

2017

The Effects of Power on the Processing of Identity Threat

Matthew Facciani
University of South Carolina

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Facciani, M.(2017). *The Effects of Power on the Processing of Identity Threat*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/4428>

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.

THE EFFECTS OF POWER ON THE PROCESSING OF IDENTITY THREAT

by

Matthew Facciani

Bachelor of Arts
Westminster College, 2011

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in

Sociology

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2017

Accepted by:

Matthew Brashears, Director of Thesis

Laura Brashears, Reader

Andrea Henderson, Reader

Barry Markovsky, Reader

Cheryl L. Addy, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

© Copyright by Matthew Facciani, 2017
All Rights Reserved.

ABSTRACT

Identity theory provides a useful foundation for understanding how social factors influence the acceptance of evidence. This is because identity theory provides a framework of how we process information from other people depending on what social positions we occupy. The current study explored how the perception of power impacts the processing of an identity threat with college student participants (N=217). High power was predicted to decrease acceptance of identity-threatening information, and low power was predicted to increase acceptance of identity-threatening information. However, the study yielded non-significant effects of power on the acceptance of identity-threatening information. Results did show that individuals were more likely to accept identity-threatening information when they felt secure about their career prospects within their chosen major. Future research may be able parse out how exogenous social variables impact the processing of identity threats.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Theory Background.....	3
Chapter 3: Methods.....	13
Chapter 4: Results	16
Chapter 5: Discussion	21
References.....	25
Appendix A: Consent Form	30
Appendix B: Experiment Questions	32
Appendix C: Experiment Primes	33
Appendix D: Identity Threat.....	34
Appendix E: Relevant Definitions	35

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics for student identity prominence and power	16
Table 4.2 Factor analysis results on acceptance of evidence questions.....	18
Table 4.3 Descriptive Statistics for power's effect on acceptance of evidence	18
Table 4.4 Descriptive Statistics for college major's effect on acceptance of evidence	20

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Identity Control Model.....	9
Figure 2.2 Adding Power Into The Identity Control Model.....	12
Figure 2.3 Diagrammed Propositions	12

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Can social factors impact how likely individuals are to accept evidence? Humans are social creatures, interacting with many groups on a routine basis. These social interactions provide us with identities, which are linked to a set of beliefs about how we should enact those identities. that help in navigating an uncertain and chaotic world. Because identities provide a framework for making sense of our environments, they can be psychologically and socially adaptive. Our identities can help us understand our worlds so when an individual is exposed to information that conflicts with their identity, they may become threatened and even reject the information, even if it is supported by strong evidence (Nyhan and Reifler 2010). This occurs because individuals are psychologically motivated to avoid any mismatch between information from the environment and their identities (Zanna and Cooper 1976). Because avoiding these mismatches can prevent psychological discomfort, the generally adaptive processes from identities can become inappropriate by biasing our information processing with more routinized responses. Research has shown that exogenous variables, such as thinking about positive values, can impact how people respond to identity-threatening information (Sherman and Cohen 2006; Sherman 2013). However, little is known about how power impacts the processing of identity threats. Power has been shown to reduce our attention to other perspectives (Galinsky et al 2006). Identity theory involves considering other perspectives to formulate our own identity (Felson 1985). Because both power and

identity theory involve consider the perspectives of others, we have reason to believe that power should affect identity threats. Thus, the current study seeks to find out if feeling powerful, and subsequently paying less attention to other perspectives, would make individuals less concerned with identity-threatening information.

CHAPTER 2

THEORY BACKGROUND

Power

The concept of social power has been studied extensively in sociology (Boulding 2011). Theorists such as Emerson (1962) have argued that power is heavily influenced by structural location because power is generated by an individual's dependency on another individual to whom they are tied. The present study adopts Weber's (1914) definition of power which is the ability to control another's resources. Power is an interesting social-psychological concept because structural power can impact people's behavior. A seminal study by Kipnis (1972) found that those with structural power are more likely to attempt to influence others and think less of the performance of less powerful individuals. Consequent studies revealed how structural power can also increase positive affect, increase attention to rewards, and increase automatic cognition (see Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson 2003 for a review).

In many instances, it may be unnecessary for a person to actually have structural power as their behavior will be altered similarly by merely believing themselves to have power (Anderson and Galinsky 2006; Chen and Lee-Chai 2001; Galiksnky et al. 2003). Priming provides a way to activate the psychological properties of power through a task, and one way it can be achieved is by asking the participant to recall a time when they had power over an individual. For example, when Anderson and Galinsky (2006) had

participants recall a time they felt powerful, those participants were more likely to draw an “E” in a self-oriented position on their forehead instead of in a position oriented for other people to read. Chen and Lee-Chai (2001) found when participants with an exchange relationship orientation were power primed through semantic cues (i.e. sitting in a professor’s chair), they were more likely to behave in self-interested ways. Thus, while primes do not create power, they nevertheless induce a comparable mental state in the individual useful for certain applications”.¹

Experimental work has shown that priming power creates less concern for social consequences (Galinsky et al. 2003), resulting in less of a need to pay attention to other people’s perspectives (Galinsky et al 2006), including expert opinions (Tost, Gino, and Larrick 2012). Priming power also motivates people to focus on information that’s consistent with their existing knowledge (Fischer et al 2011), resist persuading messages (Brinol et al 2007), and rely more on mental shortcuts through automatic social cognition (Keltner Gruenfeld and Anderson 2003; Fiske 1993). Conversely, people who have low power have greater concern for social consequences, engage in more controlled analytic thinking, and want to consider other people’s perspectives (Galinsky et al. 2003; Fiske 1993). The power prime developed by Galinsky and colleagues (2003) has been found to produce reliable and robust effects and has been used extensively in social psychology experiments since its inception.

This brief review demonstrates that structural power has been empirically shown to influence attitudes and ultimately behavior. Broadly, individuals with power tend to be

¹ We make the assumption that feeling powerful from a prime, and having structural power, are interchangeable for this study.

less likely to be concerned with the perspectives of others and their social consequences are not perceived as threatening. Because power impacts how we attend to the perspectives of others, it would be useful to connect this evidence with other theories that involve attending to other individuals. Identity theory is one such research area that involves attending to the perspectives of others through reflected appraisals. Thus, we believe it would be important to analyze how power and identity theory intersect in order to better understand what social factors can impact how people respond to their environments.

Identity Theory

To understand how identity theory can intersect with structural power, we will briefly review the relevant aspects of identity theory. Identity theorists have differentiated between three different types of identities: role, person, and social; the current study will be using the framework of the role identity. The role identity originated from the work of McCall and Simmons (1978, p. 65) and is defined as one's "imaginative view of himself as he likes to think of himself being and acting as an occupant" of a certain role. The "role" in role identities derives from the "cultural expectations tied to social positions in the social structure that actors try to meet" (Burke and Stets 2009, p.39). These roles involve a cluster of values, duties, rights, and obligations associated with a particular identity and are enacted through our behavior (Burke and Stets 2009). Importantly, these role identities have idiosyncratic dimensions, as different actors holding the same identity may attach different meanings to their identity (McCall and Simmons 1978). For example, if a professor takes on the meaning of "protector of students" for their professor identity, then they may behave differently than a different professor that does not hold

this idiosyncratic dimension (Burke and Stets 2009). However, the two different professors may both share the role of caring about academic research. How identities help us navigate and behave in our environment depends on their salience and prominence.

A prominent identity is simply one that is subjectively important to a person (Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker 2014; Ervin and Stryker 2001). Individuals can rank various identities in terms of importance in a prominence hierarchy. On the other hand, identity salience is defined as the “probabilities of each of the various identities within it being brought into play in a given situation” (Stryker and Serpe 1982, p.206), which can be referred to the set of all identities in a hierarchy as well. Thus, salience is defined in terms of the behavioral output from the identity and prominence is defined in regards to cognition. Prominence can be thought of as relating to one’s “ideal self” whereas salience can be thought of as relating to one’s “situational self” (Burke and Stets 2009). For example, one can have a prominent guitarist identity that is personally meaningful, but their barista identity becomes salient while they are in the situation of working at a coffee shop. This individual will enact their barista identity while they are at work, but at home they may enact their guitarist identity and practice guitar. Both prominence and salience are influenced by how much commitment an individual has for a particular identity.

Where an identity ranks on the salience or prominence hierarchy depends on the commitment an individual has to that particular identity. Commitment is defined as “the degree to which the person’s relationships to specified sets of others depends on his or her being a particular kind of person” (Stryker and Serpe 1982 p.207). Thus, commitment deals with how our social connections influence the devotion we have for a particular identity. The greater the commitment an individual has to a particular identity, the more

salient or prominent the identity will be (Stryker and Serpe 1982). The more salient the identity, the greater the likelihood it will impact our behavior. This occurs because we aim to behave in ways that act consistently with the roles of our identity. Thus, a barista in a coffee shop is very likely to act in a way consistent with their barista identity, but they are likely to enact their guitarist identity in a more neutral environment because it is more important to them. The barista's number and strength of ties to their co-workers influences the level of commitment of the salient barista identity. Additionally, the number and strength of ties with the guitar player's band members creates the commitment for the prominent guitarist identity.

How other individuals impact the strength of commitment occurs through the process of reflected appraisals. Reflected appraisals are the feedback we get from significant others that influence our identities (Felson 1985; Mead 1934). Individuals prefer consistency between the meaning of their identity and input from reflected appraisals (Burke and Reitzes 1991). If our close associates inform us that we are behaving in a way inconsistent with our identity, we will attempt to reduce any mismatch between the two.

Reflected appraisals have a direct connection to the power literature because both involve processing the perceptions of others. As noted above, greater power makes individuals attend less to the perspectives of others. Thus, if reflected appraisals involve attending to the perspectives of others to construct the meaning of our identity, then higher levels of power may disrupt this process. The intersection of power and reflect appraisals leads us to our first proposition:

$p = \text{actor}$

P1) The more p feels powerful, then the more p rejects reflected appraisals.

Although separate concepts, identity prominence and identity salience are related. Research has shown that as identity prominence increases so does identity salience (Burke and Stets 2009). For example, a prominent guitarist identity may become more salient when an individual enters a stage, but will be less salient while attending a baseball game. The guitarist identity is still subjectively important (i.e., prominent) to them, often making the identity somewhat salient, but the salience can change within different environments. Importantly, salience and prominence can become functionally equivalent as individuals become aware of the salience of their identities (Stryker and Serpe 1994). Thus, if a participant completes a survey asking how important an identity is to them, the prominence of the identity can align with the salience and both prominence and salience can be primed.² These identities help us navigate the social world, but sometimes we are exposed to information that is incongruent with the values of our identity, which can alter our behavior. Social scientists define these scenarios as identity threats.

Identity Threats

The Identity Control Model (Figure 1) illustrates the cybernetic process of identity threats, within the Identity Theory framework (Burke 1991; Stets and Burke 2009). The model begins with the input, which consists of the information to which

² While identity salience and prominence have a great deal of conceptual overlap, Brenner, Serpe, & Stryker (2014) found that prominence precedes salience.

individuals are exposed from their environment. This input is biased by our perceptions, which are included as the perceived self-meanings in the model. Then these perceived self-meanings are influenced by reflected appraisals, which can be defined as a process that influences how we see ourselves from the input of our associates (Felson 1985; Mead 1934). After that, we compare the perceptual inputs to our *identity standard*, or the set of meanings associated with the roles of an identity, with the *comparator*. The comparator assesses the similarity of the meanings between the perceptual inputs and the identity standard one has in their memory. Error occurs from a mismatch between the perceptual inputs and our identity standard, creating the *identity threat*. Finally, our *output* is the behavior that occurs to correct any mismatch between the inputs and our identity standard. The less error, the less need for role performances (behavior) to be consistent with the identity standard.

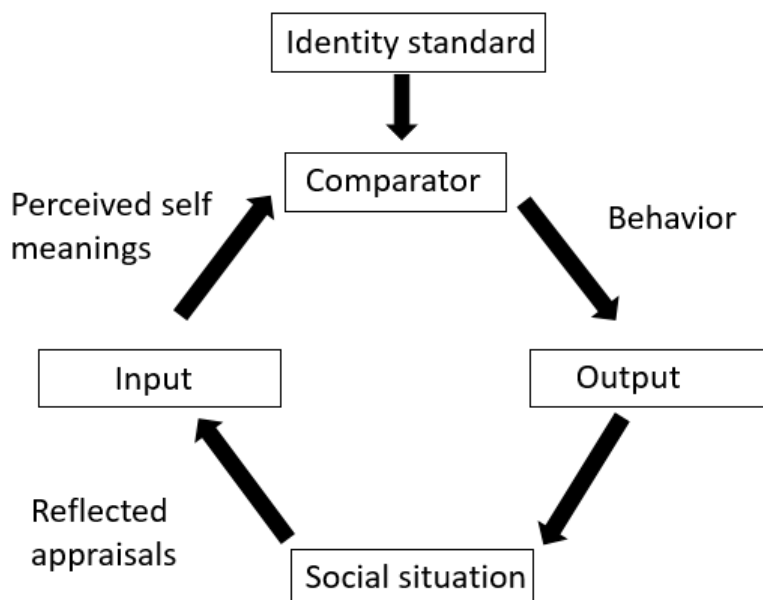


Figure 2.1 Identity Control Model Adopted From Burke (2009).

This cybernetic model provides us with a foundation and inspiration for our next two theoretical propositions:

- P2) The more p rejects reflected appraisals that do not support the identity, then the less mismatch between p 's perceptual input and identity standard.
- P3) The less mismatch between p 's perceptual input and identity standard, then the less p engages in error correcting behaviors.

Burke and Stets (2009: p66) provide a simple example of gender identity to illustrate this process. Let's say there is a man named Tom who has a salient masculine identity. Tom receives feedback from others (reflected appraisals) that he is acting feminine, which creates a mismatch between the identity standard and perceptual inputs (identity threat). To correct this, Tom may engage in a masculine behavior to relieve the mismatch. Exposure to this error between the identity standard and perceptual inputs, which creates an identity threat, has been studied extensively (see Branscombe, et al. 1999 for a review).

Identity threats are unpleasant and individuals often try to reduce the threat as much as they can. Sometimes this means rejecting evidence. For example, when the conservative identity of an individual is made salient, they are even more likely to reject the existence of climate change (Unsworth and Fielding 2014). Psychologists have found that having a participant think of positive values (i.e. thinking of how they are a good spouse) can make them more likely to accept identity-threatening information (Sherman and Cohen 2006; Sherman 2013). This suggests exogenous social variables could impact the Identity Control Model, but to date, such psychological mechanisms have not been explicitly combined with the Identity Control Model. The present research aims to introduce power as an exogenous variable in the Identity Control Model. We propose that

power influences the Identity Control Model as mentioned in the earlier propositions and that this ultimately impacts how a person responds to identity threatening information. Because power makes people less attentive to the perspectives of others, they may not experience mismatch between the input and identity standard. Less mismatch would create less need for engaging in error correcting behaviors. If an individual is not engaging in as many error correcting behaviors, then they will be more likely to reject identity threatening information.

P4) The less p engages in error correcting behaviors, then the more p will reject identity-threatening information.

Current Study

As noted above, there is good reason to believe that the perception of power may influence the Identity Control Model. Figure 2 shows how power can be added into the Identity Control Model as an exogenous variable.

Given that individuals who feel powerful are less concerned with the perspectives of others, this would make them more likely to down weight reflected appraisals. It is difficult to empirically differentiate between outright rejecting or down weighting reflected appraisals. So when this paper comments on the rejecting of reflected appraisals, it is understood that it may not be a complete rejection. If individuals are not as concerned with reflected appraisals, there would be less mismatch between their perceptual input and identity standard. Less mismatch between perceptual input and the identity standard would create less error and less error-correcting behaviors. Reduced error-correcting behaviors may make individuals more likely to reject new identity

threatening information. Therefore, power can be then studied as an exogenous variable in the Identity Control Model as summarized by the following propositions:

- 1) The more p feels powerful, then the more p rejects reflected appraisals.
- 2) The more p rejects reflected appraisals that do not support the identity, then the less mismatch between p 's perceptual input and identity standard.
- 3) The less mismatch between p 's perceptual input and identity standard, then the less p engages in error correcting behaviors.
- 4) The less p engages in error correcting behaviors, then the more p will reject identity-threatening information.

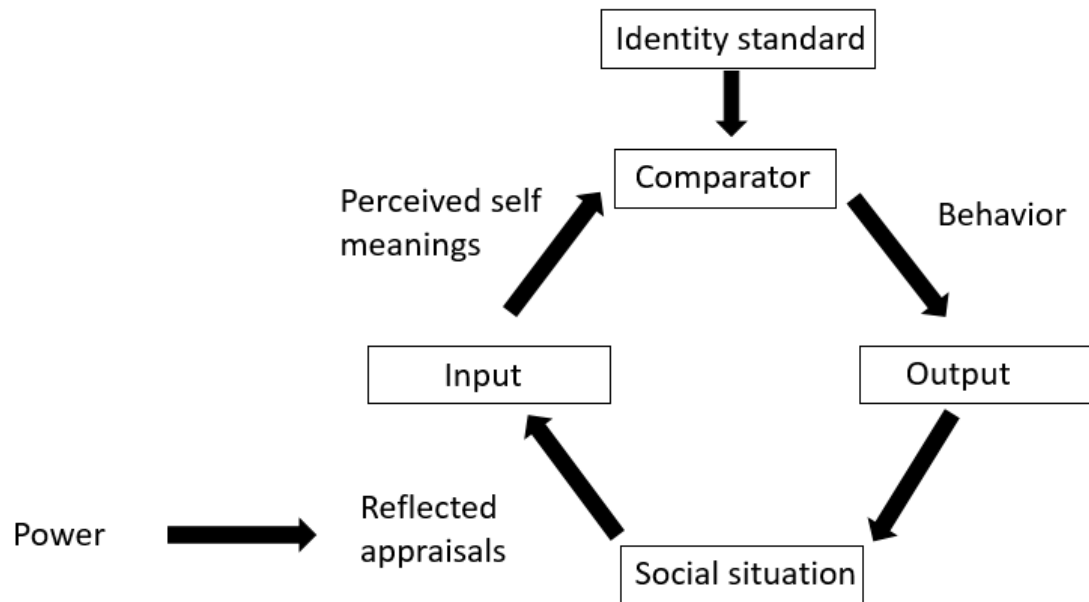


Figure 2.2 Adding Power Into The Identity Control Model.

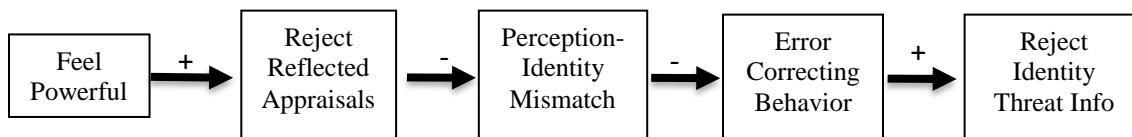


Figure 2.3 Diagrammed Propositions Of Adding Power Into The Identity Control Model.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Participants and procedure

The researchers recruited 217 undergraduate students (166 women) at the University of South Carolina to complete an experiment using Qualtrics software. Before beginning the experiment, the participants had to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix A). Participants completed the study in exchange for course credit. In this experiment, participants were randomly assigned to a high (n=100) or low (n=117) power condition.

The current study aims to evaluate how feeling powerful and powerless impacts the processing of identity threatening information. The key independent variables of interest are feeling powerful or powerless. The dependent variable is the acceptance of evidence that threatens a prominent identity. The identity the current study assessed was a college student identity. College student identity prominence was measured through questions assessing the importance of the identity that were adopted from Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker (2014). Because the participants were made aware of their college identity by these survey questions, the prominence and salience are functionally equivalent (Stryker and Serpe 1994). Questions about the participant's race, gender, college major, and confidence that one's major typically finds good employment after college were also asked at the end of the study (see Appendix B).

The empirical indicator for high power was a priming task that made participants feel like they have power over others. The empirical indicator for low power was a priming task that made participants feel like other people have power over them (see Appendix C). These tasks were adopted from Galinsky and colleagues (2003) and have been shown to make people feel powerful or powerless by recalling a time they felt powerful or powerless. The participants had 10 minutes to think about the event and describe how they felt and had to write at least 250 characters.

Immediately after each subject finished writing, they were exposed to the identity threat. Because all the participants were University of South Carolina students, the researchers threatened the prominent college student identity with false information that suggested college is no longer relevant or valuable. Participants read a summary of some fake studies that argue college degrees are becoming irrelevant and people obtain a sufficient knowledge base from online material and open courses. The participants were then asked how much they accept the information on a 1-7 scale, as well as how credible they think the information is, if they think college increases income and job prospects, and is valuable (see Appendix D).³ Participants were also asked about the trustworthiness of the information as a check to make sure they took the evidence seriously.

The laboratory experiment tested the following operational hypothesis:

H1) Priming participants to feel like they have power over others will make them less likely to accept identity threatening information.

³ Though each of the questions asked about college degrees, we thought they were still too dissimilar to combine them in an index for analysis.

In summary, participants were randomly assigned to low power or high power conditions that used a power prime as the empirical indicator for power. Participants primed with high power were predicted to ignore the reflected appraisals from the education scholars who argued college was no longer valuable in the summary they read. We argue that high power participants would be more likely to ignore the evidence that conflicts with their identity and then are less likely to engage in error correcting behaviors. When they are engaging in less error correcting behaviors, they should be more likely to report that they accept the evidence they just read about college compared to the low power condition. Answering the questions about college no longer being valuable represents the empirical indicator for how much the participant accepted the identity threatening information. Agreeing with the questions more strongly suggests they accepted more of the evidence. The acceptance of evidence questions will be condensed into a single index that is comprised of the mean of the responses. This will be done for the sake of parsimony and to reduce potential alpha error of running several t-tests. Factor analysis and Cronbach's Alpha were used to determine which of the questions combine into the best index. Confirmatory t-tests were then used to compare the two power groups and the index of questions about accepting the evidence the participants just read.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

College student identity prominence was measured via a Likert scale (7= “strongly agree”, 1=“strongly disagree”) capturing how important the respondent’s student identity was to them. Participants in both the low power and high power group had strong college student identity prominence (see Table 1).

Table 4.1. Descriptive statistics for student identity prominence and power.

Question	Low Power			High Power		
	Mean, SD, Std. Error			Mean, SD, Std. Error		
Being a college student is an important part of my self-image.	6.21	.943	.087	6.09	1.138	.114
Being a college student is an important reflection of who I am.	5.92	1.131	.105	5.91	1.207	.121
I’ve come to see myself as a college student.	6.27	.997	.092	6.44	.857	.086
I have a strong sense of belonging to the college student community.	5.70	1.069	.099	5.66	1.204	.120

* = significant at .05 level

A t-test revealed that there was no significant difference between the identity prominence index⁴ and the two power groups ($t(215) = -.095, p > .05$).

Participants were asked four questions about how much they accepted the evidence they just read. These questions were measured via a Likert scale where 7 represents “strongly agree” and 1 represents “strongly disagree.” Factor analysis revealed that two questions, “I think my college degree will increase my lifetime earnings” and “I think my college degree will help me get a better job” loaded strongly on the first factor (.70 and .72 respectively), while the other questions did not load strongly on any factor (see Table 2). The first factor explained 33.1% of the variance while the second factor only explained 6.2%. The Cronbach’s Alpha of these two questions was consistent with the factor analysis results as they yielded a higher alpha ($\alpha = .77$) than including all four questions ($\alpha = .61$). Thus, even though our index consists of just two questions, we feel it is the strongest representation of our dependent variable.

A t-test showed that power did not have a significant main effect on the index of questions measuring how much the participants accepted the evidence they just read ($t(215) = -.527, p > .05$ (see Table 3)). Thus, power was not found to have any influence on acceptance of evidence. On the same 1-7 scale, participants were also asked how trustworthy the information they just read was. Overall, they thought the information was fairly trustworthy ($M=5.41, SD=1.186$). There was also no significant difference between belief in trustworthiness and power groups ($t(215) = .436, p > .05$).

⁴ This index was created by taking a mean of the four identity prominence questions.

Table 4.2 Factor analysis results on acceptance of evidence questions.

	Factor 1	Factor 2
I think my college degree will increase my lifetime earnings	.70	-.16
I think my college degree will help me get a good job	.72	-.17
College degrees are no longer valuable	.48	.27
The evidence I just read about college degrees is convincing	.30	.34
Eigenvalue	1.32	.24
Proportion of Variance	33.1%	6.2%

Table 4.3 Descriptive statistics for power's effect on acceptance of evidence.

Question	Low Power			High Power		
	Mean	SD	Std. Error	Mean	SD	Std. Error
I think my college degree will increase my lifetime earnings	6.35	.969	.089	6.42	.855	.085
I think my college degree will help me get a good job	6.29	.865	.080	6.34	.987	.099
College degrees are no longer valuable	2.42	1.275	.118	2.34	1.343	.134
The evidence I just read about college degrees is convincing	5.66	1.347	.124	5.61	1.406	.141
The evidence I just read about college degrees is trustworthy	5.62	1.116	.104	5.55	1.266	.127

* = significant at .05 level

However, this null effect may be explained by college major. One of the demographic questions asked if participants felt their major had a difficult time finding employment after college. Thus, we were curious if those who thought their major typically found good employment ($n=117$)⁵ would accept the evidence more than those who did not think their major typically found good employment after college ($n=59$). Those who neither agreed nor disagreed about their major finding good employment ($n = 41$) were not included in this analysis. We found that the participants who were secure about their job prospects were more likely to accept the evidence compared to those who were insecure about their job prospects ($t(174) = -2.51, p <.05$ (see Table 4)).

Because security in one's major to produce job opportunities seemed to influence the results of the study, an ancillary analysis examined individuals who did not agree their major would get them a good job and power. Interestingly, power had a significant effect on the acceptance of evidence index ($t(58) = 2.37, p <.05$); however, it was in the opposite direction that was predicted. Participants concerned about their major's job prospects were actually more likely to accept the evidence when in the high power position.

⁵ Participants who somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed were combined into one "agree" group. Participants who somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed were combined into one "disagree" group.

Table 4.4 Descriptive statistics for college major's effect on acceptance of evidence.

Question	My college major will get me a good job			My college major will not get me a good job		
	Mean, SD, Std. Error			Mean, SD, Std. Error		
I think my college degree will increase my lifetime earnings	6.53* .836 .077			6.27 1.014 .132		
I think my college degree will help me get a good job	6.48* .783 .072			6.09 1.144 .150		
College degrees are no longer valuable	2.26 1.269 .117			2.68 1.456 .189		
The evidence I just read about college degrees is convincing	5.50 1.472 .136			5.73 1.257 .164		
The evidence I just read about college degrees is trustworthy	5.35 1.227 .113			5.52 1.158 .152		

* = significant at .05 level

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Identities help us make more sense of our environments. Being exposed to information that conflicts with our identities (identity threats) can make us more likely to reject that information, even if it is supported by strong evidence. So, while identities can help us navigate our social worlds, they can also bias our information processing with more routinized responses. Self-affirmation has been found to make people more open to accepting identity-threatening information; however, little is known about the impact of power in processing of identity threats. This study assessed how power influenced the processing of a student identity threat.

The present study first had college students read a power prime to make them feel powerful or powerless. The participants then read an identity threatening passage that suggested college was no longer valuable. The researchers predicted that participants in the high power condition would be more likely to reject the information. However, we did not find any significant effects for power. We can examine each proposition and assess what may have created our null results.

P1) The more p feels powerful, then the more p rejects reflected appraisals.

Our first proposition first requires that the participant feels powerful, but we could not know if this was the case because no manipulation check was used. The task used to generate feelings of power has been well-studied, but it still would have been beneficial to include a manipulation check measuring the participant's sense of power (Anderson, John, and Keltner 2012). It is possible that the prime did not work on a significant number of participants, which would certainly impact the results. Future researchers should include a manipulation check to know if their participants actually felt powerful during the study.

P2) The more p rejects reflected appraisals that do not support the identity, then the less mismatch between p 's perceptual input and identity standard.

Our second proposition requires that powerful participants would reject reflected appraisals, but our study might not have produced these appraisals adequately. It is possible that reading information about college outcomes from the work of education scholars is too indirectly related to how others view us to connect to reflected appraisals. Power may still reduce attention to reflected appraisals, but the current study may not have had any direct association to the individual. A future study could present identity threatening information from close friends or colleagues.

P3) The less mismatch between p 's perceptual input and identity standard, then the less p engages in error correcting behaviors.

A potential problem with the third proposition could have been the diversity of college majors in our sample. Participants who believed their major would lead them to a good job were more likely to agree that college will increase their earnings, make them get a good job, and agree that colleges are valuable, regardless of condition. This suggests they were not affected by the identity threat since they already believed they

were in a lucrative major. Thus, while the two samples did not differ in college student identity prominence, the students may have had different meanings ascribed to their role identities producing different identity standards. Just as men and women have different identity meanings for being a parent (Simon 1995), other identities can be influenced by other factors to create significant variation among individuals. Furthermore, the present study may not have tapped into college student identity at all. Research by Reitzes and Burke (1980) found that a significant meaning of the college student identity involves academic responsibility, so perhaps the value of college more generally falls too far outside the college student identity. A future study could try to threaten academic responsibility instead of the value of college as an intuition.

P4) The less p engages in error correcting behaviors, then the more p will reject identity-threatening information.

Our last proposition may have been impacted by power influencing identity-threatening information differently than theorized. When only looking at participants who felt insecure about their majors, we found that high power made them disagree that college will help them get a good job. This subgroup of participants also disagreed that college will increase lifetime earnings and agreed college was no longer valuable (though these findings only approached significance). Power has been found to increase self-esteem (Fast et al 2009). Self-esteem is highly related to self-affirmation, which has been shown to protect individuals from identity threats (Sherman 2006). Perhaps power then protects people from identity threats as well because elevated self-esteem acts as a mediating variable. If this is true, such an effect may override any potential impact of power's influence with reflected appraisals. However, the sample size of insecure college major participants was 29 and 30 for low and high power respectively. Thus, sample size

would ideally need to be larger to have statistical reliability and a stronger argument for determining causality.

Not only did our study lack college major diversity, it lacked diversity in race and gender. Our sample had an over-representation of female participants (76%) and white participants (81%), which limited any statistical analysis for looking at race or gender effects as well (see Tables 5 and 6). It would have been interesting to see if race or gender interacted with power in my study. This would have only been an exploratory analysis as we did not theorize if race or gender would impact the results. Future researchers could investigate these potential factors if they recruit a more diverse participant sample.

This study added the exogenous social variable of power into the Identity Control Model. Even though power did not yield significant effects, interesting results emerged when the researchers only looked at participants who felt insecure about their college major, albeit in the opposite direction than predicted. Future research can build from these findings and perhaps use competing hypotheses with how power may increase or decrease acceptance of identity threats.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, Cameron, Oliver P. John, and Dacher Keltner. 2012. "The personal sense of power." *Journal of personality* 80(2): 313-344.
- Blanton, Hart, Brett W. Pelham, Tracy DeHart, and Mauricio Carvallo. 2001. "Overconfidence as dissonance reduction." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 37(5): 373-385.
- Binning, Kevin R., Cameron Brick, Geoffrey L. Cohen, and David K. Sherman. 2015. "Going along versus getting it right: The role of self-integrity in political conformity." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 56: 73-88.
- Boulding, Kenneth E. 1990. *Three faces of power*. Sage.
- Branscombe, Nyla R., Naomi Ellemers, Russell Spears, and Bertjan Doosje. 1999. "The context and content of social identity threat." *Social identity: Context, commitment, content*. 35-58.
- Brenner, Philip S., Richard T. Serpe, and Sheldon Stryker. 2014. "The causal ordering of prominence and salience in identity theory: An empirical examination." *Social psychology quarterly*. 77(3): 231-252.
- Brinol, Pablo, Richard E. Petty, Carmen Valle, Derek D. Rucker, and Alberto Becerra. 2014. "The effects of message recipients' power before and after persuasion: a

self-validation analysis." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 93(6): 1040-1053.

Burke, Peter J., and Jan E. Stets. 2009. *Identity theory*. Oxford University Press.

Burke, Peter J., and Donald C. Reitzes. 1991. "An identity theory approach to commitment." *Social psychology quarterly*. 239-251.

Chen, Serena, Annette Y. Lee-Chai, and John A. Bargh. 2001. "Relationship orientation as a moderator of the effects of social power." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 80(2): 173-187.

Cohen, Geoffrey L., Joshua Aronson, and Claude M. Steele. 2000. "When beliefs yield to evidence: Reducing biased evaluation by affirming the self." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 26(9): 1151-1164.

Cohen, Geoffrey L., David K. Sherman, Anthony Bastardi, Lillian Hsu, Michelle McGoey, and Lee Ross. 2007. "Bridging the partisan divide: Self-affirmation reduces ideological closed-mindedness and inflexibility in negotiation." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 93(3): 415-430.

Critcher, Clayton R., and David Dunning. 2015. "Self-affirmations provide a broader perspective on self-threat." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 41(1): 3-18.

Emerson, Richard M. 1962. "Power-dependence relations." *American sociological review*. 31-41.

Ervin, Laurie H., and Sheldon Stryker. 2001. "Theorizing the relationship between self-esteem and identity." *Extending self-esteem theory and research: Sociological and psychological currents*. 29-55.

Fast, Nathanael J., Deborah H. Gruenfeld, Niro Sivanathan, and Adam D. Galinsky. "Illusory control: A generative force behind power's far-reaching effects." 2009. *Psychological Science* 20(4): 502-508.

Felson, Richard B. 1985. "Reflected appraisal and the development of self." *Social Psychology Quarterly*. 71-78.

Festinger, Leon. 1962. *A theory of cognitive dissonance* Vol. 2. Stanford university press.

Fischer, Julia, Peter Fischer, Birte English, Nilüfer Aydin, and Dieter Frey. 2011. "Empower my decisions: The effects of power gestures on confirmatory information processing." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 47(6): 1146-1154.

Fiske, Susan. 1993. Controlling other people: The impact of power on stereotyping. *American Psychologist*, 48(6): 621-628.

Galinsky, Adam D., Deborah H. Gruenfeld, and Joe C. Magee. 2003. "From power to action." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 85(3):453-466.

Galinsky, Adam D., Joe C. Magee, M. Ena Inesi, and Deborah H. Gruenfeld. 2006. "Power and perspectives not taken." *Psychological science* 17(12): 1068-1074

Keltner, Dacher, Deborah H. Gruenfeld, and Cameron Anderson. 2003. "Power, approach, and inhibition." *Psychological review* 110(2):265-284.

Kipnis, David. 1972. Does power corrupt? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 24: 33–41.

McCall, George, and Simmons, Jerry. 1978. Identities and interactions: An examination of human associations in everyday life Rev. ed.). *New York, ao*.

Mead, George. 1934. *Mind, self and society* Vol. 111. University of Chicago Press.: Chicago.

Nyhan, Brendan, and Jason Reifler. 2010. "When corrections fail: The persistence of political misperceptions." *Political Behavior*. 32(2): 303-330.

Tost, Leigh Plunkett, Francesca Gino, and Richard P. Larrick. 2012. "Power, competitiveness, and advice taking: Why the powerful don't listen." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 117(1): 53-65.

Reitzes, Donald C., and Peter J. Burke. 1980. "College student identity: Measurement and implications." *Pacific Sociological Review* 23(1): 45-66.

Serpe, Richard T. and Sheldon Stryker. 1987. "The Construction of Self and Reconstruction of Social Relationships. Pp. 41-66 in E. Lawler and B. Markovsky Eds.), *Advances in Group Processes*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Sherman, David K., and Geoffrey L. Cohen. 2006. "The psychology of self-defense: Self-affirmation theory." *Advances in experimental social psychology*. 38: 183-242.

Simon, Robin. 1995. Gender, multiple roles, role meaning, and mental health. *Journal of Health and Social behavior*: 182-194.

- Stets, Jan, and Burke, Peter. 2000. Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social psychology quarterly*: 224-237.
- Stryker, Sheldon. 1968. Identity salience and role performance: The relevance of symbolic interaction theory for family research. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*: 558-564.
- Stryker, Sheldon, and Serpe, Richard. 1982. Commitment, identity salience, and role behavior: Theory and research example. In *Personality, roles, and social behavior* pp. 199-218. Springer New York.
- Unsworth, Kerrie L., and Kelly S. Fielding. 2014. "It's political: How the salience of one's political identity changes climate change beliefs and policy support." *Global Environmental Change*. 27: 131-137.
- Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and society*. G. Roth and C. Wittich, Trans. Berkeley: University of California Press. Original work published 1914.
- Zanna, M. P., and J. Cooper. "Dissonance and the attribution process: In JH, Harvey, WJ, Ickes, RF Kidd,(Eds.), *New directions in attribution research* (Vol. 1v)." (1976).

APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT PAGE: College student attitudes

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by researchers in the Department of Sociology at the University of South Carolina. This research study is sponsored by the Department of Sociology at the University of South Carolina. The purpose of the study is to investigate understand college student attitudes. This page explains what you will be asked to do if you decide to participate in this study. Please read it carefully and feel free to ask any questions you like before you make a decision about participating.

Description of Study Procedures

During the study, you will use your computer to type out answers, read information about college, and respond to several survey questions. The study will last about 15 minutes.

Risks of Participation

Your name or other identifying information will not be used in any way in reports of the research findings. There are no known risks associated with participating in this research study except a slight risk of breach of confidentiality, which remains despite steps that will be taken to protect your privacy.

Benefits of Participation

At the end of the study, you will receive a thorough explanation of the study explaining what we hope to learn from your and other students' participation. Thus, you will gain insight into the type of questions sociologists ask and how they go about answering them. Otherwise, taking part in this study is not likely to benefit you personally. However, this research will help us understand how people make decisions about groups and thus will benefit the field of sociology.

Costs

There are no costs to you for participation in this study.

Payments

Participation in this study will qualify you for extra credit and/or research participation credit in eligible courses you may be taking.

Confidentiality of Records

Participation will be confidential. A number will be assigned to each participant at the beginning of the project. This number will be used on project records rather than your name, and no one other than the researchers will be able to link your information with your name. Study records/data will be stored in locked filing cabinets and protected computer files at the University of South Carolina. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed.

Contact Persons

For more information concerning this research, contact Matthew Facciani at, **facciani@email.sc.edu** Questions about your rights as a research subject are to be directed to, Lisa Marie Johnson, IRB Manager, Office of Research Compliance, University of South Carolina, 1600 Hampton Street, Suite 414D, Columbia, SC 29208, phone: (803) 777-7095 or email: LisaJ@mailbox.sc.edu. The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (USC IRB). The Institutional Review Board consists of representatives from a variety of scientific disciplines, non-scientists, and community members for the primary purpose of protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects enrolled in research studies.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free not to participate or to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason, without negative consequences. In the event that you do withdraw from this study, the information you have already provided will be kept in a confidential manner. Participation is not related to regular course work and participation or withdrawal will have no impact on grades. If you are participating with the goal of earning extra credit or research credit for a class, and decide you do not wish to participate (or you decide to withdraw) your professor will provide alternative means of you satisfying this extra credit or research participation requirement.

Signatures /Dates

By clicking the “Proceed” button below, you indicate that you have read the contents of this consent page. Note that even if you consent to participate, you may withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

PROCEED

APPENDIX B

EXPERIMENT QUESTIONS

Identity Prominence Questions

Being a college student is an important part of my self-image.

Being a college student is an important reflection of who I am.

I have come to think of myself as a “college student.”

I have a strong sense of belonging to the college student community.

Demographic Questions

What is your sex?

(Female, Male)

What is your race?

(white, black, Hispanic, Asian, other)

College Major Questions

What is your major?

Do you have a major in Science, Technology, Engineering, or Math (STEM)?

People with my major have a difficult time finding a job after college (1-7 Likert scale)

What is the highest education level of your mother and father?

Are you a first generation college student?

APPENDIX C

EXPERIMENT PRIMES

High Power prime:

Please recall a particular incident in which you had power over another individual or individuals. By power, we mean a situation in which you controlled the ability of another person or persons to get something they wanted, or were in a position to evaluate those individuals. Using the space provided below, please describe this situation in which you had power what happened, how you felt, etc

Low Power Prime:

Please recall a particular incident in which someone had power over you. By power, we mean a situation in which they controlled your ability to get something you wanted, or were in a position to evaluate you. Using the space provided below, please describe this situation in which they had power over what happened, how you felt, etc

APPENDIX D

IDENTITY THREAT

College student identity threat:

College has been a valuable experience both economically and intellectually for many students over the years. However, modern technology is beginning to change the educational climate. With so much information being available for free on the internet, motivated students can learn as much as they can from a college course without ever sitting in a classroom. There are also many free online courses that are taught by top professors in many fields. A recent study by Johnson and colleagues (2015) found that high school graduates who took a free online course in biology actually performed higher on a general biology test than USC students who took an intro to biology course. Another recent study by Cohen and colleagues (2016) found that participants performed better on the math section of the GRE when they took a free online math course compared to USC math majors.

With college tuition prices sky-rocketing, some leading economists have predicted that the traditional college experience may become obsolete. Stanford economist Dr. Lee argues: “With the current market as it is, a college degree simply isn’t as valuable as it once was. If people obtain the skills they need from free online sources, they can be just as successful in the workforce as those with college degrees without the crippling debt.” Given the success of non-college degree students, the wealth of free information found online, and the economic climate, college degrees may soon be a thing of the past.

Acceptance of Evidence Questions

I think my college degree will increase my lifetime earnings

I think my college degree will help me get a better job

College degrees are no longer valuable

The evidence I just read about college degrees is convincing

The evidence I just read about college degrees is trustworthy

APPENDIX E

RELEVANT DEFINITIONS

Power – having the ability to control another’s resources

Social position – any socially recognized category of actors (Wikitheoria, 2014)

Role – a cluster of values, duties, rights, and obligations associated with a particular identity and are enacted through our behavior (Wikitheoria, 2014)

Role identity – view of oneself of being and acting as an occupant of a certain role

Identity Saliency – probability an identity being enacted in a given situation

Commitment – the influence social connections have on the devotion individuals have for a particular identity

Identity threat – one’s experience of being exposed to information that is incongruent with the values of their identity

Input – the information to which individuals are exposed from their environment

Perceptions - perceived self-meanings

Reflected appraisals – process that influences how we see ourselves from the input of our associates

Comparator - assesses the similarity of the meanings between the perceptual inputs and the identity standard one has in their memory

Identity standard – set of meanings associated with the roles of an identity with the comparator

Error – a mismatch between the perceptual inputs and our identity standard

Output – behavior that occurs to correct any mismatch between the inputs and our identity standard