	.06	.44*
	Normative	-.44	.05	-.05

NOTES: * $p < .05$

Finally, for RQ5, a 2x2 ANOVA indicated that interdependent motives for attending college did not significantly differ based on first-generation or SES status, or their interaction $F(1, 267) = .22, p = .638$. See Table 6.

Table 6

Analysis of Variance for First-Generation and SES Status on Interdependent Motives

<i>DV</i>	<i>IV</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Interdependent	First Generation	1.34	1	0.25
Interdependent	SES	.12	1	0.73
Interdependent	First Gen X SES	.22	1	0.64

The second analysis of variance indicated a significant difference on independent motives for attending based on first-generation status, $F(1,267) = 4.945, p = .045$ and the interaction between first-generation and SES status was significant, $F(1,267) = 5.063, p = .025$. See Table 7.

Table 7

Analysis of Variance for First-Generation and SES Status on Independent Motives

<i>DV</i>	<i>IV</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Independent	First Generation	4.94	1	0.04*
Independent	SES	1.12	1	0.29
Independent	First Gen X SES	5.06	1	0.02*

Two one-way ANOVA's were conducted, examining differences in level of independent motives between first-generation and non-first-generation students at each SES level. Results indicated that first-generation students in low SES families had significantly higher scores on independent motives than did non-first-generation students in low SES families ($F=4.78$, $df=(1,37)$, $p<.038$). No significant differences were found for students in high SES families ($F=.086$, $df=(1,230)$, $p<.770$).

Table 8

Mean Differences First-Generation and SES Status on Independent Motives

	Non First-Generation	First Generation
Low SES	4.03	4.46
High SES	4.37	4.34

CHAPTER FOUR. DISCUSSION

The normative developmental track for U.S. youth has been to obtain a college degree (Baum, et al., 2013b). Along with this pattern, enrollment rates have become increasingly diverse, and are projected to continuously become more diverse in terms of the traditional aged college student (Baum, et al., 2013a). This diversity includes more students who are first in their family to attend college, who have racial and ethnic differences, and who come from varying SES upbringings. The diverse student population enrolled in higher education institutions is an important occurrence that deserves careful consideration. With the shift in higher education student populations, the current study aimed to better understand the higher education experience for first-generation and low income students.

The purpose of the present study was to expand on the existing literature on identity processing and the influence SES has on students in college. Research on the ISI-5 has not explored whether first-generation and SES has any influence on how one processes identity related information and experiences. Our results indicated, first, that first-generation and SES status did not impact one's identity processing. Students in both groups appeared to utilize similar processing styles as their peers, regardless of the differences in upbringing and social status.

Second, we found that identity status predicted sense of belonging, with each style related to one's overall score on the belonging scale. Individuals who reported higher levels of informative, normative, and diffuse avoidant styles also reported high levels of belonging. Despite a great deal of the literature on first-generation students that has shown they are less likely to obtain a sense of belonging in higher education environments, within this study first-generation and SES status was not related to levels of belonging. Most of the participants

reported they felt they belonged to the university, regardless of being a first-generation student or from a lower social class. An additional possibility that explains the similarities in the sample may relate to the type of university. The data were collected from a public university in the Midwest. This university is not considered to be an ivy league and therefore attracts students from rural areas of the Midwest. It is unlikely that the student population consists of many wealthy and resourced students. Therefore, the differences among students may not be as apparent as they would be at a school with a significant number of wealthy students.

Third, identity status predicted both interdependent and independent motives for attending college. First-generation and SES status did not predict interdependent motives; however, they did predict independent motives. In other words, first-generation and lower SES status of the students were related to whether students had more independent motives for attending college. These results may reflect societal changes in how individuals view a college education. It is becoming more diverse and possible for underrepresented students to obtain a degree which may have resulted in an overall shift in students motives for attending regardless of their background.

One commonly discussed concept for college students is whether they can obtain a sense of belonging within the institutions they attend. The available research has posited that a lack of belonging is frequently most experienced by underrepresented students (Johnson et al., 2011). In this study, first-generation and lower SES status showed no difference in level of belonging when compared to continuing generation and higher SES students. Given that the statistics in this study come from one institution, the results may indicate that the institution is better at fostering a welcoming environment for all students. In addition to this explanation, according to the reported state totals on the NDSU website students from this university tend to come from

surrounding Midwest states. These students may be closer to possible supports such as family in turn may help students adjust easier to the university, and not feeling completely out of place in a new environment.

A sense of belonging, especially within the university, has shown to have profound effects on academic achievement, well-being, and successful identity development (Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Johnson et al., 2011). These results may not necessarily explain the full picture and other questions may be asked in future studies on sense of belonging in the university.

Given the complex backgrounds of students enrolling in higher education, it is important to note that all will approach the process of identity formation differently. Identity processing orientation relates to the social-cognitive strategies that depict how individuals react or behave in light of certain identity information and conflicts (Berzonsky et al., 2013). Through the current study, results did not show any significant differences amongst the groups of students on first-generation and SES status. Based on the exploration of identity processing styles, it may be of interest to examine how students in their institutions may be having difficulties when it comes to managing and handling identity related information. Each style encompasses both positive and negative attributes. Notably, students processing in a diffuse avoidant manner may have the most difficulties when enrolled in the university. This style relates to limited self-control, difficulty making commitments and decisions, and other problem behaviors (Berzonsky & Papini, 2014; Berzonsky et al., 2013), all of which may make a being a college student a challenge.

Limitations

There are several limitations of the current study. First the homogeneity of participants poses a significant limitation. The overall sample consisted of mostly Caucasian female students. Considering the overall sample demographics, generalizations to other populations and other

universities should be done with caution. Second, the results of the study indicated that participants' responses were similar on most of the measures. This may be due to the measures used and the sample being prominently female. With a diverse sample, the measures may have been perceived and understood differently by the participants, which may have changed the overall results of the study.

Another limitation of the study was the subjective measure of social class. SES can be difficult to measure in a straight forward manner. The complexity that goes into defining one's social status or social class may encompass very different experiences in different locations of the U.S. Social class can be defined through material resources and how one perceives their rank in relation to others in society (Kraus et al., 2012) However, in this study, we used the participants' subjective upbringing and how they perceived it. One strength in light of this was the use of a subjective measure of social class along with an objective measure that collected parent's education and type of occupation. In recent discussion about education research, there has been a shift in untangling the complexity of social class and the importance of including both subjective and objective pieces to fully understand the robust construct (Rubin et al., 2014). The simplicity of the subjective SES question was brief, and it may be useful in future studies to include more than one question and possibly focus groups to better understand the family environment students grew up in. Questions such as, size of town they grew up in, was the city rural or urban, should be considered. Another avenue to explore would be to ask participants about their home life experiences, did they receive any assistance from the government, did their family go on many vacations, and number of siblings could all reflect their SES perceptions growing up. Additionally, the lack of questions that captured how upbringings may influence

experiences related to identity and belonging once enrolled may have created significant limitations for the scope of the current study.

In order to explore the theoretical lens used for this study, cultural mismatch was measured using Stephens et al. (2010) independent vs. interdependent norms for attending. This measure does not have any reported reliability and validity statistics, which could have skewed the results. Future studies may consider sending the questionnaire to university professionals to obtain what that university or college endorses as the most important thing for students. This information would be crucial in understanding the environment that is promoted within the university, without making conclusions based on student perspectives only. Another possibility would be to conduct reliability and validity on different samples to ensure that the measure captures the essence of cultural mismatch.

Lastly, results indicated that first-generation and lower SES status students did not report significantly different motives for attending college. Contrary to the existing literature, this sample appeared to endorse similar motives as their counterparts. The literature has shown that first-generation students are more likely to endorse more interdependent motives, due to the motivation to give back to their community and to help their families once they complete their degree (Stephens, et al., 2012b). Again, if the study consisted of a more diverse sample and incorporated different colleges and universities, the findings may have supported the literature on first-generation students and their continuing-generation peers.

Future Directions

Several possible future directions will be considered in this area. First, in order to encourage institutions and other higher education stakeholders to understand the diversity of their students, they should continue to study the impact of SES and other diversity factors on

students who attend their institutions. With more studies focusing on the backgrounds of the students, more programs and efforts can be implemented to increase support of diverse students. Second, to measure cultural mismatch, additional measures from Stephens' work should be used. Other studies have incorporated collecting data from university faculty and professors to obtain what their university promotes (Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012). It may be beneficial to also incorporate an open-ended question to gather qualitative data from each participant on how they may or may not be experiencing a mismatch within their university. Deciding to incorporate more measures and more structured questions regarding social class may produce more robust findings.

Future studies should recruit students from both 2-year community and technical colleges, as well as, 4-year universities in different locations across the states and in different countries. In doing so, this would reduce the homogeneity. Because the sample was from only one 4-year university, it may have skewed the results. By incorporating a more diverse group of students from different institutions, it may uncover the significance SES has in students' lives based on where they grew up and where they currently reside.

Universities and colleges could potentially deal with student differences based on SES and their upbringing by putting emphasis on seeking feedback from students at more than just one point in time. Some universities collect data after freshmen year regarding retention rates and experiences. However, this is not a practice that occurs everywhere. Therefore, putting pressure on colleges and universities to take the time to ask students important questions such as 'I feel like I belong here' and 'I feel my institution supports me' is incredibly important to ensuring that all students are adjusting to the culture that is promoted within their college or university. The careful consideration of student differences and understanding students come to college with

very different developmental trajectories should be a part of the conversation moving forward. Colleges and Universities across the U.S. are feeling the push from a variety of key stakeholders in higher education to implement and strengthen the overall number of students who earn their degree. This study provides insights into a different way to pay attention to the details that are often overlooked when thinking of a ‘successful’ institution.

In addition to collection of feedback and information from the students, universities and colleges should prepare their faculty and staff with adequate training and understanding of diversity and the implications of underrepresented students. Recent reports suggest that the student population will continue to become more diverse regarding the traditional aged student (Wyatt, 2011). Non-traditional students may begin college for the first time in their lives at an older age, or even re-enroll years later to finish their degree. This deserves careful consideration of how institutions can create cultures that welcome, support, and successfully prepare students of all backgrounds to enter their desired careers.

In summary this study may help higher education institutions better understand the environment that they promote, as well as how their students may be adjusting to their expectations. Insight into the impact of both on students’ ability to foster an optimal sense of self and identity may also be gained. Finally, results may shed light on how instructors can configure various teaching and learning strategies to ensure success of all students, regardless of their backgrounds.

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APPENDIX A. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Gender	Male Female Other Prefer not to specify
Racial or ethnic background	White Black or African American American Indian or Alaska Native Asian Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Hispanic Other
Age	Write-in option
Marital Status	Married Single Widowed Divorced Engaged Cohabiting
Do you have any children?	Yes (<i>Please indicate how many children in the provided box</i>) No
The following people in my family have received at least a 4 year degree (Bachelors)? Please check all that apply	Mother Father Stepparent Brother Sister Step/half sibling Other, please explain _____ No one
Did you start your college career at NDSU?	Yes No, started at a 2 year school and transferred No, transferred from another 4 year university
What was your GPA last semester?	3.50+ 3.49-3.00 2.99-2.50 2.49-2.00 1.99-0.00
What is your cumulative GPA?	3.50+ 3.49-3.00 2.99-2.50 2.49-2.00 1.99-0.00

Current Major	Write-in
Think about your experiences growing up, how would you classify your family's social class?	Poor Working class Lower middle class Upper middle class Upper class
What is your mother's highest earned education?	Less than high school High school or GED Some college 2 year degree 4 year degree Masters degree M.A. or M.S. Doctorate
How would you classify your mother's career/profession?	Unemployed Unskilled labor (examples: Grocery store clerks, maids, fast food workers, and janitors) Semi-skilled labor (examples: truck drivers, retail salespersons, bartenders, servers, and security guards) Skilled labor (examples: law enforcement, nurses, sales representatives, and electricians) Clerical or Technical work (examples: office assistant, answering phones and managing office paperwork) Business owner Professional (examples: doctor, college professors, lawyer, and therapist) N/A
What is your father's highest earned education?	Less than high school High school or GED Some college 2 year degree 4 year degree Masters degree M.A. or M.S. Doctorate

<p>How would you classify your father's career/profession?</p>	<p>Unemployed Unskilled labor (examples: Grocery store clerks, maids, fast food workers, and janitors) Semi-skilled labor (examples: truck drivers, retail salespersons, bartenders, servers, and security guards) Skilled labor (examples: law enforcement, nurses, sales representatives, and electricians) Clerical or Technical work (examples: office assistant, answering phones and managing office paperwork) Business owner Professional (examples: doctor, college professors, lawyer, and therapist) N/A</p>
<p>What year are you in school currently?</p>	<p>1ST year 2nd year 3rd year 4th year 5th year 6+ year</p>

APPENDIX B. MOTIVES FOR ATTENDING COLLEGE

How well do the following questions describe you and your motivation for attending college?

Not at all like me (1)	Rarely like me (2)	A little like me (3)	Somewhat like me (4)	A lot like me (5)
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Interdependent Motives

- Help my family out after I'm done with college
- Be a role model for people in my community
- Bring honor to my family
- Show that people with my background can do well
- Give back to my community
- Provide a better life for my own children

Independent Motives

- Expand my knowledge of the world
- Become an independent thinker
- Explore new interests
- Explore my potential in many domains
- Learn more about my interests
- Expand my understanding of the world

APPENDIX C. PSYCHOLOGICAL SENSE OF SCHOOL MEMBERSHIP

Rate the following items in terms of how true each one is for you:

Not at all true (1)	Somewhat true (2)	Moderately true (3)	Mostly true (4)	Completely true (5)
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- I feel like a real part of this university
- People here notice when I'm good at something
- It's hard for people like me to be accepted here
- Other students in this university take my opinions seriously
- Most professors at this university take my opinions seriously
- Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong here
- There's at least one professor or other adult in this university I can talk to if I have a problem
- People at this university are friendly to me
- Professors here are not interested in people like me
- I am included in a lot of activities at this university
- I am treated with as much respect as other students
- I feel very different from most other students here
- I can really be myself at this university
- The professors here respect me
- People here know I can do good work
- I wish I were in a different university
- I feel proud of belonging to this university
- Other students here like me the way I am

APPENDIX D. IDENTITY STYLE INVENTORY ISI-5

For the following items, indicate how well these statements describe you:

Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Diffuse Avoidant:

When personal problems arise, I try to delay action as long as possible
I'm not sure where I'm heading in my life; I guess things will work themselves out
My life plans tend to change whenever I talk to different people
Who I am changes from situation to situation
I try not to think about or deal with problems as long as I can
When I have to make a decision, I try to wait as long as possible in order to see what will happen
It doesn't pay to worry about values in advance; I decide things as they happen
I am not really thinking about my future now, it is still a long way off

Informative:

When making important decisions, I like to spend time thinking about my options
When facing a life decision, I take into account different points of view before making a choice
It is important for me to obtain and evaluate information from a variety of sources before I make important life decisions
When making important decisions, I like to have as much information as possible
When facing a life decision, I try to analyze the situation in order to understand it
Talking to others helps me explore my personal beliefs
I handle problems in my life by actively reflection on them
I periodically think about and examine the logical consistency between my values and life goals
I spend a lot of time reading and talking to others trying to develop a set of values that makes sense to me

Normative:

I automatically adopt and follow the values I was brought up with
I think it is better to adopt a firm set of beliefs than to be open-minded
I think it's better to hold on to fixed values rather than to consider alternative value system
When I make a decision about my future, I automatically follow what close friends or relatives expect me to do
I prefer to deal with situations in which I can rely on social norms and standards
I have always known what I believe and don't believe; I never really have doubts about my beliefs
I never question what I want to with my life because I tend to follow what important people expect me to do

When others say something that challenges my personal values or beliefs, I automatically disregard what they have to say
I strive to achieve the goals that my family and friends hold for me