

## INTRODUCTION

Organizations in the United States spend upwards of \$8 billion on diversity and inclusion efforts each year (Marketwatch, 2019). Despite this investment, many organizations report little, if any, gains in diversifying their membership or creating more inclusive environments where all members (e.g., employees, students) thrive and stay for the long-term. Women and minorities continue to report less positive experiences and more experiences of discrimination and exclusion than their white male counterparts across a range of sectors, including academia, government, and the private sector. These experiences are more pronounced for those who possess multiple marginalized identities. For instance, women of color in STEM faculty positions are more likely than non-URM women to report microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007) and feeling ostracized and devalued (Carter-Sowell & Zimmerman, 2015), likely reflecting the intersection of their racial and gender identities.

*Intersectionality reflects the crossing of multiple forms of often marginalized identities that yield distinct perspectives and oppressive consequences among individuals (Hooks, 1984).*

The literature is clear that individuals' multiple identities inform their needs, values, and preferences relating to work and shape life experiences and perceptions of their job and organizations. For example, Galinsky and colleagues (2013) found that overlapping racial and gender stereotypes affected preferences for interracial dating, leadership selection, and athletic participation. Others find evidence for the double-jeopardy hypothesis that individuals with multiple-minority status (e.g., non-White female) suffer the most discrimination and negative workplace experiences (Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Kulik, Roberson, & Perry, 2007; Nelson & Probst, 2004). Creating more inclusive organizations, including colleges and universities, therefore requires that organizations recognize and adapt to individuals' multiple and varying identities so that all members can bring their "full selves" (Debebe & Reinert, 2014) to a given role. These identities can include personal identities (e.g., gender), relational identities (e.g., mother), or social identities (e.g., Muslim).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To date, however, intersectional studies focus on the intersection of race and gender or race and sexual identity, ignoring other equally important identities. This is problematic because the congruence, or connectedness, of individuals' identities is associated with higher levels of creativity, retention, performance, satisfaction, and the quality of interpersonal relationships (e.g., Polzer, Milton, & Swann, 2002; Swann, Milton, & Polzer, 2000, as well as lower stress and more positive social well-being (Stirrat et al., 2008). More work is therefore needed to understand how the connectedness of individuals' multiple identities impacts their experiences. In order to address this gap, our study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How connected are the participants' different identities and what effect does this have on their psychological health (e.g., anxiety and well-being)?
2. How does the connectedness of all of a students' identities (race, gender, religion, sexual identity, and health) impact their overall experience as a student?



## METHOD

We collected pilot data from 40 undergraduate and graduate students from the U.S. and abroad. The participants were asked to fill out a survey of 28 questions identifying their background (e.g., year in school), identities (e.g., race, gender, religion, health status, and sexual identity), connectedness of identities, attitudes toward school, and psychological health (see below).

### Measures

- *Inclusive Climate* – Six-item scale developed by Nishii (2013) to capture the extent to which a university's climate integrates differences.  $\alpha = .75$ .
- *Well-being* – 14-item Warwick-Edinburgh mental well-being scale covering subjective well-being and psychological functioning (Tennant et al., 2007).  $\alpha = .84$
- *Anxiety* – 7-item generalized anxiety scale from Spitzer et al. (2006).  $\alpha = .77$ .
- *Intentions to Leave* – 3-item measure adapted from Meyer et al. (1993) assessing whether students may consider leaving their university before graduation.  $\alpha = .62$ .
- *Institutional Identification* – 5-item organizational identification scale from Smidts et al. (2001).  $\alpha = .84$ .
- *Satisfaction as a Student* – 3-item job satisfaction scale adapted from Spector (1997).  $\alpha = .84$
- *Connectedness of Identities*. For each pair of identities, respondents indicated whether the identities were positively related, unrelated, or negatively related. Each of these items were summed. Total connections = sum of positively and negatively related pairs.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics**

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Total # of identities connections	10.2	8.9	--								
2. # of positive connections	11.4	8.6	.98***	--							
3. # of negative connections	1.2	1.9	-.27	-.07	--						
4. Identification with institution	3.8	0.7	.34*	.24	-.51***	.84					
5. Student satisfaction	4.3	0.6	.29	.18	-.54***	.83***	.84				
6. Culture of inclusion	3.8	0.5	.33*	.26	-.38*	.77***	.65***	.75			
7. Turnover intentions	1.4	0.6	.07	.18	.49**	-.47**	-.59***	-.26	.62		
8. Anxiety	3.1	0.6	-.36*	-.28	.44**	-.38*	-.39*	-.28	.35	.77	
9. Well-being	3.4	0.5	.18	.09	-.42**	.51***	.53***	.37*	.56***	-.57***	.84

## RESULTS (CONT.)

Results reveal:

- Participants have more positive identity connections (mean = 11) than negative connections (mean = 1), but variability exists (sd = 8.6 and 1.2, respectively).
- Gender identity is more likely to negatively connect to other identities, particularly to race identity and health-related identity. Students identifying as female are most likely to report a negative connection between their gender and other identities.
- The total # of connections is significantly related to anxiety ( $r(38) = -.362, p < .05$ ), institutional identification ( $r(38) = .34, p < .05$ ), and inclusion ( $r(38) = .33, p < .05$ ).
- The # of negative connections relates negatively to institutional identification ( $r(38) = -.51, p < .001$ ) and student satisfaction ( $r(38) = -.54, p < .001$ ).
- Surprisingly, there were no significant relationships between the total # of positive connections and the outcome variables.

## DISCUSSION

- Gender identity may be more pertinent to females' identities, as they typically have had to fight for equality before. This identity may harm their well-being when connected with their work, health, and race identities as the "prototypical" student may still be seen as male. Females have a more amplified negative experience when all of these identities are connected and conflicting with the social norms.
- Our results were consistent with previous findings that negative connectedness among one's different identities might increase one's anxiety and intentions to leave, decrease their well-being, satisfaction, inclusion and identification with their institution.
- The results also suggested that positive connectedness alone was not sufficient to influence people's experience in their institution. However, when the total number of identities connections was considered, there are significant relationships between the total number of connections and anxiety, inclusion and institution identification. This suggested that the number of connections might have a larger impact on people's experience than the type of connections (negative or positive).

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

- We were not able to provide more sophisticated data analyses and generalized findings due to having a smaller sample size (n=40).
- We were not able to predict casualty as COVID-19 restrictions prohibited us from releasing a second survey to measure the participants' experiences at a subsequent time period.
- There may be self-report bias as all items in the survey were self-reported.
- For future research, we would recommend that Survey 1 and Survey 2 get distributed 4 weeks apart post COVID. We would also recommend creating a larger incentive to get more participants.
- We would also recommend further investigation of possible explanation for the impact of identities connections, regardless of the type of connections.