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The Emergence of Pre-Professional Identity

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An abstract of a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

The Emergence of Pre-Professional Identity

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Despite the wealth of scholarly work on the topic of identity, few studies have specifically examined the formation of new role identities. This study draws on sociological identity theory and theories of vocational choice to explore the process by which individuals begin to form a new, pre-professional role identity. Data consist of texts written by 189 undergraduate business students. A qualitative analysis of the data indicate that (1) impression management largely fuels the identity formation process in the early stages and (2) individuals view the pre-professional role principally in terms of resources to be gained and exploited in service of other goals. Implications for identity theory, professional socialization, and undergraduate business education are discussed.

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Preface

It is often thought among the professoriate that in the ideal – if not in the reality – the demands of research and teaching do not compete but instead exist in symbiosis. On the one hand, it has seemed clear to me that a professor's research interests surely contributed to his or her success in the classroom, since at all of the universities I have attended students have seemed impressed by scholarly research and the discussion of such as a part of instruction. On the other hand, as an instructor, I have also suspected it is easy to lose sight of the opportunities for the inverse: for teaching to enrich research efforts. Instead, in my experience as a novice instructor and doctoral student, the day-to-day requirements of teaching tended to overshadow the subtle demands of research. During a teaching semester, my students' needs were visible, persistent, and unyielding; the needs of my research were quiet, docile, and easy to ignore. This project, however, is an example of the ways in which the academic work of the classroom instructor might benefit her scholarly work outside teaching. It took me some time to recognize the opportunity.

In my fourth year of graduate school I was asked by a department outside my own to teach three sections of a required course. There were 189 students enrolled, and the previous instructor had unexpectedly been asked by the Dean not to return. The class represented an entré to teaching in the business classroom, a context I found appealing from a career standpoint, and I was glad to be considered. I had just a month to prepare and a five-month old baby (my first) at home, so the weeks before the teaching semester were busy ones. I had considered the impact of the decision on my research, and I had determined that although my research would surely suffer, the sacrifice was worth the opportunity to teach this course.

At the time, I had embarked on a study of the formation of spousal identity. In my M.A. work, I studied identity from an Eriksonian perspective; in my doctoral work I learned about the sociological perspectives on role and identity. Throughout, I remained interested in the process by which social identities come to be at the outset; when individuals take on a new identity for the very first time, how do they initially form a sense of themselves in the role? Although the identity literature is well-developed in several disciplines, there is a lack of understanding about the emergence of new role identities. I planned to use the spousal identity as the target social identity, following others in the sociological tradition who have used newly married couples to better understand identity work (Burke, Stets, Cast). When I got the call to teach, I had recently received IRB approval to begin interviews. I knew, given

the new baby and new teaching, that the interviews would have to wait until the following semester.

As I prepared my lectures, I remembered advice given to me by assistant professors: always teach what you know best. So, I decided to include a day to discuss identity. For these students, I grounded the lecture in the business context and planned to discuss professional identity. To prepare the students and gather material to be used in the lecture, I created a brief online questionnaire about their identities as business students. I asked them to complete it before the lecture day, and I intended to use their responses to illustrate various aspects of identity: meanings, role conflict, identity formation, and identity change.

Once I started to read the students responses, I realized that I had not anticipated the significance of the seemingly token identity, "business student," to these students. I found their responses surprising, and it gave me a rich glimpse of the identity formation process I was so interested to study. In class, my students were engaged in our discussion of identity; they were curious about both the commonalities in their responses to my questions and what made them each unique. In the following class, we discussed "image" and the differences between identity and image. Students were fascinated by this distinction; in the end of the semester evaluations, many remembered it as their favorite topic. One wrote that it was the first time she truly recognized the implications of her image, and how different who she was on the "inside" (her identity) might be from who she was on the outside (her image).

Although I had decided to put my research on hold for the semester, as I read the students' responses over and over I came to realize that they presented a perfect opportunity to investigate my interest in identity formation. I did not know whether I could use the data for research purposes, but after talking with the IRB and gaining approval for analysis, I took the necessary steps to obtain consent at the end of the semester. In the end, the experience was precisely the symbiotic relationship between teaching and research for which I had hoped. The data have become the basis of my dissertation research described here.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The topic of identity has occupied social scientists for over a hundred years, at least since James wrote about it in *Principles of Psychology* (1890). Much research contributes to our understanding of the ways in which identities play a part in social interaction, such as the impact of identity processes on self-esteem (Stryker & Burke, 2000), the effects of power and status imbalances on identity negotiation (Cast, 2003), and the advantages and disadvantages of multiple role identities (Reitzes & Mutran, 1994). In a recent review of the literature, Cote (2006) found that the number of citations accessible using the keyword “identity” has more than doubled each decade since the 1940s. To be sure, the identity literature is well-developed in several disciplines, including psychology, social psychology, and sociology. Social psychologists from both sociological and psychological traditions have studied identity processes and, using identity as the explanatory variable, generated useful theoretical explanations of social phenomena as diverse as stereotype and discrimination (Turner & Tajfel, 1979), individual differences in ego formation (Erikson, 1968), the division of household labor (Stets, 1995) and domestic violence (Stets & Burke, 2005; Cast 2003).

WHY STUDY IDENTITY FORMATION?

Despite the wide interest and attention to the topic of identity, however, the construction of identity is a problem noted by identity scholars to be in need of additional study. Ibarra writes, “Despite consensus in the socialization literature that identity changes accompany work role changes, the process by which identity evolves remains under explained” (Ibarra, 1999: 765). Burke, who developed identity control theory, one of the dominant social-psychological perspectives on identity, acknowledges that his model “works well when the standard is known and fixed…[but] does not tell where the standard came from originally” (2004: 579).

When individuals occupy a new social position for the first time, how do they form an identity? This study seeks to understand the process by which individuals develop a new role identity. Using data collected from new business students, this study addresses the process of identity formation in the pre-professional context. My broad theoretical question is this: what are some key processes by which identities are formed when individuals occupy new social roles? More specifically, what characterizes the construction of *pre-professional* identity? What are the meanings that individuals hold for the pre-professional role? What are the sources of those meanings? What social psychological processes contribute to pre-professional identity formation? Developing an understanding of these processes is aided by work in both the sociological and psychological literatures on identity and role as well as the applied literatures of professional socialization and vocational choice.

Theoretical Perspectives on Identity and Role

Role theorists (McCall & Simmons, 1978) argue that children take on social role identities primarily through the process of socialization. They acknowledge, however, that "the relationship between role learning and role performance is variable and problematic" (210). One reason may be that through socialization, individuals are exposed to a multitude of messages about what it means to be a person in a given social role: from family, friends, religious teachings, the general social climate, mass media, etc. And, these messages not only vary but often conflict. Conceptions of what it means to be a "good student," for example, vary by source. In one's family of origin, being a good student may be a singular result of one's grade point average. Among one's friends, it may be primarily connected to developing strong relationships with others and holding visible campus leadership positions. How do individuals construct a role identity amid multiple, potentially conflicting, and complex directives? Although the socialization perspective highlights the

importance of learning from others, it does not fully address the processes involved in the formation of identity.

Structural identity theory (Stryker, 1980) emphasizes social interaction as the process by which identities are constructed. Specifically, structural identity theorists argue that the process of defining a situation through interaction is the primary determinant of identity. Reflexive thinking, or the ability to see the world as others do, enables individuals to play a role by allowing individuals to "see" a situation, and their role in it, as others do. Individuals are then able to behave in accordance with the socially defined role. Although the structural approach to identity has tended to prioritize others' expectations in determining identity, theorists have not denied the potential for agentic action. While "role playing" is behaving in accordance with the expectations of others, "role making" allows for more individualization in the crafting of a role identity. Although "role-making" has received some theoretical attention, the process by which a person crafts an individual identity in the context of a social role has not been thoroughly studied. How do individuals navigate between structural conditions affecting identity formation (role-playing) and idiosyncratic needs and desires when developing a new identity (role-making)? When individuals occupy a clearly defined social role, what determines the extent to which they will "play" or "make" the role? By examining the early stages of identity construction in the pre-professional context, this study seeks to begin to answer these questions.

Stryker acknowledged that conflict may result when the social expectations guiding identity development are contradictory. "Role conflict" describes the situation in which behavioral expectations for one role contradict that of another role. In such situations, individuals experience stress trying to follow both sets of expectations. "Role strain" describes contradiction in expectations attached to the same social position, such as the simultaneous expectation for a student to be "smart" and "social." Identity control theory

(ICT) (Burke, 1991; 2004; 2006), as a theoretical paradigm consistent with Stryker's framework (Stryker & Burke, 2000), has sought to understand the process by which individuals address inconsistencies in identity, such as conflict and strain. ICT explains the process by which individuals compare identity-relevant information in the environment with internally held identity meanings for the self. When inconsistency arises (such as in cases of role conflict or strain) individuals attempt to repair the imbalance by adjusting either their role behaviors or their internal identity meanings to better match feedback from the environment. Empirical evidence shows negative effects to well-being when incongruence remains (Cast, 2004); therefore, achieving consistency between internal and external representations of identity is important.

In sum, Stryker's framework suggests "role-making" as the process by which individuals take on identity meanings, but does not theorize the mechanisms governing the construction of the identity. Burke's ICT model describes what happens once identities are in conflict, but does not address the emergence of those identities (Burke, 2004).

Developmental psychology also offers a characterization of the process by which individuals form identity, but psychologists tend to focus on ego identity rather than separate identities associated with social roles, as sociologists do. In the psychological literature, identity refers to one's overall sense of self rather than context-dependent aspects of the self, although even the developmental psychologists' definition relies in part on social roles. The overall identity is considered a culmination of identity choices in various social roles, primarily religious, political, and occupational (Marica, 1966). Erikson's (1968) seminal work identified the epigenetic stages characterizing the formation of adult identity throughout the lifecycle, and other theorists (Marcia, 1966; Raskin, 2006) further described the formation of identity according to the presence or absence of two variables – crisis and commitment – in the process of development.

Crisis refers to an individuals' exploration of identity roles; individuals "try on" various social categories, such as "liberal" or "born-again Christian." Fannin described crisis as "a conscious awareness of the occupational and ideological alternatives, and the felt need to make choices in these domains" (1979: 13). *Commitment* describes individuals' investment in identifying in a particular social role, or "a certainty about one's choices and a willingness to forego other occupational and ideological opportunities" (Fannin, 1979: 13). Commitment to the role of "born-again Christian" may be evidenced by publicly proclaiming the affiliation or by serving as a church leader, for example. Research on identity formation in this tradition seeks to identify individual differences in the presence/absence of crisis and commitment and accompanying consequences of varying identity status characteristics. For example, Raskin (2006) finds that women whose occupational identity is characterized by the presence of both crisis and commitment report more difficulty in fulfilling multiple life roles (mother, wife, professional) than women in other identity categories.

The developmentalists' approach reveals an underlying assumption of identity formation not found in sociologists' theories of identity: the existence of individual differences in the process of constructing an identity. If the socialization perspective and structural identity theory both assume that all individuals form identities in the same way, the identity status paradigm assumes that the process individuals follow will vary. Despite this contribution, the developmentalists' approach fails to offer a theoretical interpretation of these differences; although it is descriptive, it is not explanatory or predictive.

Sociological theories of identity have not yet addressed the formation of role identities. Some rely on an assumption that identities are already formed (Burke, 2004), others attribute all identity work to socialization (Cast, 2004), and still others distinguish between the taking on of others' expectations and the formation of one's own interpretation of identity (role-playing and role-making) but say less about the way in which the two

processes interact (Turner, 1978). Among the psychological approaches, the identity status paradigm contributes by characterizing variations in the process of identity but does not theorize patterns or offer predictions in the formation of identity.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This research seeks to address the broad theoretical question: ***how do individuals construct new social role identities?*** Specifically, in this study I ask: ***how do new business students construct and enact a pre-professional role identity?*** In order to study the mechanisms by which new occupational role identities stem from multiple and potentially conflicting identity messages and amid other, possible confounding identities, I conducted a study of identity formation in the context of individuals adopting a pre-professional identity: BBA (business) student. I draw upon the sociological and psychological literatures on identity to frame the study theoretically, and I explore the processes by which identities are constructed using written accounts of college students entering business school (BBA degree program).

WHY STUDY UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS STUDENTS?

The decision to enter business school represents an opportune circumstance in which to study the process of role making for several reasons: the social position to be newly occupied (BBA student) is obvious, the point at which individuals officially take on the role is clear (acceptance into degree program), and individuals' behavioral commitment to the role is high [and thus its importance to the individuals would be theoretically expected to also be high (Stryker, 2002)]. Those not familiar with undergraduate business programs may question the strength of the identity ("BBA student") and its importance in a college student's life. In fact, evidence from this study indicates that these young adults' conceptions of what it means to be a "BBA student" are quite specific, and the importance the role takes in their current lives is profound. This is a temporary identity because upon

graduation the students will lose the status as they transition into their post-collegiate occupational roles. Yet, for the time they identify as a "BBA student," the affiliation appears to be influential in multiple ways: governing behavior, prescribing emotion, and suggesting future courses of professional activity.

As the data make clear, the identity of "BBA student" is more powerful than one might have thought. The data indicate that there is no shortage of cultural expectations governing the role of "BBA student," and individuals choose to identify with the role in clear ways. Later in life some individuals will identify with their professional role in ways that integrate other life roles, such as spousal or parent identities, while some do not (Simon, 1995; Raskin, 2006). At this stage, to what extent do students perceive the new role to be compatible with their existing sense of self? Do students perceive incongruity between who they are as "BBA students" and who they are in other areas of their lives? If so, is there evidence that they attempt to manage the inconsistencies?

ORGANIZATION OF THE DISSERTATION

To address these questions, I first analyze the concepts of role and identity. Developing an account of role-identity formation requires a good deal of conceptual framing which I undertake in Chapter 2. The concepts of "identity" and "role" are often confounded in the sociological literature, perhaps because on a larger scale, for some sociologists the individual (as "identity") and social structure (as "role") are themselves not conceptually distinct. Certainly, the degree to which we separate the concepts of identity (as an aspect of the self or individual) and role (as a characteristic of a position in society) have philosophical implications, and for that reason alone it is important to be clear about one's guiding conceptualizations.

In fact, the "self" has been conceptualized by various theorists in terms of a structure of roles and identity. Turner conceived of self as a structure of *roles* (1978),

Stryker claimed the self was a structure of *identities* (1980), and McCall & Simmons argued that the self was a structure of *role-identities* (1978). By doing so, these scholars also make claims about the nature of the self in society – the extent to which society influences the individual (through roles) and the potential for the individual to affect society (through identity-relevant behavior) (Turner, 1978; Rosenberg, 1981). In this way, then, the study of role and identity lies at the heart of sociological social psychology – the study of the individual in society. Drawing on the sociological concept of identity, I define identity in this study as "a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation, defining what it means to be who one is in that role or situation" (Burke & Tully, 1977).

In Chapter 3, I ground the study in the context of the vocational behavior of young adults. I review the extant literature and note that theories of vocational behavior can be categorized into three basic perspectives: individual trait-based theories of behavior, sociological/contextual theories, and developmental theories. I also review the literature on professional socialization, as this study takes place in a pre-professional school, considered a "socializing organization" because it serves as individuals' formal, organizational introduction to the vocation of business.

I draw on both of these broad literatures – theory on role and identity and the applied literatures – to offer a theoretical framework to structure the empirical study in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the empirical methods I used to collect the data and conduct the analysis. In sum, I collected text data from 173 undergraduate business students in my Fall 2008 undergraduate course to serve as an appropriate and useful source with which to examine identity formation. Data consist of responses to several questions about the students' "BBA" identities. I conclude the chapter by outlining the process of analysis.

I present findings in Chapters 6 and 7. In Chapter 6, I address students' enactment of the new identity. How do students enact an identity that is newly formed? The data show that students primarily use impression management techniques to enact the new identity, and they focus a great deal of energy on the appearance of "professionalism" rather than on actual competencies. In Chapter 7, I address "why" students work so hard to manage others' impressions of them in the pre-professional student role by arguing that students view the identity primarily as a resource in and of itself. In order to capitalize on the resource, they must enact the identity "successfully," requiring the significant efforts at impression management described in Chapter 6.

Finally, I review the theoretical contributions of the study in Chapter 8 and address its limitations. I also draw implications of the study for educators in undergraduate business schools, and I suggest that students' earliest identity formation experiences may in fact set the stage for their own identity-relevant behaviors as business executives. If, as the recent financial market troubles suggest, it is in society's best interest to nurture ethical and responsible business leaders, then perhaps taking a close look at the early years of business decision-makers' professional identities will provide a useful lens with which to view modern problems of business and society.

CHAPTER 2
CONCEPTUALIZING ROLE AND IDENTITY

Although research into the acquisition of roles was called for decades ago (Gordon, 1976), empirical studies on role acquisition have rarely focused on the formation of the internal identity standard by which individuals craft personal role identities. In the review that follows, I approach the problem of role acquisition from three perspectives: taking on a new "role," a new "identity, and a new "role-identity." In so doing, I make distinctions between the concepts and lay a foundation to extend theories of identity construction.

This study focuses on identity acquisition in the professional context. Thus, in the following chapter I will review the applied literatures to understand the process of vocational choice and professional socialization. Finally, in Chapter 4 I take the theoretical insights from the work reviewed here and the concepts from Chapter 3 to conceptually frame the formation of a pre-professional social role identity. Now, I turn to a review of the concepts of role, identity, and role-identity.

PART I: ROLE

Role is one of the most widely studied concepts in sociology writ large, and in social psychology in particular. To date, theoretical perspectives on "role" can be organized into three broad categories: the structuralist, interactionist, and resource view of roles.

The Structuralist Perspective

The structuralist perspective originates with Linton (1937) and Merton's (1957) theories of roles as sets of behavioral expectations. According to this view, roles represent the demands and social expectations that define the parts people play in social interaction (Sarbin, 1964). From a structuralist perspective, role is defined as "all the norms attached to a given social position" (Rodgers & White, 1993: 234) or as "the behaviors expected from and anticipated by one who occupies a position (or status) in a social structure" (Baker & Faulkner, 1991:280-281). Not to be confused with social position, which is a specific

location in a given social structure, role is a "mechanism by which people identify similar positions across different situations" (Winship & Mandel, 1983:316). While a social position may be defined principally in terms of prestige, resources, and social status, a role is a more refined manifestation of that position. For example, "employer" may be one role assumed by a woman who manages domestic help in her home; her social position (of relative wealth) contributes to the role but the position of power is not the "role" itself. Also, structuralists conceive of roles as external to individuals: they are not a part of a person's self-concept, like identities may be (Zvonkovic, 1999), but rather are embedded in the social world. As such, roles are products of society; they are constructed at the macro level, not at the individual level, through economic, institutional, and political systems.

The Interactionist Perspective

The interactionist view emphasizes the part social interaction plays in determining roles: "roles are symbols – shared social meanings – that are learned through the process of socialization, but new emergent meaning may be negotiated in the actual situation" (Reitzes & Mutran, 1994). This view focuses on what has been termed "role-making" (Turner, 1978; 1985), and it acknowledges the potential for personal internalization of roles. The interactionist position is that roles emerge, are enacted, and are maintained through interpersonal interaction; it is through person-to-person behavior that roles become real and meaningful.

This view highlights the necessary part individuals play in determining a role and its performance and paved the way for other role-based concepts to emerge. Goffman's (1961b in Turner 1978) "role embracement" was later conceptualized as "role-person merger" (Turner, 1978) and now might be termed "role-identity" (see Section III for a discussion of "role-identity"). Each concept refers to the integration of a role with an individual's sense of self, a process made possible in part by a conceptualization of "role" as

more than a set of normative expectations. For example, the role of "employer" may be a part of a person's self-concept; it may have an emotional component, be central to a sense of worth, and give individuals a degree of "meaning" in their lives. Since it is through interaction that roles emerge, are enacted, and are maintained, interactionists argue that roles are not static and stable but are instead ever-changing and developing (Turner, 1985).

The Role as Resource Perspective

The resource approach is the most recent iteration of role theory and builds upon both the structuralist and interactionist perspectives. The conceptualization of "role as resource" (Baker & Faulkner, 1991; Callero, 1994) suggests that social roles are cultural objects, or "real, objective, meaningful features of the social world" (Callero, 1994: 232) that are used in the interest of the individual. As part of our "cultural toolkit" (Swidler, 1987), roles are recognized as natural and commonly understood and are "used as resources in the accomplishment of social action" (Collier & Callero, 2005: 47). Roles provide resources in two ways: first, as a social classification that helps others to answer the question, "Who are you?" and thus provides a means by which an individual may claim social affiliations; and second, by providing access to the capital (cultural, material, and social) needed to accomplish one's goals (Baker & Faulkner, 1991). The role of "employer," then, accomplishes two goals: first, by identifying the woman as the one who makes employment-related decisions to others, and second, by making it possible for her to hire, manage, and fire employees. In this view, roles are not produced by positions in social structure as indicated by the structuralist view; instead, role as resource argues that roles make social positions possible. In the example above, the social role of "employer" makes possible one woman's position of power.

Baker and Faulkner (1991) first argued the role as resource perspective in a study of the Hollywood film industry. By analyzing historical changes in the combinations of the

primary professional roles involved in a movie production (i.e. director, screenwriter, and producer), they argued that by combining the artistic (director/screenwriter) and producer roles, film productions achieved an extreme degree of success (the "blockbuster") not realized before. Scholars building on this notion of role as resource have predominantly focused on two main avenues: business scholars interested in the film industry itself have built on Baker and Faulkner's work by extending theories of cultural production in the film and entertainment industries (Smith-Doerr, 2010; Bielby, 2009; Hadida, 2009; Dowd, 2004) and social network theorists have worked to contribute to the network literature (Zaheer & Soda, 2009; Khaire, 2010). Since the focus is on organization and industry-level analysis, these streams are concerned with the macro implications of the concept of a role as a resource; with few exceptions (Collier, 2001; Fine, 1996; Collero, 1992), scholars have not integrated Baker and Faulkner's contribution at the more micro, individual level of role identity formation. Instead, scholarly work seems to have continued in each of the traditions the authors sought to synthesize: the structural and the interactionist literatures appear to continue as distinctly as before, while the social network literature borrows heavily from the role as resource perspective but does not seek to further psychological understanding of role itself.

Given Baker and Faulkner's primary emphasis in the 1991 work, it is not surprising that the majority of citations stemming from the "role as resource" piece have focused on the social network characteristics of new venture evolution. Interestingly, the authors' primary argument - that the professional role is a psychological and instrumental resource to be used by individuals in service of other goals – has been essentially neglected by the literature.

PART II: IDENTITY

Like "role," "identity" has been a popular subject of sociological (and psychological, literary, anthropological, and philosophical) inquiry for decades (in fact, over a century) and theorists have produced much scholarship, but studies have not always focused on the same – or even a similar – concept. Varying in content, scope, and complexity, "identity" has been approached by scholars in numerous ways. Rather than delve into the discipline-based differences in the conceptualization of identity (which are too numerous to address in this context), I will focus this review on identity as it has been studied in the social-psychological literature. In addition, however, I will also turn to the psychological literature to capture at least one of the major positions on identity, Eriksonian identity which is highly relevant to my study of vocational-related role.

Sociological Perspectives

From a sociological perspective, identity can be defined as "a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation, defining what it means to be who one is in that role or situation" (Burke & Tully, 1977). While psychologists may be more inclined to define identity in terms of who the self perceives itself to be more generally (as in "Who am I?"), sociologists and social psychologists are careful to contain any given "identity" in a social context. In this way, sociologists often invoke the concept of "role" as they embed identity in a social context.

Gecas (2000) makes a conceptual distinction between identity formulated from social role or group memberships and identity based on ideology and values. For instance, "daughter" is an identity based on social role, while "honest" would be an identity derived from values. In some cases, the distinction between social role and ideology is clearer than in other cases, but in many instances the distinction is somewhat artificial. For example, "mother" is an identity based on social role (and often biological role as well), but what it

means to a woman to be a mother is likely to also be heavily value-laden. Asking a woman, "What does being a mother mean to you?" would probably yield much more than "It means I gave birth to (or adopted) my children." She may describe the duties of being a mother, but she may also talk about her philosophy of motherhood, what it means to her emotionally, and what value she perceives she receives from her experience as a mother.

In the sociological literature, theories of identity are dominated by identity control theory (Burke, 1991; 2004; Burke and Cast, 1997), social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979; 1986; Stets and Burke, 2000), and affect control theory (Heise, 1988; Smith-Lovin, 1990). Each is quite different in focus. Identity control theory (ICT) asserts that an internal feedback loop regulates individuals' social behavior and internalized identities. Social identity theory (SIT) rests on social categorization theory and primarily predicts group behavior. And, affect control theory (ACT) predicts role occupants' behavior in given situations, emotions associated with behavior in role, and cross-cultural affective meanings. In addition, each conceives of "identity" differently. According to SIT, identity is a social category to which one may or may not belong, such as "Black," "American," or "Accountant." According to ACT, identity is a quantitative calculation of affective meanings attached to a social role, such as "mother." And, in ICT, identity is how an individual wants to be perceived in a social role. It is clear that in these sociological definitions of identity, the concept of role is integral.

In terms of identity construction, only ICT addresses the process by which individuals take on new identities (for reviews see Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker and Burke, 2000; Hogg and Abrams, 1988). Both ACT and SIT assume an identity characterization *a priori*, and instead focus on cognitive and behavioral processes occurring as a result of an identity categorization. The basic model underlying ICT also assumes an identity a priori, but ICT theorists have begun to explore the origin of identity by acknowledging that the

current theoretical model does not account for the process by which identity is *initially* formed.

According to ICT, perceptual input from the environment (a gauge of how the individual is being perceived in a social role) is compared by the actor to an internal, cognitive identity standard (defining what the individual believes himself to be in the role). Based on the outcome of the comparison, the individual's identity is either verified (if feedback from social interaction matches the identity standard) or not verified (if the social feedback does not mirror the identity standard). Model 1, below, illustrates the process. If the identity is verified, the individual maintains his or her current status quo and continues as he or she has been. If the identity is not verified (if the perceived feedback from the environment suggests that the identity the individual holds for himself or herself is not being confirmed), the individual adjusts either the output (behavior) or the cognitions (identity standard) to attempt to achieve a match between the perceptual input and the identity standard under certain conditions. ICT theorizes that the identity standard remains more or less constant throughout interactions and in various contexts, as long as the identity of the self is verified through a match between behavior and situation. An individual's behavior may be changing in any given situation to achieve a match between perceptual input and behavioral output, but in the control system the identity standard remains intact.

Model 1: Identity Control Theory

Input

Identity Standard

Verified?

Discrepant?

Interaction

Output

Identity theory, as a closed system, leaves the interested student of identity origin in a pattern of infinite regress. Consider the following:

> "The identity standard itself is the output of a higher-level control system…In the lower-level loop, the output (a difference between the standard and the perceptions) manifests itself in the situation as meaningful behavior. The output of the higher-level loop (also a function of the difference between perceptions and the standard at the higher level) is the standard for the lower-level loop. In this way it is clear how the identity standard at the lower level can change. Changes in the lower-level standard – that is, changes in the meaning of who one is in the role or situation – result from attempting to reduce discrepancies at the higher level. The standard at the higher level may be regarded as a more global set of meanings applying to the self. The particular role identity (perhaps along with others) is embedded in this more global set of meanings. Only one higher-level standard is depicted in the diagram; several, however, may be operative at once (Burke 1997), each working to modify the lower-level standard. *Similarly, the standard for the higher-level control system is not necessarily taken as fixed, but may be the output of even higher-level control systems*." (Burke and Cast, 1997: 277-278, emphasis added)

As Burke and Cast (1997; Burke, 2006) describe, identity theory does a good job of explaining how identities change once they are activated, but the process does not account for the origin of the identity standard. As in the above quote, the theory explains the existence of an identity standard by claiming it to be the outcome of a higher-level process. Multiple identities are arranged in a hierarchical structure, with the output from an identity higher in the hierarchy being the standard for an identity just below it (Burke, 1997; Burke and Cast, 1997; Stets and Carter, 2005; Stets and Harrod, 2004; Tsushima & Burke, 1999; in Stets and Burke, 2005).

Lower level identities, however, are not simply products of higher level identities, or there would not be a qualitative difference in identity meanings at the lower level. Although much of the meanings in a lower level identity may be shared with the higher level identity, there is something unique to a lower level identity, so what accounts for the uniqueness? If a higher level identity is "Sociologist," for example, then a lower-level identity, such as "Emory professor" is not simply the outcome of the higher level identity, although many of the qualities of being a "sociologist" may also be qualities of being an "Emory professor." Like the age-old conundrum of the primacy of the chicken or the egg, something must start the process in the first place. In the case of identity standards, identity control theory does not explicate the launch the system.

Burke acknowledges this gap: "the control model on which identities operate works well when the standard is known and fixed…[but] does not tell where the standard came from originally" (2004: 579). To begin to address the problem, he borrows a "classifier system" model from the field of artificial intelligence (see Holland, 1975) and applies it to identity processes. Burke theorizes that it is through an adaptive, message-passing rule-based system that the identity standard is formed. Essentially, the model proposes that an automatic cognitive system takes in messages from the environment, codes them, and compares the input to internal goal-states. Messages that match goals are then acted upon with predetermined responses. The system learns by remembering which sequences of events result in a "pay-off," and replicates the same responses when it encounters the message in the future. The model accounts for socialization as an input: information gathered through processes of socialization enter the system as "inputs;" those inputs are then ordered according to "pay-offs" and ease of use, as described above. Burke does not apply the classifier system to examples of identity construction explicitly, nor does he offer

evidence that the classifier approach would describe empirical data (or how one would do that).

Like Burke, other scholars in the ICT tradition have recently approached the question of identity construction. Cast (2004), drawing from both ICT and role theory, studied the emergence of a new role identity (parent) in terms of role congruence. She studied identity change in the context of new parenthood and found that congruity between partners' expectations of each other's role is positively related to marital quality. Although Cast does not focus her theorizing on the formation of the new parent identity, she does offer a summary of her working assumptions: "When individuals become parents, previously held understandings of what it means to be a parent are internalized in the form of an identity. Becoming a parent then activates this identity, and individuals begin to seek to verify meanings about the self as a parent (parent identity)" (56-57). In Cast's description, taking on a new identity involves a subconscious "activation" of previously learned meanings.

Although some prior work in ICT has been described as explaining "how individuals take on and lose identities, or more broadly, how identity standards slowly change with changing output of higher level identities" (Stets and Burke, 2000: 224), the studies (in this case, Burke and Cast [1997] and Cast et al., [1999]) have, more accurately, provided insight into the second question ("how identity standards slowly change") to a much greater extent than the first question ("how individuals take on and lose identities"). What those studies showed was how *some identity meanings* were taken on or lost, not how *an entire identity* was taken on or lost. And, while Burke's application of the classifier system to the problem of the construction of identity is novel and potentially useful, his work to date has not pulled those ideas through to develop theory describing how the process occurs in everyday identity work.

Psychosocial Perspectives

Scholarly work on identity outside of sociology has occurred primarily within the field of psychology, and particularly, in the area of developmental psychology. The question of identity has concerned life-stage scholars interested in the major transitions that mark shifts in psychological attention, often connected to age. Most theories of psychological identity development draw at least partly on Erikson's (1968) seminal work, in which he proposes the major challenges of each life phase as contained in epigenetic stages (each one building from the last). The goal of development, then, is the eventual acquisition of identity, or the sense of who one is in the world. Clearly, psychological perspectives on identity conceptualize it in a more global, less role-based way than sociologists do. Although Erikson's work does address multiple aspects of identity (religious identity, political identity, and career identity), the concept of identity in these realms of life are still broad compared to role-based sociological identities such as "teacher" or "born-again Christian." In fact, these three aspects of identity are explicitly connected to an overall, ego-based identity that subsumes all particular identities.

To address the process by which identity is acquired, Marcia (1966) extended Erikson's work and identified four states of identity development: identity moratorium, foreclosure, diffusion, and achievement (see Model 2 below).

Model 2: Marcia's Identity Statuses

		Crisis / Exploration	
		Yes	*No*
Commitment	*Yes*	Achieved	Foreclosure
	No	Moratorium	Diffusion

These four stages are characterized by the presence or absence of two factors: commitment and crisis/exploration. Commitment refers to the presence of evidence of a psychological attachment to the identity, often evidenced by social commitments or intentions. For example, commitment to the occupation of flight attendant may be the completion of a flight attendant training program. Crisis/exploration is the active search for alternatives to an identity or options from which to choose. An example of exploration in terms of parental identity may be reading books on various parenting philosophies in order to identify one's perspective on discipline.

Marcia conceptualized four status states as the unique combinations of the presence and/or absence of commitment and crisis/exploration in adolescents' identity development. A person who had explored identities (presence of crisis/exploration) and made a commitment to the one that seemed to fit best (presence of commitment) is "identity achieved." An individual who has (or is currently) exploring various identifications but has not yet committed to any particular identity would be said to be in "moratorium." A commitment to an identity without exploration is "identity foreclosure." Last, an individual who has not explored options or made commitments to identity would be in "identity diffusion."

Marcia's perspective is useful in that it makes clear the myriad ways in which individuals come to terms with identities. The various combinations of exploration and commitment can be observed in social life, particularly when "identity" is operationalized in terms of a particular identity, such as occupational identity. The "foreclosed" status might be illustrated by a woman who is a lawyer because her mother was a lawyer. When asked if she had ever considered any other careers, she would respond no, that she always knew she'd become a lawyer. This woman, having gone to law school, passed the bar exam, and practicing law, is clearly committed to the occupation of law. Without having explored any

other careers, however, her occupational identity would be classified as "foreclosed." Likewise, a young adult who has worked in a number of entry-level positions in various industries and with diverse skills shows evidence of exploration, but without a commitment to any particular occupation, this individual's occupational identity would be described as in "moratorium." One can imagine another individual who exhibits little commitment and little to no exploration as well, such as a recent graduate who is working hourly for a friend-of-the family to pay living expenses but does not seem to have clear intentions to continue the work or to look for other types of work. This individual's occupational identity would be "diffused." The opposite, "identity achieved," could be characterized by a person who explored many career options, perhaps by reading books or visiting a career counselor or talking with parents, teachers, and friends, and then, upon determining the best career fit, made a commitment to that occupation by taking a job, enrolling in school, or making some other commitment to the identity.

The four identity statuses are usually measured globally, that is, as a construct describing the development of the self as a whole rather than the development of individual identities. Because developmental psychologists tend to view identity as a more encompassing construct, a person would be said to be identity diffused, achieved, moratorium, or foreclosed *overall*, not necessarily in terms of a given role identity. For social psychologists, this presents a major limitation of the approach, because if we are to take seriously the notion of "multiple selves," which is a common assumption of symbolic interactionists, then it would be more appropriate to consider the identity statuses relevant to separate identities. Interestingly, developmental psychologists do measure the identity states separately (usually occupational identity, political identity, and religious identity) and then sum the scores to determine the status of the individual as a whole (see Adams et

al., 1989). The fact that the measurement must be initially separate speaks to the idea, then, that identity can be decomposed into separate role-based entities.

Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer (2001) used Marcia's framework to study the relationship between ego-identity status (an overall measure) and religious beliefs and found that an individual's identity status (measured as an aggregate of the presence of absence of crisis/exploration and commitment along political, religious, and occupational identity) was significantly related to doubting and commitment to beliefs. Crisis/exploration was positively related to doubting, and identity commitment was positively related to commitment in one's beliefs. The contribution from this work is the observation that the identity standard characteristics are mirrored in the way that the individual currently approaches the subject, and additionally, that a global conception of identity standard may be predictive of other, identity-related behaviors.

Marcia's four identity statuses provide a useful lens with which to view the process of identity construction, as the framework implies that identity can be constructed in various ways. Some people commit to identities without conscious evaluation of other options (supporting socialization as the mechanism); for others, commitment occurs after carefully weighing alternatives. Still others remain uncommitted to particular identities, with or without exploring various choices. Importantly, though, Marcia seems to imply a normative value inherent in the "achieved" status, as if it is developmentally more advanced than the others. Doing so may not be necessary or useful in applying the framework to separate role identities, especially if individuals' status is theorized to vary by role and change over time. That is, an individual may have an "achieved" parental identity status yet be occupationally "diffused" at a given point in time, and later in life, after future decisions, display an occupational status closer to moratorium.

An advantage of using Marcia's approach is his emphasis on commitment to the identity. Commitment to an identity has been shown to be related to many outcomes, such as stress (Burke, 1991) and emotions (Stets, 2010). By addressing identity commitment in a larger framework, Marcia's statuses give sociologists a new way to conceive of the taking on of identities.

PART III: ROLE-IDENTITY

Role identity theory is a close cousin to ICT, as both rely on the basic assumptions of symbolic interactionism (see Stryker and Vryan, 2003) and theorists from both traditions define identity in nearly the same terms: "Identity meanings are those which persons attribute to themselves in a role" (Reitzes & Mutran, 1994). Theorists with a focus on role as an aspect of identity emphasize value-laden identity meanings: "role identities…tend to include idealized normative components (as do all roles) and thus provide motivation for the person to be a 'good' doctor, father, Catholic, etc." (Gordon, p. 407. citing McCall & Simmons, 1966, Ch. 4). (This emphasis on normative meaning is central to role theory's take on the construction of identities, as I will describe further below.) Although the origins of the concept of role-identity can be found in Goffman's use of "role embracement" (1961) and in Turner's "role-person merger" (1978), it wasn't until later that the term "role-identity" was coined. After reviewing Goffman's and Turner's contributions to the concept, I define "role-identity" in the more recent literature and apply it to the current study.

Goffman's (1961) study of role embracement focused primarily on the extent to which a person played a role wholly and with much personal investment. Goffman suggested that the degree to which individuals play a role with personality varies; some take up a role with enthusiasm, imbue it with meaning, and convincingly play it earnestly, while others do not. Additionally, individuals may "embrace" some roles and not others. Importantly, role embracement is not a personality trait applied by an individual to all roles

and situations. Instead, role embracement may vary between and within individuals. In all cases, when role embracement occurs, the performance of the role is thought to be especially riveting and meaningful.

Building on Goffman's work, Turner (1978) conceptualized "role-person merger" to reflect a more intense process of role embracement: the extent to which "attitudes and behavior developed as an expression of one role carry over into other situations" (1). In contrast to role embracement which may co-exist with role compartmentalization (in which individuals play a role when required and then easily leave the role), role-person merger reflects an integration of the person and the role. For those highly merged with a role, letting it go is extremely difficult, if not impossible. A mother of adult children may still attempt to wipe crumbs off their chins; a retired manager visits his old office often to dispense technical advice; an elementary school teacher pedantically speaks to his spouse. In these cases, the person is so merged with the role that it is not easy to see where behavior in one role stops and another begins. The woman is always a "mother," the retired man is still a "boss," and the husband is forever a "teacher."

Turner (1978) identified four criteria in the identification of role-person merger: (1) little to no role compartmentalization, (2) resistance to role abandonment despite attractive and beneficial alternatives, (3) the acquisition of attitudes and beliefs appropriate to the role, and (4) the learning and practice of a role. Despite Turner's assertion that his concept of role-person merger is separate and distinct from identity, these criteria hint at the close connection between his concept and current theorists' sociological study of identity. In formulating the concept of role-person merger, Turner highlighted differences between it and identity. He suggests that (1) role-person merger is a behavioral, objective characteristic while identity is feeling-centered and subjective, and that (2) identity is

context-dependent while role-person merger is not. Although theoretically grounded, his assertions have not been repeated by the sociological work in the area.

In contrast to Turner's suggestion that identity is emotional/subjective while role-person merger is behavioral/objective, recent work (Stets and Burke, 1996; Cast, 2003) indicates that current sociological identity theorists conceive of identity as objective/behavioral. In studies of spousal identity, the authors operationalize identity as household behavior, such as food shopping, vacuuming, and cleaning/ironing clothes. In addition, although Turner defines identity as situational, these scholars' studies do not contextualize the spousal identity concept. Turner is rarely cited in these works, so it is difficult to know whether and how current identity theorists position their work relative to his. Based on these reviews, it appears that the concepts of (sociological) identity and role-person merger are similar.

Other theories of role and identity are less so. Callero (1985), in an empirical study of the salience of the role-identity, offers Mead's (1964) conceptualization of role-identity: "the role-identity concept can be defined in general terms as a particular social object that represents a dimension of the self. As a social object, a role-identity must necessarily be shared, socially-recognized, and defined by action" (Callero, 1985: 204). Given these terms, it could be argued that a role-identity is nothing more than a role attached to an individual. Callero, interpreting Mead, suggests here that role-identities are primarily characterized as social objects, like roles. As social objects, they are understood by others ("shared"), legitimate ("socially-recognized"), and become apparent through interaction ("defined by action"). The only difference between role-identity and role, then, is the additional aspect of role-identity as "a dimension of the self." Rather than facets of culture or social structure, as are roles, role-identities are components of the individual self.

Role Identity Theory on Identity Construction

Role theory differs from ICT in that it does not address change; instead, role theory mainly describes the way in which social roles provide a context for behavior. Drawing heavily on Goffman's dramatulurgical approach to explaining social interaction (1959), role theory posits that individual behavior is guided mainly by the expectations an individual and others' have for his performance in a given role. By behaving in accordance with a social role, individuals gain a sense of meaning from their actions.

Two important characteristics of identities first come to light in role theory: identity commitment and salience (see Stryker, 1968). Commitment to a role, or an individual's attachment to a role, is said to be a function of the "identification with" process (Burke & Reitzes, 1991), and individuals vary in the extent to which they demonstrate commitment to the performance of any given role. Individuals also vary with respect to the way that they order multiple roles hierarchically, displaying the significance or centrality of each (salience). Role identity salience and commitment are factors widely used in the literature to understand human behavior and priorities, in arenas such as work and family issues (Barnett et al., 1992) and stress (Burke, 1991; Simon, 1997).

One sociological study in particular thoroughly addressed the formation of personal identities in the context of a social role: Snow and Anderson's (1987) ethnographic account of homeless persons' identity construction. In a rich account of the ways in which the homeless construct positive identities in spite of significant structural limitations, the authors suggest distinct patterns of verbal identity construction processes: distancing (denying the identity as a homeless person: "I'm not a bum"), embracement (confirmation of the identity: "I'm a bum"), and fictive storytelling (claiming fanciful life experiences: "I'm going to buy a Corvette"). Through these patterns of "identity talk," individuals in a socially undesirable position creatively construct an identity for themselves that is positive and

meaningful. In conclusion, the authors "caution against the tendency within sociology to adopt an overly structuralized conception of self and identity, treating the latter as an entity that is routinely assigned or bestowed upon the actor rather than constructed on occasion" (1368-1369).

In contrast to Snow and Anderson's work, role theorists generally identify socialization processes as the primary way actors construct role identities. By learning through shared experiences, individuals are able to identify social roles in operation and understand how the role they are expected to play interacts with others' roles. This process, defined as "identification of" roles by Stone (1962; in Reitzes & Burke, 1983), differs from a corollary process, that of "identification with" roles. Identifying with a role refers to the actor's imputation of personal values and meanings into his conception of and performance of the role. Socialization is assumed to be the principal mechanism in the "identification of" roles, but less is said about the process by which individuals "identify with" roles. Overall, socialization is claimed by role theorists to be the primary basis for the construction of the identity standard (Stryker, 1980).

Some researchers have begun to more precisely explicate the mechanisms by which roles are taken on through socialization. Extending both role theory and Burke's identity control model, Collier (2001) proposes a "differentiated model of role identity acquisition" in which roles and identities are characterized as multidimensional sets of meanings. Collier's model also draws on situated identity theory, (Alexander & Knight, 1971; in Collier, 2001) which emphasizes the role of the reference group (sets of influential others) in determining identity meanings. Through the use of role in interactions in the reference group, actors learn what meanings are salient for the group and which are most important. Using a sample of new college students, Collier makes the case that "people… emphasize different dimensions of role meaning depending on how the role is being used and the

group in which the role is being constructed" (219). He found that college students emphasized different dimensions of the meaning of being a "college student" based on their membership in various groups. Analyzing longitudinal data from a university program for new freshmen, he finds that students' role identities come in to line with the identity meanings emphasized by the program. Collier's contribution to Burke's control system is in his emphasis on the multidimensionality of meanings – in his differentiated model, changes in behavior or in the identity standard (as a result of the comparison process, just as in ICT) are a result in changes in the hierarchy of meanings reflected by different reference groups. As students shift attention to new reference groups or new group goals, their internal standards for the identity standard evolve. His results strongly support a view of identity acquisition that is dependent upon socialization processes. Again, the role standard is assumed to exist *a priori* in meanings associated with various reference groups: "the role standard is based on the individual's reference group" (222). Like in others' work, Collier does not theorize any degree of agency in the process of forming an identity standard.

Collier's results may be influenced by his measures of role identity. Role identity was assessed through respondents' rating of the degree to which they performed various role behaviors. They were asked, "Compared to all entering college students, how likely are you to … make an oral presentation before an unfamiliar audience / work with a diverse group of people / etc." These data emphasize behavior in role, not necessarily how the student identifies *with* the role. It is not surprising to this author that the role behaviors reported by the students changed over time to reflect the role behaviors perceived to be important to the freshman program; surely, the process of socialization was successful in teaching students which behaviors are most important to success as a college student at this university. This study shows that the performance of roles changes, but it does not truly address the formation of the identity standard, the "set of meanings applied to the self in a

social role or situation, defining what it means to be who one is in that role or situation" (Burke & Tully, 1997: 883; Burke, 1991). While Collier purports to have studied "identity formation," it would be more accurate to describe the work as a study of self-reported role behavior.

EXTENDING THEORY ON ROLE, IDENTITY, AND ROLE-IDENTITY

From empirical evidence as well as data in our own lives, we know that much variation in role identities exists within socially well-defined roles, such as parent, spouse, and worker (see Simon, 1997). As reviewed in this chapter, each theoretical perspective on identity, role, and role identity suggests concepts central to individuals' formation and enactment of social roles, but interesting questions remain. For example, the differentiated model may reveal some ways that individuals incorporate role expectations, but it does not address how those expectations are sorted out. Biddle writes, "…it is not always clear from the writings of symbolic interactionsists [on role theory] whether expectations are assumed to generate, to follow from, or to evolve conjointly with roles…" (Biddle, 1986: 72). Just as identity theorists have failed to fully explicate the mechanism by which any given identity standard is created, so too have role theorists neglected the origin of the set of expectations with which individuals behave in accordance.

Symbolic interactionists point out that individuals are not passive in enacting roles, they "actively shape and infuse roles with intrinsic, subjective, and self meanings" (Turner, 1956; in Reitzes & Mutran, 1994). In order to frame a study of identity construction, this chapter reviewed conceptualizations of "identity," "role," and "role-identity." In doing so, the many similarities among the concepts became clear as well as the differences. While identity, role, and role-identity are obviously interrelated, each carries certain connotations that are more or less appropriate to various research questions. In terms of identity construction, it is important to be clear about the particular "identity" of interest. Even still,

there is considerable theoretical overlap, such as the close connections between "identity" as conceptualized by sociological identity control theorists (Burke, Stets, Cast) and "role identity" (Reitzes, Mutran).

I draw from each theoretical tradition in order to more fully develop an account of identity acquisition in the pre-professional context. Chapter 4 will provide a brief review of the theoretical concepts most central to this work. First, however, I review the substantive literature informing the focal identity in this study (young adults' vocational choice) in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3
STEPS TOWARD PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY: APPLIED LITERATURES

Identity has long been associated with career decisions. What one does professionally often stands in for a fuller life account as one's social "identity." Surely most everyone has witnessed, committed, or been asked the inevitable first question upon meeting someone new: "What do you do?" Perhaps due in part to our country's Puritanical work-as-religion history (see Weber, 1905) or the American capitalist system (see Marx, 1867), it is no doubt that one's occupation plays a central part in defining who one is to others (and to one's self, as well). The connection is so obvious and yet so profound that many people refuse to acknowledge that what they "do" and who they "are" are intertwined (presumably, so as not to address a potential disagreement) (Whyte, 2001). Theoretically, work roles have been strongly linked with self-concept for at least the last fifty years (see the following for early work: Caplow, 1955; Darley and Hagenah, 1955; Hughes, 1958; Miller and Form, 1951; Roe, 1956; Super, 1957; Tyler, 1951). As this chapter will illustrate, the notion of self-concept is present throughout most scholarly treatments of the subject of vocational choice.

As self-concept plays a role in studies of vocational behavior, so does vocational behavior play a role in scholars' treatment of self-concept. Although in studies of identity in the social sciences many contemporary sociologists have tended to focus on identity in the *family* context (Cast, 2003; Stets & Burke, 2005), the early sociologists (Miller and Form, 1951; Parsons, 1909; Caplow, 1954; Hughes, 1958) and both early and modern developmental psychologists (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966; Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Savickas, 2000) have focused primarily on *occupational* identity as the context of choice. Erikson's suggestion in the adolescent development text *Youth and Crisis* (1968) that the major task of adolescence is the formation of an occupational identity not only

addressed theories of identity and self-concept, but it also spurred a large, new literature on vocational choice among young adults.

Thus, in addition to the theoretical work on identity undertaken in the occupational context, there is also a vast literature on vocational behavior that cites "identity" (or "self-concept") among its constructs. In the first case, identity is the variable to be explained ("dependent variable"), and theorists (e.g. Erikson) do so using occupation as an "independent variable." In the second, occupational choice is the variable to be explained, and scholars do so citing characteristics of identity. Thus, the intersection of vocation and identity is found in at least two broad literatures: developmental accounts of identity (in which occupation is a contributing factor) and theories of vocational behavior (which explains vocation by way of identity).

Additionally, early social theorists (e.g. Frank Parsons, 1909) tackled the problem of vocational choice as a way to understand social life more broadly, including addressing persistent problems of the correlation between racial identity and low career status. Overall, the intersection of career and identity is well-established in the social-psychological realm; in fact, as the occupational life of modern individuals becomes more and more protean (i.e. the "boundaryless" career [Arthur and Rousseau, 1996]), the construction of an identity amid multiple employers and job positions is theoretically more difficult to do than it once was (Meijers, 1998). And so, the connection between career and identity is not only long-standing but also current.

For the purposes of this study, I examine the literature on the career development of young adults to determine the factors that affect how college students form a pre-professional identity and include those in a general model. Although my theoretical interest in the formation of social role identity is broad and not context-dependent, the empirical study undergirding my theoretical work is firmly grounded in an empirical context. In this

study I examine the "BBA student" as the identity of interest, which represents an occupationally-relevant role. For undergraduate students, one's primary work is college, and this is likely true for both students who do not work for pay, those who work part-time, and even those who work full-time. [Non-traditional (i.e. older) students who have established an occupation prior to entering college may identify vocationally with their paid work as opposed to their educational work, but as this population is not represented in the data, the distinction is not highly relevant.]

In this chapter, I review two broad literatures relevant to this study: first, the psychological and sociological literature on vocational behavior, and then, the theory and research on professional socialization. Both literatures address factors related to the development of a professional identity, by addressing why and how individuals choose occupations (the vocational behavior literature) and by describing the processes by which individuals are socialized into those occupations (professional socialization literature). Vocational psychologists use three main lenses with which to view the process of occupational choice and career development: (1) the influence of individual traits, (2) sociological factors, and (3) developmental accounts of career behavior. In all three perspectives, self-concept plays a key role in understanding the vocational choices of young adults, and I will outline those mechanisms in the chapter.

After young adults make college major and occupational choices, they then enter a given professional field (and, frequently, an employing organization). The literature on professional socialization describes the way in which new members to a professional field are socialized, and the more specific area of organizational socialization addresses the particular mechanisms enacted by organizations to do the same. I review these literatures with an emphasis on implications for the development of a pre-professional social role identity.

Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the recent "constructionist" perspective in the career literature and I draw connections between those ideas and my own study.

VOCATIONAL CHOICE

Organizing the Literature on Vocational Choice

Osipow (1973) prepared a seminal text on career development in which he identified three major types of theories of vocational choice: trait-factor theories, sociological models, and developmental theories. After reviewing the literature, I suggest that Osipow's model still accurately and efficiently organizes the literature. Although today there exist some theory that overlaps categories, for the most part the state of the body of knowledge still fits the "three perspective" structure nicely. In this review, I will begin with a summary of the "trait-factor" theories (which I call "Theories of Individual Differences"). I then move to the "sociological" models, and I conclude with the "developmental" accounts. Throughout, I make note of concepts especially related to the formation of identity and to my study in particular. Before doing so, however, I would like to briefly review the terminology employed.

The terminology of vocations, occupations, professions, and careers

In this paper, I often use the terms "career," "occupation," and "vocation" interchangeably. To be fair, this is not entirely appropriate, as each term carries particular definitional and colloquial interpretations. "Vocation" is the broadest term of the three, and it refers to one's calling or mission. (Heeding a "call" to the ministry is a classic example of vocation.) "Occupation" refers to a class of professions in the same field. (For example, "Photographer" is an occupation that would include fashion photography, children's portrait photography, fine art photography, and nature photography.) "Profession" is similar to occupation, but is used more precisely to refer to a more precise occupation. (In

the previous example, "Portrait Photographer" may be a more accurate professional designation.) "Career" is one's own interpretation and trajectory of vocational, occupational, and professional decisions.

In this study, the focal identity of "BBA student" represents an early step in the process of developing one's career. For some students, status as a BBA student is a step in the pursuit of a specified, pre-planned affiliation with a particular occupation, such as accounting. These students may have applied to business school in order to pursue the field of accountancy. Others have not yet chosen a particular occupation, but rather, they are attracted to the range of possibilities business school offers. Only later will these students' enrollment in business school make sense from an occupational perspective. [In the "sensemaking" process (Weick, 1977), a student who had been occupationally undecided may later understand the choice as a precursor to their eventual profession.] It could be argued that *all* BBA students have, however, chosen a general vocation ("business") once they applied to and began undergraduate business school.

Theories of Individual Differences[1]

The first broad category of theories of vocational behavior, those of "individual difference," suggests that explanations of vocational choice rest principally on an understanding of the individual him/herself. Essentially, these theorists argue that it is through individual characteristics that we can understand why one woman becomes a sociologist and another becomes a caterer and then, how each woman manages her career in the chosen vocation.

[1] Many theories of career development have not been included here, because the sheer volume of literature prevents an efficient review. As well, most do not seem to be highly relevant to my research question. For example, there are psychoanalytic theories of career postulating that individuals seek to reconcile the Freudian "pleasure principle" with the "reality principle" in career decisions. Major perspectives relevant to this study are included in the review.

This class of theories rests principally on the notion that it is through an understanding of one's traits, abilities, and personality ("self-concept") that one determines an appropriate career path. By finding a satisfying fit between the "person" and the job "environment," a successful career is launched. Throughout, personal agency is paramount; one's occupational behavior is largely determined by one's own efforts, ambitions, and personality style.

PE-Fit

Frank Parsons (1909) is credited for early theorizing on occupational choice, and his work laid the ground for "person-environment fit" (or PE-fit) models. *Choosing a Vocation*, Parson's original text, laid the foundation for the study of vocational choice in terms of the influence of individual factors. Parsons suggested that one's choice of occupations could be explained by the following three factors: (1) clear understanding of one's self; (2) one's knowledge of occupations; and (3) the ability to draw relationships between them. This basic model is still used today by career counselors who rely on a cognitive model of career choice (see Peterson et al., 1996). According to "cognitive information processing" models, individuals are able to make successful career choices on the basis of three broad factors: self-knowledge, occupational knowledge, and decision skills. These cognitive models can be subsumed under the broader category of P-E fit models of vocational behavior.

Simply put, PE-fit models of vocational choice assert that one's vocation is determined by the degree of fit between the occupation and the individual's interest and abilities (Holland, 1985; Lofquist and Dawis, 1984). According to PE-fit, people seek to find a match between one's self concept and the work environment. The better the fit, the more likely the occupational choice. Holland (1959; 1985), in creating a "career typology theory," introduced the concept of "self-knowledge" in the career literature, describing the "person" piece broadly as "one's goals, interests, and talents." Holland's early career typology also

brought to light the concept that individuals differ in the extent to which they engage the occupational environment and how, specifically, they do so. He identified six styles of identification with occupational goals: realistic, investigative, social, conventional, enterprising, and artistic.

Other theorists have added “perceptions of personality” and “psychological needs and values” (Lofquist and Dawis, 1984). Social learning theory (Mitchell and Krumboltz, 1990), discussed later in this section, helps to make clear how individuals form a sense of these individual traits. By compiling information about one’s abilities, task efficacy, interests, and personal values, individuals form “self-observation generalizations.” These generalizations represent the “person” aspect of the PE-fit model.

One of the chief contributions of the trait theories is their empirical strength: multiple, consistent cross-sectional empirical studies assert the connection between individual traits and occupational choice (Swanson, 1999). Some researchers, however, have recently begun to argue that these “traits” (or “dispositions”) are in fact socially constructed, and we should now study the constructions underlying the relationships that have consistently been found (Savickas, 2002).

Lee’s (1998) study of adolescent girls’ interest and ambition in science, math, and technology makes the sociological link profoundly clear: girls’ low interest in science and math can be explained through their gendered self-concepts. As Lee illustrated in a study of 433 talented high school students, the more a female student’s self-concept was linked to same-sex others, the lower the interest in math and science (since math and science are not “feminine” disciplines). Therefore, the PE-fit is gendered; the “fit” is determined by whether the environment fits the gender of the person as well as her traits, abilities, and personality.

Social-Cognitive and Learning Theories

While individual trait theories in the PE-fit tradition share a common respect for the role of self-concept in determining career choice, theories in the social-cognitive and learning realm highlight the importance of self-efficacy (the overall sense of one's ability to do what one sets out to do) in making career decisions. Overall, theories in this category also emphasize personal agency as the principal driver of career choice and behavior (Borgen, 1991; in Lent, 1996). For career counselors, this assumption is gratifying, because it makes clear the ways in which counseling affects individual outcomes. (If individuals are not essentially drivers of their career choices, then career counseling would not be as relevant an enterprise.)

A collection of career development theories can be broadly classified as "social cognitive" or "learning" theories, and they are each based principally on Bandura's (1977) general social and cognitive theory of learning. For instance, "social cognitive" theory (Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1996) posits that individuals' sense of self drives a process by which they form interests in occupations, develop goals and aspirations in those occupations, involve themselves in occupationally-relevant activities, and experience the outcomes of those activities. While much more complex than this brief description, the theory points to individual and contextual factors that impact self-efficacy, as well as to the consequences of learning experiences on an individual's occupational choice. Recent empirical evidence (Lent et al., 2008) indicates that the social-cognitive models are justified in predicting a variety of vocational outcomes, such as occupational goals and college major choice.

Similarly, Krumboltz's "social learning theory of career decision-making" (1979) adds "learning experiences" to a list of factors affecting career outcomes, among other factors such as "genetic endowment and abilities," "environmental conditions and events," and "task approach skills." Finally, Betz and Hackett's (1981) identification of women's

particular career challenges is also an extension of this line of theorizing: through self-efficacy (or lack thereof) women form ideas about appropriate and inappropriate careers and aspirations. As well, social learning processes reinforce generalized notions of masculine and feminine careers. Throughout these perspectives, the notion of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) plays a central role in determining career choice.

Sociological Models of Vocational Choice

While theories of individual difference point to the importance of individual agency in determining occupational outcomes, sociological models suggest that context, opportunities, and constraints play a greater role in the process. Specifically, Miller and Form (1951) put forth the notion that sociological factors, such as parents' education, affect individuals' vocational behavior at each major stage of the career process. Other theorists point to gender, social relationships, and resources as mitigating forces in individual career trajectories. Some refer to this class of perspectives as a "contextualizing discourse" (Young and Collin, 2004) because these orientations firmly plant the discussion of career and vocation in the social, historical, economic, and cultural context. Although trait-based theorists acknowledge context in the sense that "environment" refers to a general context, the sociological models extrapolate theoretically about the given context.

The following theories are characterized by the presumption that it is circumstances beyond the control of the individual that contribute most strongly to the choice he or she makes, and that vocational behavior is best understood as a coping mechanism to the environment in which one finds him/herself. The study of "occupation" as a field of scientific inquiry can be traced to the sociologists, as it was the Chicago school that spawned a literature of occupational sociology in its early days: Hughes' (1928) work studying the real estate industry, Hall's (1944) of medical careers, Becker's (1951) of public school teachers, Solomon's (1952) of doctors and nurses, Habenstein's (1954) of funeral

directors, and Wager's (1959) of airline pilots. Although lacking in conceptual specificity (Barley, 1989), since to the early sociologists "career" was a term that organized any work-related activity, those early theorists did much to incite interest in occupational and institutional life.

Work Periods

Miller and Form (1951) made early statements about the sociology of vocational behavior. The proposition that individuals experience occupations in a series of stages is much like Super's (1960) later theorizing (to be discussed later in this chapter, in the section on "developmental" accounts). In fact, the stage-based approach they proposed is one of the earliest "developmental" accounts of vocational behavior (Dalton, 1989) in that it organizes occupational behavior across the lifespan and it uses age-based indicators to categorize the stages. The stages Miller and Form identified were these:

Model 3: Miller and Form's Vocational Stages

The "preparatory" period is defined by the socialization of a child at home and in school in preparation for the world of work. The "initial" period begins when the child first samples work, usually through a part-time job. In the "trial" period, an individual experiences the first full-time job. The "stable" period is characterized by the permanence of employment. Finally, in "retirement" an individual discontinues work altogether. This study population, college students, would be theorized to be in either the "initial" or

"preparatory" periods, depending on the individual's work experience. Students with no work experience would be in the "initial" period, while students with some part-time employment history would be in the "preparatory" stage.

Miller's and Form's primary interest in describing work, however, was not developmental so much as sociological. While Super (1960) would later identify stages of life and seek to better understand healthy human development, Miller and Form paid more attention to the impact of the social context on individuals' experience of these stages. They found, for example, significant effects of the following factors on the stability and permanence of work: father's employment, education level, social class, and social networks. These findings illustrate the importance of context in any discussion of career stages.

Career and Major Choices and Gender

Sex and gender (and the related concepts of sex role identity, gender ideology, and masculinity/femininity) are clearly involved in students' choice of college major and empirical studies of the influence of sex and gender on choice are numerous (see Correll, 2004). Explanations for the persistent relationship between sex/gender and vocational choice have been offered from multiple perspectives: identity theory (Lee, 1998), work salience (Greenhaus, 1973), and the status attainment model (Blau and Duncan, 1967).

Lee's (1998) study of interest in science among adolescent boys and girls found systematic sex differences in interest in science-related careers; he explained the findings using data suggesting that respondents' gendered self-concepts account for their vocational interests. In other words, girls that viewed themselves as possessing feminine traits did not see themselves as "scientists." Lee reported on previous research demonstrating a significant gender effect on vocational interests and choice (Baker, 1987; Boswell, 1985;

Handley and Morse, 1984; Hollinger, 1983). In all, a feminine gender identity was negatively correlated with interest in science and math.

For many vocational psychologists, the historic differences between men and women in relation to major (and thus, vocational) choice have been largely attributed to differences in work salience, or the degree of the desire to work (Greenhaus, 1973; Richardson, 1974; 1976; Wolkon, 1972; in Fannin, 1977). Since the 1970's, women's participation in the labor force and in high-status careers have greatly increased, but still it may be true that the salience of work affects women's major choices more so than men's.

The influence of gender on occupational choice is a choice example of the sociological perspective on vocational behavior, and this is particularly true in cases where theorists reveal the social construction of gender effects. For example, studies show that the gendered nature of occupational choice is not fully explained by interest levels alone (Aros, Henly, and Curtis, 1998). In other words, boys may actually be interested in nursing, and girls may, in fact, report an interest in turf management, but other variables account for the fact that men rarely enter nursing and women don't pursue turf management (in consequential numbers). Although the nature of gendered vocational behavior may change over time (Hopfl and Hornby Atkinson, 2000), the role of gender in determining individual's occupational choices and behaviors cannot be ignored. The PE-fit models indicate and research suggests that girls and boys stereotype occupations based on gender, and then through "self-to-prototype" matching, determine which occupations fit them best (Rommes et al., 2007; Lee, 1998). Additionally, women use self-efficacy to evaluate career opportunities to a greater degree than men, potentially self-limiting advancement and status potentials (Betz and Hackett, 1997).

Theories of vocational behavior have expanded to include a feminist perspective; the "relational" theories of career take feminist thought into account by acknowledging the

importance of relationship in vocational choices and development. As feminist scholars (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan et al., 1991; Kashak, 1992) revealed the unique nature of women's approach to social relationships, career theorists (Spokane, 1991) have applied this perspective the vocational literature. From a relational perspective, individuals' career choices and behavior can be understood by examining the nature of individuals' relationships, networks, and opportunities (see Blustein, Schultheiss, and Flum, 2004). Relational scholars argue that it is not possible to view career isolated from interpersonal relationships, and that the degree of relatedness leads to discernible differences in career patterns [e.g. career "exploration" occurring across the lifespan for those with dense interpersonal networks (Flum, 2001). [The relational perspective on careers might be better suited in the last section of this chapter – "developmental accounts" – because the majority of the relational theoretical work has been done from a developmental frame. While traditional developmental psychology prioritized independence as the capstone of healthy human development, relational scholars argue that interdependence may be a more appropriate end-state for women and many men (Bowlby, 1982; Josselson, 1992; Lopez, 1992; Mitchell, 1988; Kohut, 1977).]

The empirical patterns suggest that family dynamics and social support figure prominently across sex and gender in studies of important variables in the vocational process such as: choice of occupation (Bordin, Nachmann, and Segal, 1963; Holland, 1985; Roe, 1956), adolescents' vocational development (Blustein and Palladino, 1991), career decision-making (Blustein and Noumair, 1996; Lopez, 1989; Penick and Jepsen, 1992) and vocational psychology more generally (Lopez, 1989; Palmer and Cochran, 1988).

In addition to occupational stereotyping and a relational perspective on career, women's experiences navigating (or preparing to navigate) the work-family balance also impact career choices and development. There is now a large literature on professional

women's experiences (see Watkins & Subich, 1995) and a new literature on the "opt-out" population – those women who forgo professional lives in order to stay home after having children – is just emerging (Marcinkus and Hamilton, 2006). In terms of career choice and behavior, the work-family issue affects nearly every aspect of vocational behavior. Evidence exists that women and men are anticipating the demands faced by dual-career families much earlier than their parents, perhaps as a result of living through a childhood with dual-income parents.

Parental Influences

One of the most widely-discussed contexts influencing occupational choice and behavior is the family context. Clearly, parents influence young adults' vocational behavior, as evidenced by scores of studies. We know, for example, that adolescents talk about career choices most frequently with their parents (Fend, 1991; Otto, 2000), cite parents as major influencers of their decisions about school and work (Tynkkynen, Salmela-Aro, and Nurmi 2008), and connections between parenting style and career outcomes have been noted (e.g. attachment and career decision-making processes [Blustein, Walbridge, Friedlander, and Palladino, 1991; Blustein, Prezioso, and Schultheiss, 1995; O'Brien, 1996; Lopez and Andres, 1987]).

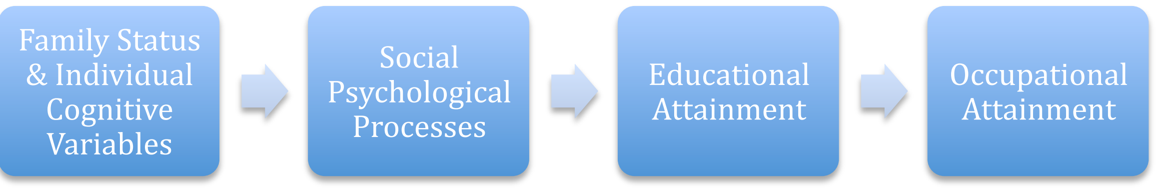
With little exception, however, these studies have been limited by cross-sectional design and an assumption of linear effect. Only recently have theorists begun to unravel the precise social mechanisms by which parents affect adolescents' behavioral patterns and choices regarding career. Dietrich and Kracke (2009) suggest that three primary factors account for parental influence: support for career exploration, lack of engagement, and interference in offspring's behavior. From a social-psychological perspective, these parental behaviors can be understood in terms of structural identity theory. These behaviors represent the social process of identity verification: parents may verify a chosen identity

through behavior (in the authors' term, "support for career exploration"), they may refuse to engage in verification, and in so doing in fact challenge the offspring's emerging occupational identity ("lack of engagement"), or they may actively negate the chosen identity through "interference." From the ICT (identity control theory) perspective, parents might impact outcomes on vocational choice by participating in the process by which children form occupational identities. (See the discussion of identity control theory in Chapter 2 for a review of this process.)

The strong connection between the socio-economic status of one's parents and major and occupational choice is often explained by sociologists with the status attainment theory (Blau and Duncan, 1967). Simply, the social status of one's parents affects the level of schooling achieved, which then affects the occupational choices available (Duncan, Featherman, and Duncan, 1972). In terms of major choice, whether one has access to college in the first place clearly affects whether one chooses "business" as a major choice. A more thorough review of the mechanisms by which parents' SES affect offspring major choice and occupational choice is reviewed later in this chapter. As Blustein (1994) has commented, "it is difficult to think of the formation of one's identity without first considering the extent to which one is able to view the social and economic world as accessible and attainable" (145).

A more thorough model (called the "Wisconsin Model") further refines the process by adding the separate effects of cognitive variables (such as "mental ability") and social-psychological processes (like others' attitudes about appropriate levels of education and occupation). See the following page for a simplified path diagram of the Wisconsin Model:

Model 4: The Wisconsin Model



The empirical research on status attainment (and its related concepts of occupational and social mobility) is enormous. Time and again, the data show that the status of one's parents affects educational attainment and occupational attainment through social-psychological processes (i.e. identity processes, navigation of social networks, the use of social capital). Scholars have gone so far as to suggest "few models have held up so well under such extensive scrutiny" (Hotchkiss and Borow, 1996: 288). The status attainment model is especially useful, because many sociological factors of interest can be included in an analysis of "status." Race, for example, is a status characteristic that, when included, helps to explain why minorities continue to be concentrated in low status occupations.

Developmental Theories of Vocational Choice

According to the developmentalists, individuals naturally process through vocational choices as they age. Sociological variables and individual factors may influence the nature of the process and its outcomes, but the task of choosing a vocation is at its

essence a requirement of healthy human development. As individuals age, they become more clear about who they are and, as they do, they also form images of possible occupations. Vocational choice occurs as those images of the self and possible occupations are reconciled. The concept of "stages" of life is central to the developmental perspective on vocational choice. The underlying assumption guiding this work is that every (healthy) individual proceeds through age-appropriate stages (Buehler, 1933), and each stage is accompanied by customary identity processes (see Sheehy, 1977; Levinson, 1978; 1996). The process of forming a pre-professional identity (e.g. "BBA student") is, then, a natural outcome of human development. Throughout, the self-concept plays a key role in the developing occupational life-cycle.

Although other process-oriented perspectives on career could be considered relevant in a developmental class of career theories (i.e. career decision-making [Gati, 1986], the social-cognitive processes already discussed [Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 2002]), the developmental account of vocational behavior most central to this study is Super's (1963) *self concept theory of vocational behavior* based on Erikson's lifespan development.

Erikson's (1961) seminal work identified the particular task of young adulthood as "crisis" (later termed "exploration") that entails the behavior of exploring a variety of occupational (and religious, political, and romantic) possibilities from which to choose as one's life work (or religion, political affiliation, or spouse). Marcia (2002) later refined Erikson's theory to include four distinct status states representing the presence and/or absence of two factors: exploration (of many choices) and commitment (to a given choice). As described in the preceding chapter, Marcia's states not only have informed the literature on young adults' vocational behavior but also the broader literature on identity formation. In fact, empirical studies demonstrate a significant connection between identity states and career-related variables, such as career decision-making styles (Blustein and Phillips,

1990), exploration of vocational opportunities (Blustein et al., 1989), atypicality of major choice (Fannin, 1979), and others (Blustein, Devenis, and Kidney, 1989; Munley, 1975; Savickas, 1985). As well, recent empirical work suggests that these status states are significantly related to dozens of other psychological traits, such as the Big 5 personality traits (Clancy and Dollinger, 1993), purposiveness and low levels of inferiority (Zuo and Tao, 2002), psychological needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence (Luyckx et al., 2009), and perceived social support from peers (Meeus, 1993). Overall, these studies suggest that the identity status states are representative of other indicators of psychological health that also theoretically contribute to vocational behavior.

Self-Concept Theory

In Super's (1963) self-concept theory he argues that "in expressing a vocational preference, a person puts into occupational terminology the kind of person he is; that in entering an occupation, he seeks to implement a concept of himself; that in getting established in an occupation he achieves self actualization. The occupation thus makes possible the playing of a role appropriate to the self concept" (1963: 1). Essentially, Super theorized that as individuals age, they develop a concept of who they are as individual persons. They do so through "exploration" (discovering one's talents, abilities, and preferences), "self-differentiation" (identifying differences between oneself and others), "identification" (developing awareness of similarities between the self and others), "role-playing" (imitating others in desired social roles), and "reality testing" (trying out roles for oneself and gathering data about one's success of failure in the role – see footnote)[2]. Then, at the developmentally appropriate time, individuals take these self-concepts and apply them to the occupational realm ("translation") through vocational exploration and discoveries. A high school student may enjoy biology so much that she thinks of becoming a

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[2] This formation of self-concept is familiar, as it calls to mind Mead's theorizing on "make believe" play of children as they form a sense of the self as an object.

biologist, for example. Or, a young adult is told he is "creative" so often that he wonders if he should pursue the arts. Finally, the self-concepts are "implemented" when individuals make a commitment to a chosen occupation through early vocational behavior such as part-time jobs, educational training, and the like. (Lee's [1998] study of adolescent girls' gendered self-concepts and [low] interest in science and math comes to mind.)

Super's theory was accompanied by other scholars' work in the developmental arena (Tyler, 1951; 1955; Torrance, 1954), which also highlighted the central role of the self-concept in predicting occupational choice. He differed with his colleagues, though, in his assessment of the self-concept. While others were relying on adjective checklists and interest inventories (much like some current sociological work on identity, see Chapter 2), Super believed that scoring such lists and assessments did not result in an individual's view of himself, but rather a machine's analysis of that individual. He claimed, "The point is that an individual's self-concept is *his* concept of himself, not the inferences concerning him made by an outside *other* – be that other man or machine" (Super, 1963, p. 5, emphasis original).

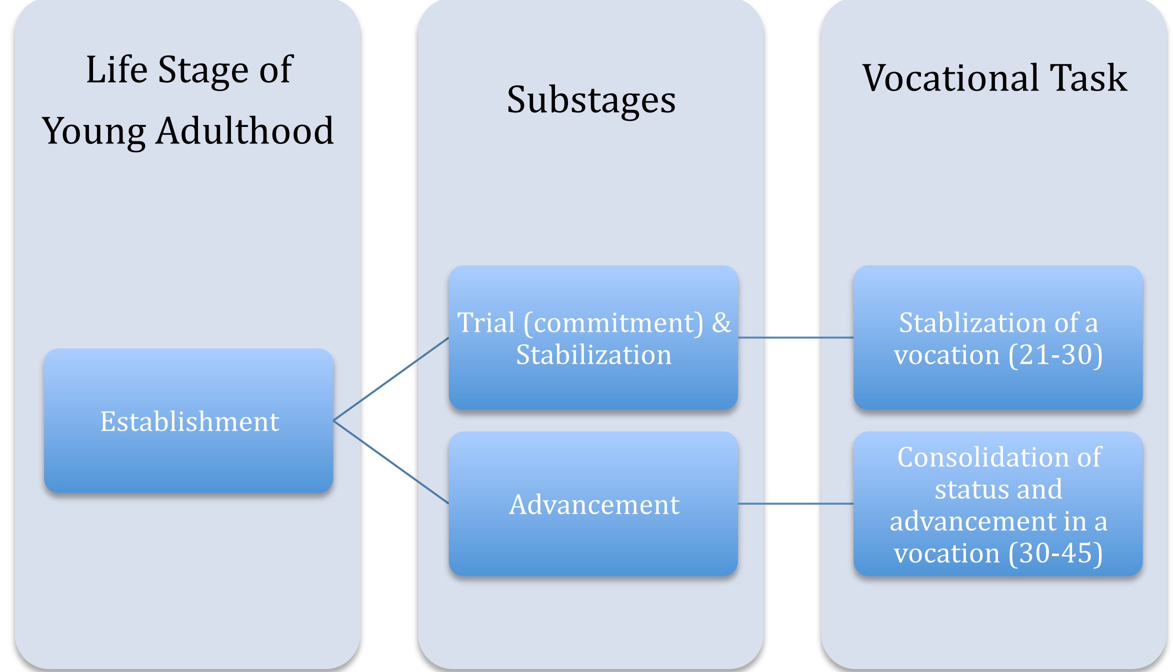
Most recently, Savickas (2002) put forth a major reworking on Super's original theory, calling the new theory "career construction theory." In Savickas' theory, vocational behavior is about *what* people do (what choices they make), *how* they construct a career (the developmental stages and tasks), and also *why* they do so. Savickas drew on Super's original concept of career as an expression of the self and extended it: in career construction theory, narratives of career help individuals to make sense of their lives and why they matter.

The life stages underlying Super's original framework are growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline. In young adulthood, the corresponding life stages are the exploratory and establishment stage. In each, there are further substages and

particular associated vocational behaviors. The following diagram makes these relationships more clear:

Model 5: Super's Career Stages

Life Stage of Late Adolescence
Substages
Vocational Task
Tentative
Crystallization of a vocational preference (14-18)
Exploratory
Transition
Specification of a vocational preference (18-21)
Trial (little commitment)
Implementation of a vocational preference (18-25)



What this graphic does not clarify is the potentially overlapping nature of the substages and accompanying vocational tasks. Consider, for example, "stabilization of a vocation," or the task of becoming situated in one's chosen occupation. During this time, an individual may change employers or particular work roles in order to find the best fit, but such changes would occur in the context of the same occupation. This "stabilization" task is associated primarily with the first substage of the Establishment life stage, but it can begin in the last substage of the Exploratory life stage ("Trial with little commitment"). In a similar way, the "Crystallization" task, whereby an individual clarifies his career goals and aspirations, most typically occurs early in the Exploratory life stage, but it can also occur mid-way through another stage, such as the "Trial (little commitment)" substage. Consider a new college graduate who, while working in her first job after college, decides to return to graduate school to pursue a new direction. This individual is surely in the "trial" period, yet is still crystallizing her vocational preference. The graphic includes approximate ages in parentheses, but it is important to note that these ages are approximate. It is possible that contemporary young adults exhibit slightly different age ranges for each stage than those in the 1950s.

Overall, the developmentalists again emphasize the role of the self-concept in understanding work. Like the trait theorists and sociological models, the developmental approach to career acknowledges the close connection between an individual's sense of self and the occupational choice he or she makes. Unlike the other categories of theories, however, the developmental perspective makes clear the natural progression of career behaviors in the context of human development. Applied to this study, it is important to note where in the process students of this age would naturally fall (as discussed above) and which social-psychological processes may naturally occur at this stage.

PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION

Once an individual has determined a course of study and a vocation (as discussed in the previous sections), the next step in the career path will likely entail more formal entry into a chosen profession. As opposed to one's vocation, the chosen profession is particular to an individual's career goals and aspirations and connotes a degree of status (as opposed to non-professional workers[3]). Leicht and Fennell (1997) argue, "career paths trace the training outcomes (degrees and location) and job transitions of individuals over their work lives. The *professional career path* represents the observable history of how individuals have been *socialized* into appropriate professional roles" (222; emphasis added). It is precisely this mechanism of professional socialization that focuses the remainder of my review of the applied literatures. Additionally, subsumed within the general area of professional socialization is more precise socialization into a particular organization.

If socialization "involves the acquisition of attitudes and values, of skills and behavior patterns making up social roles established in the social structure" (Merton, 1957, p. 41), what is "professional socialization?" Professional socialization, a subdivision of the field of adult socialization, is the process by which individuals acquire the skills, attitudes, knowledge, values, and norms needed to perform *professional* social roles acceptably. The study of socialization processes in the professional context is as old as the study of socialization itself: the earliest sociological studies of adult socialization were undertaken in the professional realm [Parsons' (1951) and Merton's (1957) analyses of medical students' entry into the profession of medicine]. Because socialization results in professionals' self-image, attitudes, values, and role-concept, understanding the process by which individuals become professionals is important in order to understand the social landscape of work and organizational life.

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[3] This review does not address non-professional workers' socialization *per se*, as the study population – soon-to-be college graduates – would be described as a professional workforce.

Overview of the Professional Socialization Literature

While it is certain that socialization is occurring at the previous steps in the path toward professional identity (as students choose an appropriate college major and choose a vocation), when individuals actually enter a profession the socialization process is more intentional from an institutional perspective. Empirical studies of the processes of professional socialization have been largely undertaken in professions with highly identifiable cultural traits: law (Abbott, 1993; Goode, 1957) and medicine (Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006; Coverdill et al, 2005, Beland and Maheux, 1990; Colombotos, 1988; Colombotos and Kirchner, 1986; Mechanic, 1983; Conrad, 1988) [scholars' interest in medical socialization has also extended to nursing (see Nesler, et al., 2001; Benner, 1984; Throwe and Fought, 1987)]. Other work, with a more organizational (or "management") focus, has expanded the professional contexts to include retail (Pratt, 2000), orchestras (Weick, Bougon, Binkhorst, 1977), and dentistry (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1996), among others. In each setting, scholars have identified mechanisms whereby new professionals are socialized as members of a larger professional culture. Effects of socialization processes abound: the process of professional socialization has been empirically implicated in variables as diverse as ethical decision-making (Fan, Ho, and Ng, 2001) and the presence of anxiety (Scott, 1970). Perhaps most important to my area of interest, socialization processes have clear implications for the development of professional identity (Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006).

The processes by which individuals are socialized into professions are numerous, and a review of the literature suggests several particularly relevant to my study of the formation of pre-professional identity. After briefly describing each process in this section, I then apply the mechanisms to my area of interest, the formation of pre-professional social role identity, in the following chapter. It is important to note that socialization is a two-way

process by which social entities both shape individuals on the one hand (institutional socialization) and individuals maneuver through institutions (personal agency) on the other (Mortimer and Simmons, 1978). This study, however, intentionally focuses on the second aspect: the processes by which individuals actively learn to participate in social life; the fact that socialization is also a social process acting *on* individuals *by* organizations is also acknowledged.

This section is organized in two parts: socialization into professional fields (part 1) and socialization into particular organizations (part 2). While membership in a professional field largely determines "what" one does for work, organizational membership defines "where" one does that work. Theoretically, the two associations should yield distinct implications for identity. In reality, most studies of professional socialization confound the two, and this study is no different. Pratt, Kaufmann, and Rockmann (2006) analyzed the processes of socialization of medical residents at a highly regarded university hospital, and their findings point to factors both universal to medical communities as well as particular to the study location. Similarly, in this study I seek to understand the formation and enactment of the identity of "BBA student," but my methods unintentionally confounded the professional affiliation ("BBA student") with the particular organizational identity. For this reason, I will remain attune to processes theorized to operate at both levels of socialization: into a professional field and at the organizational level.

Part I: Socialization into a Professional Field

Modeling

Bandura's (1977) seminal work on the function and processes of role modeling as a mechanism of socialization by which individuals learn and adopt new behaviors is easily relatable to the professional context. The process of modeling, whereby an individual observes and then uses another's behavior as a guide for one's own, is a core process of

both child and adult socialization. (In fact, the ubiquity of modeling as a means by which individuals in a new environment learn how to behave in that context is so taken-for-granted that some scholars do not cite Bandura's original work [see Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006].)

For modeling to be functionally useful, Bandura theorized that two requirements must be met: individuals must view the models as competent in the first place, and they must have an opportunity to practice the modeled behaviors, in the second place[4]. The professional context's ability to meet these requirements depends in part on the phase of professional life. In the medical context, for example, medical students on rotation may have more ability to "practice" behaviors they see modeled without serious negative consequences, but it may be more difficult for a practicing physician to do so without fear of penalty for poor performance. Business school students at the undergraduate level, then, would theoretically enjoy the latitude with which to practice professional behaviors through modeling. Bandura (1977) argues that individuals hold "symbolic representations" of modeled behaviors in mind for replication at later, appropriate times. In the professional school context, new students observe seasoned, tenured students' classroom behaviors, store the symbolic representations in memory, and then retrieve them as needed.

Impression Management

One of the tasks of professional socialization involves successfully managing others' impressions of the new professional. That is, despite whether or not the new professional is, in fact, adept and capable, it is professionally important to convey the *impression* of competence. Medical students, for example, learn how to behave like doctors as they learn the technical skills involved in the practice of medicine (see Haas and Shaffier, 1982). By

[4] The opportunity to practice modeled behaviors is not a requirement for individuals to merely learn behaviors, however, as Bandura's original experiments of preschool-aged children demonstrated (1965), but he later argued that for modeling to be *functional* it is important that individuals have an opportunity to practice the behaviors (1977).

ensuring they project the behavior associated with competence, the students enhance their professional image. Similarly, new business school students may pick up behaviors of successful business executives in an attempt to appear capable before they learn the skills necessary to perform competently. Which behaviors they choose to assert, then, may tell us something about what they see as evidence of "competence" in the identity of BBA student.

The presence of impression management work has been found to be related to the experience of "reality shock" when newcomers face unanticipated challenges. Studies of medical and nursing students (Becker et al, 1961; Davis, 1968; Olesen and Whittaker, 1968) have found that students respond to the surprisingly overwhelming amount of material, unclear standards, and general anxiety upon entry into medical school by focusing attention on creating the perception of competence rather than actual skill-building. Becker (1964) described this process as "situational adjustment" to demonstrate the transiency of the behaviors required: once students leave the school environment, they (are assumed to) change the behaviors needed to signal competence to reflect the new professional context.

Role Compatibility Issues and Socialization

The degree to which a new role in which one is being socialized is compatible with other, existing roles and one's general sense of self can be described as "role compatibility" and has been found to determine the amount of learning required in the new role (Riley et al., 1969). The degree of perceived compatibility between a new role and existing roles also determines the amount of social support for the taking on of a new role, as Mortimer (1978) discovered in a study of men's and women's participation in the labor force. The incongruence of women's roles in family and work is thus theorized to be deterred as a result of problematic socialization processes.

Part II: Organizational Socialization

In concert with mechanisms of professional socialization, new members to a professional class are also subject to indoctrination by their particular organizational cultures. There is a large literature on organizational socialization (see Van Maanen and Schein, 1979; Michel, 2007), and a broad review is not appropriate here given the scope of this project. There are, however, particular processes of organizational socialization that are implicated in this study, and I review them here.

It is important to recognize, however, that these are techniques organizations use to either change an individual member's current sense of self or augment an existing self-concept in order to align it with an organization's image ("sense-giving") (see Pratt, 2000). The organization is the "actor" and the individual member's identity is the outcome. This perspective is different from that I adopt in this study: here, I argue that the individual is the actor who uses resources from the organizational context in order to form a new social role identity ("BBA student"). It has been noted that "although sense-giving implies what identity content is desired by the organization (i.e. an adoption of organizational values), little is said about how members actively use identity-relevant information to construct their own identities" (Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006: 237). Two decades ago, Fine (1984) noted that more ethnographic work was needed to better understand "the means by which individuals are socialized into an organization" (257).

Structural factors

The literature on organizational socialization can be categorized according to four broad foci: (1) general characteristics of organizational socialization, (2) stages of socialization, (3) content of socialization (what organizations teach the new member), and (4) the practices of organizational socialization (Reis Louis, 1980). Characteristics include such experiences as "reality shock," as newcomers come to terms with a new organization.

Stages begin with “anticipatory socialization” and continue through “encounter” and “adaptation.” The content of organization socialization includes studies of the effect of organizational culture on new recruits and role-related learning opportunities. The last category, practices, describes the effect of social structure on socialization processes, and it is this sociological perspective that may be particularly illustrative here. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) developed a framework to describe the effect of structure on socialization and state that the process "entails the learning of a cultural perspective . . . [i.e.] a perspective for interpreting one's experiences in a given sphere of the work world" (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979: 212). As such, organizations give newcomers a structure (i.e. culture) with which to understand what happens in the organization and how one should behave.

Socializing Organizations

The type of organization doing the socializing is also important in determining the particular socializing processes. A “socializing organization” is one “like professional schools or rehabilitative hospitals whose main purpose is to socialize the participants” (Mortimer and Simmons, 1978). Clearly, the undergraduate business program can be conceptualized as a socializing organization, and as such, theory and research indicate certain characteristics and processes to be particularly relevant.

One characteristic of socialization processes within “socializing organizations” relevant to this study is the *influence of peers versus authorities* in shaping new members’ values and attitudes. Several studies note that, in socializing organizations, two roles are being learned: the current role (of “BBA student”) and the future role (of “professional business person”) (Becker et al., 1961; 1968). These studies find that the dominant reference group new recruits rely on for socializing information differs depending on the

role being learned. When learning the current role (of "student"), individuals rely more heavily on peers; when focusing on the future role, they turn to authorities.

A second contextual factor is the *relative isolation* of members of a socializing organization. Although a professional school is unlike a prison, where members cannot physically leave, a school environment still encourages a certain degree of isolation from those not affiliated with the school. On the college campus, the business program is contained entirely within one large building. The building is almost entirely self-contained: space is provided for quiet study, group activity, eating, relaxing, in-class and extra-curricular participation. Aside from physical space, students' academic time is almost entirely consumed by business coursework. Often before a student is formally admitted to the undergraduate program, coursework is focused on courses within the business school as students take business pre-requisite classes. After admittance, unless a student specifically searches out other coursework to take as a second major or minor, full-time studies are completed in the physical space of the business school. In these ways, students are enmeshed in the business school organization.

A third factor of socializing within a "socializing organization" is the *presence of anxiety* as a part of the process. Moore (1969) found suffering to be a significant aspect of participation in professional schools, as a result of the aforementioned isolation, reality shock, and ambiguous roles (current and future). Among BBA students, mention of anxiety and stress may be indicated.

Organizational Rhetoric

In order to successfully socialize new members, organizations often need to present rhetoric that convinces new recruits of the organization's positive intentions for them (even if, in fact, the organization's goals and the member's well-being are not entirely congruent). Kleinman and Fine (1979) found widespread use of the rhetoric of "community" in a

seminary and suggested its use as a mechanism whereby the institution attempts to connect on an emotional level to students. In the case of undergraduate business students, institutional rhetoric may be used to redefine institutional goals that could appear misaligned with individual student's goals.

For example, in this context, the study participants' institution maintains a strict grading curve in required courses which forces at least 30% of students to earn a C or below in those courses. This organizational goal is clearly misaligned with individual students' goals to earn high GPA's. Additionally, it represents an uncomfortable awakening for the 30% who receive the C grades, as the students as a whole have maintained a GPA of 3.8 (mean) until this point. By using rhetoric, the business school may successfully socialize students to believe the institutional practices have a positive benefit for them personally. As Hosticka (1979) demonstrated in a study of lawyer-client interactions, effective organizations must convincingly demonstrate that they prioritize the best interests of recruits, even if recruits' own personal expectations and experiences suggest otherwise. Through enculturation, new members learn this rhetoric and eventually the language becomes absorbed as tacit knowledge (Siehl and Martin, 1982).

Sensemaking

Studies of the organizational entry process have highlighted the need for newcomers facing an unfamiliar organizational context to make sense, cognitively, of changes, contrasts, and surprises (Reis Loius, 1980). As new members face the need to change aspects of the self to fit the new organization, identify contrasts in the new context, and register surprise at unexpected situations, they are drawn to make sense of the new situation. This sensemaking process (Weick, 1977; 1979) relies on several inputs, including other's interpretations of the situation, past experiences, and belief systems. By processing

the new experiences through sensemaking, new members rectify dissonance created by the new, problematic scenario.

For new BBA students, sensemaking may be triggered in the early stages of organizational entry as students encounter unanticipated situations (i.e. finding oneself at the bottom of the forced grading curve). Theoretically, the outcome of the sensemaking is a new interpretation of events that forces a fit between potentially conflicting data points. Evidence of sensemaking, then, may include newcomers' beliefs that appear to be incoherent but seem to make sense to the individual.

Conclusion

Scholars have identified mechanisms whereby professional institutions socialize new members, not unlike processes likely occurring earlier in the professional path. Although this dissertation project is contextualized in the undergraduate business school environment, I suspect that similar processes of professional socialization are occurring. In the following chapter, I draw on these literatures to analyze the process of pre-professional identity formation. Then, I will move to the data to determine to what extent these mechanisms are apparent in students' own conceptualizations of pre-professional identity.

CHAPTER 4
SUMMARY OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the previous two chapters, I reviewed the broad literatures relevant to my research question: identity theories (Chapter 2) and theories of vocational choice, behavior, and professional socialization (Chapter 3). Now, I incorporate these contributions to frame my study of pre-professional identity formation and enactment. To do so, I first clarify the assumptions guiding my study. Then, I discuss contributions of the literatures along my three main areas of inquiry: (1) what are the major social-psychological processes underlying pre-professional identity formation?, (2) what are the main sources of students' identity meanings?, and (3) what are the pre-professional identity meanings reported in students' narratives?

GUIDING ASSUMPTIONS

Based on my review of identity theory, discussed in detail in Chapter 2, I define role identity as "a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation, defining what it means to be who one is in that social role or situation" (Burke and Tully, 1997: 883). I conceive of role identity as subjective; that is, following others (Gergen and Gergen, 1987; Spence, 1982), I subscribe to the view that "meanings…represent a narrative or psychological reality that may or may not be related to a more objective, historical reality" (Timmer and Orbuch, 2001: 178). My focus is on how individuals like to see themselves in the social role as well as what they actually do in that role. I also treat identity as a process rather than a fixed state; I assume it may change over time (Burke, 1991; 2006; Burke and Cast, 1997).

From the literatures on vocational choice and behavior and professional socialization (reviewed in more detail in Chapter 3), I assume the following about the formation of a pre-professional role identity. First, self-concept and vocational behavior are

inextricably connected (Super, 1963; Parsons, 1909; Hughes, 1958; Savickas, 2000; Blustein, Schultheiss, and Flum, 2004). Second, healthy individuals progress naturally through various stages in the process of establishing a career; young adults of college age would presumably be in the process of exploring options and crystallizing their occupational ambitions (Erikson, 1968; Super, 1957; Marcia, 1966). Third, context matters in determining vocational choice (Blau and Duncan, 1967; Miller and Form, 1951; Blustein and Palladino, 1991) and professional socialization (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979; Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006). Fourth, gender affects self-concept, which then affects vocational behavior (Lee, 1998; Fannin, 1979; Correll, 2004).

Fifth, the degree to which a new role is perceived to be compatible with other aspects of the self determines the amount of learning required and the amount of social support required for the new role (Mortimer and Simmons, 1978; Riley et al., 1969). Sixth, in a socializing organization, like a school, individuals are learning two roles: first, the present role of "student," and second, the future role of "professional" (Becker et al., 1961; Wheeler, 1969; Rosnow, 1964).

I draw from the constructionist perspective on careers (Savickas, 2000; Driver-Linn, 2003; Mahoney, 2003; Young and Collin, 2003) in assuming that (1) the individuals in the study are actively making meaning of their pre-professional experiences; and (2) such meaning is made on the basis of social interactions.

Now that I have stated my guiding assumptions, I turn to my three basic areas of interest: (1) the processes underlying identity formation and enactment, (2) sources of students' pre-professional identity meanings, and (3) characteristics of the identity meanings. The major concepts and processes described here will guide my analysis of the data (discussed in the following chapter, Methods).

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES UNDERLYING PRE-PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION?

In this section, I review the major processes expected to play a role in pre-professional identity formation and enactment. I argue that there are cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes by which individuals make sense of meanings gathered from identity resources.

Cognitive Processes

Individuals may engage in a number of cognitive processes: reflected appraisals, social comparisons, cost/benefit analysis, and impression management. *Reflected appraisals* represent the process by which individuals perceive others' perceptions of themselves and take that information into account when forming self-conceptions (Felson, 1985). Reflected appraisals represent a fundamental process in sociological perspectives on identity, as they reflect the symbolic interactionist view that individuals act toward the self as an object (Gecas & Burke, 1995). Identity control theory (Burke, 1991) centers on the process by which individuals attempt to match their own identity standard (how they like to see themselves) with their perceptions of how others see them (reflected appraisals). Khanna (2004; 2010) explains the formation of biracial identity in terms of reflected appraisals and finds empirical evidence that others' perceptions strongly affect the way in which individuals form identity. As well, Cast and Catwell's (2007) study of newly married couples finds that spousal feedback was a vital determinant of one's own self-views, regardless of whether the feedback was positive or negative. In the BBA context, the extent to which students report receiving feedback from others may be associated with the development of the BBA identity.

Similarly*, social comparison processes* (Festinger, 1954) describe the way in which individuals compare aspects of the self with others in similar positions in order to evaluate

the self. Performance of a role identity is often vague (what is a "good" BBA student? Top grades? Best job placement? Well liked? All of the above?), and it is precisely when criteria are unclear that social comparison processes and reflected appraisals function. Although theoretically social comparison processes have been tied more closely with the development of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), more recent scholars of identity (Khanna 2004; 2007) have empirically demonstrated the use of social comparison in identity formation by examining the processes by which individuals use comparisons with others to form a new identity for the self.

Cost/benefit analyses refer to systematic, intra-psychic processes by which individuals evaluate the utility of various identity meanings. I suggest that individuals have access to a collection of vocational identity meanings (by way of self and social identity resources). By calculating the rewards of any given identity meaning (Burke, 2004) and comparing the costs and benefits of various meanings and combinations (Simon, 1995), individuals make rational judgments about which identity meanings they will incorporate into their own vocational identity. Identity control theorists (Burke, 2004), seeking to uncover the source of the identity standard (from which identity meanings gained through interaction are compared), have recently focused on the value of "pay-off" in ascertaining the extent to which individuals adopt identity meanings provided by others. Do new students report cost –vs. – benefit analysis as they form a new pre-professional identity?

Last*, impression management* is largely a cognitive process, as new organization members consider which behaviors are idealized and then set out to display those behaviors in an effort to appear competent before competency is reached (Hughes, 1958; Goffman, 1959). Research on professional socialization programs in the medical field has consistently noted evidence of impression management work among new entrants (i.e.

Haas and Shaffir, 1982; Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufman, 2006); is the same true for non-medical undergraduate programs?

Affective Processes

From a social psychological perspective, the transition to a new vocational role is certainly accompanied by emotions, but this assumption has only begun to be addressed in the vocational behavior literature in the last decade (Kidd, 1998). More recently, Kidd stated, "…in several areas of career theory there appears to be a greater acknowledgement of the role of emotional experience and expression in career development than previously…however, we have barely touched the surface of the range and depth of emotions experienced in making career decisions and engaging in career transitions" (2004: 442). Emotion is a component of both constructing a career (Savickas, 2000) and being socialized in a new organization (Moore, 1969). I argue here that emotional experience plays a part in the construction of the vocational role identity ("BBA student").

I conceive of the Eriksonian concept of *crisis* as emotional, in that the experience of identity crisis is described as filled with anxiety as a result of individual's confusion about the role (Erikson, 1968). In the identity status paradigm, crisis is noted as individuals describe feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and insecurity surrounding who they are in the social role. I expect that the presence of absence of crisis in the vocational role will be gleaned through individual stories surrounding the transition to the BBA program. Taking an exploratory approach, I will study the presence or absence of crisis in the formation of the identity and look for patterns related to its presence and/or absence in the data.

Last, identity control theory (Burke, 1991) argues that *stress* results if individuals receive information from the environment (through social interaction) that does not verify their own internal identity standard. (Identity control theory is reviewed in Chapter 2.) During a period of early identity formation and enactment, it may be that individuals have

not yet reconciled their own identity standards with social perceptions, and thus, may experience stress as a result of the identity formation process.

Behavioral Processes

In constructing a new identity, individuals may engage in several behavioral strategies. Individuals learn how to "be" in new organizations by modeling behaviors of respected others and managing others' impressions of them (Bandura, 1977). *Modeling* is a core socializing process whereby individuals adopt others' role-related behaviors before concretizing a personal social role identity. *Identity talk*, coined by Snow and Anderson (1987), refers to the way in which individuals assert a chosen identity through discourse. Essentially, asking students to describe their identity as a "BBA student" is an invitation for identity talk. More specifically, Snow and Anderson theorized the ways in which individuals use discourse to make sense of potential inconsistencies between aspects of the self and a given role. Strategies for managing perceived dissonance between the self and a given social role include role distancing , embracement, and/or storytelling to affirm a positive identity for onseself. Role distancing is the practice of claiming that one is not actually an occupant of the social role in question ("I am different from other BBAs"). Embracement is the opposite ("I am proud to be a BBA student"). Storytelling is the practice of creating fictional accounts of the self in role that demonstrate the individual's positive attributes ("I will be managing a $1 billion dollar hedge fund in five years"). Identity talk is theorized to help individuals construct identities when a mismatch exists between aspects of the self and the given role ("BBA student.") To the extent that mismatch is reported, I will look for whether strategies of identity talk are present in the data.

Last, the *use of ritual* can also be conceived of as a behavioral strategy to construct identity. By drawing on various aspects of existing rituals or making one's own ritual, individuals signify their new identities. Rites of passage ceremonies (van Gennep, 1910;

Turner, 1967) often accompany vocational role transitions, such as entrance and exit into degree programs, new employee orientations, and retirements; individuals' engagement (or lack of such) in ritualized ceremonies may be one way that individuals demonstrate the forming of a vocational identity. In this context, I expect that the ritual of the program's multi-day orientation program will facilitate individuals' transition to new roles. (As a formal socialization program, the program's new student orientation is expected to *provide* identity meanings as well.)

WHAT ARE THE MAIN SOURCES OF STUDENTS' IDENTITY MEANINGS?

In a study of the construction of medical residents' professional identity, Pratt and colleagues (2006) used the term "identity sets" to describe the "raw materials" used to form professional identities, including "internalized beliefs from prior socialization experiences" and "elements adopted from the organizational context." My concept of identity resources is similar in intent: I am interested in the beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and meanings provided by the individual's prior life experiences (which I will call "Self Resources" in this paper) and those available in the social context (called "Social Resources" here) that participants may use to craft and enact the new social role identity. **Social resources** refer to those resources present in the social environment, including meanings embedded in *reference groups* (such as family, friends, and colleagues), meanings in the *organizational culture* (organizational rhetoric, formal socialization, classroom policies, etc.), and meanings communicated by interaction partners ("*altercasting*").

Reference groups have long been associated with socialization accounts of identity; it is by way of the groups of individuals to whom we refer for social information that we take on role meanings. Collier's (2001) differentiated model of identity construction developed the mechanism of socialization further by explicating the way in which reference groups influence identity meanings for individuals. In a study of college freshmen, he

demonstrated that the attributes of being a "good student" asserted in the freshmen's seminars were later claimed as personal attributes by the students themselves. In this study, I am interested in students' perceptions of reference groups in their formation of pre-professional identity. If reference groups are mentioned, who are they? Friends? Business student colleagues or professors? Family? In addition, how do students describe the ways in which reference groups are used in identity formation and enactment?

Following many others, I expect that *cultural sources* will provide possible identity meanings as well (Milkie, 1999; Shotter & Gergen, 1989; Swidler, 1986). In the context of a socializing organization like a professional school, the organizational culture is likely to be the most relevant source of cultural meanings to the study population. Organizational rhetoric may provide a basis for identity meanings, as it does for processes of socialization (Kleinman and Fine, 1979). Cultural texts available within the organization, for example, such as student handbooks and course syllabi, provide a rich source of "BBA student" meanings that are available to individuals constructing the identity. Do students refer to these sources when asked about how they learned to be a BBA student? The academic institution itself and its subsidiary organizations, such as extracurricular clubs and activities, also may provide access to a repertoire of identity-relevant meanings. To what extent do students refer to cultural sources of identity meanings? How does the organizational culture affect students' identity formation and enactment?

Last, following the notion of *altercasting* from a symbolic interactionist perspective, others "cast" us into particular types of roles in social interaction (Goffman, 1959), and in so doing supply yet another set of meanings. In interaction, individuals become aware of the role they are expected to take and either choose to adopt that role as others' prescribe it ("role-playing") or deviate from those expectations in an effort to create an individualized

version of the role ("role-making") (Stryker, 1968). Do students report instances of altercasting in their early weeks of performance as BBA students?

Self resources refer to those resources rooted in the individual: pre-existing identities and role behavior. *Pre-existing identities* are those identities that are active at the time the new role is adopted. In terms of vocational roles, perhaps the most salient pre-existing identity is that of gender identity: who we are as male or female. Empirical data suggest that that the nature of one's gender identity significantly affects the use of power and control (Stets, 1995). Specifically, the more masculine the identity, the more control exercised. As well, the notion that gender identity affects vocational behavior is well-established in the literature (see Correll, 2004 for a review); patterns of gender effects in the data on pre-professional identity formation would be expected. In addition to gender identity, other salient identities may impact the way in which an individual develops a pre-vocational role. Family and religious identity, for example, may provide sources of meanings about the self that must be reconciled or adopted in a new role identity. More generally, identities related to class and status may also affect identity construction (Killian & Johnson, 2006). By noting students' mentions of other identities, I will examine how pre-existing identities influence the development of a new vocational role identity.

In terms of *role-related behaviors*, by performing functions of a role, meanings associated with those functions may begin to color the emerging role identity. In this way, behavior becomes a source of identity meanings. In the study, I will pay particular attention to the way in which self-reported role-related behaviors may influence students' descriptions of identity formation.

WHAT ARE THE MEANINGS OF THE PRE-PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY?

In addition to sources of identity meanings and the social-psychological processes by which individuals construct a new pre-vocational identity, I also focus on the defining

characteristics of the newly formed identity. I will be attuned to the *content* of the identity (what are the actual identity meanings represented in the identity?) and the hierarchy of such meanings (do some components of the identity seem to be more or less important to students?), the individual's *confidence* in and *commitment* to the role identity, the overall *salience* (what is the self-reported importance of the BBA role to the student?) of the role identity, and any resulting *tensions and/or role strains* reported as a consequence of the new identity.

In this chapter, I summarized the major contributions of existing theories of identity, role, vocational choice, and professional socialization by highlighting the contributions most relevant to my study. In addition to the theoretically-derived questions described above, my analysis – as described in the following chapter – will also allow for new themes and aspects of the identity formation process to emerge. In the following chapter, I will describe my empirical methods in detail.

CHAPTER 5
METHODOLOGY

The research seeks to answer the broad question: how do individuals form and enact new social role identities? Specifically, I will study the mechanisms by which a new pre-professional role identity is constructed and enacted by students recently admitted to undergraduate business school. I have drawn upon the sociological and psychological literatures on identity to provide the theoretical foundation for the study. In the empirical work, I examine the processes by which identities are constructed by analyzing essays written by individuals in a pre-professional degree program for undergraduate BBA students.

The pre-professional educational environment represents an opportune context in which to study the process of role identity formation for several reasons: (1) the social position to be newly occupied, BBA student, is clear; (2) the point at which individuals officially take on the role is identifiable (acceptance into the BBA program); and (3) individuals' commitment to the role can be assumed to be fairly high because the program requires a lengthy application process and two years of coursework.

In this chapter, I describe my methods of data collection. As part of an in-class activity, I used the survey method consisting of a set of open-ended questions that allowed undergraduate business students to describe their perceptions of their experience becoming a "BBA student." To describe my methods specifically, I first provide a general orientation guiding my empirical work. Next, I discuss the sample and procedure. Last, I describe the process of data analysis.

GENERAL ORIENTATION

In any study drawing upon the assumptions of the symbolic interactionist (SI) frame (Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980), the methodology employed should capture the subject's

experience to the best of one's ability. Super (1960) made early statements cautioning career theorists not to reply on psychometric instruments to substitute for individuals' own analyses of career decision-making and behavior. Similarly, Simon (1997) argues that social psychologists most often assess identity meaning indirectly, through other measures such as time spent in the role or emotional effects of occupying the role, rather than by examining the meanings that individuals themselves attach to role identities. She finds that when assessed directly, however, participants' own identity meanings differ from those previously reported in the literature. For these reasons, I rely on participants' own language to characterize the pre-professional identity to understand how they construct and enact this identity in their lives.

In a similar vein, Starishevsky & Matlin (1963) developed a complex theory proposing to formally analyze identity statements in terms of self-concept and occupational choice. Following their work, I share the assumption that not all aspects of a person's self concept are embedded in the occupational realm; nevertheless, the formation of a vocational identity is – at least in part – representative of the ongoing development of the individual's sense of self.

I analyzed identity as participants themselves described it, and I relied on their own expressions of the identity formation process. In doing so, I follow in the tradition that capitalizes on participants' own conceptions rather than pre-determined sets of identity meanings.

DATA

The data consist of texts written by 173 students enrolled in a Fall 2008 undergraduate management course at a Southeastern University. The data were collected as a teaching exercise and, upon preliminary analysis, proved to be ripe for research. As the course instructor, I assigned the task as a way in which to ground a discussion of

professional identity in students' own life experiences. In the exercise, I asked them to complete a short, nine-question online survey. To my surprise, students reported highly specific identities as "BBA students," and they provided accounts of their transition to the new role with considerable effort and thought. As Snow and Anderson (1987) discovered in their qualitative study of homeless persons' identity statements, I found remarkable evidence of "meaning-making" among these students' descriptions of their identity as a "BBA student."

SAMPLE

There were 189 enrolled students in the course; 188 completed the survey in advance of our class discussion; 173 gave permission at the end of the semester for their data to be included in this study.

In the class as a whole, there were 112 men and 74 women. (Students reported hometowns in all geographic parts of the country; there were 23 international students.) Organization tenure varies minimally in the sample. The vast majority of the participants (n = 134) were first-semester BBA students, meaning that at the time of the data collection, they were taking courses in their first semester after official acceptance into the BBA program. Some participants are pre-BBA students (n = 9); they are not yet officially accepted in the program, but they have received special permission to enroll in the courses. A minority (n = 26), have longer tenure in the BBA program. These students have completed at least one full semester as official BBA students and are now in their second, third, or fourth semesters. The remaining few are international students studying on campus for one-two semester(s).

Students' age ranged from 19 years old to 22 years old. Neither race or ethnicity were reported in the data or in any other student records. As the course instructor, I recall

from knowing the students in class over the semester that the majority of the students were White, approximately 30 appeared to be Asian, and a few appeared Black or Hispanic.

STUDY PROCEDURE

As part of a class activity, students were encouraged (but not required) to complete an online survey prior to a class discussion on "Professional Identity" in September 2008. The activity was not graded, but students were verbally encouraged to participate. A link to the survey was distributed to students in an email posted to the course conference after class on a Wednesday; I encourage students to complete the survey by the following Monday. The link directed students to an online survey hosted by the university's "Qualtrics" survey design, distribution, and collection program.

In class, we discussed the concept of professional identity and I used examples – masked for confidentiality – from the data to demonstrate aspects of identity. Students were interested and engaged in class, and upon hearing that I was interested in further research, several came to me to offer research assistance. (I did not use students as research assistants.)

Survey Questionnaire

The survey consisted of nine questions. Each question was followed by a text box in which students typed their responses. No questions were required; students could skip questions, leave them blank, or type as little or as much as they desired. Some questions were targeted to certain levels of organizational tenure (see questions 6 and 7). Other questions were directed at everyone.

Although, as previously discussed, the questionnaire was not originally intended to be used for research purposes, the items correspond broadly to the three questions guiding my interest in identity formation: (1) what are the major social-psychological processes underlying pre-professional identity formation?, (2) what are the main sources of students'

identity meanings?, and (3) what would we expect about the pre-professional identity meanings themselves?

Below, I list the questions here as they appeared in the online questionnaire. Then, I categorize them according to the three research questions.

1. What does it mean to you - personally - to be a BBA student at Griffin? What adjectives would you use to describe who you are as a Griffin BBA?

2. How are you different from other kinds of students at Bishop University? Or from other people your age?

3. How did you become a BBA? If you were to tell me the story of how you became a BBA student at Griffin, how does it go? Where would it start?

4. Then what happened next? How does it end?

5. How is your identity as a BBA student different from the other parts of who you are? How is who you are as a BBA different from who you are in the other areas of your life?

6. How has who you are as a BBA changed over time? How were you different when you first started at Griffin than you are now? How? If you just started the program, skip to the next question.

7. If you just started the BBA program this semester, how did you figure out how to "be" a BBA student? What have the first few weeks of class been like for you?

8. For everyone, how do you think you, as a BBA student, are different from most BBA students? Or, do you think you are mostly like other BBAs? How?

9. Now, describe the "perfect" BBA student. What is she or he like? What are their best qualities? Their worst? What makes the ideal Griffin BBA?

Each item corresponds broadly to one of the three questions of interest. The first research question, *what are the major social-psychological processes underlying pre-professional identity formation?*, is answered primarily in students' responses to Item #7 and, for tenured students, by Item #6. Responses to Items #3 and #4 also contain data describing students' understanding of identity formation processes. Those items also begin to answer the second research question, what are the main sources of students' identity meanings?, because many students describe *where* (i.e. from what sources) they learned

various aspects of the BBA identity. The third research question, *what would we expect about the pre-professional identity meanings themselves?*, is addressed by the majority of questionnaire items: #1, #2, #5, #8, and #9. Item #1 provides students' own personal BBA identity meanings; Item #2 reveals more about how students differentiate themselves more broadly and suggest additional meanings; Item #5 indicates the presence or absence of role conflict, and if present, the source(s) of conflict; Items #8 and #9 reveal students' conceptualizations of stereotypical others (#8) and the idealized, prototypical identity meanings (#9).

In structuring the survey protocol, I prioritized the "Tell me a story about…" prompt in order to capitalize on the power of narrative to capture identity. Because "stories serve as a way to weave meaningful plots that foreground family characters, events, and relationships against the galaxy of cultural processes, values, and experiences" (LaRossa, 1995: 22), I encouraged story-telling in the written responses.

Obtaining Institutional Review Board Approval

As described in the preface, I did not originally collect these data for research purposes. After reading the texts, however, I recognized that this class activity presented a valuable opportunity to study identity. The data were collected the first week of September 2008; in October 2008, I sought advice from the university's Institutional Review Board to determine whether I could seek consent – after data collection – to empirically analyze the contents of a class activity and potentially use it for scholarly publication. I learned that there is an established process for obtaining IRB approval for the empirical use of data previously gathered for another purpose, and I applied for such. After obtaining IRB approval, I followed standard procedures for obtaining written consent.

On the last day of class (December 2008), I explained to each class that I intended to study the formation of pre-professional identity, and I was interested in using the data

students had provided in the class activity in September. I assured students that their decision to participate (or not) in the study would in no way affect their performance in the class or my sentiments toward them. I promised them that I would not look at the consent forms until after the semester was over, so I would not even know who had agreed and who had not agreed until after grades were finalized and posted. I then passed out two copies of the consent form to each student. I asked them to sign one indicating their consent (or not), return the signed consent to me, and keep the second copy for their personal records. I kept all consent forms with me until well after I finished grading, and in January 2009 I organized and counted the number who returned the forms. Of the 188 who completed the online survey, 173 returned consent forms agreeing to participate in the study.

Confidentiality of Data

Participants' confidentiality was protected in multiple ways. First, I am the only individual with access to participants' names and the knowledge that they participated in this study. The texts were identified with a random number, not with participants' names or student id numbers. When using examples from the narratives, I have used pseudonyms to identity participants. Likewise, in the student texts I have changed the name of the University to "Bishop" and the name of the business school to "Griffin." If participants gave specific information in the text that could identify them, such as their name or a place of work, I changed the information to protect the identity of the participant in the course of analysis. All data from all participants were combined together in analysis, so no one individual was studied separately from the others. In publications or presentations, only short segments of the texts labeled with pseudonyms were used for illustration; no entire texts will be reproduced at any time.

Researcher Positionality

My positionality – as one of the particpants' current instructors – may have influenced the data in unknown ways. As one student described of the process of business school socialization, "giving professors what they want" is perceived as critical to new students. Although I made clear that the assignment was not graded, I did encourage participation. Doing so may have been enough to elicit the impression management work so prevalent in the data.

Did students respond to the questionnaire in ways that they believed would affirm what I wanted? It is difficult to know for sure. Ideally, in future research data would be collected by someone not at all connected to students' perception of success in their coursework. Students had not yet, however, studied the topics of identity, image, and impression formation in class at the time of the survey, so it is unlikely that they responded according to a formal idea about what we would be looking for in data about identity formation.

As instructor of the course, however, it is certain that I approached data analysis with a deeper understanding of this particular sample than an outside researcher would typically bring to the work. For example, throughout the semester I saw firsthand behavioral examples of the competitive spirit described in the data. Still, before data analysis I had not included "competition" in the original coding scheme, because although I saw it in the classroom I had not anticipated its presence in these identity data. In other words, it seems to me that my experience with the students may have made recognizing unforeseen content categories easier as they appeared in the data, but it did not seem to change my original expectations.

DATA & ANALYSIS

The data consist of the textual responses by students to the nine-item survey described earlier. Upon a preliminary analysis, the data seem rich, varied, and interesting. There are 126 pages of single-spaced text in the data set. Some students wrote shorter responses (less than ½ page) and some wrote much longer (2 pages). Overall, students' descriptions of their identities are clear, in-depth, and show both variation and some obvious patterns. Aside from questions that did not pertain to certain students (e.g., pre-BBA students would have skipped Question #6), in very few cases (n = 5) did students indicate they had a difficult time answering a question. Occasionally, students wrote "N/A" in response to a question. Overall, the data indicate that students had clear conceptualizations of their identities as BBA students, which suggests that this focal identity is theoretically appropriate as a context in which to study role identity formation and enactment.

Content Coding

Primarily, I was interested in the conceptual content of participants' responses. To analyze content, I first constructed coding categories based on the results of my literature reviews (summarized in Chapter 4 and described in Chapters 2 and 3). For example, "parental influence" was a content category of the "Reference Groups" identity resource used to capture discourse related to the respondent's beliefs about how parental influence has affected the role of BBA student. Proceeding iteratively, I continually refined the categories as needed and added sub-categories as appropriate (to "parental influence" I added "financial support," "parents' concern for student's future," "criticism from parents," etc.). As analysis progressed, the structure changed to better reflect the content of the data.

During and after coding, I paid close attention to emerging patterns, seeking both confirmation and disconfirmation in the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Marshall and

Rossman, 1995). Rather than forcing the data to fit my pre-conceived ideas about significant content categories, I allowed for unanticipated concepts and processes to emerge from the data. I drew on many resources as I prepared to analyze the data (Becker, 1996; Huberman, 2002; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). I started the analysis process with some ideas about the identity formation process gleaned through the literature reviews, but I also wanted to allow new themes and concepts to emerge from the texts.

To facilitate the coding and analysis, I employed the qualitative data management program QSR N-Vivo. As I coded, I noticed when patterns of meaning did not fit pre-existing categories, and I developed categories to fit the new themes. For example, the notion of "competitiveness" was not expected, but it became clear early in the process of reading the texts that students perceived competition to be a key aspect of the process of pre-professional identity development. Likewise, when coding students' identity meanings, the concept of the identity as an achievement was immediately clear. Thus, I created a category "achievement" to track the pattern.

Step-by-Step Coding Process

I completed the coding in several phases. In the first phase, I coded each student's text according to the individual questions and broad content areas. For example, students' responses to the first question, "What does it mean to you – personally – to be a BBA student at Griffin?" – was coded first in the broad category "Personal Identity Meanings." After all texts were coded categorically, I then coded each broad area as a whole. This way, I looked for themes and patterns in the broad category of "Personal Identity Meanings" as a whole, looking for both patterns among individual student texts as well as differences. I coded for both categories identified *a priori* in my theoretical model (reviewed in Chapter 4) as well as for unexpected, new concepts. I continued this process of reading and coding

until it seemed that the meaning in the texts had been captured in content categories. Occasionally, I condensed two categories or I separated one category into independent categories. Finally, I read through each category as a whole, and I re-coded if needed.

Coding Scheme

The following represents the basic coding scheme I employed as I analyzed the data. The coding categories are organized hierarchically. Following my theoretical models (see Chapter 4), the content categories are organized according to three basic themes: Identity Characteristics, Identity Resources, and Social-psychological Processes. I also included a fourth theme, Descriptive Content. Specific categories in each of the four themes follow the variables suggested by the literature to be important to identity formation (described in detail in Chapter 4).

In terms of Descriptive Content, I coded for tenure in the business school (pre-BBA student, first semester BBA student, or experienced BBA student); year in college (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), and gender (male, female).

The Identity Characteristics included students' own identity meanings, descriptions of the idealized BBA identity, students' commitment to the identity, how students differentiate themselves from others, how the BBA identity compares to other parts of the self, salience of the BBA identity, self-reports of how the BBA identity changed over time, reports of tension and role strain, and identity meanings attributed to the organization.

Of the Identity Resources, two broad sub-categories divide the content codes: Self Resources and Social Resources. Self Resources are those resources that exist as an aspect of the individual, including other existing identities, gender identity, general sense of self and personality, individual traits, skills, and abilities, occupational identity, and religious identity. Self Resources also included role-related behaviors, such as class and academic behavior, extra-curricular activities, internship experiences, and paid work. Social

Resources includes those resources external to the individual, such as reference groups (family, friends, generalized others, work colleagues), culture (American culture, generalized business culture, university culture, business school culture), and altercasting (expectations of parents, peers, professors, work colleagues, and one's own expectations).

Social-psychological processes include affective processes (Eriksonian crisis, emotional labor, feeling rules, fundamental sentiments, secondary emotions, and stress), behavioral processes (commitment to vocational track, exploratory vocational behavior, identity talk, imitation/modeling, use of ritual, impression management), and cognitive processes (cost/benefit analysis, crystallization of vocational preference, narrative construction, reflected appraisals, social comparisons, and use of objects and symbolism).

After coding the data according to this scheme, I then analyzed content categories as a whole. I used the N-Vivo software program to compile all coding on "impression management," for example, to examine the way in which the category seemed to function. The following chapters present the major results of those analyses.

Note: Use of Students' Quotes

In the following chapters, I have included students' quotes exactly as they were written. In reproducing them verbatim, I have left misspellings and typos as written, but I have changed identifying information. For example, I changed references to the school to reflect the pseudonym "Griffin" rather than the actual name of the business school.

CHAPTER 6
PRE-PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND ENACTMENT AS IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

In Chapter 4, I drew on existing theory to frame my empirical study of pre-professional identity formation and enactment. I organized the major concepts according to three main areas of inquiry: (1) what social-psychological processes are implicated in students' experiences of identity formation and enactment?, (2) what are the major sources of students' pre-professional identity meanings?, and (3) what are the pre-professional identity meanings reported in the students' responses? In this chapter, I address the first question by suggesting that impression management work functions as the mechanism by which students engage in the early stages of pre-professional identity construction and enactment.

I first present texts that show students view the "ideal" BBA student as one who can successfully manage difficult tensions of the BBA student experience: balances between time spent on work and play, competitiveness and sociability, and managing the stress of the job/internship search. The theme of well-roundedness is prevalent in students' descriptions of the idealized identity, yet their descriptions of stereotypical others suggest that the well-rounded student is more fantasy than reality. Throughout, it becomes clear that students view the BBA student role as a difficult role to perform as well as they would like. This striving is associated with several factors; specifically, high expectations of the role and a competitive environment make performing the role successfully highly desired by students yet difficult to manage. In addition, I find that students also largely view the BBA student identity at odds with their overall sense of self, suggesting role incompatibility. The BBA identity represents a role not yet fully embraced or enacted by the individual.

Given the ambitious idealized identity and the mismatch between the new BBA identity and students' overall sense of self, how do students new to the role manage identity

enactment? I suggest here that impression management work functions as the mechanism whereby the new pre-professional identity is enacted by students. Specifically, I identify three primary findings: (1) students are highly aware of the need to engage in impression management work as a new BBA student; (2) the necessary impression management work revolves primarily around the physical space of the school, appropriate dress, and a critical value of being seen as "professional;" and (3) tenured students characterize the perfect BBA as "authentic" and able to resolve the temptation to focus on image and impression management.

I will first use data to show a perceived mismatch between students' perceptions of their identities as "BBA students" and the other aspects of their individual sense of self. The lack of integration between the self "as a BBA" and the rest of the self suggests that at least some part of the BBA identity is perceived as disconnected, further reinforcing a need to promote an appropriate image through impression management. Next, I present findings that demonstrate students' views that the identity is difficult to enact successfully. Data illustrating the highly ambitious nature of the idealized identity are presented. Then, I turn to the mechanisms by which students manage others' impressions of them as BBA students. I will discuss the importance of the perception of credibility (and the lack of attention to actual competence), the significance of the physical place and standards of dress, the emotional consequences of impression management work, and the idealized proto-typical BBA as an "authentic" person. Throughout, I confirm prior work in the impression management literature by demonstrating the close connection between role identity formation and impression management.

INTEGRITY BETWEEN THE PRE-PROFESSIONAL ROLE IDENTITY AND A SENSE OF SELF

Overall, the majority of students reported at least some mismatch between their identities as BBA students and who they are in other parts of their lives. I posed the

question, "*How is your identity as a BBA student different from the other parts of who you are? How is who you are as a BBA different from who you are in the other areas of your life?*" A minority – 33% – of responses indicated integrity between the "BBA student" identity and the sense of self; in other words, they claimed there was no difference between who they are as a BBA and who they are in other parts of their lives. Most of these students, however, also went on to describe some differences (discussed below). Overall, the vast majority (86%) of students in the sample reported at least some clear differences between the two conceptions of the self (14% indicated no mismatch between the BBA identity and other parts of the self; 19% claimed no difference but went on to describe differences; 67% indicated clear differences).

Among the 33% of students who claimed no difference between the BBA identity and other aspects of the self, some answered with a succinct "There is no difference" (or similar), while others went on to explain:

> "**To be quite honest there are no differences, my identity as a BBA is no different from some of the other parts of my life.** I am still hardworking and ambitious. Everything sort of fits together. I guess it's because I know I have nothing to turn back to, knowing that has forced me to learn quickly who I am, where I'm going and what I have to achieve. It's also forced me to knit things together to make things work. Yea there are no differences, ""BBA"" is an opportunity that I am taking advantage of I don't believe it shapes my identity. " *Jeff*

> "**I feel like my identity as a BBA student is similar to my identity in the other areas of my life, which is not always a good thing.** I am a very informal, quiet and nervous person, which I believe has already revealed itself in certain classes and venues. I also view most business structures and decisions in the context of how they affect its employees and society as a whole. For instance, when I hear about our economy revolving around services, not manufacturing, I think of all of the blue-collar workers who have not only lost their jobs, but also cannot for one reason or another go back to school to learn necessary skills to obtain a well-paid service job. This tendency can get quite annoying after a while." *Allen*

Allen and Jeff, above, thoughtfully describe the integration between their identities as a BBA student and their overall sense of self with examples. Jeff explains the integration in a

highly rational manner: he believes that he has made a choice and now must "knit things together to make it work." Allen parlays his personality traits – "informal, quiet, and nervous" – to the business context and finds his "tendency" to "view most business structures and decisions in the context of how they affect its employees and society as a whole" as "annoying." Although Allen would likely note differences between himself and other BBA students (it is probably safe to assume that he does not believe most BBAs are "informal, quiet, and nervous"), it is important that he does not see *himself as a BBA* in ways that are different from other areas of his life. Both students describe integration between their identity as a BBA and their overall sense of self.

The vast majority of students, however, note at least some clear differences between their identities as BBA students and the other parts of who they are. Take the following example of Adrienne, who reports that she even uses a different name outside of the business school:

> "**In my BBA classes I want to be as professional as possible.** / In my liberal arts classes and all over the college my name is Adri (without the 'enne') and I feel like my education outside of the GDB (sic) grounds is less serious to me that the ones that I am enrolled in at Griffin. / / **Otherwise, I am the same person throughout life.** I dont believe in changing your identity under different circumstances and being someone that you arent."
> *Adrienne*

Adrienne's response is an example of a mixed code. Her text indicates that she does not perceive a lack of integration between her sense of self and her identity as a BBA: "Otherwise, I am the same person throughout life. I don't believe in changing your identity under different circumstances and being someone you aren't." And yet, at least one prominent aspect of identity is different: she uses her formal name as a BBA student despite using a nickname in every other aspect of her life (including prior collegiate work). For this reason, I also coded her text as an example of a lack of integrity between the sense of self and BBA identity (19% of the student texts were coded in this way).

Students' identification of areas of disconnect between the "BBA identity" and their overall self frequently suggest clear impression management efforts. For Adrienne, it seems that using the nickname "Adri" may be seen as unprofessional, and in her BBA life she "wants to be as professional as possible." Throughout, students express that they are more professional, serious, and work-oriented in the BBA identity and more relaxed, playful, and social outside of the BBA identity. Jay, Palmer, and Lindsay all describe this dichotomy:

> "**I like to think of myself as having two different sides, my ""laid back side"" and my ""down to business"" side.** When it comes to school, work, and goals that are important to me I am very much a type A personality. I am constantly challenging myself, pushing myself to do better, thinking things over very thoroughly, and working to develop a balanced and rather structured schedule. Also, when it comes to work and school I often consider myself a quiet observer, I often like to take things in and thoroughly process them before making decisions. However, I think my personal and social life is a very different story. I am very spontaneous, I am loud and outgoing, and always ready to start the party." *Jay*
>
> "**As a BBA, I am very serious and focused. In my ""real life"", I am very playful and boastful**. I sometimes get bored at the business school because everyone is so serious." *Palmer*
>
> "As a BBA student I am forced to be more driven, goal-oriented, and career-oriented. **Normally I am a reasonably laid-back person, but the BBA program forces me to kick ass any chance I get.** This is a bittersweet thing, because while it's fun to have the pedal to the metal, so to speak, it's also fun to be able to mentally relax here and there. *Lindsay*
>
> "**My BBA self is a lot more serious than my non-BBA self.** I guess to counter the highly competitiveness that goes along with the BBA program I needed to have not so serious side. In my down-time I am very much nonchalant and easy going." *Talia*

For these students, the business school environment requires a different, more serious kind of person than who they perceive themselves to be outside of the business school. Lindsay relates that she is "forced" to be "more driven, goal-oriented, and career-oriented." Throughout, students appear to perceive a dichotomy between the characteristics necessary to succeed in business school and social skills. Above, Palmer is "very playful" in

other parts of life and Jay is "outgoing and ready to start the party." Talia notes, specifically, a reaction to the "competitiveness" and suggested she needs "to have a not so serious side."

This notion of business skills vs. people skills continues, as the theme of competitiveness plays a large part in the differences students reported between the "BBA" self and other aspects of the self:

> "**Being in the BBA program definitely makes me feel a lot more competitive than I am used to.** Just searching for internships and knowing what other individuals are involved in makes me feel like I need to do more things. Furthermore, I have never worried that much about my future until I got into the BBA program. I just assumed that I would be okay, but now, harsh realities are penetrating my conscience." *Neal*
>
> "**Sometimes I feel I am too competitive as a BBA -- more than I am in other areas of my life.** The BBA side of me is definitely more stressed out all the time, worried about internships, job opportunities and networking and all that. In other areas of my life, I try not to take things too seriously and live each day as it comes. As a BBA, I think I am always considerate of the bigger picture and what the consequences of my decisions will be." *Jason*
>
> "My identity as a BBA is more competitive and intense than who I am. My intensity in life is about my relationships with those who are important to me. **My BBA identity is much less empathetic that I actually am.** I hope to incorporate both identities to be a more well-rounded BBA. Griffin will teach me this, I'm sure." *Lane*
>
> "**I attribute my aggressiveness and competitiveness to my BBA side. In many ways, I separate out my "hard" or "cold" qualities as BBA, and my "softer" and more "emotional" traits as other parts of my life.** Another way I look at my identity is through my different roles. When I am a leader, I am a BBA student. When I am listening to someone vent, I am a friend. When I am home, I am definitely a daughter and sister. BBA definitely is not involved with those roles." *Sally Bay*

The students above all note a recognized need to be more competitive in the business school environment. Some, like Jason and Neal, engage in competitive behavior for clear outcomes ("internships," "job opportunities") suggesting a rational trade-off. For these students, being competitive may not be a core personality trait, but it is perceived to be a necessary characteristic to achieve the desired rewards in this challenging

environment. These same students also report stress and/or anxiety in the same responses: for Jason, "the BBA side of me is definitely more stressed out all the time," and Neal says, "harsh realities are now penetrating my consciousness." Again, following ICT, stress is an expected result from a mismatch between identities.

Lane and Sally Bay highlight differences between the BBA identity and overall sense of self; these students seem to separate the BBA identity and other identities. For Sally Bay, friend, daughter, and sister are all roles not integrated with her role as a "BBA student." Lane does not identify specific roles, but shares that she hopes that her identity as a BBA student will come to be incorporated into her overall sense of self. She notes that "Griffin will teach me this, I'm sure," which seems to also suggest a high level of trust in the organization. Her faith in the organizational is strong: she will integrate her identities when the organization ("Griffin") teaches her to do so.

Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann (2006) identified "work-identity integrity assessments" in their data of medical residents to describe the mismatch residents perceived between the work they did ("scut work") and the ideal identity of a physician in their specialty. In their longitudinal study, they found identity work was performed over time in order to rectify the mismatch. In this study, the integrity violation is not between the work that one does and who one is as a professional, but rather a conflict between aspects of the self. Similarly, evidence from texts of tenured students indicate that changes in some dimensions of the identity standard (Burke, 2006) suggest that similar identity work occurs over time. This pattern will be discussed later in the chapter.

STRIVING TO ENACT THE BBA IDENTITY

In the first part of this chapter, I presented data demonstrating that students perceive the pre-professional role in ways that are often not integrated with their overall sense of self. In Chapter 7, I will discuss specifically how students view the pre-professional

student identity and show that the identity is perceived largely as a resource to be exploited. Now, I turn to evidence that students also view the identity as a difficult one to successfully enact. On the one hand, they perceive the BBA student role as valuable and meaningful; on the other hand, they also indicate that successfully filling the role is desired but difficult to fully achieve.

The Ideal BBA is a Fantasy

The sample population is relatively new to the pre-professional identity – most had only begun business school classes one month prior to data collection – and the data indicate that while they have clear ideas of what the new identity means to them as individuals, they also perceive that they have not yet filled the role fully. Further, students describe the ideal BBA student in ways that are impossible to achieve, and the data suggest that they view the identity as largely out of reach.

In the last item of the questionnaire, students were asked*: "Now, describe the 'perfect' BBA student. What is she or he like? What are their best qualities? Their worst? What makes the ideal Griffin BBA?"* Responses can be organized using three main themes: (1) there is no perfect BBA, (2) the perfect BBA is an impossible, yet alluring fantasy, and (3) the perfect BBA manages to achieve "balance" – often in ways that are not humanly possible. In each, evidence suggests that students do in fact idealize the role and perceive the "perfect" BBA student as a young adult with incredible capabilities.

There is no such thing as "perfect"

A small but noticeable group of respondents (n = 32) claimed immediately that "there is no perfect BBA." Students seem to say that the question is impossible to answer, because there is no such thing as "perfect." It is as if the mere suggestion that there "ought" to be a certain type of student is distasteful:

> "**There is no ""perfect"" BBA student**. I think everyone can be successful by doing whatever works best for them. For some, that means studying

> 24/7, but for others that means having a balance between social and business life." *Garratt*
>
> "**I don't think there is such thing as a perfect BBA student**. I think diversity is what makes our BBA program one of the best in the country." *Eric*
>
> "**There's really no one way to define a ""perfect"" BBA student**. Each of us is here because of our qualities and our great potential. Each and every one of us combined makes an ideal Griffin BBA. Griffin wouldn't be a great institution if it weren't for both our strengths and our weaknesses. Griffin can't cater to its students or enhance their strengths without knowing what the students has to offer and what they need." *John*

Garratt, Eric, and John all immediately claim that "perfect" does not exist, and that diversity in students is what seems to be most important to the institution as a whole. The data suggest that it may be that the concept of "perfection" is problematic for this population because it implies a lack of diversity or a disregard for individuality. The vast majority of students who first suggest there is no perfect (n=21), however, go on to describe qualities of the perfect student nonetheless, suggesting that although "perfection" is not an ideal, an ideal still exists. For example:

> "**I don't believe there is such a thing as a ""perect"" (sic) BBA student.** Every student is different and each brings his or her own strengths to the class. Qualities that are important to succeeding in a business atmosphere are flexibility, even-temperament, dedication, determination, open-mindedness, and many others. People who know how to motivate others and lead them is also essential. It also may be helpful to have a broad range of knowledge in several subject areas other than business, such as sociology, psychology, and the social sciences, to better understand how and why people behave the way they do in different environments. " *Charles*
>
> "**I dont (sic) think there is any such thing.** I think all of our differences is what is most important. We bring different qualities to the business sector which is why it flourished the way it does. I do however think it is importnat (sic) for business leaders, and students as future leaders to recognize that hardships that many people face who dont (sic) have the opportunities we have had. The business world get (sic) a bad reputation for having professionals who dont (sic) care about the greater good. Sadly, I believe that to be true. So in my opinion, the perfect Griffin BBA keeps this in mind and makes decisions as a human being while making other good things happen for business. But again, that is just my own opinion. " *Ellen*

> "**I think the ideal BBA student has no one definition**. Everyone is different, and forcing people to conform to a certain mold is not only counterproductive, but also ignorant. The ideal BBA student should be passionate about learning and being successful. However, everyone's definition of success is different, so people should do whatever they can to fulfill their personal success. Also, the ideal BBA student would pursue the passions they have to the utmost degree, in order to gain all that they can from the Griffin BBA experience." *Vince*

Charles states assuredly that he does not believe there is a "perfect BBA," but he goes on to describe the qualities that are "essential" to business success. The qualities he mentions are quite specific ("flexibility, even-temperament, dedication, determination, open-mindedness") and he also allows for "many others." He goes on to make the case for a "broad range of knowledge in several subject areas other than business" as well. In fact, Charles' description of an ideal BBA is quite ambitious and does not seem likely to be achieved by a 22 year-old BBA graduate. Consider Vince's description as well: "the ideal BBA student would pursue the passions they have to the *utmost degree.*" These "ultimate" student descriptions are found throughout the data and suggest that students perceive fully enacting the identity in ways that are virtually impossible to achieve.

The ideal BBA is unattainable

For 34% of respondents, the ideal BBA student is described in terms that are clearly unattainable. For these students, the idealized BBA student is exactly that: an ideal that impossibly achieves what, realistically, actual students cannot manage. For example:

> "Someone who studies hard, but is engaged in other ways to (sic). Is very social, always talking to teachers and networking. Someone who likes doing well, but likes helping others do well too. **Really someone who can do it all, and make it look easy. That being said, this person probably doesn't exist...**" *Chloe*

> "The perfect BBA student, **if there is such a thing**, is inquisitive, thoughtful, a leader, a good listener, a forceful speaker, **humble yet confident,** and somebody who actively seeks advice and ways to improve. *Kevin*

> "A hybrid of a library-hound, that (sic) understand when to be social. Someone who isn't distracted by the social norms that Bishop Univ. can

> arouse from students. **Someone who puts the business school first in mind and body.** They stay on top of their work and dedicate themselves to serve the Griffin community as a leader in some way. He or she is a great writer, a great public speaker and above all very well-liked by peers and professors. The connections he or she has built will propel him or her to the job of choice. That job will be the type that the ""perfect"" BBA enjoys and the money will be there regardless of field because he or she is the best at it..." *Robert*

As Robert and Chloe describe, the ideal BBA is an incredible student, but a student who can't possibly exist in real life. Chloe and Kevin acknowledge the fantasy, "this person probably doesn't exist" or "the perfect BBA student, if there is such a thing" but their recognition that the ideal is not realistic were the only ones in the dataset. In all other descriptions, the prototypical BBA student ought to be able to achieve a long, challenging list of personal qualities and behaviors, some of which are clearly contradictory. Robert suggests that the ideal BBA "put the business school first in mind and body." Robert seems to suggest that the ideal BBA student would do *everything* possible to further his success in the business school – both in what he thinks ("mind") and what he does behaviorally ("body"). Additionally, this student would also be handed the perfect job ("the connections he or she has built will propel him or her to the job of choice") with a highly desired salary ("the money will be there regardless of the field").

This description is clearly not realistic, but students like Robert seem to easily conjure an image of an extremely competent, popular, and successful BBA student regardless. In the context of the responses as a whole, it seems as if students recognize the impossibility, on the one hand, but are striving for it nonetheless.

Ideal BBA is balanced

In Robert's description, above, the theme of balance is also apparent: "a hybrid of a library-hound, that understands when to be social." Throughout, many students (n=87) paint a portrait of an ideal BBA as a student who walks a delicate line between extremes. Identity meanings are varied, but there is a strong theme of balance. For example:

> "The ""perfect"" BBA student probably has a 4.0 and is president of this club and that club. He or she dominates the social networking at the school and knows everyone and everyone wants to include him or her into their circle of friends. **Amazingly, they're able to balance the work load and still make time for all their other commitments as well.** He or she is smart, charming, and great and public speaking. They have an internal locus of control, which is good sometimes, but unfortunately means they beat themselves up too much for things that may go wrong, even if they're just simple mistakes. He or she is also always turned ""on"" and doesn't take enough individual time to unwind and relax. I think that overall, the ideal Griffin BBA is anyone who works hard and clearly makes an effort in their school work. We don't all have to possess the qualities I mentioned above, but laziness is never going to be rewarded." *Eric*

> "The ideal Griffin BBA is **hardworking yet personable, ambitious but not opportunistic, and collaborative rather than competitive.** In my opinion, the worst qualities that BBA students can possess are greed and a win-at-all-costs attitude. On the other hand, the best qualities that they can possess transcend the walls of the business school." *Tyler*

> "I think an ideal BBA would be smart and friendly at the same time. He/she would work hard while helping others around him/her. this ideal BBA student would have everything down to an art form. He/she would be proficient in most scenarios or will pick things up quickly. **He/she is willing to speak his mind, but also knows when to listen and pay attention. He/she is confident, but not arrogant.** He/she says what he/she wants to say without a lot of fluff. He/she's intuitive and understanding when conversing and learning. and last but not least classy." *Damian*

> "The perfect BBA student could be either male or female. They are extremely capable in every context of the word. **They can work with a team, and they can also work equally well as an individual.** Asking questions is not a problem for this person because they realize they are trying to get the job done as efficiently as possible. **He/she is very driven in the work setting but is rather laid back in the social forum**, allowing for a constant flow of networking and support. / I believe these characteristics make the ideal Griffin BBA, as well as every other BBA. *Jill*

Although these responses do not overtly suggest that the ideal is not achievable, the resulting "hybrid" student characteristics do still seem to be somewhat unattainable. For Jill, the ideal BBA is "extremely capable in every sense of the word." To Tyler, the ideal student is ambitious but only to a point (not "opportunistic") and hardworking but not at the expense of developing social relationships. Damian makes the case that one should be "smart and friendly *at the same time*," know when to "speak his mind" and also "listen and

pay attention." To Jill, it is about being "driven" but "laid back" and able to work equally well with a team or alone. For these students, the ideal BBA achieves a sensitive balance between many opposing characteristics: competitive yet social, focused on business yet interested in broader world issues, and practically able to handle the demands of school as well as extracurricular activities. As well, the perfect BBA often also enjoys extrinsic success: an internship and a great job after graduation. Again, there is a sense that the ideal is desired but not realistic. Damian describes the student who has "everything down to an art form" and is "proficient in most scenarios." Tyler's ideal BBA has qualities that "transcend the walls of the business school." Eric's ideal has a "4.0" and "dominates the social networking at the school." None of these descriptions seems particularly attainable for even a good student.

There are three key tensions that the ideal BBA seems to overcome: the tension between competing with fellow students and forming relationships with them, the balance of time spent on various activities, and a balance of success inside and outside the classroom.

"Perfect" balance of competitiveness and team orientation. Participants discussed the competitive nature of the environment wherein the "perfect" BBAs are able to manage the cut-throat environment without becoming overly competitive themselves. Here, I note that the perfect BBA is able to overcome the tendency to compete with colleagues. For example:

> "**The perfect BBA student is both a leader and a team player at the same time.** While these two qualities may seem contradictory they are essential for succeeding in the BBA program, in a business career, and in life. The worst aspect of the business school is the competition that it created among students (primarily because of the grading system). While competition sometimes acts as a good tool for motivation I feel it also detracts from our learning environment. I have had countless experiences in the business school in which students refrain from helping their peers out of fear that their friend may gain an advantage. Situations such as these do not make me proud of BBA student. While I know that group projects do help to

minimize this sense of competition I wish there was even more Griffin could do to help emphasize the importance of being a team player and lower the degree of competition in this high-stress environment." *Jill*

"I think what makes the ideal BBA student is hard-work and a dedication to business with an open eye to what is going on in the world and an open perspective to others opinions and ideas because when it comes down to it **you can be super intelligent and know everything there is to know but you will never get anywhere without the help and support of the people around you.**" *Samuel*

"**One who forgets the grading curve and goes out of his or her way to help others**." *Kirk*

"I think the two main attributes that constitute a great BBA is one who not only brings intelligence to the table, but the ability to interact with anyone. The corporate world is not all about grades, but how you interact with clients and coworkers. A BBA who is able to contribute and take command of a team in exercises I think really says a lot about how one will progress from an entry level position. Other great attributes is the ability to always be confident and keep a positive attitude, whether by yourself or around peers/teammates. **It is also this person who is competitive but not to the extent where bridges are being burned. Even though each class is curved, this person is always willing to do what they can to help out others who are in need of assistance.** This is not an exhaustive list, but to me these are very important things that I try to remember myself when on projects and in class." *Ashley*

Jill notes that the perfect BBA is both a "leader and a team player *at the same time."* She goes on to describe how the competitive environment of the business school has hampered her own positive experiences, and she seems to use the "perfect BBA" as an embodiment of how she views the solution to the problem. Kirk echoes Jill's sentiments and specifically describes that the perfect BBA "forgets the grading curve." Ashley notes that the corporate world is "not all about grades" and conjures a perfect BBA who is competitive but not to the extent where bridges are being burned." Ashley's ideal also highlights her own desire to emulate these positive characteristics, "these are very important things that I try to remember myself." In responses to several items throughout the responses, students repeatedly anchor on this balance between individual success and ability and team-orientation and social skills.

"Perfect" study skills, time management, and scholarship. Often, the study skills of ideal BBAs are described in highly specific ways, suggesting that – as expected – the ability to perform in the current role of "student" is central to the idealized BBA identity. For example:

> "A perfect BBA student would be super focused and super competitive. They would stay way ahead on their work, and have a close relationship with their professors. Their drive and determination would be their best qualities. **In addition, by making sure they stayed on top of all of their work (and did not procrastinate) they would have time to have an outside social life.** Being 'perfect' they would have no bad qualities. They would figure out how to make all of their qualities/characteristics work to their advantage." *Curtis*

> "The ""perfect"" BBA student is **organized, motivated, and good with time management.** In addition, he or she is decisive, but able to remain flexible. Of they he or she is a dedicated student with an excitement to learn. **This student would have extremely good social skills and is competitive without being obnoxious about it."** *Hannah*

> "I really do not think that is a necessarily an perfect BBA student. There are certain characteristics that tend to work well within the BBA program. For example, a student who is outgoing and wants to get involved in organizations. The word ""social networking"" is thrown around a lot, but it is definitely important to create lifelong friendships with people. A student needs to be willing to accept the responsibilities that come along with classes, organizations and jobs. **Along the same lines, a student must be able to balance and prioritize their schedule.** On the other extreme they may be too focused and driven that they try and push people out of their way or do not have any other aspects of their life." *Howard*

Curtis, Hannah, and Howard all suggest that time-management skills are integral to enacting the ideal BBA identity. Curtis even suggests that the ideal BBA is "super competitive," while Hannah and Howard call out social skills as important qualities as well. Hannah suggests the perfect student is "competitive without being obnoxious about it" and Howard cautions that the perfect BBA may in fact "try and push people out of the their way." As indicated here, the tension between competitiveness and pro-social behaviors is not always managed by the perfect BBA.

"Perfect" balance of academic and extra-curricular activities. There is a strong sense that students should excel both "inside" the classroom – evidenced by grades and gaining technical knowledge – and "outside" the classroom – in extracurricular activities, student leadership positions, etc. The ideal BBA is able to balance the academic rigors of the program with extracurricular leadership and broader interests in the university setting:

> "**The perfect BBA student is a student who is very involved in her studies and extracurricular activities**. She is always ready to participate in class and not afraid to make mistakes. She seeks out help from both her peers and professors and readily gives help when asked. Her best qualities are her patience, confidence, and organization. Her worst would be not taking time to do things she enjoys, like drawing, or spreading herself too thin." *Katie*

> "**I think the perfect BBA student is one who excels in the BBA program, but still connects to the Bishop college program**. As a member of the BBA program, we are no different than pre-med students or psychology students. Thus the perfect BBA is one who still keeps Griffin connected to Bishop. / A true BBA is dedicated, motivated, hard working, and professional. Yet the worst qualities can be greed and selfishness. The business world is loaded with opportunities of power, wealth, and success. A BBA can easily get caught up and step over everyone around them in an effort to further promote themselves. / Yet a Griffin BBA can easily overcome these undesirable qualities and learn to suppress them so as to really excel in the right, professional way." *Luke*

Luke and Katie both suggest business-class acumen should be balanced with extracurricular or university-wide interests and achievements. This notion of balance between a specialized vs. a broad focus is prevalent in the data and indicates that students struggle with maintaining perspective amidst the rigors of the business school. The physical building, time constraints, and business coursework requirements all contribute to the tendency for students to become isolated once they formally enter the business school; these texts suggest that the recent entry of the new BBA students to the program may allow them to continue to value involvement in the wider academic community as well.

The ideal BBA student functions as an early identity goal

Burke and his colleagues have used the concept of the "identity standard" to describe the particular set of characteristics individuals desire in their own role identities. According to identity control theory (reviewed in Chapter 2), individuals desire interpersonal feedback that indicates the identity standard has been achieved. For example, if a new BBA student desires a "social" student identity, receiving multiple party invitations confirms the identity standard.

Throughout the responses, it appears that students describe the "perfect BBA" in ways that capture their own individual desires for their BBA student identity. That is, the "ideal BBA" may operate as an early goal for the individual's own BBA student identity. Consider Jameson's description of the perfect BBA:

> "He or she is very smart and hard working. They get staright (sic) A's but are also the president of an important club or two. They also receive the best internships and job offers. **They are the person that it seems everyone here is trying to be.**" *Jameson*

Throughout the descriptions of the ideal BBA, it appears that students have a clear sense of the personal characteristics that are desired and valued in the pre-professional context. While few students acknowledge the unattainable nature of this ideal characterization, almost all describe the ideal BBA as one to be admired, and I argue, also emulated – consciously or not. I suggest that students' descriptions of the ideal BBA represent a goal they personally hold for the role. These descriptions tell us something about how the students hope to enact the role themselves. This goal, however, seems impossible to achieve.

The idealized BBA is a better version of myself

In some descriptions of the idealized BBA, students specifically address shortcomings the student has previously admitted in previous responses. In this way, the

"ideal BBA" serves as a highly personal goal – a standard that students recognize they have not yet achieved. For example:

> "**I guess someone like me except they have all the connections too**. Perhaps one who is fluent in multiple languages and can talk to anyone."
> *Allison*

Allison suggests that the perfect BBA is like her but without her perceived deficiencies. Other students characterized the perfect BBA in ways that specifically addressed shortcomings described in previous responses. Earlier in his texts, Alex wrote:

> "I don't think I am like most BBA student because I am at a point where I don't really care. I feel that most BBA students are concentrating on summer internships, getting involved and just doing everything and anything to get out there. As for me, I am just sort of relaxing and letting things run its course. Maybe I'm just not as focused. … I honestly have no idea how I became a BBA and even if I still want to be one. Since High School, I knew I wanted to do something related to psychology and/or business. When I got to Bishop, my freshman year, I started out as a psychology major. I was interested in the way the human mind works and all that is entailed with it. However, somehow along the way, I changed my major to Business and all the courses I took previously seemed irrevelant to what I wanted to do. I worked hard my last two semesters of sophomore year to apply to Griffin. **And now, I am here and I still have no idea what I want to do**."

And here is Alex's description of the perfect BBA:

> "**I think the ""perfect"" BBA student is someone that knows what he/she is doing.** The ideal Griffin BBA is one that is truly interested in business and not just because it is a practical major to find a job for. Their best qualities consist of having the ability to socialize and understanding everything that is the business industry, the politics, the rules, the facts, and basically surviving through that." *Alex*

This tendency to write about the prototypical BBA in a way that addresses one's own perceiving shortcomings or challenges is a theme noted throughout students' discussions of the ideal BBA, and provides evidence that the prototypical BBA identity may be a personal incarnation of an emerging identity standard. If the concept of the prototypical BBA calls to mind qualities I wish I had, then I am, in fact, describing a positive, ideal identity for myself.

An analysis of the most common descriptive words in the texts also provides evidence that students are striving to achieve a lofty identity. The second most common personal characteristic mentioned by students was “motivated” (n=141), following “competitive” (n=187). Trailing “motivated” is “confident” (n=71), further indicating that these new BBA students do not perceive a mastery of the role yet. The fact that they are seemingly “motivated,” however, suggests that they are striving to achieve a clear goal: the idealized BBA identity.

Stress as a result of the ambitious identity standard

If students are ascribing to an identity standard with such high aspirations, how are they managing the experience of not yet living up to the goal? From the identity control perspective, stress is the expected result. In fact, as ICT would predict, stress and anxiety are the two of the most common emotions present in the texts. Ari describes his mixed emotions as he enters the program:

> “Adjectives that would describe how I feel to be a BBA student at Griffin would be, excited and a sense of security to know that I am in a very good place. I also feel a little relived (sic) that I got into the program, as well as **a little nervous and uncertain because getting into Griffin was a real wake up call that I am going to be a real person soon and that scares me.”"** *Ari*

The words “stress,” “anxiety,” “nervous,” and “worry” (n=81) are still not as prevalent in the data set as the positive emotive words students used, “excited,” “proud,” and “happy” (n=143), but their presence is important. The word counts indicate that at least half the emotive words students used describe a stressful, worried state, suggesting that their happiness to have been accepted into the program is tempered by anxiety. The presence of stress and anxiety was very clear in approximately 35% of responses, like these:

> “Being a BBA student at Griffin is often very **stressful** to me.” *Bishop*

> “I would describe my-Griffin-BBA-self as determined, ambitious, passionate, curious, self-motivated and **stressed**.” *Jane*

> "**It is pretty much nervous so far**. I am not used to speak up infront (sic) of class or work as a team yet. But at the same time, it is very new to me and interesting to deal with the real-world matter and cases. *Michelle*

These students are very aware and candid about their experience of stress. Other students describe the environment as stressful or allude to stress and accompanying emotions. Throughout, the sense that the new BBA students perceive their academic environment as stressful is clear. Now, I turn to a discussion of how students manage these tensions. In the following sections, I argue that students engage in impression management work as a large part of their identity formation efforts.

AWARENESS OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT WORK IN THE PRE-PROFESSIONAL ROLE

> "From the first week or two of class, I have noticed something of a BBA socialization. First, get to class on time. Second, grades and giving professors ""what they want"" is top priority with assignments**. Third, image and status is (sic) very important."** *Marlis*

Despite Goffman's suggestion that individuals play social roles largely unknowingly (Collins, 1986), students in this study are very aware that they are performing on a stage. Marlis calls to mind the paparazzi, and other students also suggest a constant sense of being on guard at the business school:

> "While on the steps of Griffin though, I always try to act confident and professional. I am the kind of person who will walk around thinking that **there are cameras on me, evaluating me at all times**." *Ainura*

> "My identity as a BBA student is different from the other parts of who I am because **I cannot let loose, as I do around my friends**. I am very reserved in groups and in class, and this is a part of education - I guess." *Ross*

> "A BBA is goal orientated, passionate, and unrelenting. This fast paced, competitive environment differs from other sections of my life simply **because you are under more scrutiny.** The skills I learn from being a BBA are certainly applicable in all parts of my life, but the rules are often different; what goes with BBA may not go with my Chinese minor students, as well. But in retrospect, I feel to be the same person whereever (sic) I am. Because the skills i (sic) learned are so valued, I learned to use the best of these skills where ever I am." *Turner*

Turner says as a BBA "you are under more scrutiny," Ross "cannot let loose," and Ainura perceives the business school "evaluating me at all times." The data show that pre-professional students perceive a need to behave according to an unwritten script for an audience. As Haas and Shaffer (1982) describe, students in medical school/residency vie to appear credible before credibility actually exists. The students above illustrate new students' early sense that appearance is important. The "scrutiny" and "evaluating" suggest that there is a correct, proper manner of behavior that students hope to be seen performing. Like the medical students in Haas and Shaffir's study, these students do not seem to be particularly interested in learning actual competencies yet; instead, they are focused on promoting the appropriate image.

MECHANISMS OF IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT WORK IN IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND ENACTMENT

How do students craft these pre-credible appearances of credibility? What resources do they use to manage others' impressions of their promise of ability, before the abilities are actually present? These data suggest three primary mechanisms in the business school environment: (1) the role of physical space, (2) dress and clothing, and (3) a critical value of being "professional." Each of these broad concepts will be discussed in more detail below. Overall, I argue that the organization's culture *writ large* provides the raw materials with which students develop images befitting their professional goals. And, like past research has suggested, stress and anxiety result when individuals perceive that the requirements of the public image and the internal identity are not aligned.

The Business School's Sense of Place

Students describe the need to behave differently as BBA students in a way that is clearly related to the physical space of the school. In this way, the physical place functions as an aspect of the organization's culture, socializing new members:

> "My BBA identity is more professional than my other identities. **When I enter the business school building, I put on an attitude of professionalism that I do not have in other areas of my life.**" *Henry*

> "It means that I am somewhat disconnected from the rest of the Bishop academic community. **I feel the BBA community isolates itself from the other academic departments more so than usual**." *Jim*

Henry and Jim both identify the physical location of the school as an indicator of the need to focus on image. Henry "puts on an attitude of professionalism" as soon as he enters the building. Just as Edgerton (1967) described the "cloak of competence," Henry makes clear it is an "attitude" of professionalism; in other words, he does not say he actually *behaves* professionally. Jim suggests that the business school is more isolated than other departments and schools of the university, resulting in his sense that he is "disconnected" from the rest of the academic community.

Aaron shares this sentiment, and he also ties it to the theme of competitiveness discussed earlier in this chapter:

> "**Walking through the Business School I have always felt different than when I am anywhere else on campus**. I have never really been able to explain or put a finger on what the feeling is or what exactly is causing it but it has always been slightly dis-concerning (sic). While I do have many friends within the Business school, I feel that I act differently around BBA's than I do around other students. In general, I feel less welcomed to meet new people in the Business school despite the hype to network and be hyper-interactive**. Overall, I feel my identity in somewhat of a struggle as I teeter between two very different atmospheres of the university**." *Aaron*

Aaron describes the pull to be competitive as a reaction to his sensation of being in the physical environment. Again, there is a suggestion that he is not in control: "I have never been able to explain or put a finger on what the feeling is or what is causing it but it has always been slightly dis-concerning (sic)." Aaron suggests a lack of individual agency as he says, "I teeter between two very different atmospheres of the university."

Students' descriptions of the business school as isolated and different from other parts of campus is commensurate with my own impressions of the physical characteristics.

Visitors to the school would easily note its stature on campus. While not the newest or largest building, its architecture and interior design is markedly different from the liberal arts and science buildings on campus. In contrast to many academic buildings, whose nooks and crannies can contribute to a sense of safety, the business school building is very open and well-lit. The halls are very bright: they are wide, have very high ceilings, and are bordered by floor-to-ceiling windows. Classrooms are all auditorium-style with attached chairs, and the overall interior style is utilitarian and corporate. The building is a U-shape with an internal courtyard not visible from outside the building, contributing to the "isolated" quality noted by Jim, above, but very visible from all floors of the building. The school has its own librarians and library (physically housed within the main campus library), coffee bar and restaurant, study areas, mail room for students, and recreation areas. All extra-curricular activities of the business school are conducted in the building or in the courtyard; speakers are always scheduled in its own auditoriums (even when co-sponsored with other schools and departments). The school's technology also contributes to its insular quality. All business students and faculty are required to use the business school's own email and electronic class management systems, even though the university's system is already available. The expectation to use the business school's email system is so great that students visiting from other areas of the university to take a single class must register for a temporary email account or miss all of their faculty's messages.

Goffman's (1959) earliest writings make note of the "stage" on which individuals perform social roles. Clearly, students identify the stage – the physical school itself – as a central aspect of their formation of the BBA identity, and observational data corroborate students' impressions of the physical space as different and insulated from the rest of the university community.

Dressing like a BBA

In addition to differences between the physical space of the business school and other parts of campus, the clothing worn by students and faculty is also noticeably different. For example, students say:

> "**My identity as a BBA student involves me dressing in business casual much more often than the other part of me does**, but that's pretty much it. I do not bend any of my beliefs to fit the mold of what a BBA student is supposed to be, and I don't think that a conflict between my beliefs and being a BBA student has ever occurred." *Aiden*
>
> "**As a BBA, I tend to dress nicer**." *Walter*
>
> "I feel part of being a BBA is even **dressing the part**, which I have not yet started. " *Eric*
>
> "I heard that typical **BBA students try to look nicer than everybody else**, because its grading system is based on comparison to peers." *Joy*
>
> "At Griffin I try to be more professional than in other areas in my life. For example, **I find walking into a Bishop college class with sweatpants and a t-shirt is no big deal; however, I feel almost embarrassed to walk into a class at Griffin with clothes from the dance class I had just previously**. " *Hope*
>
> "Professional. This requires little explanation: **while many liberal arts majors are going to class in their pajamas, the BBA dons a suit and tie for a special class presentation.** We are taught the subtle but often crucial business etiquette that can mean the difference between success in (sic) failure." *Michael*

Aiden's comparison between himself as a BBA and the other parts of himself boil down to dress. Walter also simply notes "as a BBA, I tend to dress nicer." Joy elaborates by offering a suggestion that the more formal standard of dress is related to the theme of competition between peers. Finally, Hope and Michael tie the business school dress "code" to the concept of professionalism, a theme to be explored in the following section.

As a student myself, I can attest that the context is unique to other parts of campus. As a previous graduate student in the business school and a current student in the sociology

department, I know firsthand that the standard of dress is markedly different in the business school. Just as the students in this study describe the disconnect between the way they usually dress (or have dressed in the past for college) and the way they perceive they are expected to dress in the business school, I have also noticed that I was used to dressing more formally as a student in the business school when I found myself in the sociology department. In fact, my sociology colleagues would comment on my formal dress when I was in sociology classes or meetings in the sociology building. Similarly, students in this study describe that they sense a need to dress more "professionally" in the business school.

Dress and clothing have long been associated with impression management (Goffman, 1959; Stone, 1962). Certainly, Goffman (1959) made use of "costume" in his analysis of social behavior, and scholars since have identified the clothing associated with various roles. In the professional context, however, discussion of clothing and role identity has been confined to the medical field. Since particular pieces of clothing denote status in the medical community, much has been made of the rites of passage and rituals surrounding medical uniforms, colors, jacket length, etc. (Hughes, 1958). In a related vein, Simon (1997) studied the role transitions that students experience as they move from home to college and through various apartments and dorm rooms at school. She found that the use of objects (photographs, pieces of clothing, furnishings) was important in students' perceptions of how their identities shift over time at school. As students reported taking on new identities and losing old identities, so did their keeping, using, and purging objects. The students in this study seem to recognize the objective nature of the BBA attire, its signal of role identity, and while some have not yet adopted the new clothing, others report their dress has changed. Like the use of an object, I argue that students assume more formal clothing styles as their new identities as BBA students solidify.

Students in this study seem to reflect that clothing serves a similar function as a status marker, but in less obvious ways for BBA students than for medical students. There is not a uniform in the business school, of course, nor is there an actual dress code. Yet, students make note of more formal, business attire as a positive status differential. For these new role incumbents, the standard is more often a source of shame than pride at this early point in their BBA careers. As Hope points out, "I feel almost embarrassed to walk into a class at Griffin with clothes from the dance class I had just previously." It seems as if Hope finds herself in inappropriate attire (dance class clothes) when she arrives to her business classes and feels "almost embarrassed." As a new BBA student, she is still taking physical education classes, and she may not have known before her first semester in the business school that she would want time to change between classes. Similarly, Eric shares that he has not yet stepped into the appropriate clothing: I feel part of being a BBA is even dressing the part, which I have not yet started." Students at this stage recognize the role that dress plays in their new identities as BBA students, but some have not yet fully embodied the role's requirements.

BBAs are, Above All, "Professional"

The data are saturated with the concept of "professionalism." Michael, above, stated that "professionalism" "requires little explanation: while many liberal arts majors are going to class in their pajamas, the BBA dons a suit and tie for a special class presentation." While, for Michael being "professional" is primarily about dress, for other students the concept was more complex. Students mention "professional/ism" (n=108) as often as "education/educate" (n= 94) in the texts. Students often do not describe precisely what they mean by "professional," but they do imply meanings.

> "My identity as a BBA student is not so different from who I am in other parts of my life. My social life is perhaps the same as it was at the college. Many of my friends are also BBA students. I also like doing the same things as before I became a BBA. **However, my identity as a BBA student is**

> **different in that I have to focus on appearance and being professional a lot more than I do in my life's other areas."** *Hardy*

> "While I feel I am the same in both parts of my life, **I would say that I hold higher standards of professionalism as a BBA student.** I realize that we are always representing ourselves and the school, and should thusly carry ourselves as such. Generally, I tend to be more relaxed and laid-back if I am at home or away from the GBS, but while at Griffin I try to maintain a certain level of professionalism. Again, this is because **as GBS students we represent something more than just ourselves, and we should act accordingly."** *Lucia*

For Lucia and for Hardy, being professional seems to be required by the BBA role. Lucia explains that it is important to be professional to represent the school well. Students' overwhelming use of the idea of "professionalism" implies something more than formal clothing, although dress is the most common description of "professional." I argue that students use the term "professional" to mean what they see as the embodiment of the institution's culture. In other words, being "professional" is the product of socialization and the identity standard to be attained: being "professional" is achieving the "cloak of competence."

STRESS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF IDENTITY INCONGRUITY

Stress as a Result of Image / Identity Misalignment

As identity control theory (Burke, 1991; Stets and Burke, 2005) predicts, students in this study express anxiety when they perceive that the image required does not fit the individual's personal identity meanings. For some students, the degree of stress expressed is minimal, as Ryan, Shane, and Tyrone illustrate:

> "I watched how all of the students behaved and I figured that my playful personality may not be appropriate. **I wish sometimes that I could just be myself."** *Ryan*

> "**In order to be a BBA student you have to learn how to do things that you do not want to do, and do those things with a smile on your face**. It is all about having a positive attitude and if you are not a positive person **you have to fake it.** The first few weeks of class have been slow, but they are getting better." *Shane*

> "I wouldn't like to say that I had to figure out ""how to be a BBA student."" I'd like to say that I am me, doing what I do, student and BBA are just titles. I will say, however, that the resume building and career fair definitely shoved me into a ""BBA box"" pretty rapidly. There are definitely some things I have to learn, **hopefully not at the expense of who I am**." *Tyrone*

In the above examples, students describe discomfort resulting from the set of expectations and need to focus on image. Ryan says, "I wish sometimes that I could just be myself," Shane perceives he has to "fake it," and Tyrone worries that he will learn to be a BBA "at the expense of who I am." For these students, the anxiety is subtle. For others, it is clearer:

> "Starting in the BBA program, I just went to class and went home. Now, I am definitely more involved in various organizations. **The real question is why I am more involved. If it is to stay competitive within the internship search or job search, then that would be a depressing reality**." *Damian*

> "I pretended that the business school classes were a lot like classes in a business meeting environment. It has been a lot like a business meeting, but not as much as I had though. People are more relaxed and laid-back than I had thought. Also, there's still a lot of pressure from a classroom dynamic, like answering questions in front of all of your peers. **I also have this feeling like I'm being judged whenever I speak in class. That anxiety didn't seem to lessen at all."** *Lionel*

Damian compares his realization that he is involved in activities on campus in order to compete for jobs and internships a "depressing reality." For Lionel, "the anxiety didn't seem to lessen at all" despite several semesters in the business school. Since the vast majority of the sample is new to the school (one semester or less of tenure), there are few students like Lionel in the data set who have been a BBA student longer. None, however, specifically describe a reduction over time in stress and anxiety. Students either do not mention stress and/or anxiety, or they do so and affirm its continued role in the experience of being a BBA student. (Some students do, however, fantasize that the perfect BBA student does not worry about the image-identity disconnect, as will be discussed in the following section.)

This anxiety described by new students and the resulting desire to engage in impression management work has been noted in several studies of new nursing and

medical students (Becker et al, 1961; Davis, 1968; Olesen & Whittaker, 1968; Smith & Kleinman, 1986). Students in this study appear to be describing a yearning to enact a BBA identity that is perceived to be in concert with their overall sense of self, or to be "true to oneself." The subject of "authenticity" in individual's identity has been most thoroughly discussed by philosophers (see Bransen, 1998), but clearly the desire for role identities not to be in conflict with other identities is well established in the social-psychological literature (Katz and Kahn, 1966).

Theoretically, stress is also clearly connected to structural identity work: identity control theory (Burke, 1991; Stets and Burke, 1995) (reviewed in Chapter 2) predicts that when an individual's perceived feedback from others is inconsistent with the individual's internal identity, stress results. The theory suggests that – as a control process – individuals will then attempt to correct the mismatch by either (1) changing their own internal identity standard to fit the expectations of others (the image), or (2) changing behavior to more closely project the desired image. In this context, I have argued that the set of expectations students describe as the "perfect BBA" represents an emerging goal for the identity. In the absence of a more developed, personalized identity standard, students may be relying on the idealized, cultural messages about what it should mean to "be" a BBA student. Students very new to the program seem to be striving to achieve the qualities of the "perfect BBA," much the same as ICT theorizes individuals strive to be seen as the embodiment of their internal identity standard. When the standard is not yet achieved, individuals experience stress. The stress prompts a change in either (1) interpersonal behavior (in this case, impression management work) or (2) the internal identity goal. This chapter has, so far, provided evidence that students work very hard at impression management. Now, we turn to evidence that tenured students may also describe changes to the identity goal.

TENSIONS: PERSONAL IDENTITY AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

The extent to which new professional entrants engage in impression management is well documented in the literature, and scholars have not only noted the behavior in the sociology pre-professoriate itself (Ferrales and Fine, 2006) but some have also taken moral issue with its implications for developing "authentic" professionals. Puddephatt, Kelly, and Adorjan (2006) argue that as a discipline, professional sociologists should encourage the development of the "authentic self" of graduate students rather than reward displays of the "role self" (Goffman, 1959) which is highly attuned to the appropriate image of a "committed, intelligent graduate student." Puddephatt, Kelly, and Adorjan argue that by developing "authentic" scholars, the profession of sociology as a whole will benefit by "maximizing innovation and creativity at the collective level of our discipline" (2).

The tenured undergraduate students in this study seem to instinctively agree that the development of the authentic self is the healthiest outcome as well. For example:

> "The perfect student doesn't have the best resume. Although I would love to have that. **The best BBA student knows what he wants. He doesn't cater his activities to what comprises the full resume.** He is confident that what he is doing and what he is not doing is right. He doesn't join clubs to put something on his resume. **He is sure of himself and what he is doing**."
> *Brady*

The undergraduate business students in this sample seem to recognize the positive potential of reinforcing an "authentic" self at the expense of the – presumably inauthentic – "role self" (Goffman, 1959). Brady, above, emphasizes confidence and a refusal to cater to the expectations of the business school culture. The "perfect" BBA is now one who eschews impression management efforts in favor of behavior exclusively in accordance with individual needs and interests, as the following students – all with additional semesters of tenure – describe:

> “**Most importantly, honest. Honest with himself and with others.** ...**I just feel that a lot of BBA's are fake, trying to fulfill this distorted role.** He should be honestly curious in his studies instead of trying to do what the professor will like. He should do what honestly makes him interested rather than what pays the most money. ... The worst quality of a BBA is acting artificial. **Again, people attempting to be someone who they are not.** I understand that people are learning to fit new roles, but a poor BBA does not do so naturally. He does not ask questions but assumes he knows already and acts like everyone should know already. " *Horacio*

> "I think the perfect BBA student is really non-existent. I say this because I believe that everyone who comes through the business school believes that he or she needs to act, dress, or talk a certain way to fit into the ""Griffin mold."" **I prefer to meet a BBA student who has truly stuck to his or her's ideals and values. I strongly believe that one will get no where in life unless they have the capability of creating relationships and communication with others on a level where they feel comfortable being themselves.** Some ideal traits I would say about being a Griffin student is to have an open mind, be respectful to your peers and professors, and have a strong capability to manage time accurately in order to accomplish your tasks.” *Mitch*

Horacio and Mitch both make clear that students who follow the cultural expectations to “do what the professor will like,” “do…what makes the most money,” “assume(s) he knows everything,” and “needs to act, dress, or talk a certain way” are “fake.” Horacio specifically calls these students “trying to fulfill this distorted role” and Mitch refers to the role as the “Griffin mold.” Notably, all three students are in the small sub-sample of the population with additional semesters of tenure, suggesting that over time, students may eschew the prototypical identity standard in favor of a more nuanced, “authentic” identity standard.

In these descriptions of the “perfect BBA” by tenured students, an answer to the stress and anxiety of not fitting the idealized identity emerges. Rather than “be” the perfect BBA, students exhibit a desire not to care about whether one is or is not fitting the stereotype. And yet, there is little evidence in the majority of the sample – the students with one semester or less of business school complete – that at the early stage of identity formation students are prioritizing their “authentic” self’s interests and behaviors. In fact, there is little evidence in any of the texts – tenured or not – that students describe their own

deviations from the norms so clearly disliked by the three students above. What these students express is a desire to ignore the impression management work that the culture seems to require. They craft the idealized BBA as a student who disregards the pressure to conform, the pressure to pursue activities because they "look good," and the expectations of dress, behavior, or manner of speaking to fit the "Griffin mold."

FORMAL SOCIALIZATION PROCESSES

Clearly, new students to the business program perceive a need to display signals of credibility. From the intangible "professional" characteristics and dress to the "hard-working, motivated" behavior required of BBAs, students communicate a need to project a certain image as a BBA student. Where do students perceive learning these instructions for appropriate behavior and appearance? I expect that they come to understand these expectations through both formal and informal socialization processes. Very few students, however, refer to formal socialization processes when they describe "how" they learned to be a BBA.

The school does invest substantially in formal orientation programs for new BBA students. The year these data were collected (2008), the orientation program was a three-day on-campus program with speakers, large and small group activities, and catered lunches. The following year, the program grew to include an off-campus overnight trip, complete with travel coaches and boxed lunches for the trip to the retreat center. In all years, advisors, administrators, and faculty speak to the students about what it means to succeed in the school. Despite its prominence in the school's programming, however, "orientation" was mentioned by very few (n = 9) students in response to the question, "How did you learn to 'be' a BBA?" For example:

> "I figured out how to ""be"" a BBA student by talking to other friends of mine who started the program early, and also by asking my advisor questions **during BBA orientation**." *John*

> "I figured out how to ""be"" a BBA student **through orientation**. They gave us a checklist of the things we needed to get done by the end of the semester and I have just been following it." *Kathleen*
>
> "I have really enjoyed my first few weeks at the business school. The school has **provided the new students with a lot of orientation materials** and I think I had day to day life ""figured out"" fairly quickly. *Ophelia*

John, Kathleen, and Ophelia describe a clear connection between their sense of what being a BBA student means and the information shared during formal orientation programs. So few students acknowledged the programs, though, that I suspect that the organizational culture functions as a latent resource. Rather than perceive "orientation" to be the source of many of the ideals of the perfect BBA and definitions of success, students instead regard those meanings to be a part of the ethos of the environment. In this way, the organization does in fact provide a rich source of identity meanings, fueling students' attempt impression management, but students take in those meanings less consciously. Katherine describes culture explicitly, but does not mention the orientation program at all:

> "**I sensed the culture of the BBA program and its students by observing life inside and outside of the classroom at Griffin**. For example, I noticed that all students brought name cards to classes and thus realized that I had to remember mine. I also noticed that teachers highly recommended classroom participation nad (sic) thus knew that I had to speak up to excel as a Goizeuta student." *Katherine*

Katherine was the only student in the sample who mentioned – overtly – the concept of organizational culture. (We had not yet studied culture in the class.) Although students seem largely unaware of the formal socialization programs and their influence, the findings suggest that other aspects of culture are salient and visible to students – other students' behaviors, the physical place itself, perceived differences in clothing/dress – all contributing to the cultural resources available to students as they make meaning of the BBA identity.

CONCLUSION

Overall, I have organized the major concepts in this study according to three main areas of inquiry: (1) what social-psychological processes are implicated in students' experiences of identity formation and enactment?, (2) what are the major sources of students' pre-professional identity meanings?, and (3) what are the pre-professional identity meanings reported in the students' responses? In this chapter, I addressed the first question by suggesting that impression management work functions as the mechanism by which students engage in the early stages of pre-professional identity construction and enactment. The findings presented in this chapter closely follow identity control theory in several ways. First, students' perceived incongruities between the self in the new role (BBA student) and other parts of the self result in stress and anxiety. Next, students attempt to manage others' impressions of their performance as a BBA student to better achieve the identity standard. Last, it appears that as students spend more time in the role, they express a desire for the identity standard itself to evolve more closely to fit individual students' idiosyncratic qualities and desires (as opposed to an encapsulation of the cultural script of a perfect BBA student), resulting in a new "authentic BBA" identity standard.

The findings also contribute to the literature on professional socialization. Students do not seem to recognize the role that formal socialization programs play in developing their notions of successful role play, but evidence suggests that they are certainly taking in cultural cues as they form a concept of the ideal self in role. Echoing previous studies' identification of a "cloak of competence," participants in this study also report a strong desire to appear credible ("professional") but make little note of developing actual competencies in their new discipline.

These findings contribute to the existing literature on identity formation in multiple ways. First, this study confirms past work. As discussed in Chapter 3, the degree to which

new professional role occupants engage in impression management work has been theoretically and empirically connected to the environment in which socialization takes place: unclear standards, generalized anxiety, and an overwhelming amount of new material all contribute to new entrants' focus on developing a "cloak of competence" as a mechanism of positively managing others' impressions (Haas & Shaffir, 1995). Likewise, my data also show a positive correlation between these factors – the presence of ambiguous performance standards, students' anxiety, and a challenging work load – and participants' reporting a high degree of impression management activity.

As well, the data in this study support Riley and colleagues' (1969) theory that the higher the perceived role incompatibility, the greater the learning required in a new role. Students are conscious of incompatibility issues between the new role of "BBA student" and their overall sense of self, and the resulting descriptions of their identity formation process also indicate an awareness of what they must learn to be successful in the program. Last, the data provide contemporary empirical evidence of the mechanisms of impression management suggested by past scholars, including evidence of the same dramatulurgical elements suggested by Goffman (1959) to be critical in impression management – the use of physical space (stage) and dress (costume) – and a current iteration of the "cloak of competence" first coined by Edgerton (1967) described by this sample as being "professional."

In addition, the data suggest new contributions to the literature. First, students in this sample seem to be highly aware of the need to manage others' impressions and pursue the "cloak of competence," but self-awareness has not been well documented yet in studies of professional socialization and identity formation. Students in this study also indicate an awareness of the desire to negotiate conflicts between their own personal identities and the perceived requirements of the professional role. While the tensions between professional

image and personal identity have been discussed from a moral standpoint in the sociological socialization literature (Puddephatt, Kelly, and Adorjan, 2006), this study suggests role entrants' awareness of the pull toward "*authentic self*" (Trilling, 1972; Erickson, 1995) in addition to an awareness of the pull toward a desired professional image.

In this chapter, the data make clear that students perceive successful achievement of the role in terms that are ambitious and likely impossible. Their efforts at projecting a successful role identity are apparent, suggesting that they attempt to achieve the new identity largely through impression management work. The expression of stress and anxiety permeates students' reports of their identity formation as who they *are* as a BBA consistently do not fit the idealized standard of who they *should be* as a BBA. Why do students continue to work so hard to achieve the identity? For what reason do they believe the identity to be worthy of the impression management efforts described here? This chapter addressed "how" students attempt to form the identity; the next chapter answers "why" they do so.

CHAPTER 7
PRE-PROFESSIONAL ROLE AS RESOURCE

In the last chapter, I addressed the first of my three main questions in this study, "what social-psychological processes are implicated in students' experiences of identity formation and enactment?," by arguing that impression management work functions as the primary mechanism by which students engage in the early stages of pre-professional identity construction and enactment. In this chapter, I present findings that speak to the two remaining questions: (1) what are the major sources of students' pre-professional identity meanings? and (2) what are the pre-professional identity meanings reported in the students' responses?

Why do students perceive the "BBA student" role to be as personally meaningful as they do? Why do they work so hard at the impression management work and strive to achieve the idealized version of this identity? In this chapter, I argue that they engage in identity work because they perceive the "BBA student" identity to be a highly valuable resource. As discussed in Chapter 2, Baker and Faulkner (1991) suggest that social roles – and specifically, professional roles – can usefully be considered "resources" used by individuals and organizations in pursuit of other ends, such as gaining market share. Few attempts have been made to build on this "role as resource" perspective, however, as a way to understand individuals' experiences of forming and negotiating social roles. In this chapter, I use the role as resource perspective to explain students' conceptions of the new pre-professional role identity. Through the analysis of the students' responses, I extend Baker and Faulkner's original argument that roles function as intangible resources in service of other, desired end goals. Specifically, I apply these ideas to the students' individual experiences of new identity development.

I begin this chapter by first reviewing Baker and Faulkner's role as resource perspective (first introduced in Chapter 2). I then present the findings of this study and demonstrate the instrumental, resource-based meanings of the pre-professional identity. In doing so, I suggest that individuals perceive the pre-professional student identity to be meaningful and worthy of extensive impression management work because they view it as a valuable resource to be used to achieve other valuable outcomes, such as status, financial success, social networking opportunities, and career achievement.

THE ROLE AS RESOURCE PERSPECTIVE

As discussed in Chapter 2, occupational role and identity have been addressed theoretically from multiple angles; even within the field of sociology, the concept of role has been approached from disparate positions: structural, interactionist, and social network theory. Twenty years ago, Baker and Faulkner, (1991) organization scholars working within a sociological tradition, cited this lack of theoretical connection within the field and suggested a synthesis of these major sociological perspectives on role, calling their view the "role as resource" perspective. Using data from the Hollywood film industry, the authors suggested that professional roles (in their study, the roles of producer, director, and screenwriter) function as resources to be used to gain other resources (in this case, the production of films and financial success ["blockbusters"]).

Baker and Faulkner (1991) describe three functions of a role as a resource. First, the primary function of a role is "… a resource to bargain for and gain membership, acceptance, citizenship, and access to resources…[and] is particularly important in a context characterized by flux and turmoil, like Hollywood" (284). Like Hollywood, I suggest that the university setting – from a student perspective – is also a "context characterized by flux and turmoil" and, like Hollywood professionals, college students are also seeking "membership, acceptance, citizenship, and access to resources." To a college student, there may be "flux

and turmoil" inherent in their regularly changing living arrangements, unclear expectations from professors and possibly parents, and constant evaluation of individual performance. College students are often seeking membership and acceptance as they make new friends, join campus organizations and fraternities, and develop political and social views. In this chapter, I argue that the role of "business student" functions as a resource in multiple ways: as an achievement in and of itself, as a signal of status and individual ability, as a means of access to desired people, resources, and opportunities, and as a social identity that confers prestige and belongingness.

Second, the authors suggest a secondary function: as granting "access to a variety of resources. It provides claimants and incumbents with the *means* – cultural, social, and material resources – to pursue their interests" (284, italics original). Data in this study provide evidence that this function of the role is psychologically salient for students: students are very aware that the new role is a promise of access to desired resources, as well as people with access to resources and further opportunities to gain additional resources.

Third, the role as resource perspective also claims that "a role is a resource used to pursue interests and enact [social] positions" (Baker and Faulkner, 1991: 283). In other words, through the positionality of a social role, individuals are able to achieve goals and gain power. This study contributes to the role as resource perspective by extending its application to the process by which individuals seek out roles and develop identities to accompany the role. So far, the perspective has helped explain how currently held roles function for individuals (by granting access to other valued resources) and why, at an organizational and industry level, certain combinations of roles develop and persist. In this chapter, I argue that the role as resource perspective also provides a useful lens with which to view the *process* by which professional roles are chosen and develop into a role identity.

THE PRE-PROFESSIONAL ROLE IDENTITY AS A RESOURCE

Overall, I find that conceptions of what it means to be a "BBA student" consistently center on the three functions of roles identified by Baker and Faulkner (1991): (1) as a way to "bargain for and gain membership, acceptance, citizenship, and access to resources," (284) (2) as a provider of the "means – cultural, social, and material resources – to pursue (other) interests," (284), and (3) as a way to "enact social positions" (283). BBA students describe the BBA identity using all three functions of this perspective: students perceive the "BBA student" identity confers social belonging, access to resources such as faculty and career opportunities, and status.

I argue that these resource-based identity meanings signify the pre-professional identity as a resource to be exploited for future gain through three mechanisms: (1) as an indicator of individual **achievement** and/or **skill/ability**, (2) as **access** to other desired people, resources, and opportunities, and (3) as a **social identity** that indicates notions of superiority. The sense of the BBA student role as a resource pervades the data: 76% of students include at least one of these resource-based identity meanings.

As well, the texts of BBA students' role formation provides evidence that the concept of "resources" is present at each stage of the process: (1) at the time students decide to pursue the role, **personal resources** (family, interests, etc.) **are noted and used** in service of attaining the role of BBA student; (2) as the role is first taken on as a new BBA student, **peers are used as resources** in order to learn the role; and (3) as the role is used to further future career goals, students **compete with peers for the desired resources** promised by the role (jobs, prestige, status in class, etc.).

I show below, using students' perspectives on and descriptions of the BBA role, that the central theme in meanings of the "BBA student" identity is a resource-based view. By identifying the three resource-based mechanisms of the role and the three stages at which

resources are central to the process of identity formation, I build on Baker and Faulkner's original view of roles as resources. Scholars (Smith-Doerr, 2010; Bielby, 2009; Hadida, 2009; Dowd, 2004; Zaheer & Soda, 2009; Khaire, 2010) have made the role as resource argument at the organization level of analysis; by applying the view to the individual experience of role identity development, I apply the perspective to the micro level of analysis.

To do so, I first review the primary meanings of the BBA student identity. First, I will suggest that the obvious definitions of what it means to be a business student do not begin to cover the breadth of meanings students attribute to the role. In other words, being a BBA student seems to have little to do with taking business classes, studying business disciplines, etc. Next, the data show that the meanings students ascribe to their role as a "BBA student" follow the resource-based perspective that roles are conduits of other valued qualities and opportunities. Then, I explore the three mechanisms of resources in identity formation and argue that resources are an inherent part of the process of taking on a new identity.

BBA: Not Simply a "Bachelor's of Business Administration"

Students' rich, personally significant descriptions of what it means to be a "BBA student" were immediately apparent in the data. The majority of participants regard the role-identity of "BBA student" as more than its obvious, straightforward meaning of "a student who is enrolled in business classes" or a "student pursuing the Bachelor's of Business Administration." In fact, only 13% of respondents indicated that being a BBA student meant something about what classes they took or what course of study they had chosen. On the other hand, 87% of respondents did not mention – at all – that being a BBA student meant taking business coursework, choosing a career in business, or the like. To

the vast majority, "being a BBA student" means something other than how students taking business coursework are defined.

Although symbolic interactionists conceive of identity meanings as "those which persons *attribute to themselves* in a role" (Reitzes & Mutran, 1994, italics added), as discussed in Chapter 2, the majority of social psychologists assume identity meanings to be highly associated with the behaviors enacted from the role identity (Simon, 1997). For example, "spousal identity" is often operationalized as a set of household responsibilities and behaviors an individual engages in, not as the set of meanings the individual attributes to himself in the role of spouse. By asking students to define for themselves what it means to them to be a "BBA student," this study reinforces the notion that identity meanings are personal and may or may not be associated with the observable behaviors associated with being a student. In fact, as 87% of responses indicated, what it means to be a "BBA student" seems to have little to do with attending class, studying business topics, and the like.

While the vast majority of students identify with "BBA student" in ways that extend beyond a simple academic definition, a small number of students do report that being a BBA student means pursuing a Bachelor's of Business Administration:

> "Choosing to pursue an undergraduate BBA seems to me like the route of a student who wants to accelerate his acclimation with the practical aspect of working in a business environment. The vast majority of undergraduate students will have to grasp the concepts of finance, accounting, organization and management, and other business essentials in whichever field they choose to endeavor. Our (my) choice to study these areas in-depth shows a desire to understand the intricacies of business and how we can use the knowledge advantageously in various careers."
> *Joel*

> "It means that when I graduate I will have a bachelor's degree in business administration. I'm not trying to be smart by saying so, but it's the truth. I plan on concentrating in accounting and continuing on to get my CPA because I've been told the Accounting BBA sets you up nicely to do that without having to spend additional years in school. I like accounting and in my opinion, if you're going to do it, you might as well go all the way."
> *Andrew*

For students like Joel and Andrew, being a BBA student may be thought of in a very straightforward manner: a BBA student is a Bishop student who has decided to pursue business as a profession and is taking business classes, therefore, pursuing a B.B.A. degree. Even of these 13% of respondents, most also indicated other meanings as well. For example, Brandi states:

> "It means that I am surrounded by lots of other business school students who are interested in pursuing a career in marketing, management, finance, accounting, or some other related field."

Brandi's response demonstrates a concept of the BBA student role as highly connected to the vocational interests of students ("marketing, management, finance, accounting…") and it also indicates the role as a group boundary ("I am surrounded by lots of other business school students…"). Overall, it is clear from the small minority of "simple-role" meanings that students conceptualize the social position of BBA student as something more than a simple, straightforward academic role.

The pre-professional role identity is personally meaningful

In the other 87% of responses, students describe what the BBA identity means to their sense of self. Students' descriptions of the role are personal, meaningful, and indicate an importance in their overall personal identities. Although no item asked respondents explicitly about the importance of the identity in their lives, students reported that this identity is an important part of their sense of self. For example:

> "**Being a BBA student at Griffin means a lot to me**. First of all it means that I am part of of (sic) the most elite schools in America. Next, being part of the business school means that I am receiving an unbelievable education from some of the most successful and knowledgeable people in their respective fields. Some adjectives I would use to describe myself are competitive and qualified." *Dora*

> "Being a BBA student influences the way I react to situations, how I think of myself, and also how I think of others. **It is an integral part of me**." *Talia*

> "Personally, **it means a lot to me to be a BBA student**. I know a lot of my friends who applied and didn't get in, so I am expecially (sic) appreciative to

even be here. Also, I am particularly thankful because the African-American population at Griffin is so small, so to be one of the few blacks in the undergraduate program means so much. I try so hard to encourage other undergraduates like myselfe (sic) (freshmen and sophomores) to work hard in their pre-req classes so they will have a better chance to get in. I just wish I saw more faces like mine in my classes. It also makes me work just that much harder to be at the top, because I want to represent myself and my ""demographic"" well. If I had to pick a few adjectives to describe who I am as a BBA, I would choose thankful, excited, determined, and driven. " *Matthew*

"**Being a BBA student at Griffin is important to me** because it has created a small campus culture, at a large University like BISHOP. Having a small group of peers allows me to create a tight knit network. I would describe my self as energetic, passionate, and creative." *James*

"**To be a BBA student at Griffin was a big deal to me**. First of all it is one of the best BBA programs in the country. Secondly, Griffin offers me more opportunities than the University does. They have their own career management center, and a close net group of alumni that I hope to network with. As a Griffin BBA I would describe myself as hard-working, ambitious, generous, and innovative." *Daniel*

"I would say it means a great deal to me. There is a sense of accomplishment, of pride, and of anticipation for what this life choice will mean for me down the road. As a Griffin BBA student I am motivated, determined, innovative, and eager." *Victor*

These students describe the BBA student role as a central part of themselves, and without any such prompts in the questionnaire, they repeatedly report the role identity as important. Matthew says, "It means a lot to me to be a BBA student," and he goes on to share that he sees his role as a BBA student in terms of his race and position of privilege. For Victor, "it means a great deal to me," and for Talia, "it is an integral part of me."

The 87% of respondents who described the identity in ways other than as a straightforward academic role typically imbue the meanings of the role with personal significance. Only one student who suggested the BBA student role was not especially personally meaningful:

"Personally, being a BBA student at Griffen (sic) **doesn't carry more significance that being a student of Bishop University, or moreover a student in general.** What then does being a student mean to me? It means

> that I am driven to grow myself - my knowledge and abilities - to maximize my potential in both my personal life and career. The adjectives I would use to describe myself include driven, eager, intelligent, and mindful." *Patrick*

Patrick's response – that being a BBA student is not especially meaningful – provides sharp contrast to the many others who suggest the opposite: the role of BBA student at the Griffin Business School is important to students' sense of self and is a meaningful identity.

The BBA identity is a liminal state

Further evidence that the BBA role identity takes on individual, personal meanings for students is found in students' stories of how they became a BBA student.
From a strictly definitional standpoint, being a "BBA student" is a role with a clear "start" (acceptance and enrollment) and an obvious "end" (graduation or transfer). After students formally apply to the business school, they are either accepted or rejected. Upon graduation, they are no longer a "BBA student" but instead a "BBA." The story of how one becomes a BBA student, then, should rationally end with the student's acceptance into the program.

Despite this straightforward perspective on what it means to be a BBA student (and for how long), students demonstrate remarkable variation in the extent to which they see their role as fixed or transient. In analyzing the students' responses it became clear that a minority of students see the identity as a fixed academic role, as described above. For these students, the story of "how I became a BBA student" ends when the student was accepted into the program. Most, however, do not see the story ending, despite the fact that they are in fact, BBA students, which means that the story of how they became a BBA has supposedly ended. For example, Heather writes:

> "How does it end? Well that part of the story has yet to be written. I would love to see myself graduate Griffin and move into a career in Banking. After two years of that position, possibly move into the buy-side, like a private equity firm. Granted this ""golden ticket"" opportunity has come under some scrutiny lately as PE shops are no longer realizing the great returns they once used to. " *Heather*

> "How does it end? I've got no idea. It might end with me getting a job in restaurant management or with a baseball team, both of which I would like to do. It might end up with me taking a job with a consulting firm, which I am not entirely sure if I want to do. Either way, it's not going to get any easier." *Carlos*

Students imply that their identity as a BBA student – again – means more than the academic position of pursuing the BBA degree. Despite the expectation that "how I became a BBA student" *always* would end with "I was accepted and I am now a BBA student," evidence consistently suggests that students have imbued the BBA student role with other sets of meanings. To Heather, being a BBA student seems to be a liminal state she occupies until she becomes settled in a finance career. For her, the story of how she became a BBA is really a story of how she will become a professional in the private equity industry. Carlos' story of becoming a BBA also implies that it marks the beginning of a path to his eventual career, and it is one that is already difficult and "it's not going to get any easier."

BBA Student Identity Meanings as Resources

Three survey items provide data on students' perceptions of what the BBA student role means. In all three items, the major themes in identity meanings suggest that the role identity is primarily a mechanism through which other pursuits can be achieved. In this section, I review the primary identity meanings found in student responses to the following three items:

> **(Item 1)** *What does it mean to you - personally - to be a BBA student at Griffin? What adjectives would you use to describe who you are as a Griffin BBA?*
>
> **(Item 8)** *For everyone, how do you think you, as a BBA student, are different from most BBA students? Or, do you think you are mostly like other BBAs? How?*
>
> **(Item 9)** *Now, describe the "perfect" BBA student. What is she or he like? What are their best qualities? Their worst? What makes the ideal Griffin BBA?*

Item 1 answers the broad question, "Who am I as a BBA?" and responses elicited from it are presented first. Data from item 8 were coded implicitly: in order to differentiate oneself from others in the same role-identity, implicit assumptions are made about that role identity revealing stereotypes of others in the role-identity. Responses to item 9 indicate students' perceptions of the ideal BBA student. Examples will be used throughout the discussion to make the analyses clear.

The BBA role as an achievement and an indicator of skill and abilities

One third of the students display a tremendous sense of pride in their accomplishment of being a BBA student. Although I was a BBA student myself at a University with a separate application process to the undergraduate business school, I did not expect the extent to which students at this university would describe the role of "BBA student" as an achievement in and of itself. From the resource perspective, claiming the role as an achievement suggests the role is valuable, difficult to attain, signals success to others, and alludes to the promise of other rewards: all descriptions of a personal resource. Thirty percent of respondents describe that the role of BBA students means to them that they have already achieved something important:

> "To be a BBA student gives me a sense of pride. **I am very honored to be a student in the business school**, and knowing that my first two years of hard work in college paid off in my admission to the school really makes me happy." *Karen*
>
> "Being a BBA student at Griffin is **an accomplishment I am very proud of.** This title to me means that I will graduate with a high caliber of understanding concepts in addition to having a strong drive, determination to succeed, ability to think critically and communicate my opinions." *Tim*
>
> "It means that **I have excelled in the college**, to be able to become a part of one of the leading business schools in the country." *Cathryn*

Karen, Tim, and Cathryn's responses to the first questionnaire item, "what does it mean to you – personally – to be a BBA student at Griffin?" indicate clearly what many students shared: being a BBA at Griffin is an accomplishment for which I am proud. Tim and Cathryn

both make clear that they view the achievement as access to other desired rewards. For Tim, being a BBA student means that he gain personal qualities – "strong drive, determination to succeed, ability to think critically and communicate my opinions" – presumably all by virtue of his role as a BBA student. Cathryn's pride that she has "become part of one of the leading business schools in the country" suggests the social belonging and status markers the identity brings students.

It is perhaps important to note that this undergraduate business program is currently highly ranked among undergraduate business programs in the United States by U.S. News and World Report and discourse on campus reflects the importance of the rankings and national prominence. In the BBA student orientation program, the Dean of this undergraduate business program repeatedly highlights the superiority of the school. Students are congratulated numerous times after acceptance into the program: in letters of acceptance, by advisors, by Deans of the business school and its programs, and by upperclassmen. Cultural rhetoric in a professional school extolling the virtues of the vocation is a common task of socialization; extensive congratulations to students for being "students" – before actual entry into the profession – has not been empirically documented. The rhetoric in this sample is clear: students are told they are the best of the best at one of the best schools in the country. Once the organizational culture is accounted for, then, it is not at all surprising that new students already feel a sense of success upon entering the program.

The BBA role provides access to people, opportunities, and resources

Throughout the data, the BBA identity is described as a tangible resource to be exploited, an opportunity to be taken advantage of, or a tool to be used in 32% of responses. These students describe that being a BBA student provides access to instrumental resources, such as access to faculty, opportunities for networking with professionals and

colleagues, practical knowledge that will lead to future success, and a generalized sense of "opportunity."

> "To be a BBA student it means that I have access to many **opportunities and resources** to help me be successful in whatever career I choose." *Sarah*
>
> "To me it means having **an innumerable amount of resources, including professors, books, and actual opportunities, available**; furthermore, because there are much fewer BBA students than there are undergradutate (sic) students in the college, it means much **more personalized attention and opportunities to have strong one on one relationships with your professors and other staff**. I would say that as a BBA student I am definately (sic) priviledged (sic) because of the great amount of opportunites (sic) that Griffin offers each of its students. " *Henry*

Like the movie executives in Baker and Faulkner's (1991) study, students in this population are capitalizing on their role as a resource to be used in pursuit of other achievements. Sarah sees the role as "access to many opportunities and resources" to help her in "whatever career" she chooses. Henry is more precise: the role of BBA student affords him an "innumerable amount of resources, including professors, books, and actual opportunities." Henry also notes that he competes with fewer students for "more personalized attention and opportunities to have strong one-on-one relationships with professors and other staff." Henry notes the opportunity to interact closely with faculty twice; for him, the BBA student role provides access to valuable people. Students are taking a decidedly future-oriented and instrumental perspective on what it means to be a BBA: it means I have access to superior faculty, opportunities, jobs, and money, all of which I can use to pursue my life goals.

The BBA role is a desired, superior social identity

Organization memberships, and arguably the resulting social identities, are clearly used as resources for people in all life stages: country clubs, political organizations, alumni clubs, and certainly educational groups are all groups with clear instrumental advantages for members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1986). Students in this study indicate a variety of the

rewards available to them as members of this school: some rewards are quite intangible, such as status and prestige, while others seem more obviously instrumental, such as proximity to other intelligent students.

Specifically, participants make meaning of their role as a BBA student in terms of the belongingness to the business school community. Twenty-three percent of respondents refer to the role as membership in the business school, access to social networking, and/or pride in the quality of their colleagues.

> "Being a BBA student at Griffin means that I am **part of a tight knit community that encourages success.** I surround myself with students with similiar (sic) goals and aspirations. One the one side, I feel fortunate to get such a great eduation (sic) and focus on business. Almost, if not more important, I am proud to be part of such a community becuase (sic) of it is welcoming, prestigious, encouraging and meticulous in its pursuit of perfection. I fit into the Griffin BBA program by being a hardworking, perpared (sic) student who is willing to take on the challenges of school. I have the motivation needed to succeed (sic) in the program and excel in my concentration." *Bill*

> "Being a BBA at Griffin means to me that I am one of few truly determined individuals; getting into Griffin is a highly competitive process, and being admitted must mean **that there is something special about me and my classmates.**" *Leslie*

> "When I tell others that I am in the Business school, I often notice a slight change in people's expressions. Being a BBA student obviously means more to people, and definitely to me, than just the courses I will take during my time at Bishop. A BBA student is a huge part of what I would classify as my identity. **The extra B in my degree also represents the border between the College students and Business students, a line much more definitive than most would be comfortable to admit.** Yes, I am a bit cocky about being a BBA student. Though I do not see a BBA degree as superior to a BS or BA, I definitely attribute certain qualities to being a BBA. I am a typical BBA student stereotype because I am aggressive, ambitious, a bit anal, and definitely competitive. I dislike talking about problems, and prefer to trying to solve the problem instead. When confronted about that tendency, my first thought is to justify my actions by my belief that," that is what BBA students do. They fix things." *Tyrone*

Tyrone, Leslie, and Bill describe what being a BBA means largely in terms of their belonging to the Griffin community. Tyrone and Leslie also suggest that as a group, BBA students are superior to other students at the university. Leslie says, "there is something special about

me and my classmates," and Dan is more pointed about the boundary between students in the college and BBA students, "a line much more definitive than most would be comfortable to admit." He recognizes his arrogance: "Yes, I am a bit cocky about being a BBA student," and his statement represents the pride of association reported by almost a quarter of the study sample (n = 40).

KEY RESOURCES USED DURING ROLE IDENTITY FORMATION AND ENACTMENT

Identity formation may be characterized in three steps: (1) a role identity is chosen or assumed by the individual (whether consciously or not); (2) the individual first takes on the role and begins to enact it; and (3) the individual "settles" into the role and develops, maintains, or negotiates the sense of self in the role (for a more thorough description, see Chapter 3: Concepts).

In this study, the notion of resources became clearly important in each of these broad stages. (1) In the first stage, from the students' accounts familial resources and personal resources appear to have influenced the decision to take on the role of BBA student in **role exploration**; (2) in the second stage, **role enactment**, peers and the school's culture are used as a resource to learn the role of BBA student; and (3) in the third stage, **role mastery**, competition for the resources promised by the role fuels identity negotiation work. Data reported here come primarily from four survey items:

> ***(Item 3)*** *How did you become a BBA? If you were to tell me the story of how you became a BBA student at Griffin, how does it go? Where would it start?*
>
> ***(Item 4)*** *Then what happened next? How does it end?*
>
> ***(Item 6)*** *How has who you are as a BBA changed over time? How were you different when you first started at Griffin than you are now? If you just started the program, skip to the next question.*
>
> ***(Item 7)*** *If you just started the BBA program this semester, how did you figure out how to "be" a BBA student? What have the first few weeks of class been like for you?*

(1) Resources in Role Exploration

Familial Resources

Within students' descriptions of their vocational choice process, it appears that social influence played a key role in the choice to pursue the study of business. The most common social resource identified by students that influenced their decision to commit to the BBA is the family of origin – parents and siblings – mentioned by 18% of the sample.

For students who do not describe active decision-making (absence of Eriksonian crisis, reviewed in Chapter 3), familial influence seems to be the major decision-making strategy, through socialization processes (direct influence, modeling, and reflected appraisals). For example, Tommy explains:

> "Two weeks before my sophomore year **my parents say to me ""maybe you should major as a BBA after all""** in spite of telling me my whole life that I did not need a BBA to land a good job after college**. I thought to myself, ""Why not? I have to do something,""** so I completely changed my schedule to cover all the pre-requisites for admission. " *Tommy*

Tommy's recollects that his parents suggestion that he major in business seemed like a good idea to him and he "completely changed my schedule." For Tommy, it seems his parents were the driving force in his decision and directly influenced his choice to major in business. Brady and Matt, below, both offer a different take on parental influence:

> "I became a BBA student at Griffin because ever since I was in high school I wanted to be involved with business**. My dad works in business as a sales manager and I was always interested in what he did.** This sparked my interest for the field and from their (sic) I chose to pursue my dream." *Brady*

> "I don't know if there is one specific story that made me want to be a BBA student. It's not like all of a sudden a light bulb went off in my head or anything like that. **Both of my parents work in business, one in consulting and one in sales, so I guess that is where I got my first exposure**." *Matt*

Matt and Brady share that they were exposed to business through the work of their parents. They do not suggest that their parents attempted to influence them, but observing their

parents' work lives – through the socialization process of modeling – encouraged each to pursue the path to a business career. Other students also describe parents as an inspiration for the BBA track; here, the discourse suggests a higher degree of consciousness:

> "I'm an exchange student, so for me it may be kind of different how I became a BBA. My parents own some companies in my country, **and I have always dream (sic) of being the one in charge of the business.** That desire drove me to apply for the BBA in 2005." *Paulo*

> "I'd have to say that my dad was a major influecing (sic) factor in my decision to pursue a BBA degree. He definetly (sic) helped push me in the direction that it would be a great opportunity and something that I should take advantage of if I was going to Bishop. My dad is the CEO of a company and seeing him have to work and travel all the time could have turned me off to wanting to pursue a job in the business world, but it had the opposite effect. **Seeing him be so passionate about his work and hearing him tell stories of all his experiences really made me want to be part of the business network**." *Carolina*

> "My story would start with my parents. They both have MBA's and actually met in Business School. From there, my story would follow me through middle and high school where I was always good at math, was a leader in the classroom and elsewhere. **I knew I wanted to do something like my father's job**." *Mitchell*

Paulo, Carolina, and Mitchell all share stories of inspiration: Paulo is motivated to take over his family's businesses, Carolina is drawn to the passion she sees in her father's work, and Mitchell wants to follow in his father's footsteps. These data reinforce findings by Collier and Morgan (2008) that first-generation college students – who do not have the familial resource of previous college attendance – perform the role of college student with less "role mastery" than students from families with college attendance. The authors argue that differences in role performance among students in the two groups can be explained using the role as resource perspective; data in this study suggest a similar pattern. The college students with college-educated parents in Collier's and Morgan's study (2008) indicated more proficiency in basic study skills and classroom behavior. The students above have all witnessed their college-educated parents succeed in business, and they are able to draw on their parents' experiences as a guide for their own career paths.

Some students (n = 16) report a more specific resource provided by parents: reflected appraisals. In this case, reflected appraisals are the students' perceptions of parents' perceptions of the student's qualities. Theoretically, individuals use reflected appraisals as a resource in crafting one's own idea of one's identity (Cooley, 1902; Felson, 1985; Mead, 1934). Clearly, parents provide some of the very first social appraisals of a child's talents and abilities, and understandably, parents seem to exert a great deal of influence over students' own assessments of their likelihood to succeed in a given vocational track.

> "**My mom would probably say that it started when I was very young and starting to potty train**. She claims that the only reward I wanted when I went to the bathroom was money, unlike my sister who wanted toys. I find this interesting since I have always been interested in finance." *Frederick*
>
> "Freshman year. / Finished all my GERs (or most) because I had no idea what I wanted to do. **I told my mother I wanted to do business, and she said the corporate world would not suit me.** I said fine and decided to be a Pediatrician, because she said I was good with children. Halfway through freshman orientation, i knew i would not be going into medicine. / Sophmore year. / **I told my mother again that i would double major in economics and educational studies, again with the intention of doing business sometime, somewhere. Again she said she did not think my personality was suited towards the business world, as I was more like she.** (my mother was a corporate lawyer). I decided to only do Educational studies, which I was amazing at, but still knew that I would get bored eventually. / Junior year. / I was well on my way to finishing my educational studies major with honours, when my mother died (during mid- Sophmore year actually). Come Fall of my junior year, i decided to take my first business school class. I got my first B at Bishop. I really wanted to learn the material, so that multiple choice questions wouldn't stump me (as they always had). I wanted the challenge. i was upset that up until this point I really was not challenged enough at college. So I applied to the B-school and took more courses. I only got an A in one (the only one whose exam was not multiple choice based)....Well i got in, and **like my mother suspected, I am not drawn to a life of crunching numbers behind a desk**, but I want the knowledge for whatever it is I do in the future." *Allison*

Frederick, above, traces his interest in finance to his mother's observation that he wanted money at a very early age. For Allison, the influence of her mother's reflected appraisals is less direct. Despite her interest in business, she comes to recognize that her mother has

been right all along – she is not "drawn to a life of crunching numbers." Allison seems resigned at this point to her business degree anyway, "I want the knowledge for whatever I do in the future," but she recognizes the value in her mother's reflections of her interests and talents. As the above students' descriptions show, I argue that parents' reflected appraisals of their student provide a tool – a resource – the students may use to make career decisions.

There is also some indication that parents' tangible resources impact the development of BBA student identities. A few students (n = 8) describe their relative lack of family resources, like Randall:

> "I have had nothing handed to me over the years. **I'm not a prep-school kid from New england (sic) who has everything bought and paid for.** I'm a public school kid from metro Atlanta and works for what I get. Working my way through school has taught me time management, and most certainly the value of a dollar. Most importantly, I know what it means to earn my way. Expect nothing and work hard. The rest will work its way out for the best."
> *Randall*

Randall does not mention his family resources explicitly, but it is understood that the "prep-school kid from New England" has parents making it possible for "everything bought and paid for." Randall still uses this state as a resource when he makes sense of its implications for his career path: "Working my way through school has taught me time management, and most certainly the value of a dollar."

Although students recall the influence of the family in the choice to pursue the BBA identity, once they enter the program, influence shifts from the family of origin to peers. Parents, especially, provide important information in the form of reflected appraisals that drive the choice to study business (or, in cases of absence of crisis, they make the suggestion that students pursue). Once students begin to learn "how to be a BBA," they naturally turn to others in the role: fellow BBA students (to be discussed later in this chapter).

Self-Concept as a Resource

There is also evidence that student's own sense of themselves – their own perceptions of natural talents, abilities, and interests – provide a resource used in the choice to pursue the BBA degree. More common than mentions of family, students' observations of their own abilities is found in 24% of responses. For example:

> "Biology has always been my true passion in life. Upon coming to Bishop, I realized that I would only use 10% of my potential if I have my head in a petrie dish for the rest of my life. **I thrive on relationships, people, and what make both tick. I knew I could succeed in the business world.** I am also very attached to where I live and Biology isn't a feasible field of study for my area. Business would allow me to live where I was raised."
> *Christopher*
>
> "I've always been good at math and love organization and order. **And the BBA program gives me a chance to express this side of myself.** I do, however, enjoy expectation, order, and logic being turned on its head in the theater (as controlled an environment as it ultimately is!)." *Nora*

Christopher indicates a nuanced evaluation of his interests ("Biology has always been my true passion in life"), talents ("I thrive on relationships, people, and what make both tick"), and future needs ("Biology isn't a feasible field of study for my area"). Nora expresses delight that she has the opportunity as a BBA student to "express" her ability for math and attraction to organization and order. Given the preponderance of research and theory on the self-concept and career (Super, 1963), many students (n = 41) describe a sense of their own abilities in reflections on the decision to pursue the BBA degree.

Cost/Benefit Analysis

Evidence suggests that a rational rewards / cost approach functions as a process by which students make decisions about their vocational choice and develop the vocational identity. Sixteen percent of students refer to a process of comparing relative benefits to costs, such as:

> "Personally, I came in with 44 credits before my freshman year at Bishop. **Just looking at my many options, the BBA program seemed appropriate as I only had to complete one pre-requisite, Financial Accounting,**

> **before I applied.** So I did and did okay in the class. However, I have thoroughly enjoyed my classes at Griffin to the extent of switching from potentially the medical field to the finance industry. **However if the story of me starting out as a BBA could be summed up in one word, it (would) be practicality**." *Hardy*

Hardy sums up his experience of becoming a BBA in one word: "practicality." This very practical nature of cost-to-benefit evaluations makes sense within a resource perspective, and it further reinforces the instrumental nature of the BBA identity.

(2) Peers as Resources in Role Enactment

As students describe initially learning the BBA student role, attention is largely focused on peer behavior. In this way, peers serve as a tool – or a resource – to be used as new role incumbents learn how to function in the BBA student role in the second stage of identity formation. As we shall see, however, in the last stage, peers are often viewed as competition for the resources promised by the role.

Once students choose the path to the BBA degree, they seem to turn from their families and their own personal sense of their individual skills and abilities, and instead begin to focus on peers' behaviors to understand the role of BBA student and become further socialized into the role. When asked, *: How did you figure out how to "be" a BBA student? What have the first few weeks of class been like for you?*, students commonly (44%) describe observing peers:

> "By **watching what my peers do**, I can easily observe what a BBA ""does."" *J.R.*
>
> "The first few weeks have been less stressful than I had imagined. **I have friends that have helped me understand what it means to be a BBA** student. I feel like it has become much more achievable since being accepted into the program this past summer." *Michelle*
>
> "I figured out how to ""be"" a BBA student from **comments of other BBA students.** During my first two years at Bishop I was constantly trying to learn as much as I could about students' opinions of the BBA program. From their comments, I learned that I have to be motivated, driven, and an active participant in class to do well. The first few weeks of class has been pretty easy for me. I've had a lot of reading, though, and the actual amount of

written work is beginning to increase. I think my classes will definitely get tougher in the next week or so." *Luke*

"I am still learning how to ""be"" a BBA student. **I am figuring out how to be a BBA student by observing the people around me; some who have been a BBA for a while.** For the first couple class lectures, I did not participate much as I was just taking in the new environment. But as the semester progresses, I find myself actively participating and being engaged in the classroom environment. " *Jefferson*

"**I figured out how to be a BBA student through my friends.** They told me that the most important thing is to get involved in the clubs and organizations affliated (sic) with Griffin. I think the most important part about being a BBA student at Griffin is to take advantage of the community and networks set up by the school and to really learn and gain from those experiences." *Davis*

"I haven't quite figured out the ""BBA Student"" as of yet. **I try to follow the flow of my peers**, however, it is difficult to decipher what the BBA entails. I have peers who are also art majors, dance majors, or still premed. Their way of acting and interacting with others differs from person. " *Carolyn*

"**I knew how to be a BBA student by comparing myself to others**. People who I had seen as sophomores at Oxford (where I spent my Freshman and Sophomore years) that went on to the B-School really dictated how I needed to work. That is, I saw them working hard and I knew in order to succeed I, too, had to follow their path towards success. The first few weeks of class have been great, and I am really, really enjoying my classes. I find all of them to be focusing on topics that relate to the career(s) I would like later in life." *Nikki*

The students above all point clearly to peers as the primary source of information about how to be a BBA student. Peers, then, serve as role models for how to enact the BBA identity in daily interaction. Modeling (Bandura, 1977) is the social process by which individuals look to others in a new context and mimic behavior when occupying an unfamiliar role. In the texts, respondents describe modeling behaviors by "follow(ing) the flow of my peers" and "observing those around me." The mechanisms by which peers serve as resources in this stage of the process – as student first take on the new identity – are straightforward. New students like J.R. say they are "watching what my peers do," Michelle has found that "friends help me understand" what being a BBA means, and some, like Luke, have been collecting information from peers for years: "During my first two years at Bishop

I was constantly trying to learn as much as I could about students' opinions of the BBA program." As Nikki describes, comparing oneself to others also provides important information: "People who I had seen as sophomores at Oxford…that went on to the B-School really dictated how I needed to work." Nikki's text foreshadows the change in students' use of peers as they move through the stages of identity formation. As students gain a more confident sense of who they are as BBA students, they also begin to compete with peers for the promised resources the role affords.

(3) Competing for Resources in Role Mastery

As previously described, in the third stage of identity formation, peers move from a position of value – as a resource – to become a threat. As students master what it means to be a BBA student, they report competitive feelings toward the peers they originally turned to for guidance. As students learn what it means to "be" a BBA, they quickly learn that it means competing with one another for resources: admission to the school, the highest grades in each class, attention from professors, and finally, desired jobs after graduation.

This finding is consistent with Baker and Faukner's (1991) claim that as resources, roles are the conduit through which actors achieve social positions. In other words, the role provides *access* to positions but does not provide the position *itself*:

> Whether a role is considered to be static and stable, like a script, or something that is made and remade (Turner 1985), a role is usually thought to be enacted from a fixed pre-existing position (e.g. Linton 1936, p. 113-14). We reverse this process, arguing that roles are used to *create* positions and their relationships (i.e. social structures) (1991: 283-84).

Patterns in student responses support this view and provide evidence that actors are aware of the need – after achieving the desired role – to further compete for social position. The notion of competitiveness is a pervasive theme in the data. It first becomes apparent in the identity meanings, as students describe what sets BBAs apart from others. In this way, social comparisons seem to fuel group identification. Similar data are also

presented earlier in this chapter, to illustrate the social identity meanings of the identity. For example, Tiffany compares BBA students with students in the college:

> "BBA students at Griffin seem to be a little **more driven, motivated, and thus successful** than others around the college. Personally, the adjectives hard-working and successful come to mind. " *Tiffany*

> "I feel that there are **more people at the business school would are more driven than those from the regular Bishop college (mianly (sic) due to the competitive environment of the business school).** Again, I feel we are more goal oriented than others of our age. I wouldn't call us mature, but maybe more serious in some aspects." *Edward*

> "I learned to "be" an BBA student most by observing the other people I knew in the BBA program**. Going to clubs, or BBA events, I saw a lot of very driven and ambitious people. Naturally, I identified this quality to be "BBA."** Had I gone to a college event, and saw that these qualities are strong in the college as well, I would attribute these qualities to the College as well. The first few weeks of classes have been similar to what I have been exposed to the last two years in the College**. If I carefully think about it, the major difference is a mental viewpoint, and not that much of an actual one.**" *Janet*

As the examples above indicate, students perceive BBA students in qualitatively different ways than other students in the college. Tiffany and Edward both use the trait "driven" and all allude to a propensity for success: Edward attributes the difference to the "competitive environment of the business school," while Janet admits that "the major difference is a mental viewpoint, and not much of an actual one." Despite Janet's suggestion that the differences are "mental," nearly all students report some differences between BBA students and College students.

Clearly, the BBA identity is a social identity for many students, and its meaning is not only related to the *content* of the undergraduate program but also the perceived *positive/superior characteristics* of its students: BBAs are more driven, ambitious, more future-oriented, professional, on-top of what needs to be done, motivated, and therefore, more successful at landing jobs and higher salaries. The perception of BBA students' future orientation, for example, is illustrated in the following texts:

> "…**business students seem to know what they want out of college. They graduate with higher average salaries, and get jobs at better rates.** Compared to other Bishop students or other kids my age, I would say I am working harder, but also have a clearer path laid out for me to follow. *Jimmy*
>
> "I feel that as BBA students we are slightly more career-path oriented. Many students in the college, studying anything from Anthropology to Womens Studies, still haven't quite decided what course they want to take after college. **I think that, generally speaking, BBA students have a better sense of their plans for the next 3-5 years and further. In general I would say that BBA students are more future oriented in the sense that we all think fairly far ahead in our lives, as opposed to simply living in the present.** An example of this is the fact that we are all already looking into significant summer internships, networking, jobs, etc. by the age of 18-20. " *Nikki*
>
> "In comparison to other kids at Bishop, I believe that **we are more ""professional"" and more ""on top"" of what needs to be done in order to accomplish things in the future.** Especially in terms of finding, selecting, and going about a career path." *Kristy*

Kristy, Jimmy, and Nikki all describe BBAs' tendency to think strategically about their future goals. Kristy says BBAs are "'on top' of what needs to be done in order to accomplish things in the future," Nikki says that "we all think fairly far ahead in our lives, as opposed to simply living in the present," and Jimmy believes having a "career path laid out for me" results in "higher average salaries" and "jobs at better rates."

Although peers are clearly used as a source of role-relevant social information and appropriate behavior, they are also regarded as threats to one's own status in the school and as competition for scarce resources. As described previously, the undergraduate BBA program includes an application process whereby less than half of applicants are awarded admission each semester. Admission to the role, therefore, is the first scarce resource at play. Furthermore, once admitted, all classes in the business school are graded according to an enforced distribution of letter grades, requiring that no more than 35% of students in required courses receive an A or A-. The highest grades, then, also function as a scarce resource in this environment. For a population of students with an average pre-BBA GPA of

3.8, facing those statistics is daunting, and the reality of the competition between students is highly salient at the beginning of the term:

> **“**I feel like **I am constantly competing with my classmates** for jobs, participation in some classes, and trying to find the best group for group assignments.” *David*
>
> “I think I am not yet comfortable with my identity as a BBA student yet. I don't feel like I belong and I feel out of place sometimes. **When I am in a business class, I think I am more competitive as a student than I would like to be**.” *Tracey*
>
> "The first few weeks of classes have been pretty interesting and intense. **By observing students in the classrooms and outside whether dealing with extracurricular activities or just out of class there is alot of ""competition"".** So, to ""be"" a BBA student, I feel that you have to have the strength and ability to compete with other students because they have that mentality and if you don't, you lose. " *Jonathan*
>
> "**While in the classroom, I compete with my peers for that golden ""A**,"" which is generally reserved for the top 30%-40%. Outside of school, I would most likely not be competing with my peers -- or as cognizant of their success and goals. I always look one step ahead, so naturally would be comparing myself with those one above me, then with those at the same level. " *Martin*

As the students above describe, peers are a clear source of competitive sentiments. David is “constantly competing” while Tracey notes that she is “more competitive as a student than she would like to be.” Jonathan notes that “you lose” if you don’t have the “strength and ability to compete with other students.” And Martin suggests that the environment is causing him to compete with peers in a way he would not normally do.

How do students manage the new, competitive environment? The competitiveness is described as a source of stress by some students and as an incentive to work harder for others. This tension makes sense given a resource-based perspective. For some individuals, striving to attain additional resources is exciting and motivating, while for others the achievement orientation is stressful. Stress pervades the data, as previously discussed, but the other side of the coin is also easy to see. Consider the following students’ descriptions of what the competitive nature of the program does for their sense of motivation:

> "**Being ""ahead of the game"" is what constantly motivates me** to do the extra work, study the extra hour, and devote less time to night life." *Chip*

> "I decided to enter Griffin early, and enrolled midway through my sophomore year. While it was tough, especially **competing against seasoned juniors and seniors**, I found it challenging and **this motivated me to work even harder**." *Elizabeth*

> "As a BBA student, there are many demands for me to act accordingly. I am, in a sense, **pressured by the diligence of the other BBA students to do all of my work to the fullest extent as possible**." *Roger*

> "The BBA side of me is much more professional and driven than the other parts of me. Normally I am very easy-going and even borderline lazy; however, once I enter into a business classroom or seminar, **I become very focused and determined to be the best. I think part of the reason for this is that there is such a competitive nature in the business school** where in order to be successful and land a big-time job, you must be willing to work harder and smarter than those around you." *Timothy*

These students recognize the need to compete, but they use the cut-throat nature of the program as an incentive to work as hard as they can. The competitiveness of the school context is clearly implicated in students' use of social comparisons in identity work: to successfully compete in an aggressive environment, it is important to know where one stands among others. First, peers are used as models for behavior, and the modeling extends to competitive behavior. Peers are perceived both positively – as a tool to help learn how to be a BBA and as a source of positive notions of group superiority – and negatively, as a threat to one's own attainment of desired role-related rewards.

How do students manage the push and pull of comparison to other students? Over time, students with additional tenure (over one semester in the program) report that they reduce the extent to which they socially compare:

> "I always have my eye on the goal. **I can sometimes be a bit competitive, but I also really know how to laugh at myself.** I think that sometimes people either get too caught up in the competition or their own egos, and I really try to stay grounded and real so that I never lose who I am to myself. I also love working with other people, and I find that some of my fellow students dont (sic) really enjoy that as much." *Sam*

> "I was used to things coming easy to me and to being at the top end of my classes, so being classified as ""middle"" or ""average"" was hard for me, and i felt like I wasn't good enough and that I wasn't going to be successful**. The program felt too competitive, and I felt like by not being classified as the top 15% of the class meant i was failing in some way**." *Richard*

> "When I came into the program last spring I had the same attitude I do now, only I was more open to the culture of the BBA program. **Now I know that I no longer need to feel that competitive angst** about whether my resume looks as good as the next person." *Maggie*

Although the number of students indicating a reduction in competitive behavior was low (n = 5), all were students with additional tenure as BBA students. Like the shift in idealized BBA towards a more "authentic" student, noted in the last chapter, these data suggest that over time, students' may reduce the level of competitive behavior first seen as necessary to survival.

Overall, using peers as a resource plays a key role in students' formation of the BBA identity. First, by providing shared social identity meanings and serving as a guidepost for appropriate behavior, comparing oneself to others helps to make sense of the new identity. Eventually, students also navigate rivalry between classmates by using the competitive environment as a motivator to work harder or by eventually determining that the competition is not as important as once thought.

CONCLUSION

The results show that pre-professional identity is almost entirely instrumental in nature, providing strong support for the role-as-resource theory posited by Baker and Faulker (1991). Students' practical, results-driven focus on the identity as a means by which opportunities are realized, network contacts are made, and resources are available to be used makes clear the concept of the role as a tool to be used for individual gain.

Four resource-based functions of the role identity emerge from student responses: (1) an achievement indicating individual skills and abilities, (2) access to people,

opportunities, and other desired resources, (3) a superior social identity, and (4) a status symbol. I extend Baker and Faulkner's (1991) original perspective by demonstrating the individual-level use of a pre-professional role as a resource. In addition, I find that the notion of resources is present at multiple stages of role identity formation: as students first choose the role to be attained (using familial and personal resources and rationalizing using an instrumental cost-benefit approach), as they first encounter the role and its requirements (using peers as a resource for role-relevant behavior and norms), and finally, as the role is fully enacted and performed (competing with peers for the promised resources of the role).

Baker and Faulkner (1991) introduced role as resource as a way to better understand the divisions of labor in culture production. Here, I extend this view by applying their work to the process by which individuals construct and enact pre-professional identities. Respondents in my study consider resources in multiple ways: as a way to understand how they first choose the role to be attained, as the mechanism by which they learn how to perform in the role, and as the essential characteristic of the role itself. The pre-professional role itself is viewed as a resource to be achieved, mastered, competed with others for, and used in service of other, future goals and desires.

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, although the study of identity has a long history and much is known about how identities are negotiated and used in social interaction, the specific ways in which new identities are assumed and personalized has hardly been empirically addressed. Ibarra (1999) notes that the topic of identity construction is often implied by theories, but it is not their main focus.

The main focus of this project was the construction of pre-professional identity in students new to an undergraduate business degree program. By analyzing texts written in response to a series of questions about identity, I sought to more clearly understand the experience of individuals confronting a new role identity and make it their own. In this final chapter, I first summarize the main findings of the study using these three main areas of inquiry. Then, I discuss concepts I expected to be significant in the analysis that did not prove to be present. Next, I offer several theoretical implications of the work. Finally, I address key limitations of this approach and suggest future directions for research.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

Empirical evidence suggests that in the first few weeks, the new pre-professional role identity is formed largely through socialization processes and enacted primarily through impression management. The core socialization process of modeling is implicated as students describe peers' influence in their identity meanings. The extent of students' impression management work was noteworthy. First, students perceive a clear disconnect between their identities as BBA students and other aspects of who they are, suggesting that the BBA role is not yet fully embraced by the individuals. Second, students report a high degree of awareness of their impression management efforts and can describe them specifically (notably, without prompts in the questionnaire to do so). In reports of the impression management work, students point to three essential mechanisms: the physical

space of the school, the expectation of more formal clothing, and the need to be seen as "professional." Last, data elicited from tenured students indicate that, over time, students may come to minimize the degree to which they focus on impression management as they begin to idealize the "authentic BBA" who does not cater behavior to fit the "Griffin mold."

Why do students work to enact the pre-professional identity through impression management efforts? Students appear to engage in significant impression efforts because they view the BBA student role primarily as a resource to be used in pursuit of future goals. In other words, the BBA student identity is highly valued because it is perceived as an access point for other, desired rewards, and opportunities. Access to faculty and staff, the social network of current students and alumni, and internships and jobs after graduation are all mentioned as the rewards attributed to successful enactment of the BBA identity. Furthermore, the identity functions as a symbol, signaling an elite membership in the Griffin community and an indicator of other positive traits and personal qualities.

Results indicate that the BBA student identity is personally meaningful to students and is described largely in terms *other than* its academic definition. Only 13% of respondents suggested that the BBA student identity meant something about what classes they took, what vocational field they were planning to enter, or what degree they would earn upon graduation.

In addition, descriptions of the idealized BBA identity were framed largely as ambitious resolutions to the tensions inherent in the daily experience of the BBA students: balancing coursework and extracurricular activities, social and competitive behaviors, and pursuing a narrow focus on business studies vs. maintaining a broader intellectual perspective.

Surprises in Data Analyses

In Chapter 4, I framed the empirical study in terms of the broad literatures reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. Although many concepts from those literatures were in fact represented in the student responses, there were several factors I expected but that did not emerge in the data analyses.

Gender

Although I paid close attention to gender throughout analysis, I did not find patterns of identity formation or enactment processes differing by gender. Likewise, I did not find differences in identity meanings between male students and female students. Previous literature (reviewed in Chapters 3 and 4) shows that gender plays a key role in individuals' vocational choice and behavior; separating the respondents by gender, however, did not suggest key differences between male and female descriptions of identity formation, and gender did not appear as a separate concept in the texts either.

Given the strong empirical evidence that gender matters in pre-professional identity formation, I believe that these (non)results are likely a direct result of using the classroom exercise as my data collection instrument. I did not specifically ask about gender in the questionnaire, and because it was a text-based survey instrument, I did not have the opportunity to use follow-up questions either. In addition, it is possible that age of the sample played a role as well. Undergraduate students may not be as concerned with work-family issues, etc. as older professionals would be, and therefore notions of gender do not inform identity processes at this stage as they may at later career stages. Further research in this domain should be designed to allow for analysis of the effects of gender on this aspect of vocational behavior.

Eriksonian Crisis and Commitment

The questionnaire did not ask specifically about either commitment to the identity or crisis in choosing the identity, so it was ultimately not possible to analyze the data for the presence or absence of crisis and commitment. Although it could be argued that all students in the study are displaying evidence of commitment to the identity (because they are all behaviorally committed by virtue of enrollment in business courses), no question asked specifically about commitment and thus it is impossible to gauge the extent of students' commitment to the BBA role. For example, a student who is currently enrolled as a BBA student may in fact plan to change majors soon.

Similarly, although almost 50% of students (n = 80) described some form of decision-making in their texts of vocation choice (signaling Eriksonian crisis), no item asked about exploration/active decision-making/crisis so I can not assume that the number who did not overtly mention these concepts did not in fact experience it. Even still, crisis did not appear to be influencing the process of forming the BBA student identity. In other words, for the responses that could be coded as "presence of crisis," no patterns emerged.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Operationalization of Identity Meanings

Following the symbolic interactionist perspective on identity, this study reinforces the need to measure identity meanings as participants themselves perceive them (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Simon, 1997). Participants reported meanings associated with the identity that signal status ("I am part of one of the most elite schools in America"), personal meaningfulness ("It is an integral part of me"), a source of motivation to represent well one's racial group ("It also makes me work that much harder to be at the top, because I want to represent my 'demographic' well"), social belongingness ("Having a small group of peers allows me to create a tight knit network"), and a source of pride ("There is a sense of

accomplishment, pride, and of anticipation for what this life choice will mean for me down the road.")

Impression Management and Identity Formation

Essentially, the study confirms existing theory in impression management work (Mortimer and Simmons, 1978; Snow and Anderson, 1987; Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann, 2006). Specifically, establishing the *perception* of credibility is more important at early stages of the identity formation process than developing actual credibility in the discipline. Further, this study confirms the importance of the sense of physical space and dress in managing others' impressions of the new role holder. The data also support the expectation of ICT that when a role identity is not perceived as compatible with the overall sense of self, stress and anxiety accompany the process of identity negotiation (Stets and Burke, 2005; Burke, 1991; 2000).

This study extends existing work on impression management by demonstrating that the process of impression management efforts begins very early for professional workers: within weeks of taking on the new identity, a significant level of cognitive energy is directed at projecting an appropriate image of success. Also, evidence from the data of tenured students indicates that over time, new role incumbents may lessen the degree to which they perceive they must fit the cultural expectations of the role. Instead, a sense of the evolved BBA as true to his or her own interests and personality traits – rather than fitting to the idealized BBA student – emerges.

Pre-Professional Role Identity as Resource

The chief implication for the role as resource perspective first argued by Baker and Faulkner (1991) is a new application to the micro level of analysis. Citations since publication follow two main paths at the macro and meso level of organizational analysis – implications for the film industry itself and for patterns in social networking behavior – but

some recent citations suggest interest in promise of the "role-as-resource" concept for occupational identity (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). This study is one of the first to apply the concept specifically to the way in which individuals take on and use a professional role-based identity for future gains.

Specifically, individuals view the pre-professional identity as primarily a "resource" to be capitalized on in two ways. First, the function is instrumental and practical: the role gives students access to faculty, colleagues, social network, educational resources, knowledge, skills, etc. that students intend to capitalize on to achieve future goals. The role identity, then, is viewed as an opportunity with which to access limited resources. Second, the role functions as a status symbol, marking the student as "one of the best." In this way, the role marks a status differential and provides tangible evidence of achievement.

In addition, the resource perspective adds a new lens with which to view processes of vocational choice. First, resources in the form of parental influence and self-awareness play a key role in determining students' vocational path. Second, peers serve as resources as new entrants first begin to learn what a BBA "does" and begin to engage in impression management efforts. Third, as students master the role, resources play a new role: the identity itself is viewed primarily as a resource that can "buy" other, future rewards, and peers are re-cast as competitors for the promised rewards. The critical part these variables play in vocational behavior is well documented – parents and individual traits/personality play in vocational choice, peers as role models, and the role-identity as a resource to be capitalized upon – but the key variables have not been conceptualized as resources before. By casting the process in terms of resources to be used or gained, characterizing pre-professional identity formation takes a decidedly rational turn.

Implications for the Socialization Literature

In the professional socialization literature, scholars argue that there is an "often overlooked relationship between identity change and socialization" (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, 2006). This research follows others (Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufman, 2006) by focusing not just on what an organization does to socialize its members, but also what individuals do to create an identity as a member of the organization. Data show that key socialization processes function at various stages of students' professional identity development: at the outset, parental influence and modeling influence students' vocational choice, and at later stages students use peers to model, socially compare, and provide reflected appraisals as they form their "BBA student" identities. Overall, this study shows that individuals manage their new identities largely in terms of impression management efforts so that perceived scarce resources can be capitalized on at the appropriate times. Despite my perspective of the individual as an intentional, agentic actor, however, it is also notable that the sample as whole produced such similar notions of what it means to be a "BBA student." This conformity is evidence of proficient socializing on the part of the organization, and yet, students report little awareness of the formal socialization programs known to be a key element of the students' introduction to the organization.

As well, theorists rely heavily on Bandura's concept of modeling to explain much of how socialization occurs, but new organization members do more than use others' behaviors as a guide. In an organization with limited resources (and most organizations have limited resources), individuals also quickly learn to *compete* as they are learning the appropriate role behaviors. This duality – using peers as both mentors and as a threat – has not yet been documented in empirical studies of professional socialization.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

Lack of Longitudinal Data

Despite my theoretical position that the process of identity formation occurs over time, the data I relied on in this study were not longitudinal. I intended to study the *process* of identity construction, but the data were instead snapshots of students' positions in the early stages of the process. The key differences between the majority of the sample (new students) and students with additional tenure suggest that changes do in fact occur over time. As well, given the introductory nature of the course, the number of students with additional tenure was limited. Follow-up research conducted at key points of transition in the process of negotiating the BBA identity would be valuable.

Questionnaire Format

In a similar way, the format of the data collection methodology – an online questionnaire – prevented me from asking follow-up questions of participants, or allowing the instrument to evolve as some concepts began to appear more important. Furthermore, the questionnaire was not originally written as an empirical research tool, but as a classroom exercise. Therefore, questions that may have been critical from a research perspective but that have proven to be unsuccessful in the business classroom environment, e.g. regarding the influence of gender on pre-professional identity, were excluded. As a result, several key variables, like gender, are absent from the analysis. In future research, an interview format would allow the researcher to use a les structured approach to questioning and potentially allow for these unexamined areas to be explored.

Confounded Pre-Professional and Organizational Identities

The questionnaire may have confounded the pre-professional role identity – the focus of this study – with organizational identity. The key items asked respondents to comment on their identities as "Griffin BBA students," which may have called to mind both

attributes of "BBA students" in general as well as members of the Griffin organization. To correct this limitation, future research could tease apart this relationship in two ways: first, by carefully eliciting students' beliefs about "BBA student" only, and second, by conducting similar studies at multiple institutions.

The above-described limitation of confounded identities may also suggest a new avenue in which to apply the results here: that of organizational identification. "Organizational identification" describes the degree to which individual members self-identify with the organizations to which they belong (Cheney, 1983; Asforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Pratt, 2000). The extent to which my study participants identify with the business school itself (as "Griffin" students) would influence how they conceive of their pre-professional identities in general (as "BBA students"). Future research aimed at understanding the interplay between professional role identification and individual organizational identification would contribute to our theoretical understanding of each.

As well, since the process of identity formation is ongoing, addition personal identities may be unintentionally confounded in this study. Hughes (1956) argued that as medical students learned about how to be doctors, they also learned about themselves as individuals. I would suggest the same is true here; as students learn about how to "be" a BBA student, they learn about who they are as leaders, team players, and workers. If this is true, then I am potentially confounding the "BBA student" social role identity with larger, more ego-based ideas about one's identity. Future research conducted in similar pre-professional academic programs, such as nursing, pre-med, or pre-law, could provide a comparison to this population and help to dissect the various identities.

Student Population

The student population may be less than ideal. Becker et al. argued that "students do not take on a professional role while they are students" (1961: 420) and I agree. Becker, however, was referring to the difference between a medical student and a doctor. The distinction between BBA student and employee of a business organization may be less dramatic, since there are fewer barriers between the undergraduate business student and entry-level professional roles.

Also, a student population is by definition housed in a "socializing organization" (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978), which implies certain processes that may or may not be as prevalent outside the professional school context. For example, while members of a socializing organization, individuals are frequently not expected to perform the actual functions of the role to which they are presumably being socialized. As undergraduate business students, the participants of this study are not in a position to make business decisions or manage employees, for example. In this study, however, the chief problem inherent in this fact - the tendency of students to be "passive and have little motivation to learn" (Mortimer & Simmons 1978: 434) – is not as likely, given the highly competitive environment. Nevertheless, it is clear that the stakes for successful performance are not the same as they are for individuals in working professional roles. Therefore, it is important to clearly define this study as one exploring "pre-professional" identity formation and enactment rather than one studying "professional" identity.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Narrative Analysis

In addition to future work intended to specify the role of gender and the influence of Eriksonian crisis and commitment in patterns of identity formation and enactment,

narrative analysis would be a potential next step in this research. Making use of the narratives in this dataset would follow the well-established theoretical position that stories help individuals make meaning of their lives and identities (Somers, 1994). In responses to the survey items 3 and 4 ("Tell me the story of how you became a BBA…"), narrative elements such as plot progression (e.g. progressive / regressive / stable), word choice ("I," "me," "us," "we"), form, and rhetorical analysis could be coded and used to understand the close connection between narratives and identity.

Narrative progression (how the plot unfolds over time) has been demonstrated to illustrate the emotional experience of taking on the new identity (Spence, 1982). For example, progressive narratives often indicate a "happy ending" while regressive narratives suggest reminiscing. The use of pronouns (I, me, we, us) is theoretically linked to processes of identity (Mead, 1934) and may reveal underlying conceptions of self, peers, and the organization as separate or united social units. Narrative form – the story told as a comedy, romance, tragedy, etc. – may indicate particular aspects of identity formation as past research has suggested (Murray, 1989). Rhetorical analysis (Feldman et al., 2004) is the process by which implicit logics are made explicit to uncover underlying assumptions of the storyteller. By coding the data for narrative elements (i.e. use of pronouns, story progression, implicit logics), potential correlations between these narrative elements and conceptual categories would be revealed. Given the increasing interest in narratives as a source of psychological data, these steps would be a ripe direction for future research on pre-professional identity formation.

Extending Identity Theory

This research aimed to more clearly understand the processes by which individuals develop a new role identity. By using the pre-professional role as a context, the data showed that (1) early efforts at identity construction are primarily characterized by

impression management work and (2) the role-as-resource perspective describes students' conceptualizations of the pre-professional identity and informs the processes they use to develop the identity.

In order to extend identity theory in a substantive way, however, these findings must be generalizeable to other role-based identities. Thus, future research should examine whether the processes described here apply to other roles, such as spousal identity, parental identity, or post-collegiate professional identity. The heavily resource-based tenor of the pre-professional identity may or may not be replicated in other life roles. Thus, future studies should aim to examine the extent to which roles function as resources in contexts where resources are not as culturally salient: for example, do new mothers use their role as a resource? Similarly, impression management may or may not be key to early identity formation on different life roles. Future work could begin to tease apart the relationship between the degree of impression management and identity development by examining these processes outside the professional arena. For example, do individuals entering a spousal or parental role for the first time describe the need to manage others' impressions as readily as the BBA students did? Juxtaposing the identity development work undertaken in the vocational context with new studies of the family context may yield rich sources of comparisons. By seeking new contexts in which to study the process of identity development and building on the findings of this study, interesting new avenues in identity theory may emerge.

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