CHILDLESSNESS, SINGLISM, AND NON-RELIGION: AN EXAMINATION OF MULTIPLE COUNTER-NORMATIVE IDENTITIES

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Religion and family are two major components of American society. For instance, every individual is either in a relationship or single; religious or non-religious; and a parent or without children. For decades, social scientists have recognized that individuals have multiple identities and roles (James 1890) such as someone who is Catholic, married, and a parent. And, holding multiple identities results in a variety of outcomes in terms of an individual's psychological well-being. Thoits (1983; 1986; and 2003) provides empirical and theoretical evidence that accumulating identities is beneficial to one's psychological well-being. This evidence comes from several empirical investigations of the identity accumulation hypothesis (Thoits 1983) that states the more identities one acquires, the more meaning and purpose one has in life. Understanding that accumulating identities is good for psychological well-being is an important finding but is limited to those who hold normative identities such as those who are parents, married, and religious.

Previous research, in both identity accumulation and identity theory more generally, has primarily examined the effect of normative identities (Sieber 1974; Burke and Stets 2009). With a growing number of individuals claiming identities counter to the norm, research must begin to incorporate counter-normative identities into accumulation and identity literature (Blackstone and Stewart 2012; Cragun 2013; DePaulo 2015). One major question to ask is: How does the accumulation of multiple identities that are not normative impact psychological well-being?

Previously, the single, childless, and non-religious identities have not been examined collectively. Researchers have, however, focused on the subjective experience of holding a childless, a single, or a non-religious identity as well as the negative evaluations and stigmatization of childlessness, singlism, or non-religion. Missing, still, is an examination of being childless, single, and non-religious simultaneously or in an additive manner. What is clear from previous investigations is that there are strong social norms encouraging (and rewarding) people for being religious, married and with children. Park (2002) found childless individuals face an array of negative labels such as immature, selfish, uncaring, cold and materialistic. Additionally, these individuals are forced to engage in stigma management techniques to avoid the discrimination surrounding childlessness (Park 2002). For those never wanting to marry, American society continues to assume these individuals are selfish, materialistic, less attractive, career-hungry, and destined to die alone (DePaulo 2006). Furthermore, voluntarily single individuals are enmeshed in a world designed for couples who continuously get access to better homes, due to realtor preference for married couples, better tax-breaks, and are thought of more positively in general (DePaulo 2006; 2015). In 2006, atheists topped the list of groups Americans would be least likely to vote for in an election and would be the most upset if their child brought an atheist home as a partner (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006). Additionally, the non-religious, in general, report negative experiences and evaluations (Harper 2007).

Overall, then, research suggests that individuals holding even one of these identities has the potential to experience these identities as stigmatizing which could result in negative consequences including mental health issues (Scott 2009; Blackstone and Stewart 2012; Cragun, Kosmin, Keysar, Hammer and Nielsen 2012; DePaulo 2015). Whether or not being childless, single, and non-religious is experienced as stigmatizing is a question that is of great interest to

me, however, this is a question that would require these identities to be examined at the individual level instead of in a multiple identity model. Any further examination or inclusion of stigma measures is beyond the scope of the overall dissertation, but of interest to the researcher and will be pursued in future projects. While the focus of this work is not on whether these identities are experienced as stigmatized, the three identities being examined are overall negatively evaluated within our society. Previous research has shown with these negative evaluations comes the potential for negative consequences with even one of these counter-normative identities (Park 2002, DePaulo 2006, Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006, Harper 2007). What happens, then, for individuals who are non-religious, childless, *and* single? A combination of identities has been mentioned in passing within several studies such as those who are single and childless or non-religious and childless (Park 2002; DePaulo 2006; Llewellyn 2016), but these studies have not explored these experiences through the identity theory perspective, which allows for a focus on the individual experience of accumulating these identities. Additionally, beyond merely counting identities based on accumulation, Thoits (1983, 1986, 2013) suggested that various contextualizing aspect of an individual's identities may impact the accumulation process such as the prominence, salience, and commitment of the identities. Given this work, the current project also seeks to begin the exploration of how identity specific components impact the accumulation of multiple identities, drawing from the structural approach within identity theory. Recently, Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker (2014), demonstrated that the prominence of one's identity, or relative importance of the identity in one's self concept, predicts the salience, or likelihood that one will enact the identity across situations. Therefore, the current research focuses specifically on the impact prominence has on the

accumulation process and its impact on depression and social anxiety[1].

This research aims to fill the gap in the current literature using a mixed method approach to explore three overarching research goals. Each of these goals is addressed in a separate stand-alone chapter that includes its own literature review, methods, results and discussion. The second chapter uses a national web-based survey to focus on the effects of claiming multiple counter-normative identities on an individual's mental health. The specific psychological distress outcomes of interest are depression and social anxiety. Chapter two employs a structural equation model to examine the influence of claiming multiple counter-normative identities on depression and social anxiety. Building on these findings, the second goal, explored in chapter three, is to better understand how identity prominence impacts the relationship of claiming multiple counter-normative identities with depression and social anxiety. Chapter three explores the influence of prominence on the relationship between number of counter-normative identities and depression and social anxiety using a groups structural equation model and data from the national web-based panel. The final goal is to explore how individuals holding three counter-normative identities describe the meaning structures associated with their identities from the societal and personal level, where they locate these identities within their self-concept, and how these identities impact role choice behavior and interactions. This goal is examined in chapter four through data collected in 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with individuals holding all three counter-normative identities. Overall, by exploring these three research goals, this project makes three important contributions. First, given that literature on multiple roles and identities has exclusively examined positively evaluated roles and identities, examining multiple counter-normative identities fills a major gap in this literature (Sieber 1974; Burke and Stets 2009). Second, while identity theory presents a number of concepts to help understand the

[1]The terms depression and social anxiety are used reference to symptoms of depression and social anxiety, rather than a diagnostic or clinical categorization.

organization of identities, little research has examined more than a single identity at any given time. The current research will begin to explore how the prominence of identities impacts the relationship between multiple counter-normative identities and psychological distress. Third, the qualitative component of this research seeks to incorporate both a structural and interactional approach to identity theory when exploring how individuals describe and define the meanings associated with counter normative identities and their relative location within their identity hierarchy, as well as the impact these identities have on interaction and role choice behavior.

Chapter one continues with a review of the relevant literature beginning with a discussion of the three counter-normative identities examined within this project: the non-religious, voluntarily childless, and voluntarily single. The discussion of counter-normative identities describes the findings from several researchers who have predominately focused on the negative evaluations attached to these identities. With these negative evaluations comes the potential for discrimination and stigmatization, which is briefly expanded to include a discussion of Goffman (1963) and the impact discrimination and stigma can have on an individual's mental health (Hatzenbuehler, Phelan, and Link 2013; Hinshaw and Stier 2008; Major and O'Brien 2005; Markowitz 1998; Gross and Munoz 1995; Link 1987; Dohrenwend, Shrout, Egri, and Mendelsohn 1980). The summary of the counter-normative literature is designed to establish the negative societal meanings and expectations attached to the childless, non-religious, and single identities. This section also demonstrates the negative effect these identities may have on an individual's psychological distress. Finally, a discussion of why these three identities were selected over the plethora of possible identities is included.

Following the counter-normative discussion is a review of the body of social psychological research examining multiple roles and identities, which can predominately be

found within two theoretical perspectives: role theory and symbolic interactionism. A specific focus is given to the work of Thoits (1983; 1986; and 2003) and the identity accumulation hypothesis, which provides empirical and theoretical evidence guiding the understanding of how the accumulation of multiple counter-normative identities may impact psychological distress. Included in this discussion is the evolution of multiple identities research beginning with its historical emergence with William James (1890) and progressing to modern research findings that merge multiple identities, identity theory, and mental health (Thoits 2003; Settles 2004; Brook, Garcia, and Fleming 2008). The inclusion of this literature develops a clear theoretical foundation for examining multiple identities and their impact on mental health. Chapter one concludes with the three overall research goals explored within the dissertation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Counter-Normative Identities

A counter-normative identity is conceptualized as an identity which deviates from what an individual is supposed to be or become as defined by societal norms and is, therefore, "inappropriate" and counter-normative (Long 2016). The strong religious traditions of American society are a major force driving the societal norms regarding religious and family decisions: People should be religious, get married and have children. These norms are pervasive, considering about 80% of Americans affiliate with a religion (Pew 2015), 90% marry at some point in their lives (Connidis 2001), and about 80% have biological children (Simon 2008). On the one hand, a body of research empirically demonstrates that being voluntarily childless, voluntarily single, and non-religious within American society is stigmatizing for some individuals and creates negative mental, physical, and social outcomes for them (Park 2002;

DePaulo 2006, 2015; Edgell, Edgell, Gerteis, Hartman 2006; Scott 2009). On the other hand, despite the negative evaluations and stigma, people are still selecting out of normative roles, and living happy, fulfilled lives. Regardless of the outcomes, however, one thing is clear: these counter-normative identities are not viewed positively by society and those claiming the childless, single, and non-religious identities are stereotyped and are societally stigmatized. Important to note, however, is the difference between *holding* a stigmatized identity and actually *internalizing* the stigma as part of your self. This research focuses on the experience of holding a counter-normative identity rather than the experience and internalization of stigma, which is a subject of interest to the researcher that will be explored in later papers. It is, however important to note, that all counter-normative identities are, by definition, viewed negatively by American society, but not every individual who claims a counter-normative identity necessarily internalizes the stigma associated with it. Indeed, some individuals, perhaps if they are unsatisfied with their choice, want to change their identity, or based on other components, may internalize their counter-normative identity as stigmatizing, but others may not.

Individuals who select any of the following options: secular, humanist, non-religious, no religion, none, atheist, or agnostic, when asked "what is your religion, if any?" have previously been labeled "non-religious or Nones" (Kosmin and Keysar 2009). While differences exist among these individuals, with atheists being the most stigmatized, Americans make judgements based on broad categorizations of religious versus non-religious (Cragun, Kosmin, Keysar, Hammer and Nielsen 2012). Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006:55) conducted interviews with active non-religious individuals who stated being non-religious produced "difficulties amongst relatives and friends." Additionally, atheists are also one of the most strongly disliked groups by the American populace (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartman 2006). Those who are non-religious, then,

understand the societal disapproval and conduct their social interactions accordingly. Long, Yarrison, and Rowland (2015) found the non-religious, when asked about discussing religion with others, knew to keep their non-religious identity concealed. For example, Joshua, a 19 year old atheist, when asked about sharing his non-religious views responded: "*I really don't. I feel if you want to keep your friends, you don't really discuss politics or religion with them, those are two pretty heavy topics that can hurt people"* (Long et al. 2015:135). Being non-religious, then, in the current research is classified as a counter-normative identity.

For single individuals, negative evaluations can be experienced in a variety of forms. Singlism is defined as the stigmatization of single individuals which includes those who are divorced, widowed, and those who never marry (DePaulo 2006). Compared to those who are married, single individuals are viewed more negatively and described as: "immature, insecure, self-centered, unhappy, lonely, and ugly" (DePaulo and Morris 2006:251). Single individuals are often thought of as lonely, sad, envious of couples, and in a constant state of searching for the "right one" (DePaulo 2006; DePaulo 2015). When at work, single employees are often asked to cover extra shifts and stay later than their married counter-parts because it is assumed they have less at-home responsibilities (DePaulo 2006). More direct forms of stigma and discrimination can be found in American laws. For example, as of 2013, only 23 states provide single individuals protection from marital status discrimination (National Fair Housing Alliance 2013). This lack of protection is problematic considering the empirical evidence which demonstrates that realtors prefer married individuals over their single counterparts (Morris, Sinclair, and DePaulo 2007). Therefore, being voluntarily single, in a society dominated by matrimonial norms, is counter-normative.

Similarly, those making the choice to remain childless are faced with an array of negative meanings and expectations associated with this choice such as: deviant, different, strange, weird, abnormal, unfeminine, selfish, uncaring, immoral, cold, and materialistic (Veevers 1980; Muller and Yoder 1999; Gillespie 2000; Park 2002, and Mollen 2006). Being childless is viewed as an unfulfilling and empty lifestyle with mothers blatantly asking their childless friends about their purpose in life if they are not going to become a parent (Scott 2009). Park (2002) interviewed childless women to understand how they utilized stigma management techniques to avoid discrimination and stigmatization. The need for stigma management implies the presence and experience of stigma for childless women. In a society that provides preferred parking at retail stores for expectant mothers, family health care benefits, and the focus on "why don't you have children" rather than "why do you have children?" voluntarily not having children is counter-normative.

What this literature suggests is that these three identities have the potential to be experienced and internalized as stigmatizing and, with this possibility of stigma, comes the potential for the negative outcomes. Previous research has focused attention on understanding the negative effects of stigma on an individual's mental and physical health as well as their opportunities in life (Hinshaw and Stier 2008; Major and O'Brien 2005; Gross and Munoz 1995; Link 1987; Dohrenwend, Shrout, Egri, and Mendelsohn 1980), suggesting a stigmatized identity involves a risk for higher levels of anxiety and depression (Markowitz 1998). More recently, Hatzenbuehler, Phelan, and Link (2013) conceptualized stigma as highly problematic when it comes to issues of population health inequalities suggesting stigmatization satisfies the requirements of a fundamental cause (i.e. pervasive, disruptive for multiple life domains, and corrosive to population health). Therefore, any individuals who holds a single counter-normative

identity may be exposed to negative societal evaluations and stigmatization which could impact their mental health.

It is understood that by selecting only these three identities, the current research is limited with regards to missing many possible normative and counter-normative identities. These three identities, however, were specifically selected for this exploratory examination of counter-normative identities for several reasons. First, all three identity sets are common within everyday life, and, therefore, most individuals are guided by the shared meaning and expectations associated with being a parent-childless, single-in a relationship, and religious-non-religious. Recognizing and/or internalizing these shared meanings is a core component of the identity process, which is a major theoretical factor in the current research. Second, these three identities are all inter-related through the religious doctrine and traditions lying at the foundation of American society (Llewellyn 2016). Marriage and parenting are core components of a religious life and these traditions are strongly upheld across a wide variety of religious communities shaping our perception and understanding of the parent and spouse identities. Lastly, previous research has clearly established the negative societal views related to being single, childless, and non-religious, providing strong theoretical support for the hypotheses explored within the current research.

While the above findings are important, these studies examined individuals only within a single identity: non-religious, childless, or single. Some research on counter-normative identities briefly discusses individuals holding multiple identities (i.e. individuals who are both religious and childless (Cain 2001); individuals who are parents but also single (DePaulo 2006); and childless individuals who also are non-religious (Park 2002), but the overall foci has been on the experience of being a non-religious, childless, or single person. The negative mental health

consequences of holding even one of these counter-normative identities implores the question: what happens when individuals hold more than one? The research focusing on the impact of holding multiple identities on and individual's mental health, however, has overlooked these counter-normative identities (Cain 2001; DePaulo 2006; Park 2002). Additionally, little to no research has specifically explored these identities within an identity theory perspective. These prior studies, however, guide the current research project and specific hypotheses regarding the impact multiple counter-normative identities could have on an individual's levels of depression and social anxiety. Of central importance for the current study is the examination of the identity accumulation hypothesis by Thoits (1983; 1986; 2003). The following section will provide the historical foundation leading up to Thoits' work on multiple identities starting with a brief discussion of multiple identities within role theory and symbolic interactionism, a detailed discussion of the identity accumulation hypothesis and empirical findings, an evolution of the accumulation hypothesis and the importance of identity theory concepts, and will conclude with specific research questions explored in this dissertation.

Multiple Roles and Identities: *Historical Foundations*

One of the earliest conceptualization of multiples identities comes from William James (1890:291) who envisioned the self as "the sum total of all that an individual can call his." Furthermore, he stated that *"He has as many social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinions he cares…From this there results what practically is a division of the man into several selves; and this may be a discordant splitting…or it may be a harmonious division of labor"* (James 1890:294). Within this quote is an understanding that multiple identities can be experienced differentially both within a single individual and across individuals. For James, humans are social animals, ones desiring to be known by others and interact with them [a point

later emphasized by Mead (1934)]. It is through the social nature of humans that multiple identities are derived. It is this complex view of the self that established the foundation for research exploring the multiple positions, roles, and identities an individual acquires, holds, and enacts throughout everyday life.

Research examining multiple roles and identities is predominately found within two theoretical perspectives: symbolic interactionism and role theory. While these two perspectives are separate theoretical traditions, they both emphasize the analysis of social processes and phenomena from an individual's subjective experience using a theatrical metaphor to explain social life with "roles" constituting the core phenomena (Stryker and Statham 1985). Researchers have, however, integrated these two frameworks over the past several decades in order to address their weaknesses and criticisms. An integration of these two perspectives allows the incorporation of the emergent and agentic nature of social persons with the differentiated social structure organizing and influencing social roles and behavior. Therefore, for role theorists "roles" are social structure and for symbolic interactionist "roles" are social persons (Stryker and Statham 1985).

Role Theory

Ralph Linton (1936) and Talcott Parsons (1951) were key figures in setting the stage for an examination of multiple roles within role theory with an emphasis on the functional nature of roles and status while maintaining that individuals live in a stable, structured society (Biddle 2013). Within this perspective, empirical studies on multiple roles resulted in a vast amount of inconsistency. One body of research found negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety (Miles 1977) and an overall decrease in psychological well-being (Goode 1960; Barnett and Baruch 1985; Simon 1992). More specifically, when individuals have multiple roles, their likelihood of experiencing role strain, role conflict, and role overload are increased. Important to note, this

body of research emerged in a time of societal change regarding the entrance of women in the workforce, producing an opportunity to examine the role strain and conflict associated with family and work life. These studies predominantly found that balancing work and family life is challenging and results in increased levels of depression and anxiety (Engel 1970; Ritzer 1975; Miles 1977; 1976). This work focused on how multiple roles impact the self, with the assumption that the more roles one has, the more likely they are to experience issues related to playing all of the roles within social structure.

An alternative approach suggests that multiple roles can have positive benefits for an individual's psychological well-being (Baruch and Barnett 1986; Menaghan 1989; Barnett and Hyde 2001; Thoits 1983; 1986; 2003). The basis for this positive relationship lies in the work of Sieber (1974) who introduced role accumulation theory. This theory suggests holding multiple roles increases and supports self-esteem and creates a reservoir of positive self-feelings in the face of negative appraisals. Additionally, Marks (1977) states that accumulating multiple roles creates energy and commitment. Similarly, Burton (1998) feels life is meaningful and worthwhile when more identities are accumulated. Several researchers have empirically examined the effects of multiple identities. For example, Verbrugge (1986) found both men and women experience an increase in physical health when role involvements increase. When considering employment, several researchers found that employment is positively related to the psychological well-being of both men and women (Aneshensel, Frerichs, and Clark 1981; Barnett and Baruch 1985; Radloff 1975).

Beyond positive and negative consequences, some researchers find no effects of multiple roles on physical and mental health outcomes. Hauenstein, Stanislav, and Ernest (1977) found no effect on women's blood pressure when considering workload, number of hours worked, and

number of children. Similarly, Radloff (1975) found no relationship between housework load and depression, and Pleck (1985) found role overload to be an insignificant predictor of well-being in a sample of wives. The inconsistencies amongst findings leave questions about whether the accumulation of multiple roles is positive, negative, or inconsequential for individuals. It is from the work of Sieber and role theory that Thoits (1983) developed the identity accumulation hypothesis discussed later. Symbolic interactionists also recognized the implications of multiple identities with regards to the organization of identities (Stryker 1968; 1980; Burke 2003), the behavioral implications (Stryker 2000), and the mental health outcomes related to multiple identities (Burke 1980; 1991; Thoits 1983; 1986; 2003). Given the dominant focus on competing roles within role theory, the current research focuses on the symbolic interactionist approach to multiple identities which focuses on the inter-relationship of roles within an individual.

Symbolic Interactionism

Mead (1934) and Kuhn (1964) established the theoretical and empirical tools needed to systematically study identities. It was Stryker (1980), however, who integrated role theory and symbolic interactionism to provide the foundation for Thoits to adequately address research questions regarding multiple identities. Mead (1934) posited that we live in a world of shared meanings and expectations. He emphasized the reflexive relationship between individuals and society such that: self shapes society which shapes self. This reflexive relationship is witnessed through the process of role-taking in which an individual's self consists of two parts: the "I" and the "Me" (Mead 1934). The ongoing and reflexive communication between our "I" and "Me" helps us understand how roles and identities develop through social interaction and our understanding of the social world. Within symbolic interactionism, roles are thought to reflect the norms and attitudes of society as well as the contextual demands and negotiation of the definition of the situation (Mead 1934). While Mead recognized that humans have multiple

selves, beyond the "I" and "Me" and the process of role-taking, he did not further discuss how the self was structured or how multiple selves may unfold (Stryker 1980).

Kuhn (1964) incorporated role theory's vision of social structure as a network of positions and roles with an emphasis on the reflexive nature of self, society, and behavior (Stryker and Statham 1985). Building on the belief that social structure is created and maintained through social interaction, Kuhn asserted that social structure constrains an individual's future interactions. He also viewed self as a "plan of action" (Stryker and Vryan 2003: 17) with a stable core self (McCall 2013). This view of a stable self, allowed for reliable measurements inspiring the creation of his Twenty Statements Test, which examined individual responses to the question: "Who Am I? (Kuhn and McPartland 1954). Similar to role theorists, Kuhn used the concepts of position and role to analyze social interaction. Positions for symbolic interactionists, however, represent any socially recognized category of individuals (Stryker and Statham 1985). These positions have behavioral expectations and meanings and when a positional label is applied to an individual, these meanings and expectations are called *roles.* Given that persons are viewed as social beings and roles are attached to the shared behaviors of others, individuals are not viewed as having a single position in society. They have multiple positions, and therefore, multiple roles. Stryker built upon the work of Mead and Kuhn to develop advancements in understanding multiple identities.

Structural Symbolic Interactionsim and Structural Identity Theory Approach

Stryker developed structural symbolic interactionism (henceforth structural SI) to further explore the relationship between self, society, and interaction (Stryker 1980). It is within this framework that Stryker incorporates structural components of role theory into symbolic interactionism to further examine the reflexive relationship between self and society. A key assumption within structural SI is that opportunities for, and engagement in, social interaction is

not a random process; individuals are constrained by social structure (Stryker 1980). Taking the core assumptions of structural SI, Stryker further elaborated on the reciprocal relationship between self, society, and interaction through the establishment of Identity Theory (Stryker 1968; 1980). From this perspective, individuals living in a complex society have complex selves. In fact, individuals have as many identities as other individuals who recognize them. An identity is defined as the internalization of the meanings and expectations attached to a role, group, or person (Stets and Burke 2009). For Stryker, identities, then, are organized in a salience hierarchy; defined as the probability of identities being enacted across situations (Stryker 1980). The salience of an identity becomes important for an individual when multiple identities could potentially be enacted in a given situation. More recently, it was established that the salience of an identity is predicted by the prominence of the identity (Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker 2014). The prominence of an identity, for Stryker, represents the importance of the identity for the individual and the location of that identity within their self-concept (Stryker 1980). Given the theoretical ordering of prominence and salience, prominence will be incorporated into the current project for analysis.

Within structural identity theory, research on multiple identities has theoretically examined the organization of multiple identities within a single individual envisioned as a hierarchy, while also exploring how multiple identities are structurally organized. According to Stryker (1980), identities are tied to social structural positions and this understanding has several implications for considering multiple identities: there can be multiple roles within a single group, a single role in multiple groups, and multiple identities in multiple groups (Burke and Stets 2009; Serpe and Stryker 2011). While recognizing individuals have multiple identities, a majority of previous work within Identity Theory has yet to empirically examine issues regarding multiple

identities because of the focus on one identity that becomes the most important in each situation and, therefore, individuals act to verify and maintain that identity (Burke and Stryker 2000; Burke 2003; Smith-Lovin 2003; Burke and Stets 2009; Stets and Serpe 2013). This focus is due to the conceptualization of identities resting in a hierarchy based on their salience and prominence, and the assumption that these hierarchies are relatively stable (Stryker 1980).

Interactional Approach to Identity Theory

Developed at nearly the same time, McCall's approach to identities differs slightly from that of Stryker. McCall and Simmons (1966) also use the terms prominence and salience with reference to how the self-concept is organized, but for them, they are slightly different concepts. Prominence is very similar across the structural and interaction approaches to identity. For McCall and Simmons (1966), prominence is a representation of an individual's ideal self, or who they usually see themselves as in general. Contrary to the stable conception of salience in the structural approach, however, the interactional approach sees salience to be, as the name suggests, based more upon the interaction an individual finds themselves in.

This conception of salience is based heavily on the concept of the definition of the situation from Goffman (1956). From the interactional approach, salience is still a hierarchy, but one that can change in every interaction an individual finds themselves based on how they define their identities to be appropriate for the given situation. This allows for identities to be more fluid in their enactment because individuals are not enacting them simply based on their placement in their self-concept, but also based on the situation they find themselves in. Thus, it is possible for an identity that is not near the top of the prominence or importance hierarchy to become enacted because an individual finds it appropriate for a given situation. This conception of salience and the interactional approach to identity theory is of interest for the exploration of counter-

normative identities, given the generally negative meanings associated with these counter-normative identities. For example, previous research has shown that non-religious individuals are quickly able to pinpoint certain situations where the identity is not appropriate, and when it is appropriate (Long, Yarrison, and Rowland 2015).

While the interactional approach to identities has been incorporated to the overall umbrella of identity theory (Burke and Stets 2009), it has had little examination since its inception (Stets and Serpe 2013). Both the interactional and structural perspectives, however, provide a strong theoretical basis to examine the ways multiple identities can impact psychological distress and provide meaning and structure to our lives as demonstrated by the work of Thoits.

Thoits: Identity Accumulation Hypothesis

Thoits (1983; 1986) argues that identities provide meaning and purpose to our lives by integrating us with others. These identities tell us who we are, how we should behave in a situation, and why we should behave that way (Thoits 1983). Having a clear sense of belonging and role requirements provides a sense of security and purpose which are key components in psychological well-being (Sieber 1974). The benefits of multiple roles for one's psychological health was demonstrated by Sieber's role accumulation theory which stated that accumulating roles creates positive benefits. These benefits include an overall sense of status security and a sense of being appreciated by others (Sieber 1974). Sieber (1974) argued that role strain and conflict had long been normalized consequences of role accumulation, but there was little research to examine the possible rewards from having more roles. The alternative is also true, however, that a loss of identities can be detrimental to one's health resulting in higher levels of anxiety or depression (Rose 1962). Psychological distress, then, is related to multiple identities through the process of identity enactment (Thoits 1983). Whether the relationship between

identity accumulation and psychological distress is additive or curvilinear was an important empirical question examined by Thoits.

Thoits (1983) hypothesized that identity accumulation would enhance one's psychological well-being and identity loss, having few identities, will negatively impact it. The direct relationship from number of identities to psychological well-being was termed the "identity accumulation hypothesis" (Thoits 1983:175). Using a sample of 720 adults from the New Haven Community survey, Thoits (1983) regressed psychological distress on number of identities accumulated as well as identity gain and identity loss over time. The empirical results supported her hypotheses such that the more identities an individual accumulated, the lower their psychological distress. Similarly, those individuals who gained identities over time showed significantly lower levels of distress than those who lost identities over time (Thoits 1983). These results were substantiated in a follow-up examination of gender differences with a sample of 2,300 individuals in Chicago. In particular, in this case, the more identities an individual claimed, the lower their levels of anxiety and depression (Thoits 1986).

More recently, Thoits (1992; 2003) expanded her previous work on multiple identities to include a discussion of agency. Agency is brought into multiple identities by specifying whether identities are voluntary or obligatory with the former being freely chosen and easily exited, and the latter being more compelled and difficult to exit. The key component of this argument is that individuals have agency or motivation when selecting voluntary identities and are presumably selecting identities that provide them some personal benefits; if problems should arise, they could simply exit these identities. Empirical results indicate that having more voluntary identities lowers distress levels (Thoits 2003). This body of work examining multiple normative identities provided the foundation for research to continue to explore the link between multiple identities

and mental health outcomes. Additionally, Thoits (1983; 1986; 2003; and 2013) alluded to the importance of various contextual aspects of identities in several of her pieces even providing several hypotheses for commitment, salience, and importance but never empirically examined the relationships.

It was suggested that beyond the number of identities an individual holds, the organization of these identities within an individual is also predicted to impact psychological distress (Thoits 1983). In her early work, Thoits (1983) theoretically describes how commitment regarding one's identity could play an important role in the accumulation process. For instance, if individuals are more committed to the accumulated identities, those should have a stronger effect on psychological well-being (Thoits 1983). More recently, Thoits (2013) described how prominence, or the importance, of an identity could impact the accumulation process. When identities are low in prominence and accumulated, they may not impact psychological well-being as compared to highly prominent, accumulated identities (Thotis 2013). While theoretically exploring the relationship between prominence and accumulation, Thoits never empirically examined these relationships.

Building on the suggestions of Thoits, several researchers have begun incorporating concepts from identity theory to help explain the inconsistent findings regarding the effects of multiple normative identities. Brook, Garcia, and Fleming (2008) incorporated measures of identity importance and discrepancy to determine the effects of multiple identities on psychological distress. The authors find that when identities are highly important to an individual having more creates greater psychological well-being if these identities provide resources and require similar behavior. Similarly, Settles (2004) found identity centrality or importance, to be a significant factor in examining multiple identities in a study examining the interference between

the woman and science identity on levels of depression. Interference is defined as the experience of the pressures from one identity interfering with the performance of another identity. The interference between the woman and the science identity did not impact depression when both identities were low in centrality. Alternatively, this interference did predict higher levels of depression when both identities were central to the self-concept (Settles 2004). While these studies demonstrate the importance of a more detailed analysis of multiple identities, they focused on normative and positively evaluated identities within society, not counter-normative ones. Their findings, however, support the inclusion of prominence in a test of the identity accumulation hypothesis.

The Current Project/Research Questions

Within this overall dissertation, I explore the relationship between holding counter-normative identities and psychological distress as well as the experience of holding counter-normative identities in everyday life. The specific outcomes explored regarding psychological distress are depression and social anxiety. The first outcome, depression, was selected based on its inclusion in previous accumulation research as well as the link to negatively evaluated identities (Thoits 1983, 2013). Social anxiety, however, is an exploratory outcome related to psychological distress and is measured by incorporating six items of the social distress subscale from the larger Social Avoidance and Distress scale (SADS; Watson and Friend 1969). Social anxiety was selected over generalized anxiety because it taps into the social nature of identities and the interactional component of experiencing these identities in everyday life. I examine three specific counter-normative identities: the childless, single, and non-religious. These specific identities were selected based on their rising numbers as well as their relevancy to everyday life (Scott 2009; Cragun 2012; DePaulo 2015). To explain, familial and religious norms are pervasive aspects of society, ones that are prevalent enough for a majority of individuals to

recognize and conceptualize. While numerous counter-normative identities exist within society, these three were specifically selected because of their readily apparent counter-parts (i.e. those who are in a relationship, parents, and religious) and the broad understanding of what these identities are, regardless of whether you hold them personally.

This dissertation is designed as a two-staged mixed method approach to studying multiple counter-normative identities and is presented as three separate, but related studies; each with a unique research question designed to answer a social psychological inquiry into multiple counter-normative identities. While independent papers, they build upon one another in terms of their focus while exploring multiple counter-normative identities.

Chapter two investigates the research question: "Does accumulating multiple counter-normative identities negatively influence individuals' psychological well-being?" This question is addressed using a structural equation model and data from a nationally representative, web-panel. Chapter 3 explores two related questions: (a) "How do groups of multiple identities differ in their influence on psychological well-being?" and, (b) "How do identity specific concepts, particularly prominence, influence these relationships?" These questions are investigated using the same nationally representative web-panel and a groups structural equation model. Table 1.1 shows the breakdown of the normative and counter-normative identities included in this sample. Chapter 4 uses in-depth interviews to explore the question: "How do individuals who claim all three of the counter-normative identities explored here experience them within their everyday life?"

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Table 1.1: Multiple Identity Survey Sample Design

Number of Counter-Normative Identities	Sample	Total
Three Counter-Normative Identities	**750**	**750**
Two Counter-Normative Identities		**750**
Non-religious and Childless	250	
Non-religious and Single	250	
Childless and Single	250	
One Counter-Normative Identities		**750**
Non-religious	250	
Childless	250	
Single	250	
Total Study Sample		**3000**
Sample Summary		
Three Normative Identities		750
Non-religious		1500
Childless		1500
Single		1500

CHAPTER 2

ACCUMULATING MULTIPLE COUNTER-NORMATIVE IDENTITIES, DEPRESSION, AND SOCIAL ANXIETY

Introduction

Relationships, parenting, and religion are three components of everyday life within the United States. As individuals we are either parents or childless, religious, or non-religious, and single or in a relationship. Additionally, as social humans, we have complex selves derived from the complex society we live in (Stryker 1980) and with this complexity comes multiple identities. For example, someone can be a religious, single, parent while another individual is married, with children, but non-religious. Previously, research has found that individuals who accumulated positively valued identities, such as being a parent and married, have higher levels of psychological well-being (Thoits 1983). American society is rife with traditional religious and familial values, which establish a negative understanding and perception of childless, single, and non-religious individuals (Llewellyn 2016). What happens, then, when individuals accumulate negatively evaluated identities? Could these individuals experience higher levels of depression and social anxiety because of the negative association linked with their identities? The current paper seeks to explore the accumulation of childless, single, and non-religious identities.

Individuals seek meaning and purpose throughout their lives, which brings about a better understanding of their own self-concept while reaffirming and defining the self-concept of others around them (Mead 1934). Humans are social by nature, which means we have multiple selves, or "as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image

of him in their mind…" (James 1890:294). These selves, or identities, come with socially defined meanings and expectations that are developed through social interaction and can be internalized by those claiming the identities (McCall and Simmons 1966). Identities can be tied to personal characteristics (i.e. person identities), social groups one belongs to (i.e. group identities), or social roles one claims (i.e. role identities) (Burke and Stets 2009). For example, one can be religious, a parent, and a spouse, all of which bring with them a set of shared meanings and expectations about how to "perform" that specific role. Given the importance of roles for social interaction and psychological well-being, this paper focuses on the accumulation of role identities.

Thoits (1983; 1986; 2003) described the positive impact accumulating multiple role identities has on one's psychological well-being. It is argued that identities provide meaning and purpose in life, and therefore, acquiring more identities provides one with psychological benefits (Thoits 1983). Providing benefits is especially true for voluntarily chosen identities that are easily exited lower costs and higher rewards associated with them such as the friend or volunteer identity (Thoits 2003). This can be compared to obligatory roles that involve strong normative demands or intense emotional ties such as spouse/partner and worker identities (Thoits 2003). Obligatory roles, however, can be beneficial when they involve minimal stressors (Thoits 1992). In sum, individuals claim and enact a variety of role identities throughout their everyday lives. These identities come with shared meanings and expectations that tell us and others who we are and how we should behave in these roles. In addition, having more identities is beneficial for one's psychological well-being because role identities provide meaning and purpose in life. There is, however, an important caveat to this story: Research in identity accumulation examines

individuals who acquire socially-valued identities that are positively evaluated within society (Thoits 2013).

While the accumulation of positive identities, such as religious, parent, and spouse, is important, there are an increasing number of individuals who are deviating away from normative identities. These individuals, then, hold counter-normative identities that run "counter" to the norms and expectations of society leaving them with devalued and negatively appraised identities. For example, individuals who voluntarily decide not to have children are viewed negatively and often described as: deviant, different, strange, abnormal, selfish, uncaring, cold, and materialistic (Veevers 1980; Muller and Yoder 1999; Gillespie 2000; Park 2002, and Mollen 2006). Similarly, those who are single by choice with no plans to marry in the future are discriminated against by employers, realtors, and family members for their "selfish" relationship choice (DePaulo 2015). The non-religious also face negative evaluations (Cragun, Kosmin, Keysar, Hammer, and Nielsen 2012). Specifically, atheists experience the most negative evaluations; they are the least liked and trusted groups in America (Edgell, Gerteis, Hartman 2006). The non-religious, childless, and single all share at least one thing in common: as counter-normative, these identities are viewed negatively within American society (Park 2002; Hunsberger and Altemeyer 2006; DePaulo 2006; Thoits 2013; Long 2016). This negativity is derived from the familial and religious values that are pervasive influences on most aspects of everyday life as well as each other. For example, the norms surrounding marriage and child-bearing can be traced back to religious roots with the idea that individuals, specifically heterosexual couples, should get married and have children, and then, bring those children to church (Veevers 1980; Gillespie 2000; Park 2002; DePaulo 2006). What happens when these individuals acquire more than one counter-normative identity? Does the psychological benefits

accumulate as they did with socially-valued identities or do individuals experience negative consequences for claiming one or more counter-normative identities?

In this paper, I investigate the impact claiming multiple counter-normative identities has on an individual's level of depression and social anxiety. Specifically, I will be focusing on three identity sets associated with three aspects of everyday life: parental status, relationship status, and religious status. This chapter aims to expand on the previous identity accumulation literature in three important ways. First, it incorporates both normative and counter-normative identities heeding the call for a closer examination of socially-devalued and/or stigmatized identities (Stets and Serpe 2013; Thoits 2013). Second, it includes depression as a measure of psychological distress, as has been previously examined (Thoits 1983; 1986). However, it also includes a measure of social anxiety to capture an interactionist approach to the psychological distress associated with holding counter-normative identities. Third, given the potential variation in the amount of choice each individual perceives when claiming, these identities a measure of perceived choice is examined within the statistical models to control for its impact.

Theory

Normative and Counter-Normative Identities

Mead (1934) described the process through which individuals develop their self-concept through social interactions, in which individuals establish the ability to view themselves as an object to themselves by taking the role of the "other." This process begins with children portraying significant others, those an individual interacts with regularly, and evolves into the portrayal of a generalized other, encapsulating society at large (Mead 1934). When people think about themselves as parents, for example, they reflect upon themselves based on a broader understanding of what "parenting" behavior and expectations entail. These behaviors and

expectations include being caring, loving, patient, understanding, and responsible (Veevers 1980; Park 2002). Parents, then, will evaluate themselves based on the shared meanings and expectations associated with the role of parent in their society. Symbolic interactionists have examined the implications of these social positions as roles and identities with an interest in the behavioral and emotional outcomes that occur as these roles and identities unfold over time (Stryker 1980). This paper focuses on the structural approach to symbolic interactionism, and identity theory more specifically, which recognizes that individuals develop complex selves derived from a complex society that are relatively stable and organized (Stryker 1980). Therefore, an identity is defined as the internalization of the meanings and expectations attached to a role, group, or person. (Stets and Burke 2009). The current research focuses on three role identity-sets: parent-childless; married-single, religious-non-religious.

The ability to perform these roles appropriately as set by the shared meanings and expectations associated with them brings positive evaluation and emotions (Burke 1980). Thoits (1983) argues that identities provide meaning and purpose in life for individuals by telling them how to behave and "perform" their roles. A certain identity such as teacher, for example, has a specific dress code requirement, time committed to students, and language expectations such as avoiding obscene words. Having this identity and recognizing one's purpose provides positive outcomes (Thoits 1983). Understanding one's place in social interaction, such as how they should emotionally, physically, and verbally respond, has a positive impact on an individual's psychological well-being (Sieber 1974; Thoits 1983).

There are, however, identities and roles that run counter to the normative expectations of society. Research examining non-normative identities within identity theory has focused on stigma and the identity process, examining the criminal identity (Asencio and Burke 2011), the

"fat identity" (Granberg 2011), and physical and mental illness (Lee and Craft 2002; Kroska and Harkness 2011; Markowitz, Angell, and Greenberg 2011). What about the identities that may or may not be experienced as stigmatizing, but are still negatively evaluated within society? A counter-normative identity is defined as an identity that deviates from what an individual is supposed to be or one day become as defined by societal norms (Long 2016). For example, within American society it is expected that individuals practice religion, get married, and have children (Llewellyn 2016). It is recognized that counter-normative identities may, in fact, be experienced by some as stigmatizing. It is also recognized, however, that counter-normativity does not necessitate stigma. The three counter-normative identities of interest in this paper are the childless, single, and non-religious.

For those individuals who are single, singlism is experienced both by family members, colleagues and employers, congregation members of their church, realtors, and society in general. Singlism is defined as the stigmatization of individuals who are single including those who are divorced, widowed, and never married (DePaulo 2006). This stigmatization can appear in the form of verbal statements (i.e. negative labels such as selfish, immature, ugly, cold, etc.); realtor discrimination such that relator's give preference to married couples when selling homes; and workplace discrimination with the expectation, for example, that single individuals are "available" to pick-up extra hours because they do not have family obligations (DePaulo and Morris 2006; DePaulo 2015). These experiences are similar to those of the childless, who experience negative consequences because of their choice to not have children.

Those who are childless are described using a variety of negative terms such as deviant, different, strange, weird, abnormal, selfish, uncaring, immoral, cold, and materialistic (Veevers 1980; Muller and Yoder 1999; Gillespie 2000; Park 2002, and Mollen 2006). Childless

individuals also experience workplace discrimination when they are asked to work late and extra hours because their co-workers have children at home (Blackstone and Stewart 2012). Those without children are categorized by a variety of names such as childless, unchilded, involuntarily childless, and childfree (Veevers 1980). Child-free is a positive term used for voluntarily childlessness (Basten 2009). There are some terms, however, used for individuals without children that do not specify whether or not this is a choice or involuntary such as unchilded, non-mother, non-father, without children. The current research uses the broad term of childless to include all individuals given the inclusion of involuntarily, voluntarily, and temporarily childless individuals in the sample. Perceived choice is, however, included in the analysis as a predictor variable in order to account for the variation among the childless respondents included in the analysis.

Lastly, the non-religious consist of individuals who have previously been labeled "non-religious or Nones" (Kosmin and Keysar 2009). Within America, nearly 80 percent of the population identifies with some form of religion, leaving over 20 percent of the population carrying the label: non-religious, which creates a variety of social and personal troubles (Pew 2015). Long, Yarrison, and Rowland (2015) found that non-religious individuals anticipate negative evaluations from others regarding their stance on religion, and therefore, simply avoid bringing up the topic unless directly asked. Cragun, Kosmin, Keysar, Hammer and Nielsen (2012), describe the overall negative affect aimed at the non-religious as well as the stigma faced by those whose stance on religion becomes known.

Ultimately, holding any one of these identities has the potential to negatively impact an individual's social and psychological health as has been shown in previous research (Park 2002;

Hunsberger and Altemeyer 2006; DePaulo 2006; Thoits 2013; Long 2016). What, then, are the implications of holding more than one counter-normative identity?

Multiple Identities: Role Theory and Symbolic Interactionism

Given that humans are social by nature (Mead 1934), we interact with a variety of others throughout our everyday lives by enacting various identities. James (1890:291) was among the first to state that individuals have multiple selves and identities, and that these selves might exist in harmony or in conflict. Over the last century, social psychologists have discussed the implication of holding multiple selves in the form of multiple roles, with a majority of work occurring within role theory and symbolic interactionism (Stryker and Statham 1985). Within role theory, scholars built upon the work of Parsons and Linton to explore roles as "social structure" and the negative consequences of role strain and role conflict (Goode 1960; Biddle 2013).

An alternative approach, however, was taken by Sieber (1974) who suggested that accumulating roles provides positive psychological benefits for individuals as described in his role accumulation hypothesis. Empirical results are inconclusive with support for both positive and negative outcomes related to claiming multiple roles (Biddle 2013). Symbolic interactionists, alternatively, examine roles as "social persons" with a focus on the development of complex selves derived from the complex societies we live in (Stryker and Statham 1985). According to Stryker (1980), identities are tied to social structural positions, which has several implications for examining multiple identities: one can have multiple roles within one group, one role in multiple groups, and multiple roles in multiple groups (Burke and Stets 2009; Serpe and Stryker 2011).

While it is understood that individuals have multiple identities, a majority of work within identity theory has not empirically examined issues regarding multiple identities. Rather,

research has focused on one identity in a given situation, and how individuals act to verify and maintain that identity (Burke and Stryker 2000; Burke 2003; Smith-Lovin 2003; Burke and Stets 2009; Stets and Serpe 2013). This body of research, however, provided the tools needed to examine the implication multiple identities has on an individual's psychological well-being. This was further examined by Thoits' (1983) expansion of Sieber's role accumulation theory (Sieber 1974). The identity accumulation hypothesis (Thoits 1983; 1986), provides the core theoretical framework for the current research.

Identity Accumulation Hypothesis

When people acquire an identity, they also obtain a better understanding of the meanings and expectations associated with this identity. This understanding provides them with a sense of security within their social interactions and relationships by creating a greater sense of meaning and purpose in life (Thoits 1983). With more identities, then, one acquires positive psychological benefits and this direct relationship between the number of identities and psychological well-being was termed "the identity accumulation hypothesis" (Seiber 1974; Thoits 1983:175). This hypothesis was empirically supported in several studies (Thoits 1983; 1986). Individuals with more identities reported lower levels of psychological distress. Going beyond the mere number of identities, Thoits (1992; 2003) suggested that agency, or the ability to make one's own choices, is an important component of the relationship between number of identities and psychological well-being. Voluntary identities, or those that are easily exited and freely chosen (i.e. friend and volunteer), are more beneficial when accumulated than obligatory identities, which are those that are compelled and difficult to exit (i.e. family and work) (Thoits 2003). More specifically, empirical results indicate that having more voluntary identities increases self-esteem, mastery, and lowers distress levels (Thoits 2003).

The identity accumulation literature provides the theoretical basis for the current study but this chapter deviates from prior research in two ways. First, I examine the accumulation of counter-normative identities as well as normative identities. A general assumption regarding devalued and/or stigmatized identities is that individuals who hold them always experience lower levels of psychological well-being, but little empirical evidence has been provided (Thoits 2013). The current research explores the implications of holding one or more counter-normative identities on one's level of depression and social anxiety.

Second, this research includes a direct measure of agency as the perceived choice of holding the identity as compared to the conceptualization of choice included in previous research. Thoits (2003) describes obligatory identities as ones that involve strong normative demands and intense emotional ties often related to family and work roles, whereas voluntary identities are lower in cost and higher in associated rewards. While the parental, spousal, and religious identities are normative within our society and, therefore, may be categorized as obligatory; it is the counter-normative identities that challenge the current conceptualization of "voluntary" identities. For some individual being without children or a spouse is opted into and voluntarily selected, while others experience childlessness and singleness by no choice of their own.

This distinction is important to note when considering the implication of accumulating multiple counter-normative identities, some of which are, in fact, voluntary and some not. While the current paper does not distinguish between those who hold these counter-normative identities voluntarily or involuntarily, it does include a measure of perceived choice as a predicting variable. By asking respondents how much choice they perceived having when claiming this

identity, we capture an understanding of the voluntary nature of these identities both normative and counter-normative.

Hypotheses

The general predictions of the identity accumulation hypothesis are that more identities an individual claims, the lower their levels of psychological distress. Previous research (Thoits 1983; 1986; 2003) has found support for this hypothesis with normative, positively evaluated identities. While these benefits are gained when claiming normative identities, the question remains what happens when one acquires multiple counter-normative identities. To explain, claiming counter-normative identities is unique for two reasons: (1) these identities are negatively evaluated by society and (2) these identities are discreditable. Discreditable here refers to aspects of one's self that are not readily apparent to others without one revealing it (Goffman 1963). Additionally, if the counter-normative identities remain hidden from others in order to avoid the negative feedback, acquiring more identities cannot bolster an individual's social network or support in the same way a normative identity would. Therefore, the current study proposes a relationship that is in the reversed direction from the predictions of the identity accumulation hypothesis.

In order to examine this relationship, two outcomes are used to represent psychological distress. The first outcome, depression, is used because of its previous examination with respect to multiple identities (Thoits 2003; Settles 2004; Brook, Garcia and Fleming 2008) and the link between potentially stigmatized identities and depression (Markowitz 1998). The second outcome, social anxiety, has not been explored regarding multiple identities but is relevant for a discussion of *counter-normative* identities. In particular, for individuals claiming multiple counter-normative identities social interaction is potentially problematic. If the identities are

known, then individuals may be socially anxious in anticipation of negative evaluation. If identities are unknown, individuals still may be socially anxious due to the management required to either hide or reveal their identity. Therefore:

Hypothesis 1: The more counter-normative identities an individual claims the higher their levels of depression.

Hypothesis 2: The more counter-normative identities an individual claims the higher their levels of social anxiety.

Thoits (2003) describes the important role agency plays in the identity accumulation hypothesis, with the accumulation of voluntary identities impacting one's psychological well-being, but the accumulation of obligatory identities having little to no impact. Additionally, identity theorists have described the important role choice plays in the identity process, when examining a variety of normative role identities and role choice behavior (Serpe 1987; Serpe and Stryker 2011; Stryker and Serpe 1982). Missing from this examination of choice, is the inclusion of counter-normative identities. For example, the experience of childlessness is physically, emotionally, and mentally different for women if it is voluntary versus involuntary (Scott 2009). So, while I am conceptualizing voluntary identities in a different manner than Thoits' work, I examine the important role perceived choice has on an individual's level of depression and social anxiety. More specifically, for individuals who perceive having less choice when it comes to their religious, parental, or relationship status I predict they will have higher levels of depression and social anxiety as compared to those who perceive having no choice. Therefore:

Hypothesis 3: The more choice an individual perceives when claiming their religious or non-religious identity the lower their levels of depression.

Hypothesis 4: The more choice an individual perceives when claiming their religious or non-religious identity the lower their levels of social anxiety.

Hypothesis 5: The more choice an individual perceives when claiming their parental or childless identity the lower their levels of depression.

Hypothesis 6: The more choice an individual perceives when claiming their parental or childless identity the lower their levels of social anxiety.

Hypothesis 7: The more choice an individual perceives when claiming their relationship or single identity the lower their levels of depression.

Hypothesis 8: The more choice an individual perceives when claiming their relationship or single identity the lower their levels of social anxiety.

In order to demonstrate the predicted hypotheses, a conceptual model is presented in Figure 1.2.

Data and Methods

Data

The data for this study consists of a nationally representative sample that was collected through an online survey conducted in July 2016. The survey was designed and implemented using Sensus 6.0 and was deployed through the Sociology Department's Survey Research Lab at Kent State University. A sample of 3,000 was obtained using the Dynamic Sampling Platform employed by Survey Sampling International (SSI), which uses traditional random-digit-dialing techniques to recruit individuals by landline and cell-phone numbers. Recent studies suggest that online samples result in a probability-based web panel equivalent to a nationally representative telephone sample collected via traditional random-digit-dialing (Braunsberger, Wybenga, and Gates 2007; Yeager, Krosnick, Change, Javitz, Levendusky, Simpser, and Wang 2011).

Given the interest in multiple counter-normative identities, quotas were set to ensure enough individuals were captured within each possible identity constellation. The sample is

designed to fill four specific quotas of 750 cases each: (1) individuals with no counter-normative identities; (2) individuals with one counter-normative identity, (3) individuals with two counter-normative identities, (4) and individuals having all three counter normative identities. There were several other restrictions placed on the sample to focus on individuals who *currently* hold and engage with their religious, parental, and relationship identities. Therefore, the sample was restricted to individuals between the ages of 25 and 65 to reduce empty-nest parents and younger individuals who are still unsure of their future identities. Additionally, we excluded individuals who are married but currently separated, widowed, and those who selected "Don't Know" or "Prefer Not to Answer" to questions asking whether or not there are married and whether or not they have children. The overall response rate of those individuals who started the survey is 33.1%.

Measures

Independent Variables

Number of Identities- In order to determine how many counter-normative identities an individual has they were asked a number of questions. For the **non-religious** they were asked *"Do you consider yourself to be religious or non-religious?*" The possible responses include (1) *Non-religious* or (2) *Religious.* Those individuals who selected non-religious were classified as having a non-religious counter-normative identity. If they select religious they were counted as normative.

For parental status, individuals were asked "*Which of the following best describes you?"* With responses being (1) *I have at least one child by birth, marriage, or adoption* and (2) *I do not have a child.* Those without children were counted as counter-normative and those with children as normative. Similarly, for relationship status, individuals were asked "*Which of the*

following best describes your current relationship status?" The possible responses include: *married; married, but currently separated; divorced, not currently in a committed relationship; divorced, currently in a committed relationship; in a committed relationship; dating, not currently in a committed relationship; widowed; and single (not in a relationship), never married.* Because the interest is on individuals who are currently holding a relationship or single identity we have excluded those who are widowed and married, but currently separated. For individuals who selected divorced, but currently not in a committed relationship, or single, they are considered to hold a counter-normative identity. For those who answered: married, divorced, currently in a relationship; in a committed relationship, and dating, not in a committed relationship, they are coded as having a normative identity.

The number of identities variable is constructed such that a higher score represents more counter-normative identities and a lower score represents more normative identities. For example, for someone who is non-religious, childless, and single their score would be a 3. For someone who is religious, a parent, and married their score would be a 0.

Perceived Choice of the Three Identities -For all three identities, respondents were asked *"How much choice did you have with respect to currently being [Insert identity]?* The wording of this questions remains the same apart from inserting the identity claimed by the respondent earlier in the survey. With possible responses ranging from (1) No choice to (7) Total Choice. A higher score on these choice items, represents more perceived choice in claiming the identity.

Dependent Variables

The focus on several psychological distress outcomes within the current research is based on previous research examining multiple roles and identities (Coverman 1989; Simon 1992;

Thoits 1983, 1986, 2003; Settles 2004; Brook et al. 2008) and the relation to stigma research (Markowitz 1998).

Depression will be measured using the depression sub-scale from the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI: Derogatis and Spencer 1982; Derogatis and Melisaratos 1983) to be consistent with previous research (Thoits 2003). The full BSI contains 20 items taken from the full Symptom Checklist-90-revised (SCL-90-R: Derogatis 1977) designed as a self-report inventory to assess symptoms of both non-clinical and psychiatric patients. For each subscale, individuals were asked to think about how distressed they were by the various symptoms in the past month with responses ranging from 0 (not at all) to 4 (extremely). The BSI depression sub-scale consists of seven statements. Higher scores represent higher levels of depression. The seven specific items include: *"Thoughts of ending your life; Feeling lonely; feeling blue; Feeling no interest in things; Feeling hopeless about the future; Feelings of worthlessness; and Feelings of being easily hurt."* These items are not asked role-specifically, rather captured an overall sense of depression.

Social Anxiety is an outcome of interest for the current research given that counter-normative identities are negatively evaluated by society in general, which may impact respondents' levels of social anxiety. The measure for social anxiety incorporated six items of the social distress subscale from the larger Social Avoidance and Distress scale (SADS; Watson and Friend 1969). For this measure, respondents were asked to rate how much the six statements are characteristic to the way they tend to feel on a 0 (not at all characteristics) to 10 (extremely characteristic) scale. The six specific items include: "*Nervous at casual gatherings; Uncomfortable in groups; At ease speaking with the opposite sex; Anxious and uncomfortable at*

parties; Seldom anxious in social situations; and Shy person." Similar to the depression items, these questions were not asked role-specifically and captured a general sense of social anxiety.

Controls

Because of the variation in societal expectations towards the normative aspects of one's religious, parental, and relationship status, several demographic controls are included in the analysis. *Age* is measured in number of years. *Gender* is coded dichotomously as 0 if the respondent is male and 1 if the respondent is female. *Sexuality* is measured using two dummy variables that distinguish among heterosexuals, homosexual/gay/lesbian, and bisexual/queer. In the analysis, heterosexuals are the reference category. *Education* was measured by asking which best represents your education: *less than high school; high school graduate; some college or technical school; college graduate; graduate or professional degree.* A higher score of the education variable represents more education.

Results

In order to examine the effect of identity accumulation of counter-normative identities on depression and social anxiety, two structural equation models were estimated with one model for each outcome variable of interest. Table 1.2 presents the means and standard deviations for all the variables included in the models, including the demographic variables that were controlled for. When looking at the demographic characteristics of the sample, one can see that 62% of the sample is female. Additionally, the average age of respondents is 41.23, which is as expected given the age restriction of the sample of adults between the ages of 25 and 65. Once again, this age restriction was used to capture individuals who claim these identities and are in the midst of their identity experience rather than the transitional periods of early and late adulthood. five percent of our sample identified themselves as homosexual, gay, or lesbian with an additional four percent identifying themselves as bisexual or queer. The average number of counter-

normative identities is 1.5, which is expected given the quotas set within the sample. Table 2.2 presents the bivariate correlations between all the constructs included in the models. Table 3.2 and Table 4.2 presents the results with unstandardized coefficients and significance of the two structural equation models estimated one for each of the outcomes of interest. Several goodness of fit measure suggests the models demonstrate an adequate fit to the data with an RMSEA of .06 and a CFI of .95 for the depression model. For the social anxiety model the RMSEA is .06 with a CFI of .96.

As shown in Table 3.2, the first hypotheses, *that individuals with more counter-normative identities will report higher levels of depression*, is not supported. The number of identities does not have a significant relationship with depression. As shown in Table 4.2, the second hypothesis, *that individuals with more counter-normative identities will report higher levels of social anxiety*, is supported. The more counter-normative identities an individual has, the higher their social anxiety (β=.21).

Hypotheses three through eight predict that the more an individual perceives having choice in their identity, the lower their depression and social anxiety. With respect to the religious identity set, as shown in Table 3.2, the more an individual perceives that they had choice in claiming their identity, the lower their levels of depression (β=-.05); supporting hypothesis three. As shown in Table 4.2, choice with respect to the religious identity, however, does not show a significant relationship with social anxiety, which does not support hypothesis four. With respect to choice within parental status, both hypotheses five and six are supported. The more choice and individual perceives they had with respect to their parental status, the lower their levels of depression (β=-.03) and social anxiety (β=-.12). Similarly, regarding choice with respect to relationship status, both hypotheses seven and eight are supported. The more choice an

individual perceives they had with respect to their current relationship status, the less depressed (β=-.10) and socially anxious (β=-.27) they are. Thus, overall, the number of counter-normative identities an individual claims has little impact on their levels of depression, while the number of counter-normative identities does have an impact on their social anxiety. Similarly, the amount of choice they perceive having in claiming those identities is crucially important for their depression and social anxiety.

In these models, a few of the control variables have noteworthy patterns of relationships. First, individuals who are homosexual or bisexual/queer are significantly more likely to claim multiple counter-normative identities as compared to straight individuals. This is an important relationship because previous literature on childlessness and singlism, in particular, focus on heterosexual individuals. In addition, individuals who are bisexual/queer report significantly higher levels of depression and social anxiety when compared to straight individuals, while homosexual individuals show no difference in their levels of depression as compared to heterosexuals. Lastly, age shows a significant relationship with both outcomes. Older individuals report lower levels of both depression and social anxiety.

Discussion

The goal of the current study was to extend the work of Thoits (1983; 1986; 2003) regarding the identity accumulation hypothesis by including counter-normative identities. Previous work found that accumulating positively evaluated identities, established a better understanding of one's self-concept and produced positive outcomes (Thoits 1983). With more identities, people find more purpose and meaning in their lives. Accumulation of identities was positive for normative identities such as being a parent, spouse, and religious but this relationship was not explored with negatively evaluated identities such as being non-religious and childless.

Given the negative societal expectations and meanings associated with these identities, and the previous research establishing these identities as stigmatized (Park 2002, DePaulo 2006; Hunsberger and Altemeyer 2006) it was hypothesized that accumulating more counter-normative identities would not produce positive outcomes for individuals. Additionally, based on the distinction between voluntary and obligatory identities and the important role agency played in the more recent work on identity accumulation, perceived choice was incorporated into the analysis. The main focus of accumulation research has thus far been on self-esteem and psychological distress (Thoits 1983; 1986; 2003). Depression was incorporated into the current research in an attempt to mimic previous findings. It was predicted that the more counter-normative identities one has, the higher levels of depression they would report. Interestingly, however, the number of counter-normative identities did not significantly predict depression. Whereas depression focuses on various aspects of mental health at the individual level, social anxiety asks individuals to think about themselves in relation to others in interaction. This interaction, in turn, can bring about feelings of uncertainty with individuals unaware of how others will respond to their various counter-normative identities. As predicted, in this analysis, the more counter-normative identities an individual claims, the higher their levels of social anxiety. The accumulation of counter-normative identities, then, has a significant impact on how individuals think about social interaction with others.

Another important finding emerges when examining perceived choice. In 2003, Thoits enhanced the identity accumulation hypothesis by including agency into the relationship; distinguishing between voluntary and obligatory identities. It became apparent that it was not just the accumulation of identities, but specifically, the accumulation of voluntary identities that impacts an individual's psychological well-being (Thoits 2003). While taking a different

approach, the voluntary/obligatory dimension in the current research is measured by an individual's perceived choice rather than a societal definition of obligations versus voluntary roles. The results demonstrate the robustness of choice. In general, the more choice respondents report when claiming the identities, the less psychological distress they experience. This finding is important for the extension of the identity accumulation hypothesis as well as the study of counter-normative identities for several reasons.

First, beyond the inclusion of counter-normative identities, the current work furthers our understanding of the important role choice plays in the identity accumulation hypothesis. The strong relationship between the number of counter-normative identities and social anxiety, coupled with the significant relationship between choice and depression/social anxiety suggests that simply counting the number of identities an individual holds is not enough to make assumptions about the benefits they receive from them. When individuals perceive they have choice over their identity selection, they are less depressed and socially anxious. Alternatively, when individuals do not think they have choice over the identities they claim, they report greater depression and social anxiety.

Second, despite the fact that counter normative identities are negatively evaluated by society, and previous research has demonstrated the potential for discrimination and stigma, the current research finds that having more than one of the counter-normative identities does not increase one's level of depression. Recent work on counter-normative identities within identity theory demonstrated the importance of contextualizing factors in the experience of holding any given counter-normative identity. For example, when individuals who are childless, single, or non-religious have higher levels of choice and authenticity, the impact these identities have on one's feelings of shame and embarrassment is diminished (Long 2016). When individuals select

these identities, and want to hold them (i.e. they have choice in claiming their identity), these identities do not impact depression and social anxiety. For those without choice in their childless, single, and non-religious identities, however, depression and social anxiety are increased.

As with any empirical investigation, there are several limitations. First, the current research uses a set of pre-selected identity sets: religious, parental, and relationship. These identity sets were selected because they are major aspects of everyday life. Despite their prevalence within American society, importance of these identities may vary for every individual. This pre-selection is a limitation, then, because individuals in the sample, while holding these identities, may not view them as important or central to their self-concept. In addition to preselecting these identity sets, we also limited the number of identities in the current study to three. The number of identities was limited to three because the length of the survey is drastically increased with every identity included as is the time it takes to complete the survey. In addition, including a large sample of individuals who claim three counter-normative identities is challenging, adding more only exacerbates this issue. This is a limitation given that individuals can have a plethora of identities and these three specific identities are not the only identities impacting their psychological well-being. Future research should make an effort to examine additional counter-normative identities. Additionally, unlike past research on identity accumulation (Thoits 1983; 1986; 2003), the data employed is cross sectional, which does not allow the examination of how multiple identities influence depression and social anxiety over time, but provides a snapshot of their current experience with holding these identities.

Despite these limitations, there are clear potential avenues for future research on multiple counter-normative identities. According to identity theory, individuals' selves are complex due to the complex structures in which we enact them (Stryker 1980). With this complexity comes

the understanding that identities vary across individuals in several important ways described over several decades by identity theorists (Stets and Serpe 2013). The importance of an identity, the likelihood one enacts an identity, the way other individuals think about your identity performance, and the identities of those around you all impact how you enact and experience identities within your everyday life (Stets and Serpe 2013). Thoits (1992; 1995) discusses the significant role prominence, salience, and commitment plays in determining whether one experiences positive psychological benefits from claiming an identity. This becomes important when thinking about the various constellations of identities individuals hold and how the various levels of salience, prominence, and commitment impact behavioral and psychological outcomes. While the current research does not find a significant relationship between number of counter-normative identities and depression, one might consider what would happen if these identities are all important to an individual or if these identities are frequently enacted across situations. Would having more salient and/or prominent counter-normative identities increase depression or social anxiety as compared to unimportant and never enacted identities? Future research should continue to explore the implication of multiple counter-normative identities on psychological distress by including some contextualizing factors into the examination of holding multiple counter-normative identities.

Figure 1.2: Conceptual Model

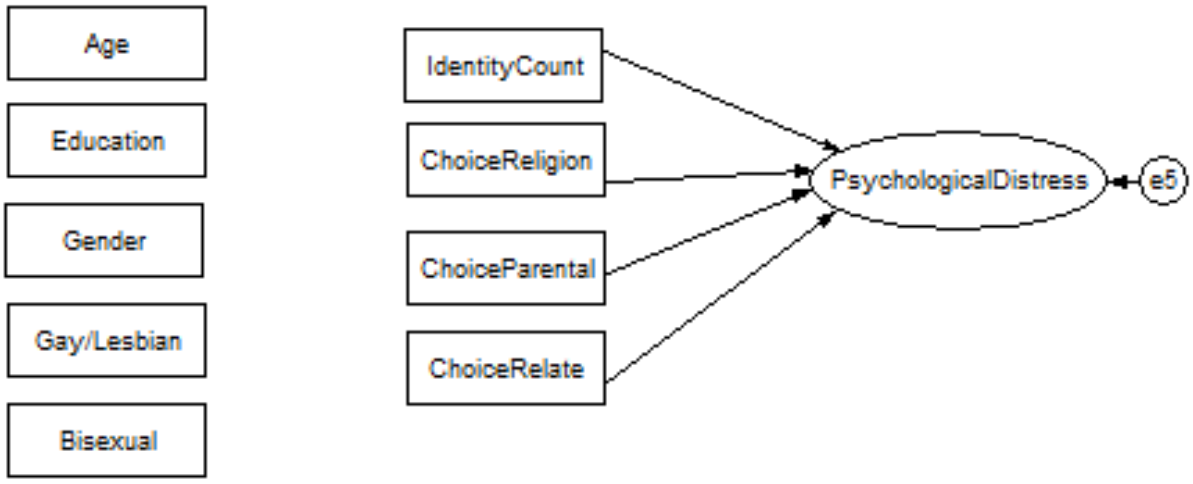


Table 1.2: Means and Standard Deviations

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Range
Education	3.6	.99	1-5
Gender	.62	.48	0-1
Age	41.23	11.04	25-65
Gay/Lesbian	.05	.21	0-1
Bisexual/Queer	.04	.20	0-1
Counter-Normative Count	1.53	1.12	0-3
Choice Religion	6.52	1.13	1-7
Choice Parental	6.15	1.67	1-7
Choice Relationship	6.18	1.59	1-7
Depression Items			
Depression 1	.52	1.07	0-4
Depression 2	1.38	1.35	0-4
Depression 3	1.44	1.28	0-4
Depression 4	1.19	1.30	0-4
Depression 5	1.21	1.36	0-4
Depression 6	.96	1.28	0-4
Depression 7	1.16	1.32	0-4
Social Anxiety Items			
Social Anxiety 1	3.98	3.34	0-10
Social Anxiety 2	4.16	3.40	0-10
Social Anxiety 3	6.04	3.14	0-10
Social Anxiety 4	4.21	3.44	0-10
Social Anxiety 5	4.26	3.32	0-10
Social Anxiety 6	4.59	3.28	0-10

Table 2.2 Pearson Correlations Coefficients

	Education	Gender	Age	Gay/ Lesbian	Bisexual/ Queer	Choice Religion	Choice Parent	Choice Relationship	Identity Count	Depression	Social Anxiety
Education	1										
Gender	-0.062*	1									
Age	-0.050*	-0.099*	1								
Gay/Lesbian	0.002	-0.178*	0.051*	1							
Bisexual/Queer	-0.059*	0.034	-0.096*	-0.047*	1						
Choice Religion	-0.043*	0.095*	0.100*	0.032	0.044*	1					
Choice Parent	-0.023	0.074*	-0.010	0.041*	-0.003	0.174*	1				
Choice Relationship	-0.010	0.081*	0.025	-0.013	-0.037*	0.127*	0.337*	1			
Identity Count	0.010	-0.074*	-0.017	0.184*	0.108*	0.099*	-0.105*	-0.105*	1		
Depression	-0.030	0.004	-0.149*	-0.001	0.102*	-0.126*	-0.163*	-0.163*	0.094*	1	
Social Anxiety	-0.024	0.051*	-0.156*	-0.004	0.068*	-0.042*	-0.094*	-0.094*	0.138*	0.491*	1

Table 3.2: Unstandardized Coefficients for Depression Model N=2752

	Choice Religion	Choice Parental Status	Choice Relationship Status	Counter-Normative Identity Count	Depression
Education	-.02	-.22	-.00	.03	-.03***
Gender	.25***	.26***	.27***	-.09*	.04
Age	.01***	-.00	.00	-.00	-.01***
Gay/Lesbian	.20*	.39**	-.11	.10***	.03
Bisexual/Queer	.26*	-.17	-.24***	.69***	.22***
Choice Religion					-.05***
Choice Parental					-.03***
Choice Relationship					-.10***
IdentityCount					.01

Depression Model: χ^2 =820.09; p-value<.01; RMSEA= 0.06; CFI= 0.95

Table 4.2: Unstandardized Coefficients for Social Anxiety Model N=2784

	Choice Religion	Choice Parental Status	Choice Relationship Status	Counter-Normative Identity Count	Social Anxiety
Education	-.02	-.23	-.01	.02	-.05
Gender	.25***	.26***	.25***	-.07	.50***
Age	.01***	-.00	.00*	-.00	-.04***
Gay/Lesbian	.20*	.41**	-.11	.10***	.12
Bisexual/Queer	.27*	-.14	-.19***	.64***	.62*
Choice Religion					-.02
Choice Parental					-.12**
Choice Relationship					-.27****
IdentityCount					.21***

Social Anxiety Model: χ^2 =552.20; p-value<.01; RMSEA= 0.06; CFI= 0.96

CHAPTER 3

PROMINENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS IN INDIVIDUALS WITH MULTIPLE COUNTER-NORMATIVE IDENTITIES

Introduction

As individuals we have complex selves derived from the complex society in which we reside (Stryker 1980). Part of the complexity stems from the existence of multiple identities, which, when combined, constitute an individual's self-concept (Burke and Stets 2009). The earliest conceptualization of multiple identities comes from William James who described the self as: "*the sum total of all that an individual can call his."* (James 1890:291). For example, one might be a parent, spouse, employee, and avid football fan. For James (1890), multiple identities do not always coexist easily together. He stated: *"He has as many social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinions he cares…From this there results what practically is a division of the man into several selves; and this may be a discordant splitting…or it may be a harmonious division of labor"* (James 1890:294). Therefore, research on multiple identities has explored the implication multiple identities has on an individual's psychological well-being (Thoits 1983; Burke 2003; Lynn Smith-Lovin 2003; and Burke and Stets 2009).

Thoits (1983; 1986; 2003; 2013) has theoretically and empirically examined the impact of multiple identities for over two decades. Her research on multiple identities focuses on the positive impact accumulating roles and identities has for an individual's psychological well-being (Sieber 1974; Thoits 1983; 1986; 2003; 2013). Accumulating identities creates a sense of

security, social support, and decreases psychological distress (Thoits 1983). As research on accumulation evolved, Thoits (2003) introduced the concept of agency into the equation using a combination of voluntary (i.e. easily exited with lower costs and higher rewards) and obligatory (i.e. strong normative demands with intense emotional ties) identities. Accumulation of voluntary identities, results find, is a significant predictor of increased psychological benefits (Thoits 2003). Accumulating obligatory identities, however, does not increase one's psychological benefits, unless an individual experiences minimal stressors related to the obligation (Thoits 2003).

One issue arises within the accumulation literature: a lack of diversity among the identities accumulated. To explain, the overall focus within identity accumulation literature has been on normative identities that are positively evaluated within society such as parent, employee, spouse, religious, and volunteer (Thoits 2013). All of these positively evaluated identities have positive properties within interaction, and can be expected to provide the kinds of outcomes Thoits discusses as important (such as increased social support). Little to no research on identity accumulation, however, has incorporated negatively evaluated identities (Thoits 2003) and, therefore, there has been no reason for negative consequences to be predicted or to emerge when accumulation is examined. The lack of inclusion of negatively evaluated identities from an accumulation perspective has not accounted for potential negative consequences resulting from multiple identities. Furthermore, the exclusion of counter-normative identities has limited our understanding of how multiple identities can negatively impact psychological well-being from an accumulation perspective.

This limitation in the current literature may be problematic considering a rising number of individuals are claiming identities which run counter to the traditional norms of society. This

paper examines three specific aspects of everyday life within which an individual can claim a normative or a counter-normative identity, all of which are related to familial and religious norms in our society: parents vs. voluntary childlessness, married vs singlehood, and religious vs. non-religious. The increasing number of individuals opting out of familial norms and religion is prompting interest from researchers, as well as society at large. In addition, despite an increase in childlessness, being single, and being non-religious, these three identities deviate away from the religious foundation of American society (Stavrova and Fetchenhauer 2014). A majority of Americans, then, view these identities negatively with many individuals reporting personal experience with negative evaluations and stigma related to these specific components of their self-concept (Park 2002; DePaulo 2006; and Cragun, Kosmin, Keysar, Hammer and Nielsen 2012). Given the negative expectations, meanings, and experiences associated with these identities in society at large, one might ask whether accumulation of counter-normative identities has the same positive relationship with psychological well-being that positive identities do (Thoits 2013). The first contribution of the current paper, then, is the addition of counter-normative identities in an examination of how multiple identities influence individuals' psychological well-being.

Thoits (1983; 1986) also described the theoretical importance of several characteristics of the individual identities accumulated that may impact this relationship. It is recognized that identities exist within a self-structure and this structure is organized hierarchically (Stryker 1980). Therefore, Thoits (1983; 2013) draws on various concepts from identity theory research (Stryker 1980; Burke and Stets 2009; Stets and Serpe 2013) to theoretically explore the accumulation process. Of particular interest to Thoits (1983; and 2013) are the concepts of commitment (i.e. the amount of network ties one has based on the identity and the affective ties

created because of the identity), salience (i.e. the likelihood of enacting an identity across situations), and prominence (i.e. the importance of an identity within the self-concept) (Stryker 1980; Stets and Serpe 2013). While Thoits (1983; 2013) theoretically examines the implication of these identity concepts, she did not empirically explore their impact on the accumulation process. Identity theory, then, provides the framework and previous empirical explorations of these three concepts to explore how they impact the accumulation process.

The second contribution of this paper builds upon an examination of the accumulation of counter-normative identities by examining how identity concepts may impact psychological outcomes when society negatively views the accumulated identities. Given the significance of prominence within the identity model (Brenner, Serpe, Stryker 2014), coupled with the counter-normative character of the examined identities, the current research will explore the influence of prominence on psychological well-being within the accumulation of counter-normative identities. The question of interest, then, is: How does the prominence, or importance to an individual's self-concept, of individual's identities influence their psychological well-being differently as they accumulate more counter-normative identities?

This paper seeks to expand research on multiple identities by focusing on the impact of counter-normative identities and the identity specific concept of prominence. Using a nationally representative probability-based web panel of 3,000 U.S. adults, four potential groups of normative and counter-normative identities will be explored. In particular, the research seeks to understand how the prominence associated with individual's identities differentially impact psychological well-being, measured by depression and social anxiety, as an individual accumulates multiple counter-normative identities. This analysis is conducted using a groups structural equation model and tests of equality for each of the effects of interest. This paper

begins with a review of the literature on identity accumulation research, identity theory concepts, and counter-normative identities. It continues with a discussion of the data, methods and analysis and is followed by a results section describing the findings. The paper concludes with a discussion and conclusion highlighting the overall findings, limitations, and avenues for future research.

Literature Review

Identity Accumulation Literature

When individuals acquire identities, they also gain a sense of meaning and purpose in life through the shared expectations associated with each identity. This creates an understanding of how to act in interactions as well as what to expect from others. Additionally, accumulating identities provides an increase in social support and positive psychological benefits (Thoits 1983). The identity accumulation hypothesis, built upon the work of Sieber (1974), states that acquiring more roles establishes a base of positive self-feelings that serves to protect individuals against negative feedback, which, in turn, bolsters an individual's self-esteem. Additionally, an accumulation of identities results in higher levels of energy and commitment (Marks 1977); an increase in the fulfillment of life (Burton 1998), and an increase in psychological well-being (Aneshensel, Frerichs, and Clark 1981; Barnett and Baruch 1985; Radloff 1975). The examination of multiple roles was further specified by the identity accumulation hypothesis of Thoits (1983).

The impact of identity accumulation on psychological well-being was empirically examined by Thoits (1983; 1986; 2003) across several studies. Thoits (1983) first explored accumulation with a sample from the New Haven Community Survey to determine whether or not the accumulation of identities decreased the amount of psychological distress an individual

reports. Results supported the hypothesis such than individuals reported lower levels of psychological distress when more identities were acquired. Similarly, Thoits (1986) found an increase in multiple identities significantly reduced distress, which included measures of depression and anxiety within the Chicago study and generalized distress in the New Haven study. Once again, a clear pattern emerged with more identities producing positive psychological benefits.

Recognizing that merely counting identities was problematic, Thoits (2003) expanded her hypothesis to include agency into the relationship. Agency was included by distinguishing between *voluntary* identities and *obligatory* identities. Voluntary identities, such as the friend and volunteer identity, are those that are freely selected and easily vacated if the cost of holding the identity exceeds the perceived rewards. Obligatory identities, such as the spouse and employee identity, involve demands and expectations that are strongly upheld and expected within society (Thoits 2013). Results indicate that it is the accumulation of voluntary identities that have the most significant impact on mental well-being as compared to obligatory identities, which only impact mental well-being when they involve few stressful associations (Thoits 2003). Expanding on the concept of voluntary identities, agency has been explored within identity processes using a measure of perceived choice. Long (2016) found that individuals who perceive having more choice in claiming their non-religious identity report lower levels of shame and embarrassment as compared to individuals with less perceived choice. Perceived choice, then, impacts how an individual experiences the identity process.

While having empirically explored the implication of agency within the accumulation process (2003), Thoits (1983; 2013) also theoretically describes the importance of identity specific characteristics within the accumulation process. Specifically, Thoits (1983) describes

several concepts from identity theory as important to the understanding of identity accumulation. One concept of particular interest is identity commitment, which is conceptualized as the social ties one has related to a specific identity and the emotional attachment one has to those individuals (Stryker 1980). According to Thoits (1983), identities with high levels of commitment should have a greater impact on an individual's psychological well-being than identities low in commitment. In recent work, Thoits (2013) includes additional identity theory concepts such as identity salience and prominence into her accumulation discussion, suggesting identities that are more salient and prominent to an individual will also have a higher impact on psychological well-being (Thoits 1992; 1995). While defining the theoretical importance to the accumulation process, Thoits never empirically explored these concepts. The current research draws on accumulation research by Thoits (1983; 1986l 1992; 1995; 2003; and 2013) as well as identity theory research to integrate the two bodies of research.

Identity Theory

The work of Thoits (1983; 1986; 2003; 2013) demonstrates the importance of identities as a facet of psychological well-being. Identities, defined as the internalized meanings and expectations associated with roles, groups, and personal characteristics (Stets and Serpe 2013), have been heavily researched over that past thirty years. The early formulation of identity theory was posited by Stryker (1968). Using symbolic interactionism and role theory as a foundation, Stryker developed structural symbolic interactionism (structural SI) to further explore the relationship between self, society, and interaction (Stryker 1980). By emphasizing the influence of social structure on selves and interaction, structural SI allows for a better understanding of the complex social world in which identities and selves exist. A key assumption within this framework is that opportunities for, and engagement in, social interaction is not a random

process; individuals engagement with an identity is either constrained or facilitated by social structure (Stryker 1980). Stryker further elaborated on the reciprocal relationship between self, society, and interaction posited by Mead (1934) through the establishment of Identity theory (Stryker 1968; 1980). From this perspective, individuals living in a complex society have complex selves, made up of multiple identities. Throughout the past three decades, identity theory has produced a wide array of theoretically driven empirical research with various research programs establishing facets within the overall theory (Burke and Stets 2009).

For Stryker and colleagues, identities are organized in a salience hierarchy; defined as the probability of identities being enacted across situations (Stryker 1980). The salience of an identity becomes important for an individual when multiple identities could potentially be enacted in a given situation. The more salient an identity, the more likely an individual will enact it in a given situation (Stryker 1980). Another concept important to the organization of self is prominence, with the prominence of each identity organized as a hierarchy. The prominence of an identity is defined as the amount of importance an individual places on an identity (McCall and Simmons 1966; Stryker 1980; Stets and Serpe 2013). While developed as two independent concepts, it has been recently established that prominence acts as an influencing force on salience (Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker 2014). Therefore, salience and prominence become important when one is interested in the implications of multiple identities (Serpe and Stryker 2011). For the sake of parsimony and because of the established relationship between the two concepts (Brenner et al. 2014), the current chapter will focus on the prominence of identities. What this perspective examines is the organization of multiple identities within the prominence hierarchy for each person. Several studies theoretically explore the implication of multiple identities within a single individual (Burke 2003; Lynn Smith-Lovin 2003; and Burke and Stets

2009), and more empirical work on multiple identities has been called for within the identity theory framework (Stryker and Burke 2000).

The identity accumulation hypothesis bridges the gap between research on psychological well-being and identities. While identity concepts are included in theoretical discussion (Thoits 1983; 2013), no empirical research examines the implication of multiple identities on psychological well-being while taking identity relevant concepts into account. Additionally, Thoits (2013:369) points to a limitation within accumulation studies and stress research on the gain or loss of identities: the attention solely on "socially valued identities". She emphasizes a need to incorporate devalued or negatively appraised identities into this research (Thoits 2013). A similar gap in the literature exists within identity theory research (Stets and Serpe 2013). A majority of identity research has focused on normative role identities with some expansion to counter-normative identities (Long 2016). Identity theorists are also calling for more research on non-traditional identities (Stets and Serpe 2013. The current study seeks to heed this call by including a number of counter-normative identities into an accumulation model. Specific attention will be given to how counter-normative identities impact psychological well-being when accumulated as compared to normative identities.

Counter-Normative Identities

From a very young age, individuals begin to develop their self-concept through social interaction by creating the ability to view themselves as an object through the process of role taking (Mead 1934). Children begin with roles linked to significant others, such as parents and teachers, and expand their roles to include generalized others, allowing them to develop a sense of societal expectations and meanings (Mead 1934). Throughout this process, we learn that roles have meanings and expectations attached to them, which tell us who we are and how we should

behave in a given situation (Stryker 1980). Consider the role of mother, for instance; there are meanings such as caring, loving, selfless, kind, and nurturing associated with the performance of that identity (Shapiro 2014). Individuals recognize these meanings and can internalize them as part of their self-concept establishing various identities (Stryker 1980).

While individuals can acquire a vast number of identities throughout their lives, for most, a majority of these identities are normatively constructed and selected based on one's location in the social structure (McCall and Simmons 1966). Within American society, religious and familial traditions and values are strongly upheld and understood (Stavrova and Fetchenhauer 2014). Individuals, in general, are expected to be religious, get married, and have children (Gillespie 2000). The link between familial norms and religion can be found across religious doctrines, which emphasis pronatalism. For example, in the book of Genesis 1:28 individuals are told to "Be fruitful and multiply." Within Catholicism, women are pushed toward motherhood as the "fundamental contribution that the Church and humanity expect from women" (*Evangelium Vitae*: 19). The expectation that one adheres to traditional family and religious values sheds light on the negative societal views of individuals who violate these norms by opting out of religion, parenting, and marriage.

While being childless, single, and non-religious may be experienced by some as stigmatizing, the current research recognizes that the perception and experience of these identities vary based on multiple factors. These factors include: geographic location, age, gender, socioeconomic status, religious belief, and social networks (Scott 2009; Rijken and Merz 2014; Long, Rowland, and Yarrison 2015; Shapiro 2014; Long 2016; Llewellyn 2016). While these experiences vary by these factors, the overall American context maintains a negative evaluation of holding any of these identities. Therefore, these identities are conceptualized as counter-

normative identities, defined as identities which deviate away from the normative expectations of society (Long 2016). For some individuals, then, holding any one of these identities may bring about the negative consequences associated with holding devalued identities (Major and O'Brien 2005; Hatzenbuehler, Phelan, and Link 2013). Understanding the negative meanings and expectations associated with these identities is important when examining how multiple identities can impact depression and social anxiety.

The Single Identity

Being single, either temporarily or permanently, in a society where married and coupled individuals are the norm presents a variety of challenges. DePaulo (2006) defines *singlism* as the stigmatization of uncoupled individuals including those that are divorced, widowed, and never-married. When individuals are asked to compare those who are single to those married, research finds negative adjectives arise such as: "immature, insecure, self-centered, unhappy, lonely, and ugly" (DePaulo and Morris 2006:251). Within the media, single individuals are depicted as struggling to find the "right one", lonely, desperate, always looking for a hook-up, selfish, career-obsessed, and miserable (DePaulo 2015). A more direct form of discrimination appears within the housing market. For example, Morris, Sinclair, and DePaulo (2007) found that relators prefer married individuals over single counterparts and only 23 states provide single individuals protection again marital discrimination (National Fair Housing Alliance 2013).

The Childless Identity

Similar to singles, childless individuals often face an array of negative meanings associated with their choice to not parent. Being childless is often described by others as selfish, immoral, uncaring, unfeminine and materialistic (Veevers 1980; Muller and Yoder 1999; Gillespie 2000; Park 2002, and Mollen 2006). Chancey and Dumais (2009) stated that despite the

rising number of childless individuals, the overall stereotypes of the general population regarding the childless have not progressed since the 1970s and are overall very negative. Burkett (2002) found individuals described childless as burdens to society, working the welfare system, and getting a "free-ride". Childlessness is viewed by many as an empty lifestyle devoid of meaning and purpose (Scott 2009).

The Non-religious Identity

Given that religion predominately shapes the negative perception of individuals who are single and childless (Shapiro 2014), it should come as no surprise that individuals who are non-religious experience negative evaluations. Despite differences among the non-religious, Americans often make judgements based on a broad categorization of those who are religious and non-religious (Cragun, Kosmin, Keysar, Hammer and Nielsen 2012). This is potentially problematic considering the differences among atheists, agnostics, and "Nones" (Nones are defined as anyone stating "None" when asked their religion) (Cragun, Kosmin, Keysar, Hammer and Nielsen 2012). When asked about the impact of non-religion on their relationships, Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006), found individuals experience difficulties with friends and relatives. Atheists are also found to be one of the most strongly disliked groups by the American populace. For example, researchers found that Atheists topped the list of groups that individuals would be least likely to vote for, or most upset about if their child brought home as a partner (Edgell, Gerteis, Hartman 2006).

Interaction among Normative and Counter-Normative Identities

While most research on individuals who are single, childless, and non-religious focuses on the experience of holding one of these identities, several studies have examined the interaction among various identities. Previously, researchers explored how the religious

emphasis on parenting and marriage impacts individuals who deviate from the norm such as a religious, single mother or a religious couple opting out of parenting (Llewellyn 2016). Llewellyn (2016) found that negative outcomes arise for individuals who fail to conform to the normative expectations associated with a religious identity causing an increase in psychological distress. For example, religious women who decide to remain childless often find themselves struggling to maintain relationships within their religious identity. Furthermore, single parents struggle to find a place within a religious community that ostracizes their non-normative family structure (Stavrova and Fetchenhauer 2014). Another body of research examines the role religion plays in decreasing stress related to parental responsibilities, finding that individuals with a strong religious community experience lower levels of parental stress (Henderson, Uecker, and Stroope 2016).

This prior research on counter-normative identities suggests that the various ways in which individual's construct their self-concept has differential impact on their psychological well-being. The current paper expands this research by examining four different combinations of both normative and counter-normative identities to determine how these identities impact depression and social anxiety.

Hypotheses

In summary, individuals have multiple identities they claim throughout their everyday lives. Some identities are positively valued by society, in general, while others are negatively viewed and potentially stigmatized. Identities, then, can impact how an individual interacts with others and experiences everyday life. Researchers have explored the various ways in which identities impact behavior, emotions, relationships, self-concepts, mental, and physical health (Stets and Serpe 2013). For example, Thoits (1983) examines how the accumulation of identities

impacts an individual's mental health, finding a positive relationship between accumulation and psychological well-being. Little research within accumulation, or identity theory more broadly, however, has examined negatively evaluated identities (Thoits 2013; Long 2016; Stets and Serpe 2016). In addition, Thoits (1983; 2003; 2013) theoretically has connected a number of major concepts within identity theory to the accumulation model, but has not empirically examined them.

This paper seeks to expand the examination of identity accumulation to include counter-normative identities as well as the prominence associated with individuals' identities. In particular, this research examines how prominence influences psychological well-being differently within four possible groups of normative and counter-normative identities that individuals can claim from the three role-sets examined.

Previous research within accumulation has focused mainly on mental health by examining psychological well-being (Thoits 2013). This paper continues this focus and examines psychological well-being with two measures; depression and social anxiety. Using depression as an outcome matches well with previous research on multiple identities (Thoits 2003; Settles 2004; Brook, Garcia, and Fleming 2008). Social anxiety has not been examined in previous literature on multiple identities, but it fits well in the exploration of counter-normative identities. According to previous research (Thoits 2003; 2013) accumulating positively evaluated identities increases psychological well-being by providing purpose and social support for individuals. Counter-normative identities, however, do not contain the same benefits that normative identities do. To explain, individuals who claim counter-normative identities often cite difficulties with their counter-normative status in interaction with others (Hunsberger and Altemeyer 2006; Long, Yarrison, and Rowland 2015). This difficulty in interaction, along with the negative evaluation

of these counter-normative identities leads to a different set of hypotheses from a traditional accumulation approach. In general, previous research on these identities has shown that holding only a single counter-normative identity can have adverse effects on an individual (Cragun, et al 2012; DePaulo 2015; Long 2016). Given what we know about normative and counter-normative identities then, it is expected that:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Individuals claiming all three normative identities will report the lowest levels of depression compared to those who claim one, two, or three counter-normative identities.
>
> *Hypothesis 2:* Individuals claiming all three normative identities will report the lowest levels of social anxiety compared to those who claim one, two, or three counter-normative identities.

Similarly, it is expected that individuals who are claiming more counter-normative identities will be particularly worse off than those who are claiming normative identities because they face negative evaluation associated with any of the three counter-normative identities (Scott 2009; DePaulo 2015; Cragun 2013) as well as the potential for the experience of stigma within each (Park 2002; Cragun, Kosmin, Keysar, Hammer and Nielsen 2012; Shapiro 2014). Thus, it is expected that:

> *Hypothesis 3:* Individuals claiming multiple counter-normative identities will report higher levels of depression compared to those who claim normative identities.
>
> *Hypothesis 4:* Individuals claiming multiple counter-normative identities will report higher levels of social anxiety compared to those who claim normative identities.

Previous research on both accumulation (Thoits 2003) as well as counter-normative identities (Long 2016) has included the role of choice with respect to the relationship between identities and psychological well-being. In particular, both research on accumulation and counter-normative identities has found that more choice with respect to an identity reduces the negative psychological impact of those identities. Consistent with this research, it is expected:

> *Hypothesis 5:* The more choice an individual perceives with respect to claiming an identity (regardless of the normative vs. counter-normative status) the lower their levels of depression.
>
> *Hypothesis 6:* The more choice an individual perceives with respect to claiming an identity (regardless of the normative vs. counter-normative status) the lower their levels of social anxiety.

Thoits' (2003; 2013) theoretical expansion of the accumulation model began to incorporate a number of concepts from identity theory including commitment, salience, and prominence. Given the focus on counter-normative identities for this work, prominence is examined in terms of its effect on psychological distress within the four possible groups of identities. As Thoits (2013) suggests, if an identity is not important to an individual it will likely have a weaker influence on the well-being of that individual. In particular, when thinking about counter-normative identities, individuals who do not find these identities to be large components of their self-concepts may experience less negative outcomes from the negative evaluation associated with them. In other words, prominence differentially effects depression across those who claim zero, one, two, and three counter-normative identities. Specifically, given the negative connotation surrounding counter-normative identities:

Hypothesis 7: As individuals claim more counter-normative identities, prominence will have a stronger positive influence on depression.

Hypothesis 8: As individuals claim more counter-normative identities, prominence will have a stronger positive influence on social anxiety.

Data and Methods

This study employs data from an online survey conducted with a nationally representative web-based panel of U.S. adults. The sample was collected in July 2016 and included 3,000 respondents recruited by Survey Sampling International (SSI). SSI uses a sampling platform that involves recruiting individuals who are willing to participate in online panels first via random-digit dialing and cell-phone specific recruiting. Once an individual agrees to participate they are added to SSI's panel and are sent online surveys via email. A number of studies have shown that samples collected with this methodology are equivalent to those collected via traditional random digit dialing techniques (Braunsberger, Wybenga, and Gates 2007; Yeager, Krosnick, Change, Javitz, Levendusky, Simpser, and Wang 2011).

The focus on counter-normative identities was accounted for by employing quotas to ensure that all possible combinations of normative and counter-normative identities are well represented in the sample. Specifically, 750 respondents were collected in both the three normative and three counter-normative conditions, with 250 respondents in each of the other six constellations (i.e. single, parent, and religious; single, childless, and religious; married, childless, and non-religious; married, parent, and religious; etc.). All of the possible combinations and sample sizes for each are included in Table 1.3. In addition, the sample was designed to ensure that as many respondents as possible would *currently* be in any of the

counter-normative identities. Thus, to avoid empty-nest parents and younger individuals who may not have fully decided on their future roles, the sample was restricted to individuals age 25 to 65. Finally, individuals who are married but currently separated, widowed, or said "Don't Know" or "Prefer Not to Answer" about their status with respect to any of three identity sets were also excluded.

TABLE 1.3 ABOUT HERE

While this paper is theoretically grounded in both the work on identity accumulation and identity theory, the specific groups of individuals under examination have had very limited empirical exploration in the past. Thus, the analyses completed here are designed to begin to explore how counter-normative identities may play out in terms of accumulation. The hypotheses discussed above are also exploratory in that they are based on research in the area of accumulation and identity theory, but because of the dearth of research on counter-normative identities only broad predictions can be made. In order to test the eight hypotheses described above, this paper will employ a number of analyses. First, to test for differences in depression and social anxiety between individuals who claim zero, one, two, and three counter-normative identities, an Analysis of Variance with Bonferroni corrected t-tests for all possible group comparisons will be employed. Second, to examine the relationship between choice and psychological well-being as well as prominence and psychological well-being, a groups structural equation model will be employed with the four possible groups of counter-normative identities. Figure 1 shows the theoretical model that will be examined.

FIGURE 1.3 ABOUT HERE

This groups model will allow for the examination of the effects of choice and prominence on depression and social anxiety across those who claim zero, one, two, or three counter-

normative identities. In addition, constraints will be employed to test for specific differences across the groups within the structural equation model. In particular, each effect from the three choice variables and from the summative prominence to depression and anxiety will be tested across all six possible group differences: all three normative vs. all three counter-normative, one counter-normative vs. three counter-normative, three normative vs. two counter-normative, one counter-normative vs. two counter-normative, two counter-normative vs. three counter-normative, and three normative vs. one counter-normative.

Unfortunately, with all of these possible comparisons being tested, only one constraint can be tested at a time and multiple constraints cannot be added to the model when groups do not differ. This is because there is potential overlap in terms of the group comparisons. To explain, if we consider the groups 0 counter-normative identities, 1 counter-normative identity, 2 counter-normative identities, and 3 counter-normative identities, it is possible that groups 0 and 3 may show significant differences, while groups 0 and 2 as well as 2 and 3 are not significantly different from one another. This creates a problem from an estimation perspective because of the overlap across the groups. In particular, if we allow groups 0 and 2 to be constrained to be equal, we cannot also allow groups 2 and 3 to be constrained because the effect for group 2 is already fixed to be equal to that of group 0, but groups 0 and 3 are significantly different so we cannot constrain 0, 2, and 3 to be equal. Thus, to explore whether significant differences exist in the effects from choice and prominence on depression and social anxiety each possible group comparison is tested for significance but then allowed to be unconstrained in the final model regardless of the significance of the test.

Measures

Identity Constellations

As described above, each respondent can fall into one of eight possible identity constellations. These are then condensed to four groups employed in this analysis; individuals who claim all three normative identities, those who claim one counter-normative identity, those who claim two counter-normative identities, and those who claim all three counter-normative identities. To establish whether an individual is normative or counter-normative for each of the identity sets, three questions were asked. First, for religion, respondents were asked "Do you consider yourself to be religious or non-religious?" Respondents were categorized as religious or non-religious based on their response to this question. Second, for parental status, respondents were asked whether they currently have a child by birth, adoption, or marriage. Those who do have children were classified as parents and those who do not were classified as childless. Finally, for relationship status, respondents were asked to select the category that best described them. Those who selected "single, never married" are included as counter-normative and those who selected either "married" or "in a committed relationship" were consider normative in the relationship category.

Identity Choice

Identity choice was measured for all three identity sets with one question. The question asks respondents how much choice they had with respect to their current status. The question is edited to include their specific identity claim (i.e. religious or non-religious) and this is done for each of the three identity sets. Respondents can select how much choice they perceive having with respect to their current status on a scale from 1 – No Choice to 7 – Total Choice. Higher

scores on any of the three choice items represent a higher level of perceived choice with respect to their identity status within that set.

Identity Prominence

Identity prominence is measured once for each identity set. The measurement structure is based on previous research (Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker 2014) and adapted to fit the specific identity sets examined. In particular, the four-item scale is asked once for each identity set and the wording alters slightly based whether they are claim the normative or counter-normative identity within the set. The four questions are "Being [**Show identity**] is an important part of my self-image."; "Being [**Show identity**] is an important reflection of who I am."; "I have come to think of myself as a ''[**Show identity**].'' and; "I have a strong sense of belonging to the community of [**Show identity**]." These four items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The four items are scaled together for each of the three identity sets. The higher an individual's score, the more prominent the identity is to their self-concept. These items scale well together having a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.84 in the religion identity set, 0.91 in the parental identity set, and 0.84 for the relationship identity set. In order to examine the effect of prominence on depression and social anxiety across the four groups of identities, the three scales for prominence are added together to create a summative prominence scale. The goal of this variable is to allow for the examination of prominence of identities when individuals who are claiming both normative and counter-normative identities can be in the same group. Specifically, within the one counter-normative group, some individuals will claim the counter-normative identity of non-religious, while others will be religious but claim the counter-normative identity of childless. This summative prominence variable simply allows for the prominence of all three identities for each individual to be included in the model at the same

time. This will allow for an examination of how prominence influences psychological well-being as individuals claim multiple counter-normative identities.

Depression and Social Anxiety

As in previous research on multiple identities (Coverman 1989; Simon 1992; Thoits 1983, 1986, 2003; Settles 2004; Brook et al. 2008), the current research examines two psychological distress measures as outcomes. The first, depression, is measured using seven items from the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI). The full version of the BSI (Derogatis and Spencer 1982; Derogatis and Melisaratos 1983) contains 20 items out of the full Symptom Checklist 90 Revised (Derogatis 1977). This measure was chosen because of its use in previous research on multiple identities (Thouts 2003). The BSI is a scale that captures self-report symptoms for both non-clinical and clinical experiences of depression. Each question asks respondents to select how distressed they have been by the symptom in the past month. Respondents can select from a 4-point scale with 1 = not at all and 4 = extremely. Overall, the higher an individual's score, the more they claim to experience depressive symptoms in the last month. The seven symptoms include thoughts of ending your life, feeling lonely, feeling blue, feeling no interest in things, feeling hopeless about the future, feelings of worthlessness, and feelings of being easily hurt. These items, unlike those described above, are asked in general about the respondents' overall feelings and not specifically about any one identity. For the purposes of these analyses, the seven items are averaged to create a scale. The items scale very well together with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93.

The second measure of psychological distress, social anxiety, will be measured using six items from the social distress subscale within the Social Avoidance and Distress scale (Watson and Friend 1969). As discussed above, social anxiety is incorporated into this research due to the

negative evaluation associated with the counter-normative identities under examination. This overall negative evaluation may influence the interactions that individuals claiming these kinds of identities have, and may influence their levels of anxiety within interactions. Respondents were asked to select how characteristic each symptom is how they typically feel. The six symptoms include nervous at casual gatherings, uncomfortable in groups, at ease speaking with the opposite sex, anxious and uncomfortable at parties, seldom anxious in social situations, and shy person. Respondents selected from 0 = not at all characteristic to 10 = extremely characteristic. For the following analyses, the six items were averaged to create a scale. The items scale well together with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83.

Controls

A few demographic factors are controlled for in the analysis because of their relationship to the counter-normative identities examined here. Age is measured with a self-report in years. Gender is measured with a dummy code; 0 for male and 1 for female. Income is measured at the household level by asking respondents to select from a list of ranges which best represents their household income.

Results

The main goal of this analysis is twofold. The first goal is to examine differences between the groups of counter-normative identities in terms of their experience of depression and social anxiety. The second goal is to examine how the choice and prominence of identities influences depression and social anxiety differentially within the groups of counter-normative identities. The results below begin with an exploration of the variables employed in this analysis, move to a discussion of group differences for depression and social anxiety and finally include a

discussion of the groups structural equation model and constraints used to test the effects from choice and prominence to depression and social anxiety.

TABLES 2.3 AND 3.3 ABOUT HERE

The descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for all variables in the model are provided in Tables 2.3 and 3.3, respectively. There are a number of important patterns within these descriptive level statistics. In terms of choice and prominence, there is a consistent decline from those who claim all three normative identities to those who claim all three counter-normative identities. For example, for the summative measure of prominence there is a decrease from an average prominence of 10.04 for those who claim three normative identities to 7.62 for those who claim three counter-normative identities. The same pattern remains for the choice associated with these three identity sets. In addition, in terms of psychological well-being, both depression and social anxiety increase across the three groups, with those who claim all three normative identities having the lowest average depression and social anxiety. Finally, looking across each group, there are very few differences among any of the three demographic characteristics of the groups.

The bivariate correlations for each of the variables to be employed in the groups SEM model are shown in Table 3.3. The three choice variables, for parental status, relationship status, and religion are strongly correlated with each other. This suggests that some individuals feel more agentic in general, and therefore feel that they are in control across multiple facets of their self-concept. In addition, choice in parental status and choice in relationship status has a significant positive correlation with the summative prominence variable. The summative prominence variable is negatively related to both depression and social anxiety when examining

these correlations. Finally, as would be expected, depression and social anxiety have a strong positive correlation with each other.

In order to test the first four hypotheses, an ANOVA with Bonferroni corrected t-tests was employed. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4.3. The first and second hypotheses state that individuals who claim all three of the normative identities examined here will report the lowest levels of depression and social anxiety. The results do not fully support these hypotheses. Those who claim all normative identities only report significantly lower levels of depression when compared to those who claim all three counter-normative identities. For social anxiety, they show significant differences from those who claim all three counter-normative identities and those who claim 2 of the three counter-normative identities, but no difference from those who claim one counter-normative identity.

TABLE 4.3 ABOUT HERE

Hypotheses 3 and 4 predict that those individuals who claim counter-normative identities will report higher levels of depression and social anxiety. These hypotheses find more support from the ANOVA conducted here. As expected from the results of the first two hypotheses, those who claim three counter-normative identities report significantly higher levels of depression and social anxiety compared to those who claim three normative identities. In addition, however, those who claim three counter-normative identities also report significantly higher depression than those who claim only one counter-normative identity, and significantly higher social anxiety than both those who claim one and two counter-normative identities. Thus, hypothesis 3 receives some support and hypothesis 4 is fully supported in these analyses. In order to test the other four hypotheses, the groups structural equation model discussed above must be examined.

Because of the strong bivariate relationships between the three choice items as well as depression and social anxiety, the error terms for these scales are allowed to covary in the model. With these covariances included, and because the model is estimated with scaled variables, the model shown in Figure 1 is just identified. To address this issue, two paths from the controls that were nonsignificant for all four of the groups were eliminated. These paths are from age to choice in the parental identity and age to the summative prominence variable. Neither of these variables is significantly influenced by age in any of the four groups. The results from the full model without these paths are presented in Table 5.3.

TABLE 5.3 ABOUT HERE

As we look at Table 5.3, we begin to see some differences among the groups from the effects of the control variables. For instance, looking at the effect of income on choice when claiming parental status, we can see that income has a significant negative effect for those who claim all three normative identities ($\beta = -.06$) but that it is opposite for those who claim counter-normative identities ($\beta = .09$). There are also a number of places, however, that the groups do not influence the effect of the controls. For example, as we would expect from previous research, age has a significant relationship with both depression and social anxiety across the groups, with older people reporting lower levels of both depression and social anxiety regardless of the number of counter-normative identities they claim.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 state that the more choice an individual claims in their identity, the lower their levels of psychological distress in the form of depression and social anxiety, respectively. In table 5.3, we see strong support for Hypothesis 5 with respect to depression. For choice in the religious and parental identity sets, there are significant negative relationships with depression for two of the four groups. In particular, for the religious identity set, we see negative

effects when an individual is in the two (β = -0.10) or three counter-normative identity groups (β = -0.15). A majority of the respondents in these two groups will claim the non-religious identity, which implies that the effect of choice on depression is particularly important for those who are non-religious. For choice in the relationship set, there are significant negative relationships with depression in all four of the groups (zero counter-normative β = -0.26, one counter-normative β = -0.15, two counter-normative β = -0.12, and three counter-normative β = -0.17). Regardless of whether an individual is in a relationship or single, the amount of choice they perceive having when claiming that identity, the lower their levels of depression. Hypothesis 6, regarding social anxiety, is not as well supported in this model. For example, there are no significant effects for choice in religion on social anxiety and only one significant effect (for those who claim all three counter-normative identities, β = -0.31) for choice in relationship on social anxiety. The exception to this is within the parental identity set, where there are significant negative effects of choice on social anxiety for three of the four groups; those who claim zero counter-normative identities (β = -0.23), those who claim one counter-normative identity (β = -0.13), and those who claim two counter-normative identities (β = -0.16). In general, this model shows support that perceiving more choice within an identity leads to lower levels of depression, but is not strongly related to social anxiety.

TABLE 6.3 ABOUT HERE

Table 6.3 shows the tests of the main effects for significant differences across the four groups. As discussed above, however, because of the problem with overlapping constraints, the model shown in Table 5.3 does not include any constrained effects. The tests shown in Table 6.3, then, were completed individually. The tests shown in Table 6.3 are chi-square difference tests for the specific path shown in the row and the specific group comparison shown in the column.

Each cell is the chi-square for the model with that path constrained for those groups. This chi-square can then be compared to the chi-square of the base model, or the model with no constraints. The base model shown in Figure 1.3 has a chi-square of 5.12. If the chi-square with the path constrained (i.e. those shown in Table 6.3) are more than 3.84 points higher than 5.12, the path is significantly different across those two groups. These tests, then, allow the exploration of differences across groups for the main effects, and, therefore, shed some light on Hypotheses 7 and 8 which state that prominence will have a stronger relationship with depression and social anxiety as individuals claim multiple counter-normative identities.

In terms of depression, we see a very interesting pattern of effects and significant differences between the groups. For those who claim all three normative identities, the more prominent those identities are, the lower their levels of depression ($\beta = -0.13$). For those who claim all three counter-normative identities, however, there is a significant positive relationship between prominence and depression ($\beta = 0.08$). In other words, the more prominent individual's counter-normative identities are, the higher their levels of depression. In terms of differences across the groups, those who claim all three normative identities show significant differences from the other three groups, each of which claim at least one counter-normative identity, but none of the three groups that claim at least one counter-normative identity show significant differences from each other. These results suggest that prominence is protective with respect to depression for normative identities, but that protective factor is mitigated when an individual claims at least one counter-normative identity.

For social anxiety, the results are slightly different. The effect from prominence to social anxiety for those who claim all three normative identities is still significant and negative ($\beta = -0.21$). However, the effect for those who claim all three counter-normative is no longer

significant. In addition, we see significant differences between those who claim all normative identities and those who claim one counter-normative identity, as well as those who claim all three counter-normative identities, but interestingly no difference for those who claim two counter-normative identities. Similar to depression, more prominent normative identities seem to provide a protective factor for individuals' social anxiety, but once they claim at least one counter-normative identity, there is no relationship between prominence and social anxiety.

In sum, the prominence of normative identities appears to act a buffer from psychological distress. The number of counter-normative identities, however, seems to have little effect on the relationship between prominence and depression and social anxiety. Once an individual claims even one of the counter-normative identities the negative effect from prominence to depression and social anxiety is eliminated. In this analysis, then, it is not that the number of counter-normative identities that influences the relationship between prominence and psychological distress, but rather simply having a counter-normative identity is what eliminates the effect.

Discussion and Conclusion

The exploratory analysis focused on two main tasks: First, ANOVA was employed to identify whether or not accumulating zero, one, two, or three counter-normative identities impacts depression and social anxiety differentially, and second, a groups SEM model with a test for constraints was used to examine the effects of choice and prominence on the two outcomes. Results from the ANOVA find that differences do exist, but not as dramatically as was originally hypothesized. The ANOVA provides some evidence that claiming multiple counter-normative identities is worse for individuals' psychological well-being, and particularly for their social anxiety.

The complexity of accumulating counter-normative identities truly emerges when one begins to incorporate choice and the prominence of identities within the groups SEM model. Overall, findings regarding identity choice suggest that when individuals perceive having choice when claiming their identity regardless of the normative or counter-normative status, they report lower levels of depression. Having an agentic sense of self has been previously explored with the results of the current study supporting findings that when individuals feel agentic or have "agency" in their decisions they report higher levels of satisfaction and psychological well-being (Thoits 2003, Thoits 2013; Long 2016). Even when claiming counter-normative identities, having "made" the choice for one's self provides a positive effect for individuals.

The opposite relationship can also be discussed with individuals having lower choice reporting higher levels of depression. This is of particular importance when examining these three specific role sets: Parents/childless; single/in a relationship; and religion/non-religious. Some individuals who hold counter-normative identities are steadfast in their decision to abstain from marriage, children, and religion, with satisfaction and confidence in their choice. Alternatively, others may only hold these identities temporarily with hopes and desires to claim one or more of the normative roles in the future. While choice is incorporated into the current analysis, it is important to note that this is only one component of choice. To explain, for a majority of individuals, with the exception of those who cannot have children for a variety of biological reasons, these counter-normative identities can be held temporarily with the option of opting into the normative role at some point in the future. For example, a respondent might have completed the survey as someone who is childless, single, and religious but they may have plans to have children and get married in the future. For some, this current status may feel like a personal choice, but one that could change in the future with positive potential for that

possibility. For others, however, this current status may be a choice, but the prospective for the normative role might appear bleak. These individuals may report the same level of current choice, but when asked about their future goals, their answers might be different and may potentially impact their psychological well-being. Future research should aim to distinguish individuals who hold these counter-normative identities temporarily or permanently. Research on childlessness and singlism has described the differences between those who are childfree and childless (Scott 2009; Blackstone 2014) and those who are single and singlist (DePaulo 2015), with a majority of differences emerging when considering self-perceptions and satisfaction in life. It would be interesting to explore the voluntary nature of identities through the perspective of voluntarily opting into them and how this impacts psychological well-being.

The same pattern for choice, however, does not appear when social anxiety is the outcome of interest. There were not significant effects of choice on social anxiety when looking at the religion role set, and only one effect within the relationship role-set with an effect appearing for those with all three counter-normative identities. One major exception occurred within the parental role-set. Within three of the four groups, higher levels of choice decreased social anxiety. Interestingly, depression has been previously explored within the accumulation process (Thoits 1983; 1986; 2003), whereas social anxiety has not. The differences in patterns may be related to the outcomes capturing very different aspects of counter-normative identities. Depression is constructed to capture one's assessment of distress within both clinical and non-clinical respondents. Depression can be a debilitating experience, one causing many individuals to seek professional expertise and guidance, which may be more related to the negative consequences associated with counter-normative identities. Social anxiety, as measured in the current research, focuses more on interactional components of holding counter-normative

identities rather than the clinical experience of being anti-social. Additionally, there may be other factors beyond the scope of the current paper impacting social anxiety related to counter-normative identities, such as various stigma management techniques and proximate social structure, or the context within which an individual actually enacts their identity.

Individuals employing various stigma management techniques such as passing and may hold counter-normative identities but not experience higher levels of social anxiety because of these techniques. Passing is defined by Goffman (1963) as the process in which an individual can "pass" as a "normal" or have others "cover" for them. Additionally, individuals who find themselves within a proximate social structure (Merolla, Serpe, Stryker, and Schultz 2012) containing individuals who share or understand their counter-normativity may also report lower levels of social anxiety despite holding multiple counter-normative identities. Future research should continue to explore the distinction between these two outcomes with regard to identities and counter-normative identities in particular.

The inclusion of prominence represents another major contribution of this paper. The findings suggest that prominence, indeed, plays an important role in the relationship between identities, depression, and social anxiety. It is important to note that in this exploratory analysis a summative measure of prominence was employed to examine the effect on depression and social anxiety across the four groups. This measure represents a contribution because it allows for the exploration of how prominence across an individual's self-concept can influence their psychological well-being as opposed to exploring how the importance of a specific identity may influence it. For both depression and social anxiety, when one holds all three normative identities, the more prominent these identities are, the less depression and social anxiety they report. Prominence of the normative identities, then, buffers against psychological distress.

These findings support the theoretical claims made by Thoits (1983, 2013) who suggested that merely counting identities was not sufficient for understanding how identities impact psychological distress. She predicted when identities are more prominent and salient to an individual, then they will also have a greater impact on psychological distress. Alternatively, when identities are lower in prominence, they may not have as great an impact on psychological well-being (Thoits 2013). For normative identities in this analysis, prominence is negatively related to depression and social anxiety. When at least one counter-normative identity is added to one's self-concept, however, the negative effect of prominence on the outcomes is eliminated.

When thinking about the advancement of counter-normative research, the most important finding within the current paper is that having at least one counter-normative identity seems to reduce or eliminate the protective factor of prominence. When individuals claim all three normative identities, the more prominent those identities are, the better their psychological well-being; for those who claim at least one counter-normative identity, however, prominence does not significantly improve their psychological well-being. In fact, the effect of prominence on depression and social anxiety is not statistically different across the three groups having one, two, or three counter-normative identities. More importantly, this exploration suggests that it is not about the accumulation of counter-normative identities, nor it is about the prominence of counter-normative identities. These findings suggest that the inclusion of any counter-normativity within your self-concept may result in negative consequences. This finding is consistent with previous research on the negative aspects of being single, childless, and non-religious within American society (Park 2002, DePaulo 2005; 2015; Long 2016). Counter-normativity, then, is significantly impacting how individuals experience these identities and future research needs to further investigate how, if, and when counter-normative identities

differentially impact identity processes. For instance, does the relationship between prominence and salience, as described by Brenner et al. (2014) still hold with counter-normative identities? Are more prominent counter-normative identities still more salient?

It is recognized that by using a single cross-sectional sample of individuals that the research presented here represents a snapshot of accumulating multiple identities and that experiences with identities are not stagnant. Future research should also explore the evolution of identities and identity change over time. Given the rising number of individuals opting into these counter-normative identities, future research may eventually discover a shift in the societal definitions and meanings associated with these identities, which, in turn, could influence how holding these identities impact an individual's self-concept. While the cross-sectional design of the research represents a limitation, this research provides the foundation for future work to continue an exploration of counter-normative identities.

Another limitation in the current design is the restriction to three pre-selected identity sets, which are imposed on an individual when asking them to answer questions about identities they may or may not have internalized. Recognizing that these three identities are not the only potential counter-normative identities and that the three normative identities are not representative of all identities an individual can hold, this presents another opportunity for future research to include more counter-normative identities. Future research should explore how allowing individuals to select their own identities to evaluate influences the relationship with psychological well-being. Once again, these identities should be explored within various social and personal contexts to determine the various complexities associated with multiple identities.

Stryker (1980) described the complexities of identities when he described the process within with complex selves are derived from the complex societies we reside in. Normative

identities were complex enough without adding counter-normativity into the mix. Now with an increasing number of individuals deviating away from the norms of society, research on counter-normative identities and their accumulation continues to grow in importance. This paper represents a foundational step into the exploration of multiple counter-normative identities, context, interaction, and psychological well-being.

Figure 1.3: Theoretical Model

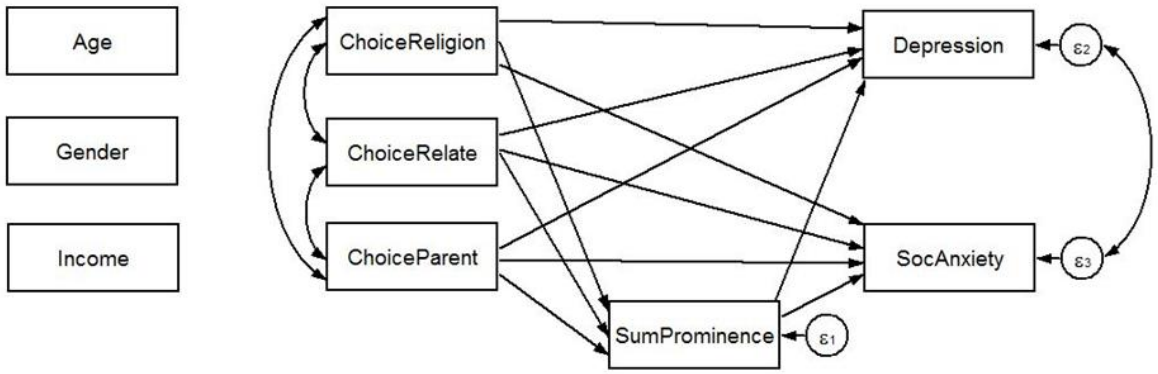


Table 1.3: Multiple Identity Survey Sample Design

Number of Counter-Normative Identities	Sample	Total
Three Counter-Normative Identities	**750**	**750**
Two Counter-Normative Identities		**750**
Non-religious and Childless	250	
Non-religious and Single	250	
Childless and Single	250	
One Counter-Normative Identities		**750**
Non-religious	250	
Childless	250	
Single	250	
Total Study Sample		**3000**
Sample Summary		
Three Normative Identities		750
Non-religious		1500
Childless		1500
Single		1500

Table 2.3: Means and Standard Deviations by Group				
	Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Range
Zero Counter-Normative Group	Household Income	5.75	2.19	1-12
	Gender	0.62	0.49	0-1
	Age	41.23	9.97	25-64
	Choice Religion	6.38	1.13	1-7
	Choice Parental	6.45	1.21	1-7
	Choice Relationship	6.72	0.83	1-7
	Summative Prominence	10.04	1.25	6.25-12
	Outcomes			
	Depression Scale	0.98	1.09	0-4
	Social Anxiety Scale	3.99	2.24	0-10
One Counter-Normative Group	Household Income	4.79	2.39	1-12
	Gender	0.68	0.46	0-1
	Age	41.29	10.78	25-64
	Choice Religion	6.46	1.27	1-7
	Choice Parental	6.15	1.67	1-7
	Choice Relationship	6.45	1.38	1-7
	Summative Prominence	8.91	1.42	3.25-12
	Outcomes			
	Depression Scale	1.02	1.02	0-4
	Social Anxiety Scale	4.24	2.34	0-10
Two Counter-Normative Group	Household Income	4.4	2.37	1-12
	Gender	0.67	0.47	0-1
	Age	42.37	11.28	25-65
	Choice Religion	6.55	1.11	1-7
	Choice Parental	6.00	1.80	1-7
	Choice Relationship	5.98	1.75	1-7
	Summative Prominence	8.20	1.52	3.5-12
	Outcomes			
	Depression Scale	1.11	1.05	0-4
	Social Anxiety Scale	4.49	2.47	0-10
Three Counter-Normative Group	Household Income	4.14	2.37	1-12
	Gender	0.55	0.50	0-1
	Age	40.57	11.90	25-64
	Choice Religion	6.65	1.01	1-7
	Choice Parental	5.88	1.97	1-7
	Choice Relationship	5.53	1.90	1-7
	Summative Prominence	7.62	1.70	3.75-12
	Outcomes			
	Depression Scale	1.20	1.06	0-4
	Social Anxiety Scale	4.86	2.51	0-10

Table 3.3: Pearson Correlations Coefficients

	Age	Sex	House Inc.	Choice Relg.	Choice Par.	Choice Rel.	Sum. Prom	Depression	Soc. Anx.
Age	1								
Sex	-0.075*	1							
House Inc.	-0.045*	-0.102*	1						
Choice Relg.	0.118*	0.109*	-0.085*	1					
Choice Par.	-0.005	0.080*	0.001	0.179*	1				
Choice Rel.	0.018	0.079*	0.093*	0.135*	0.348*	1			
Sum. Prominence	0.019	-0.007	0.070*	0.036	0.234*	0.212*	1		
Depression	-0.133*	-0.006	-0.070*	-0.147*	-0.167*	-0.274*	-0.068*	1	
Soc. Anxiety.	-0.138*	0.041*	-0.110*	-0.047*	-0.094*	-0.178*	-0.116*	0.486*	1

Table 4.3: One way ANOVA with Bonferroni Corrected T-Tests for Depression and Social Anxiety					
Group	All Norm	One Counter-norm	Two Counter-norm	Three Counter-norm	F-Score
	Mean				
Depression	0.98[D]	1.02[D]	1.11	1.20[AB]	5.46**
Social Anxiety	3.99[CD]	4.24[D]	4.49[D]	4.86[ABC]	15.40***

[A]Significantly different from All Normative
[B]Significantly different from One Counter-norm
[C]Significantly different from Two Counter-norm
[D]Significantly different from Three Counter-norm

**Significant at p<.01
***Significant at p<.001

Table 5.3: Unstandardized Coefficients for Model with Depression and Social Anxiety

	Choice Religion				Choice Parent				Choice Relationship				Summative Promience				Depression				Social Anxiety			
	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3
Age	**.01****	**.02****	**.01***	**.01****	-	-	-	-	.01	.01	.01	.01	-	-	-	-	**-.02*****	**-.01****	-.01	**-.02****	**-.04*****	**-.02***	**-.03****	**-.03***
Gender	**.30****	**.28***	**.41*****	.21	**.21***	-.17	**.45***	.04	**.23****	.14	.33	-.05	-.17	-.23	.20	.03	-.04	-.06	-.03	.06	**.41***	.10	-.09	-.07
Income	-.04	-.03	.02	.01	**-.06***	**-.08***	-.06	**.09***	**-.04****	**.06***	-.02	.05	.02	**-.08****	-.01	**-.08***	.01	**-.04***	**-.06****	.01	-.06	**-.10***	**-.17****	.02
Choice Religion													**.22*****	**.11***	-.04	-.17	-.06	-.04	**-.10***	**-.15****	-.02	-.01	.09	-.21
Choice Parent													**.10***	**.18*****	**.16****	**.12***	-.07	**-.11*****	**-.12****	-.01	**-.23****	**-.13***	**-.16***	.02
Choice Relationship													.06	-.07	.04	**.13***	**-.26*****	**-.15*****	**-.12*****	**-.17*****	-.15	-.13	-.11	**-.31****
Summative Prominence																	**-.13*****	.01	.06	**.08***	**-.21****	.01	-.01	.07

$\chi 2$ =45.12, p-value = .745, CFI = 1, RMSEA = 0.000

n Group 0= 594

n Group1= 448

n Group 2= 393

n Group 3= 319

*Significant at p<.05

**Significant at p<.01

***Significant at p<.001

Table 6.3: Model with Depression and Social Anxiety Test of Constraints (x^2 = 5.12)						
Path Tested	0-3	1-3	2-3	0-1	1-2	0-2
Prom-Depression	**25.04***	7.35	5.25	**13.94***	6.36	**21.63***
Prom-Soc. Anxiety	**11.77***	5.36	5.55	**9.58***	5.15	8.67
Choice rlg-Depression	6.95	7.58	5.47	5.17	6.06	5.68
Choice par-Depression	6.73	**10.67***	**10.68***	5.62	5.17	5.86
Choice rel-Depression	7.11	5.3	6.47	8.08	5.64	**10.20***
Choice rlg-Soc. Anxiety	6.67	6.7	8.14	5.12	5.66	5.74
Choice par-Soc. Anxiety	**9.49***	7.25	7.72	5.86	5.21	5.4
Choice rel- Soc. Anxiety	6.42	7.81	8.66	5.13	5.16	5.19
Choice rlg- Prominence	**20.04***	**12.44***	6.45	7.65	7.84	**14.06***
Choice par-Prominence	5.23	5.8	5.42	6.7	5.17	5.97
Choice rel-Prominence	5.86	**12.89***	7	7.35	7.76	5.18

*Significantly Different from base model

CHAPTER 4

A QUALITIATIVE EXPLORATION OF COUNTER-NORMATIVE IDENTITIES

Introduction

Identities are the internalized meanings and expectations associated with the roles, groups, and personal characteristics individuals claim in their everyday lives (Stets and Serpe 2016). In fact, individuals have multiple identities or "as many social selves as there are distinct groups of individuals who recognize him as such." (James 1890:294). Therefore, individuals can hold a wide array of identities such as non-religious, spouse, and parent. These identities collectively, then, constitute much of an individual's self-concept (Burke and Stets 2009). One way in which identities have been empirical and theoretically explored is through identity theory (Stryker 1980). Identity theory examines how identities impact an individual's role choice behavior, relationships, emotions, and mental well-being (Stets and Serpe 2013). Within identity theory several research programs developed throughout the past four decades: the structural research program, the perceptual control research program, and the interactional research program. The structural and perceptual control research programs have had significantly more development than the interactional research program.

Additionally, little research within identity theory has explored the structural and interactionist research program simultaneously within a study. In fact, many researchers have previously approached the two perspectives as alternative or oppositional in their approach,

which has not been empirically explored (Stets and Serpe 2013). The structural research program states that identities are organized in a stable hierarchy such that identities are organized based on their prominence (i.e. importance), which impacts their identity salience (Brenner et. al. 2014) (i.e. the likelihood an identity will be enacted across situations) (Stryker 1968). Therefore, if an identity is more important to you, you are more likely to enact it across the various situations you encounter. The interactional program of identity theory (McCall and Simmons (1966) focuses more on a fluid conceptualization of self. This self is comprised of a relatively stable organization of identities based on their ideal self (i.e. prominence), but also includes a situational self (i.e. salience) that is based on the definition of the situation. Within this approach individuals draw from the social interaction in which they find themselves in to determine which identity they will enact. The current chapter seeks to incorporate both the structural and interactional approach to identities using a qualitative research design.

Generally speaking, research on identity theory has focused on behaviors and identities that are positively evaluated and normative within society. Missing, then, from both identity theory programs (structural and interactional), is an examination of identities that run counter to the norms and expectations of society. For example, a rising number of individuals are claiming childless, single, and non-religious identities (Blackstone and Stewart 2012; Scott 2009; Cragun 2013), which are negatively evaluated within our society (Park 2002; DePaulo 2015; Cragun, Kosmin, Keysar, Hammer and Nielsen 2012). Counter-normative identities become complicated when thinking about the shared meanings and expectations associated with them; the location of these identities within the self-concept; and how these identities impact relationships, interaction, and role choice behavior.

By examining 20 in-depth telephone interviews with individuals who currently hold three counter-normative identities (i.e. they are single, childless, and non-religious), this chapter explores counter-normative identities with an overall goal of addressing two broad themes. The first theme will focus on understanding what meanings individuals attribute to these three counter-normative identities, and how these identities are placed within the self-concept. Second, this paper will focus on understanding counter-normative identities in interactions or how counter-normative identities impact role choice behavior. These themes are designed to integrate both structural and interactional components of identity theory in the analysis.

This paper begins with a review of the literature on identities, identity theory, and counter-normative identities. It will continue with a discussion of the qualitative data, methods, and analysis. The results will then follow, which will use detailed quotes to demonstrate the findings linked to the overall themes. The paper concludes with a discussion and conclusion highlighting the overall findings, limitations, and opportunities for future research.

Literature Review

Identities: A Structural and Interactional Approach

Understanding the relationship between self and society has been the focus of research endeavors dating back to the late 1800s with the work of William James. James laid out a discussion of the self as composed of "the sum total of all that an individual can call his" (James 1890:291) including four distinct components: pure ego, the material, the social, and the spiritual self (Stryker 1980). For symbolic interactionists and identity theorists more specifically, the emphasis is on the social self with a desire to understand the reciprocal relationship between individuals and society. James (1890) defined humans as social animals, ones desiring to be known by others and interact with them. This notion of social animals was later emphasized by Mead (1934), who believed we live in a world full of shared meaning and expectations with a

self that consists of both the "I" and the "Me." These two components of the self are imperative in the process of identity development through role-taking, in which individuals take on the roles of others to understand the world through their perspective (Mead 1934). Through the work of Mead, the symbolic interactionist framework emerged to understand the relationship between self and society. This framework was extended by several scholars, including Stryker (1968; 1980), who developed structural symbolic interactionism (henceforth structural SI) to address the concerns regarding the absence of social structure in symbolic interactionist research.

Structural Identity Theory Approach

For Stryker, an individual's opportunity to engage in social interaction using a variety of roles is not merely random. Rather, social interaction is constrained by social structure, such that self shapes society which shapes self (Stryker 1980). Social structure is defined by Stryker (1980:65) as the "pattern regularities that characterize most human interaction." Roles, then, are defined as the labeled positions individuals claim as they navigate everyday life. One can witness the familiar patterns of the social structure when meeting someone for the first time or ordering food at a restaurant; there are rules and expectations we have for how individuals, holding specific identities, should act and how those interactions should unfold. These rules and expectations are contingent not only upon a variety of structural elements such as social class, gender, or religion, but roles are also thought to reflect the norms and attitudes of society as well as the contextual demands and negotiation of the definition of the situation (Stryker 1980). To examine identities and their impact on individual behavior Stryker further established identity theory. Identities, then, are the internalization of meanings and expectations that are associated with groups one belongs to, roles one claims, and person characteristics one identifies with (Burke and Stets 2009). The importance of identities has been recognized throughout the past

several decades with links between identities and role choice behavior (Styrker and Serpe 1982; Serpe 1987), identities and emotions (Stets 2005); identities and stigma (Lee and Craft 2002; Asencio and Burke 2011; Granberg 2011; Kroska and Harkness 2011), identities and mental well-being (Thoits 1983; 2003; 2013), and identities and the self-concept including self-esteem, worth, and efficacy (Rosenberg 1979).

To empirically explore identities, several major concepts have been developed throughout the literature. Of importance to the current paper are the concepts of identity salience and prominence. Throughout the literature, these concepts have been incorporated and defined differently with respect to identities (McCall and Simmons 1966; Stryker 1980). For Stryker (1980), and structural identity theory in general, identity salience is defined as the likelihood of enacting a given identity across situations. Included in this definition is the understanding that the salience of identities within an individual's self-concept are ordered hierarchically. Identities at the top of this hierarchy, which are those with higher salience, then, are more likely to be employed by the individual within and across interactions. In this model, the salience of an identity is predicted by an individual's commitment to, connection to, and perceived importance of that identity (Stryker and Serpe 1982; 1994).

The perceived importance of an identity to an individual's self-concept is known as identity prominence (Stets and Serpe 2013). Like salience, prominence is organized within an individual's self-concept in a hierarchical structure, with those identities that are more important to how an individual sees themselves located at the top of the hierarchy (Stryker and Serpe 1994; Brenner, Serpe, Stryker 2014). Recent research has evaluated the link between prominence and salience and found, using longitudinal data, that prominence, or the importance of an identity, predicts its salience or likelihood of being enacted. The more prominent an identity is to an

individual, the more likely they are to enact it across multiple situations (Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker 2014). While change is possible, structural identity theory posits that the prominence and salience of a given identity is relatively stable over time (Stryker 1980).

Interactional Identity Theory Approach

Another approach to studying salience and prominence is presented by McCall and Simmons (1966) and represents the interactional program of identity theory (Stets and Serpe 2013). Unlike the stability inherent in the salience hierarchy of structural identity theory, McCall and Simmons (1966) present salience as a more fluid concept. McCall and Simmons (1966) equate salience to the situational self. This definition relies heavily upon the concept of the "definition of the situation" (Goffman 1959) such that across a number of interactions the salience hierarchy will shift based on individuals' perceptions of what is appropriate and accessible in a given interaction.

While accounting for the specifics of the situation, McCall and Simmons (1966) also recognize that the make-up of an individual's self-concept will influence the salience hierarchy within an interaction. In particular, identity prominence is one predictor of identity salience. From the interactional perspective, prominence is defined simply as an individual's ideal self (McCall and Simmons 1966). Unlike the malleable nature of the salience hierarchy, the prominence hierarchy is relatively stable. From this perspective, individuals have a number of identities that make up their self-concept, and the prominence of each identity is based upon how the individual views themselves more generally. The ideal self, then, is constrained within specific interactions based on the definition of the situation and, thus, individuals' salience hierarchies often do not perfectly match their prominence hierarchies (McCall and Simmons 1966). For example, non-religious individuals may have higher levels of prominence than

salience. Therefore, being non-religious may be important to them, but they might not enact it across situations. For most research on identities and the self-concept, however, it has been Stryker's version of prominence and salience that has been empirically tested. A major goal of the current paper is to demonstrate how these two identities perspectives can be integrated when examining counter-normative identities, an under-represented group of identities within the current literature.

With society rapidly changing around us, the complexity of our self-concepts also continues to escalate given that self shapes society, which shapes self (Stryker 1980). Therefore, the diversity and number of our identities also increases. Many of the identities examined within identity theory have been positively evaluated roles such as being a parent, spouse, friend, employee, or church member (Stets and Serpe 2013). The role choice behaviors examined as an outcome, then, have also been normatively expected and accepted within society. The process of defining the situation and enacting the appropriate roles, therefore, has been relatively straightforward for a majority of the identities explored. A gap in this body of literature, however, is the inclusion of identities and situations that challenge that traditional norms of American society (Stets and Serpe 2016), such as those who are childless, single, and non-religious.

Traditional Familial and Religious Norms and the Identities They Establish

American society is founded upon a set of traditions and values, which shape societal perception and understanding of social roles and interaction. These traditional values shape the various facets of our everyday lives such as familial and religious norms. Research finds these religious and familial norms are strongly held beliefs that are diligently maintained in our society (Stavrova and Fetchenhauer 2014). A clear link between religion and family can be found

throughout many religious text and doctrines. More specifically, individuals are expected to be religious, get married, and then have children (Gillespie 2000). For instance, the Bible contains many examples of pronatalist support: “women will be saved through childbirth” (1 Timothy 2:15) or Catholic doctrine that proclaims becoming a mother is the “fundamental contribution that the Church and humanity expect from women.” (*Evangelium Vitae:19*).

When it comes to marriage, research has tracked the transition from arranged, and strategic marriages in ancient Chinese, ancient Greek and ancient Roman cultures to the ambivalence of marriage in early Christianity, which held that marriage simply distracted people from serving their deity (Coontz 2005). It was not until the controversy sparked by King Henry VIII regarding his divorce that Catholicism and, eventually, Protestantism stiffened their position that matrimony was a sanctity maintained and permitted by God. The notion of marrying for love and romantic love ideals did not spread until the end of the 1700s where personal choice came into marriage. Marriage and matrimony became nearly synonymous terms, sparking controversy in the past decades over the right to marry (Coontz 2005). The expectation that one adheres to the traditional family and religious values points to the negative societal views of individuals who make a choice not to have a religion, spouse, or child. Additionally, the meanings and expectations associated with being a spouse and parents are ingrained into the socialization many children experience through their childhood. Whether or not children are playing house or pretending to get married, the process of role-taking within these activities involves an understanding of the expectations associated with the role of husband/wife and mother/father (Scott 2009). Therefore, it is those individuals who deviate from these norms of the traditional family and religion that are counter-normative within American society.

Counter-Normative Identities

An important place to start is a clarification between counter-normative identities and stigmatized identities given that each of these three identities (i.e. childless, single, and non-religious) have been examined as a stigmatized identity in previous research (Blackstone and Stewart 2012; DePaulo 2006; Cragun, Kosmin, Keysar, Hammer and Nielsen 2012). For some individuals, then, holding these identities may be experienced as stigmatizing, but the current research does not assume the presence of stigma merely because an individual holds a counter-normative identity. More specifically, the perception and experience of being single, childless, and non-religious vary depending on several personal and structural factors. Personal factors include perceived choice, internalization of the societal meanings, the satisfaction of holding the identity, one's reference group, and a desire to change the identity (Mollen 2006; Scott 2009; Long, Rowland, and Yarrison 2015; Long 2016). Some structural factors include things such as age, gender, social networks, location, religious belief, and socioeconomic status (Scott 2009; Rijken and Merz 2014; Long, Rowland, and Yarrison 2015; Shapiro 2014; Long 2016; Llewellyn 2016).

It is understood that all stigmatized identities are counter-normative because they deviate away from the norms of society, but not all counter-normative identities are experienced as stigmatizing. Overall, however, American society associates negative meanings and expectations for any of these three identities, which presents the opportunity for the negative consequences resulting from stigma to arise (Major and O'Brien 2005; Hatzenbuehler, Phelan, and Link 2013). These negative perceptions are important to note in order to understand the experience of holding a counter-normative identity fully. Despite the negativity, an increasing number of individuals are voluntarily deciding to eschew not holding one or more of these normative identities either

permanently or temporarily. With the rising number of individuals belonging to these groups, and the increase in awareness generated by vocal members of these groups, research on counter-normative identities is growing.

Being Without Children

Not only has the age of first birth increased in America, but the number of individuals not having children throughout their lives is also on the rise with 15% in less developed countries and 25% in many developed countries (Blackstone and Stewart 2012). The more individuals who are childless, the more others are becoming aware of their presence and the various nuances associated with not having children in a predominately pronatalist society (Scott 2009). When researching childless individuals, then, it is important to understand the various ways in which these individuals identify themselves. There are some terms used for individuals without children that do not specify whether or not this is a choice or involuntary such as unchilded, non-mother, non-father, without children. Alternatively, child-free is a positive term used for voluntary childlessness (Basten 2009). Given the inclusion of involuntarily, voluntarily, and temporarily childless individuals in the sample, the current research uses the broad term of childless because the concept of perceived choice is included as a core theme.

Research examining those who are childless has focused on the reasoning behind the choice (McQuillan, Greil, Shreffler, Wonch-Hill, Gentzler, and Hatcoat 2012), the demographic characteristics of these individuals (McAllister and Clark 1998; Scott 2009), and the negative societal view and stigma directed towards childlessness (Park 2002, Blackstone and Stewart 2012; Shapiro 2014). Several major themes developed from this body of research include: American society does not view childless men and women positively (Park 2002; Scott 2009), rather choice plays a major factor in whether or not individuals are satisfied with this role (Long

2016). Not all individuals who do not have children are not lonely, miserable, and depressed; and not having children is a choice made for a wide variety of reasons (Shapiro 2014). For example, childless individuals have been described as cold, materialistic, selfish, uncaring, and immoral (Veevers 1980; Muller and Yoder 1999; Gillespie 2000; Park 2002, and Mollen 2006). Additionally, their decision is always presumed to be based on indecision and one that will "change some day" (Scott 2009). Another popular rhetoric is that childless individuals are working the system and "free-riding" (e.g. living off of the child stipend provided by the welfare system) (Burkett 2000) as well as living an isolated, deprived life (Scott 2009). Missing from this body of literature is an examination of childlessness in conjunction with other counter-normative identities, using identity theory as a guiding perspective. Not only is childless a status, but it is also an identity with shared meanings and associated expectations as determined by society. These shared meanings and expectations may generate negative experiences for individuals who claim this role.

Being Single

Singlism is defined as the ways in which single individuals are stigmatized, which includes those who are divorced, widowed, and never-married (DePaulo 2006). For those individuals who are single, society has preconceived notions about their personal lives and self-desires (DePaulo 2015). For example, it is often assumed that single individuals are always lonely and looking for the next hook-up or being single is less of a lifestyle than coupled living (DePaulo and Morris 2006). Similar to the childless, single individuals (when compared to married individuals) are described as "immature, insecure, unhappy, lonely, self-centered, and ugly" (DePaulo and Morris 2006:251). The media is also to blame for negative perceptions of the single lifestyle with innumerable examples of movies depicting single individuals as desperate, lonely, precocious, and always looking for their special someone (DePaulo 2015). Even

restaurants are guilty of singlism with their "table for two" ideals. With the vast amount of matrimonial norms and relationship expectations within American society, holding a single identity may be experienced negatively. The current research explores how individuals without a partner either permanently or temporarily experience this as an identity and how it impacts their everyday lives.

Being Non-religious

Of the three counter-normative identities examined in this project, it is the non-religious, specifically atheists, who receive the most negative feedback from American society (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartman 2006). One of the major misconceptions about the non-religious is the assumption that they all hold the same belief, or non-belief (Cragun 2013). The terms atheist, agnostic, and non-religious are conflated into catch-all categories of non-believers or non-religious. Only recently with the rising number of non-religious, has research begun to explore the complexities linked to these various categories of non-religion (Cragun 2013). The current research includes a sample of non-religious individuals that includes the wide range of non-belief from individuals who identify as non-religious but culturally Catholic, to steadfast atheists.

Regardless of how these individuals self-identify, it is recognized that society holds a negative perception of non-believers. Some of the negative perceptions appear first-hand with the non-religious being stereotyped or discriminated against for their lack of belief. For example, Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2006) found that non-religious individuals report increased difficulties in their relationships with friends and relatives because of their non-religious status. Harper (2007) found that many Americans find the non-religious to be lacking morals and selflessness. Not only do the non-religious experience social stigma, but they also experience negative consequences in legal matters. Additionally, Volokh (2006) found that being non-

religious impacts custody decisions in a divorce case. Overall, then, being non-religious within American society has implications for one's identity and may influence how this identity impacts an individual's everyday life. The current research explores the non-religious identity and how it impacts relationships, interactions, and one's self-concept.

Summary and Exploratory Themes of the Chapter

Theme 1: Meanings and Counter-Normative Identities in the Self-Concept

An identity is understood as the internalization of the meanings and expectations associated with a role, group or person (Burke and Stets 2009). For instance, being a parent is a role with meanings such as nurturing, loving, and caring associated with it as well as expectations of being patient and responsible with your children (Crittenden 2010). Once internalized, identities impact many facets of an individual's life (Stryker 1980). Understanding how identities impact individual behavior and mental well-being has been the focus of identity theorists for the past several decades stemming from Stryker's (1980) question: What makes one man go to the zoo with his family as opposed to going golfing with his friends? It was later discovered that the answer to this question is dependent upon how important an identity is to an individual or where it is in one's self-concept (Brenner, Serpe, and Stryker 2014). If being a father is more important to an individual than playing golf or being a friend is, then their decision would be to go to the zoo with their family. Empirically investigating identities has predominately fallen within the quantitative or experimental realm, while little research has qualitatively explored the various aspects of identities. Additionally, existing research has predominately explored the process of normative identities, which presents an opportunity for future research to explore counter-normative identities within an identity theory context (Stets and Serpe 2013).

Previously, theoretical and empirical research has found various action and consequences associated with positively valued and normative identities (Stets and Serpe 2016). Thinking about counter-normativity, however, brings into question the meanings others attribute to counter-normative roles, such as being childless, single, and non-religious. How do individuals who are single and/or without children manage these meanings and where do they place these identities with their self-concepts? The first theme of this paper is to explore quotes detailing personal meanings individuals claiming these identities associated with these three counter-normative identities. Additionally, it examines how individuals discuss the location of these identities within one's self-concept. The second theme builds upon the first, to determine whether or not the prominence of counter-normative identities impacts role choice behavior and social interaction in a similar manner as normative identities.

Theme 2: Counter-Normative Identities in Interaction and Role Choice Behavior

When thinking about identities, interaction, and role choice behavior, a majority of empirical studies have relied upon Stryker's (1968) stable version of prominence and salience. When individuals have an identity that is important to them, it is more likely to be salient to them, which means they are more likely to bring that identity up across situations (Brenner, Serpe, Stryker 2014). When individuals hold identities that are negatively evaluated in society, such as being non-religious, childless, and single enacting these identities across situations could have negative consequences for individuals. Furthermore, structural identity theory posits that the prominence of an identity is differentially related to the salience of an identity, but does this hold for counter-normative identities? To explain, if being single is high in prominence, are they still more likely to enact this identity across situations even though it is negatively evaluated by others? This question is explored within the current paper by asking respondents about the

prominence of their counter-normative identities, as well as their salience as defined by Stryker (1968).

Despite the limited empirical research associated with the interactional identity program, the situational aspect of salience (McCall and Simmon 1966) provides an opportunity to examine counter-normative identities within interaction. McCall and Simmons (1966) state that we must decide the: who, what, when, and where of interaction as the conditions for salience all of the identities present within the situation. The definition of the situation, then, becomes a core element of the relationship between identities, interaction, and role choice behavior.

For both normative and counter-normative identities, it is societal definitions based on tradition, and the power to define the situation, which determines whether or not an identity can be appropriately called upon in a situation (Goffman 1959). Given the strong presence of religion and familial norms within our society, the opportunity for enacting a counter-normative identity may be constrained and in some situations, it may be highly discouraged. This research explores how counter-normative identities impact role choice behavior and interaction. This theme sheds light on both the structural and interactional approach to prominence and salience for individuals with counter-normative identities.

Methods

This study employs an inductive approach to data analysis. A review of the childless, single, and non-religious literature, as well as previous empirical work within identity theory, guided the establishment of a general interview guide that was used as a tool to direct the interview process. Themes that emerged in early interviews were used to shape the format and questions included in later interviews, as is customary in inductive research. Broad research questions were developed based on identity theory and previous literature, the interviews were

transcribed verbatim, coded for broad analytic themes, the literature was re-consulted to develop more concrete thematic areas, and the interviews were re-coded based on these specified themes.

Data came from twenty semi-structured telephone interviews that were conducted in 2016 between the months of July and November. Participants were initially recruited to participate in an online survey that quantitatively examined the childless, single, and non-religious identity. This sample was a national probably based web panel that included 3,000 individuals. For individuals who had all three counter-normative identities (i.e. childless, single, and non-religious) an option was added to the end of the survey to provide an e-mail address to be contacted for a follow-up telephone interview. Once the online survey was completed, a follow-up email was sent to respondents who voluntarily provided their contact information. An initial 82 individuals were contacted and resulted in 20 completed interviews. Phone interviews were recorded using NoNotes software and transcribed using Express Scribe. Interviews lasted approximately 70 minutes with the longest interview lasting 120 minutes and the shortest lasting 40 minutes. 19 respondents are white, and one is black, and the average age of respondents is 41 years. The sample includes 11 females, 9 males, and 1 non-binary individual. 17 or (85%) of the sample identified as heterosexual, 13 (60%) were employed full-time, and 17 (65%) had at least a bachelor's degree or higher. Interestingly, 9 (45%) of the sample was raised Catholic with 16 (85%) being raised with some form of religion.

TABLE 1.4 ABOUT HERE

Previous research on individuals who are childless, single, and non-religious indicate that, in general, these individuals are white, between the ages of 29 and 40, have higher than average income levels and higher levels of education than the average American (Shapiro 2014;

Pew 2014; DePaulo 2015). The sample used within the current data reflects these demographic trends.

Results

Theme 1: Meanings and Counter-Normative Identities in the Self-Concept

In order to explore how individuals who hold these identities conceptualize their counter-normative identities, participants were asked to describe how they thought society, in general, defined being single, childless, and nonreligious as well as their own personal meanings associated with their identities. In general, all 20 respondents could describe the familial and religious norms pervasive in American society, while also describing at least some negative meanings associated with their counter-normative identities from a societal perspective. Interestingly, however, all 20 respondents also described more positive than negative meanings they associate with at least one of their counter-normative identities. Lastly, not a single respondent described all three of these identities as important to how they think about their self-concept. Over 15 respondents stated that none of the three counter-normative were important aspects of their self-concept, while 5 of the 20 described at least one of the counter-normative identities as important components to their self-concept. The following examples represent the recognition of societal expectations associated with family and religious norms, and how those holding counter-normative identities describe them.

First, respondents easily identified the normative expectations and meanings associated with being a parent, married, or religious. When specifically asked about the societal view of family, Ziggy, 58 year old male states:

> *You grew up, you fell in love, and you got married. I guess I was brought up thinking that was the way it was supposed to be… Just the basic you are supposed to go out and find the one. You are supposed to get married, raise a family, and live happily ever after. I guess I just never fit that mold or never found that person. –Ziggy*

Marie describes the expectations people had of her because she was single and without children:

> *Yeah, I think more to marriage because I think people think that something is wrong with you if you don't get married. Children, maybe they can understand because there are people who can't have children, no matter how hard they tried, but I think if you are single people tend to think there is something wrong with you or you are a closet homosexual or something like that. -Marie*

John experienced the negative evaluations directly from his extended family members:

> *About a decade ago, I went to California for a family reunion. One of my aunt and uncle had their youngest were four and five, maybe five and six, you know youngish, and they were afraid to leave me alone in the house because they assumed someone my age without children and not married would be a child molester. –John*

Interestingly, despite deviating away from the normative identities himself, Joey still expects others to adhere to the traditional familial norms:

> *If someone hasn't found someone or hasn't procreated there must me a reason why and that is what I would want to know. I would love people to self-identify what they think that is, but here is the problem by me wanting to know that, and thinking that, is just me playing into the same game that everyone else plays with me that I hate…I suppose I would want to know this because maybe it could make me feel more normal about things or less alone or justify the things that I do and the choices I make. –Joey*

Second, despite recognizing the overall negative perception of their identities, every respondent described more positive meanings associated with their counter-normative identities than negative. These examples represent the personal and internal meanings individuals associate with their own identities. For example, Kevin, a 33 year old male, and active musician focused on the positive side of not having children when thinking about his current lifestyle:

> *If I did have children, then I wouldn't be doing most of what I do now. My lifestyle at this point is very nomadic. I do a lot of traveling. Most of that would not be possible, I think if I had a child or children. –Kevin*

Similarly, John, a 35-year-old male, reflects on his life without children, while confronting the negative perceptions he might face for admitting this, which once again demonstrates the power of normative expectations while shedding light on the way individuals still accrue positive

meanings for their own identities. When asked what being childless means to him, John responded:

> *So, this is going to sound very selfish and flippant, but my first thought is more disposable income for myself…If I had to take care of kids, worry about education, daycare, and you know. I have a friend with twins, I don't know how she pays for her daycare. I know I don't have a wealthy lifestyle, I am comfortably middle class, but I know if I had kids a lot of that comfort goes away. If it is selfish, it is not the reason I don't have kids, but if you asked me what the first thing that comes to mind about not having them: it is disposable income. –John*

Third, and most importantly from an identity theory perspective, 17 of 20 interview respondents stated that they do not consider any of the three counter-normative identities as part of their self-concept when thinking of the top five ways they would describe themselves. These identities, then, are low in prominence for these individuals. Being childless, single, and non-religious are not central identities within their self-concept. For example, Rachel described herself as a global health professional, a New Yorker, a female, a vegetarian, and a daughter. Childless, single, and non-religious did not come up when asked about their top five identities:

> *In terms of being single…I guess it is not really how I identify as a person. It might be how I identify with my current situation, but I don't consider it my identity. Then, childless, also I see as that is not really something I ever saw for myself at this age. Whether or not I will have children in the future remains to be seen, but that is definitely not…I don't see myself as childless because I haven't had a kid yet. Then, religious I guess I could say I am a Jew. I feel that way, that is a true statement, but I wouldn't put it in the top five because I don't feel like it is particularly crucial to my identity. -Rachel*

Athena, a confident and vibrant individual, described herself as ***"irreverent, definitely funny, inquisitive, animal lover, and daughter, that works. (Laughs)"*** She didn't, however, include childless, single, or non-religious. When asked about those three identities she stated: ***"It is not how I describe myself or how I think other people would describe me as defining me as someone that they know."***

John describes himself without even mentioning childless, single, or non-religious. His list includes life-long learner, storyteller, and friend. Being childless doesn't ***"even hit his radar."***

Even more interesting was the theme that emerged where individuals would admit that they are, in fact, single, childless, and non-religious, but they do not equate those identities as part of their self. Individuals, then, recognize their counter-normative identities but insist that they are not important identities to them. In other words, these identities are low in prominence for these individuals, and this low prominence is of import to them. In total, 14 respondents specifically mentioned some variant of: *I would never think about or identify myself in that manner.* Penny, when asked whether single, childless, or non-religious would be characteristics she would use to define herself stated:

> *No, not at all. I mean single, maybe because you are always filling out married or single because it is on forms, but it is not an identity like being gay or straight. You know? That is kind of you are either gay, straight, or bi and yeah, that is part of my identity that I am straight. I would never think of non-religious or childless –Penny.*

In sum, the major findings related to the meanings and location of identities within one's self-concept are threefold. First, unanimously, respondents recognize the normative familial and religious norms within society, as well as the negative perceptions of those deviating away from them. Additionally, all respondents provided positive meanings associated with their counter-normativity. For most respondents being single, childless, and non-religious is a status that these individuals hold, but they do not let it "define" them. Lastly, these identities are low in prominence for a majority or individuals, meaning their counter-normative identities exist within their self-concept, but exist in the periphery, not being centrally located or prominent. According to structural identity theory, then, identities low in prominence, will not likely impact role choice behavior and social interaction (Brenner, Serpe, Stryker 2014). These identities, in theory, should

not impact individuals and not predict behavior. An interesting pattern emerges or is activated, however, in which individuals provided specific social interactions where their counter-normative identities became prominent and important to them. This finding will be explicated in the following theme by drawing upon the interactional research program of identity theory.

Theme 2: Counter-Normative Identities in Interaction and Role Choice Behavior

When considering both the structural and interactional approaches within identity theory, salience and prominence are two important factors to consider when exploring how identities impact interaction and role choice behavior (Stets and Serpe 2013). In this study, all 20 respondents, when asked how these identities impact their daily lives, reported little to no impact. It was only after further questioning that roughly half of the 20 respondents described some experience where these identities became prominent in an interaction or experience. This increased prominence, in turn, impacted their role choice behavior. Overall, respondents suggest that it is interactions and various situations that activate their counter-normative identity to be enacted, rather than an identity being important to them.

In review, Stryker (1968) described salience as the likelihood of enacting an identity across situations, and this is impacted by an identities' prominence or level of importance (Brenner, Serpe, Stryker 2014). When looking at salience and prominence from this perspective, an interesting pattern emerges: individuals with counter-normative identities do not rank these identities as important to how they view themselves (i.e. they are not prominent). For these individuals, then, being non-religious, single, and childless is not important to how they view their self-concept. Structural identity posits that identity prominence impacts identity salience (Brenner, Serpe, Stryker 2014), and, as expected, for these individuals whose identities are low in prominence, they are not bringing the identities up in social interaction. Looking at these

results solely from a structural identity approach would suggest the theory is supported even for counter-normative identities. Interestingly, however, when further asked about specifically bringing these identities up, we find the interactional approach to identity theory provides a more detailed explanation of why these identities do not emerge in interaction. When specifically asked to think about enacting their counter-normative identities in various interactions, respondents collectively state that not bringing these identities up is a factor of the situation and structural norms.

McCall and Simmons (1966) infused Goffman's (1959) definition of the situation into their conceptualization of identity theory resulting in a more fluid understanding of identity salience based upon the appropriateness of the identity within a specific situation. This conceptualization of salience frequently appears throughout the participant's discourse. Because of her understanding that society, in general, is not fond of those who are non-religious, Athena has learned that there is a time and place to bring up religion and other times when her non-belief remains undisclosed:

> *It is not like I go around saying it, but if it comes up in conversation and depending on the person, I absolutely . Typically, yes, but for example I have, I just got a new job and I have a boss that is a lovely, lovely lady and she was giving me something religious, which I, you know, what am I going to say, "no thank you," but it meant something to her and she was only trying to be nice and helpful to me, so there was no way that I was going to be like "no thanks, I don't believe in that." (Laughs) . I just said "that is really sweet, thank you very much." It just depends, it is kind of a "know your audience," but I absolutely will tell people, yes. –Athena*

Similarly, Kristin is aware of the need to be diplomatic about sharing her non-belief.

> *I think I am very mindful of like openly sharing it and who I am with because it is a sensitive topic and so I think that I insert social circumstances had I been more forthcoming about my personal views, I think I might have seen some of that negativity, but again, like me as an individual I am very respecting of other's views and so I can be amongst a group of very devout individuals and, you know, not offend anybody but yet also not need to share my personal views. Again, I am very mindful of who I share. There*

are certain family members if they knew I was no longer of the believing faith, I could see it being an interesting conversation. (Laughs) –Kristin

Penny stated that the only time she would consider herself childless was:

Unless, I am with a whole bunch of people with kids, and then I would think of myself as, well I would like of myself more as single instead of childless. But, that is part, you are more aware of that when you are surrounded by families. -Penny

With counter-normative identities, though, it is more than just situationally specific salience, there is also a pattern of forced salience. It is during these interactions, in which individuals had no intention of bringing up an identity, but others do, where they report negative aspects of their identities. On a daily basis being single doesn't seem to impact Rocco, but there are situationally specific times that he notices it more than others, or in other words where his single identity becomes more salient. For example:

Well, yeah sometimes it feels a little funny like I will go to a party or a get-together and I am the only one not coupled up. I will go to a restaurant and I'm there alone and everybody else is in groups or with their partner. That feels a little…not isolating, I just feel a little different, I guess…you know, being invited to a wedding or being invited to a family gathering or something like that were I am the only uncoupled person. I think it brings it more to the fore. –Rocco

While on doing AmeriCorps for two years, Athena attended a Lutheran based college and she experienced first-hand the negative perception of the non-religious. She told a story that started with her telling someone about her non-belief in an unimportant conversation, but this revelation leads to others enacting her identity for her:

*…you know I told them, I don't really identify with a religion and I guess everyone started talking and I got to be known at the atheist person, which was a little frustrating to me because I never said that and no one really took the time to ask really about it. I just got called an atheist a lot, which it didn't necessarily bother me, but it wasn't correct in my mind. People wouldn't talk to me or avoid me or just make comments**. :** Just like "Oh, you are the atheist."-Athena*

Penny discussed how she stopped going out to eat at restaurants because she was mortified when they said "Table for One."

> *Oh yeah, but like I use to go to this lunch place, I use to go with a friend but then my friend got a boyfriend and he stopped wanting to go to lunch. I would go there once and a while myself, and when they said "Table for One" that is just mortifying. You know what I mean? I just kind of stopped going. (Laughs) Other people don't feel that way. I know plenty of single people who will go to-Penny*

Many situations are evoking counter-normative identities described by respondents revolved around family gatherings and holidays. Coming from a very Catholic family, Joey does not usually think about being non-religious at all until around the holidays when he is with his family. When asked if being non-religious comes up in his everyday life, Joey responded:

> *No, very rarely. I don't think my religious or non-religious personal belief, it is something I hardly don't even think about anymore. I don't think about it at all. It is only, I would say when I get around family, and it becomes a little more evident that, oh this is kind of a thing that exists, particularly around the holidays. I do go home for the holidays to visit my parents and my extended family and you know I kind of just, I participate to just enough to be a part of that functioning unit. I don't get a lot out of it. I am clearly not enthusiastic about it, but I do it because I don't want to be the one person in the family who, you know, kind of shuns everything. I will say the prayers at dinner. On Christmas and Easter, I go to the evening vigils with my mom and dad and my siblings, and that is about it. -Joey*

Ashley states that certain holidays and events trigger her thoughts about being alone too:

> *I mean around Valentine's Day when everyone is making plans or telling you about their plans and they are like "Oh what are your plans?" I am like "Nothing." (Laughs) - Ashley*

Interestingly, when situations and interactions induce the salience of these identities, respondents collectively reported negative consequences and experiences. Additionally, upon experiencing these negative events and forced enactment, many respondents stated that they actively avoided those situations and experiences. Jeff, a 53-year-old male, demonstrates this when he described his past experiences with his family.

> *I was around the family more so all them were getting married and stuff like that and starting families and stuff like this, so when we would have the family gatherings and it would come this one or that one with a spouse or with a newborn or something like that and you would just kind of feel almost like the black sheep of the family… I use to hate, I hated family gatherings. I hated them. I didn't want to go. I knew that is what was going to happen. All of…the speculations and all of this stuff. I just stopped going-Jeff*

The ability to discern how identities impact behavior is a major goal of identity theorists (Stryker 1980). From a structural approach, the prominence of an identity is the primary force impacting role choice behavior, whereas an interactionist approach focuses more on the definition of the situation and the appropriateness of an identity within the interaction. What these results suggest, is that for counter-normative identities, both the structural and interactional approach helps explain how these identities impact behavior, but the interactional approach helps shed light on how individuals navigate interactions, and which of these identities become salient due to the situation or interaction.

Discussion and Conclusion

The current research explored counter-normative identities using structural and interactional identity theory by interviewing twenty individuals who hold three counter-normative identities. Overall, two broad thematic research goals were examined. The first theme focused on locating counter-normative identities within the self-concept as well as capturing how individuals describe the meanings associated with their identities personally and from a societal perspective. Importantly, all 20 respondents provided similar shared meanings and expectations regarding childless, single, and non-religious identities from a societal perspective. Unanimously respondents stated that society, in general, does not have a positive perception of these identities. In fact, many individuals reported instances where their counter-normative identities were called into question or negatively evaluated. A major finding from this theme, however, is the positive meanings individual personally hold for their identities, which overshadow the negative societal meanings. This provides an interesting opportunity for future research to explore the implication of these incongruent meanings with regards to authenticity and identity verification. Thinking specifically about verification, when someone imposes an identity on an individual simply

because of their own preconceived meanings and expectations, how does the verification process work? To explain, when the societal definition of someone who is childless is selfish and materialistic, but childless individuals views their choice as responsible and selfless, both parties would be trying to verify different meaning structures to no avail. Future research should continue to explore the internalization process and meaning structures of counter-normative identities by including both normative and counter-normative individuals within a sample. Additionally, research should examine how an individual's reference groups or proximate social structural (Stryker, Serpe, and Hunt 2005; Merolla, Serpe, Stryker, and Schultz 2012) impacts their experience of counter-normative identities. For example, individuals who are surrounded by others who share their counter-normative identities may experience them more positively as compared to someone surrounded by others with normative identities.

Also, emerging from the first theme is overall low prominence of counter-normative identities among the respondents. All but three respondents reported all three counter-normative identities as "unimportant" to how they view themselves. Most past research on childless, single, and non-religious individuals focuses on the negative aspect of holding these identities (Park 2002, Edgell, et al. 2006, DePaulo 2006), and how they impact their lives. There are an increasing number of studies focusing on the positive aspect of these identities (Cragun 2014; DePaulo 2015), and finding that individuals who hold these identities do not think of them as prominent components of their self-concept, may help explain the discrepancy between these two findings. If identities are low in prominence, then, they will have little impact on behavior and social and mental outcomes (Stryker 1980). The current results support a structural approach, during everyday interactions respondents' counter-normative identities do not impact their lives and are not important to them. When placed in specific interactions or situations that

call upon these counter-normative identities, however, despite their low importance, individuals are faced with navigating interactions some of which involved negative experiences and consequences.

The second theme concentrated on the interactional component of identities and how identities impact role choice behavior. Looking first at these interviews from a structural identity theorist perspective, where identity prominences predicts salience, a majority of respondents stated these identities were not prominent. In fact, several individuals explicitly stated that these identities are not important at all for them. Furthermore, when asked about whether or not these identities would come up in interactions, many individuals could not recall a time when they did come up. This pattern suggests that the structural identity theory model is supported by these interviews. A strength of qualitative research, however, is the ability to probe for further explanation and examples. While these identities are not important to respondents and they do not bring them up, a caveat arises, however, because respondents insist they would discuss these identities is someone else brought them up, but they are not willing to bring them up directly. Therefore, not enacting an identity, for many individuals, is based upon their perception that it is not appropriate to bring that identity to an interaction rather than their own unwillingness to engage with their counter-normativity.

The specific attention to situations mentioned by many respondents demonstrates the importance of the situational-self as described by McCall and Simmons (1966). For many individuals with counter-normative identities, these identities remain dormant until specific situations or interactions arise that bring forth the counter-normativity. Many examples provided were related to religious traditions or family gatherings during holidays. Not only were individuals forced to acknowledge their counter-normative identities, but they were also forced

to deal with the negative evaluations placed on their identities. Interestingly, then, because these identities are not prominent for all respondents, many had minimal examples of times in which they had to interact with their counter-normative identity. An interesting comparison could be made between individuals who actively engage in these identities outwardly and openly on a regular basis. To explain, recent research on childfree, single, and non-religious individuals has identified groups of activists within these communities that experience positive outcomes associated with their counter-normative identities and proudly display these identities on a regular basis. When asked, these open individuals report few negative outcomes associated with holding these identities in terms of personal social and emotional consequences (DePaulo 2015; Blackstone 2014). One might explicate that these identities for these individuals are more prominent, and therefore more salient, and, therefore, they are enacting these identities across more situations. An interesting future study would be to compare these individuals with a sample similar to the one in the current study where respondents do not actively engage with their counter-normative identities and when forced to, experience, negative outcomes. Future research should explore the implication of forced enactment of counter-normative identities and how this impacts future enactment. Additionally, beyond counter-normative identities, research should explore the interactional research program of identity for normative identities as well.

In conclusion, counter-normative identities are on the rise within American society. Despite the pervasive familial and religious norms, individuals are opting out of religion, parenting, and relationships without internalizing the negative societal perceptions. In fact, many individuals report positive meanings associated with their counter-normativity, rather than focus on the negativity. Lastly, an interesting finding emerged from these interviews, despite the prevalence of religious and familial norms: when you do not hold these roles, reasons for you to

enact them are limited. Those with counter-normative identities, however, experience an induced form of salience, where specific interactions and events force their counter-normativity to the forefront. It is in those times that individuals report negative experiences and evaluations from others.

Several limitations exist within the current research. These limitations, however, provide several avenues for future projects exploring counter-normative identities. First, a limitation of the current research is the cross-sectional nature of the data collection, and the inability to view these identities over time. Future research should explore the concept of temporary identities and collect longitudinal data to explore these counter-normative identities over time. Longitudinal data is especially important when considering age as a factor in the identity process. Previous research has found that the experience of being childless, single, and non-religious evolves throughout the life course (Shapiro 2014; DePaulo 2015; Zuckerman 2014), and monitoring this evolution through longitudinal data would be a major contribution to the literature. Second, while the current research includes three counter-normative identities, which is an advancement from previous work, which only included a single identity, a limitation emerges when considering the vast amount of identities that could exist within an individual's self-concept. For instance, for many of my respondents, who are professionals in their respective fields, being a "professional" is a prominent identity, one that trumps their counter-normative identity. Alternatively, individuals provided various identities such as vegetarian, or depressed, or "a loner" that could also be considered counter-normative, but were not discussed in the current research. Future research should aim to explore identities self-identified by individuals as important to explore how these identities impact daily life as a comparison to ones not highly important to individuals.

Given the interesting interaction between the structural and interactional approach of identity theory within the current paper, more research, both qualitative and quantitative, should explore how the various approaches within identity theory intersect and support one another within the examination of counter-normative identities. Structurally, identities derived from society, exist within a complex society (Stryker 1980), while situational definitions are also becoming more complicated and the definition of the situation increases in importance. This is especially true for individuals with counter-normative identities, who exist in a normatively driven society.

Table 1.4: Descriptive Statistics of Interviewees

Age	Gender	Sexuality	Race	Religion Raised	Current Religion	Employment	Education
25	Female	Heterosexual	White	Christian	Agnostic	Unemployed	Graduate Degree
31	Male	Heterosexual	White	Non-religious	Atheist	Unemployed	Some College or Tech School
46	Female	Heterosexual	White	Jewish	Non-religious	Working Full-time	Graduate or Professional Degree
48	Female	Heterosexual	White	Catholic	Atheist	Working Full-time	Graduate or Professional Degree
22	Non-binary	Asexual	White	Mixed	Agnostic	Part Time	College Graduate
56	Female	Heterosexual	White	Catholic	Non-religious	Retired	College Graduate
58	Male	Heterosexual	White	Protestant	Atheist	Unemployed	Some College or Tech School
33	Male	Gay	White	Catholic	Non-religious	Working Full-time	Graduate or Professional Degree
53	Male	Gay	White	Christian	Atheist	Unemployed	High School
35	Male	Heterosexual	White	Catholic	Non-religious	Working Full-time	Graduate or Professional Degree
25	Female	Heterosexual	N/A	Catholic	Non-religious	Working Full-time	College Graduate
33	Female	Heterosexual	White	Non-religious	Agnostic	Working Full-time	Some College or Tech School
55	Male	Heterosexual	White	Protestant	Non-religious	Working Full-time	College Graduate
60	Female	Heterosexual	White	Catholic	Non-religious	Retired	Graduate or Professional Degree
62	Male	Heterosexual	White	Catholic	Atheist	Working Full-time	College Graduate
26	Female	Heterosexual	White	Jewish	Non-religious	Working Full-time	Graduate or Professional Degree
29	Female	Heterosexual	White	Non-religious	Buddhist	Working Full-time	College Graduate
28	Female	Heterosexual	White	Catholic	Non-religious	Working Full-time	College Graduate
33	Female	Heterosexual	White	Catholic	Non-religious	Working Full-time	Graduate or Professional Degree
35	Male	Heterosexual	Black	Non-religious	Non-religious	Working Full-time	College Graduate

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY CHAPTER

The self is complex. It is shaped by the intricacies of the society within which individuals reside (Stryker 1980). The self is comprised of multiple identities (James 1890), which impact how we experience everyday life. Identities, or the internalized meanings and expectations associated with groups, roles, or personal characteristics (Stets and Serpe 2013), was the focus of this dissertation research. The scientific study of identities has flourished over the past several decades across a wide array of subjects. The current project, however, focused on the social psychological aspects of identities building theoretically and methodologically on research stemming from identity theory and structural symbolic interactionism. Identities impact behavior, relationships, and interactions (Stryker 1980; Stets and Serpe 2013), but, they can also impact emotions (Stets 1995; Stets and Burke 2009) and mental well-being (Thoits 1983; 1986; 1995; 2013; Long 2016).

Most research within identity theory has been quantitative in nature with a focus on identifying broad patterns across samples of individuals. Additionally, previous studies have looked predominately at normative identities such as being a parent, spouse, and religious. There are, however, an increasing number of individuals who are opting to be non-religious, childless, and single or temporarily postponing them for a variety of reasons. These identities are conceptualized as counter-normative, meaning simply that they run "counter" to the traditional norms and expectations of American society (Long 2016). Research on these counter-normative

identities has been mostly qualitative with a focus on understanding the obtainment of these identities and the stigma management associated with claiming them (Veevers 1983; Park 2002; Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006; Hunsberger and Altemeyer 2006; Scott 2009; and DePaulo 2015).

Individuals, however, do not simply have a single identity. They have multiple identities, in fact, "as many identities as there are individuals who recognize them as such" (James 1890). These identities are situated within one's self-concept in a hierarchical fashion with more important identities (Stryker 1980) or one's "ideal" identities (McCall and Simmons 1966) located near the top. Therefore, when thinking about the impact identities have on various aspects of everyday life, one must consider multiple identities (Thoits 1983). This dissertation begins with how the accumulation of multiple counter-normative identities impacts psychological distress. Thoits (1983; 1986; 1995; 2003; 2013) pioneered work on identity accumulation and mental health with a focus on normative identities and agency. Research on identity accumulation finds that the accumulation of normative, voluntary identities, such as being a friend, positively impacts mental well-being (Thoits 2013). Missing, however, is the inclusion of identities that challenge societal traditions and norms such as the non-religious, single, and childless.

Not only did Thoits (1983) provide the empirical and theoretical foundation for studying accumulation, she also provided suggestions for how various contextualizing aspects of identities, derived from identity theory, impact the accumulation process (Thoits 2013). To explain, multiple identities exist within our self-concept, but these identities are not equally important to how we see our self. Identity prominence is a concept developed by both Stryker (1980) and McCall and Simmons (1966) to describe the location of an identity within one's self-

concept. Both aspects of prominence are incorporated into the examination of multiple counter-normative identities and their relationship to depression and social anxiety. The dissertation, overall, focuses on multiple counter-normative identities from an accumulation and identity theory perspective.

The three identity sets explored are the religious-non-religious; parental-childless; and those in a relationship or single. These three sets were selected based on the widespread recognition of their meanings and expectations within society and the normative expectation of being religious, a parent, and in a relationship. Additionally, a rising number of individuals are claiming the counter-normative portions of those identities sets and openly discussing being non-religious, childless, and single, bringing awareness to this subset of the broader population (Blackstone and Stewart 2012; Pew 2015; DePaulo 2015). Important to note, however, is the inter-relationship between these three identities with religious doctrine and norms shaping familial norms within American society (Llewellyn 2016). Those holding one or more normative identity may experience their counter-normative identities differently than those holding all three counter-normative identities. More specifically, the pervasiveness of traditional norms related to any of the normative identities may take precedence over their counter-normative identity/ies. Within the overall project, three independent research questions are explored across chapters two through four. While independent, these chapters build upon one another with each proceeding chapter seeking to answer the questions generated by the conclusions in earlier chapters.

Chapter two addresses the first research question: How does accumulating counter-normative identities impact depression and social anxiety, and how does one's perception of choosing these identities impact depression and social anxiety. More specifically, given the negative societal views towards holding these counter-normative identities, it was predicted that

the more counter-normative identities one holds, the higher their depression and social anxiety. Additionally, based on Thoits' (2003) inclusion of agency into an accumulation model, it was predicted that lower levels of perceived choice in the obtainment of identities would increase depression and social anxiety. Chapter two provided evidence that accumulating counter-normative identities does not increase depression, but does increase social anxiety. A similar pattern was found for perceived choice with higher levels of choice decreasing depression across all three identities. When social anxiety was the outcome, higher levels of perceived choice within the parental and relationship identities decreased social anxiety, but higher levels of perceived choice within religion did not.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings within chapter two. First, results find that any increase in the number of counter-normative identities one has increases the chance one reports social anxiety. If one perceives having choice in claiming these identities, however, this lowers their levels of depression and social anxiety. Solely looking at this first study then, one would suggest the reverse accumulation model for counter-normative identities is supported. Identity theory, however, states that all identities are not equal within one's self-concept, with some identities being more important than others. Identities more important to how one views their self, are more likely to be enacted across situations (Brenner, Serpe, Stryker 2014) and more likely to impact their mental well-being (Thoits 2013). What the first paper demonstrates is that the count of counter-normative identities impacts social anxiety. What it does not specify is how those different groupings of normative and counter-normative identities differ in their experience of depression and social anxiety. It allows us to say that having more counter-normative identities increases social anxiety, but it does not specify whether having one or no counter-normative identities differs or whether having two or three counter-normative identities

differ with regards to their depression and social anxiety. In addition, simply counting the identities in this way does not account for how individuals perceive these identities within their self-concept. These two unanswered questions are the foundation for the study in chapter three.

The third chapter explores the second broad research question: How do specific components of identities influence the relationship between multiple counter-normative identities and psychological well-being? In particular, the influence of choice and prominence are examined in terms of how they differentially impact depression and social anxiety for individuals who claim zero, one, two, or three counter-normative identities. In her later work, Thoits (2013) made a number of theoretical arguments for the inclusions of more identity specific components, but never empirically tested them in relation to multiple identities. In addition, research in identity theory has focused heavily on multiple identity specific components of the self-concept, like prominence and salience, but not often on multiple identities simultaneously. The third chapter bridges this gap by exploring two identity specific components, choice and prominence, and how they differentially influence psychological well-being within different constellations of counter-normative identities.

In general, and consistent with previous research (Thoits 2003, Thoits 2013; Long 2016), individuals who perceive having higher choice within their identities report lower levels of depression. Choice is not, however, a consistent predictor of social anxiety. There are very few effects of choice within the religion or relationship identity sets regardless of how many counter-normative identities an individual claims. For parental status, the more choice an individual perceives, the lower their social anxiety, except for those who claim all three counter-normative identities. Prominence shows a very different pattern of influence on depression and social anxiety. For both outcomes, more prominent normative identities act as a protective factor. When

an individual claims all three normative identities, the more prominent being a parent, in a relationship, and religious is to them, the lower their depression and social anxiety. As soon as even one counter-normative identity is included, however, this effect disappears. In addition, for those who claim all three counter-normative identities, the more prominent being childless, single, and non-religious is to them the higher their levels of depression.

Overall, the exploratory analysis in chapter three shows the effects of multiple counter-normative identities may not simply be additive. It is important to explore these identity specific components, and this analysis shows that having even one counter-normative identity may eliminate the protective factor of the prominence associated with normative identities. The relationship between prominence and psychological distress is not dependent upon how many counter-normative identities an individual claims, as soon as one counter-normative identity is included in an individual's self-concept, prominence no longer protects against depression and social anxiety. Chapter three makes clear the need to go beyond simply counting the number of identities an individual holds, whether normative or not, and shows the importance of identity specific components of the self-concept in relation to psychological well-being.

The fourth chapter explores the final research questions: how do individuals describe the meanings associated with their counter-normative identities at a societal and a personal level; where do they locate these identities in their self-concept; and how do they describe the relationship between their counter-normative identities and social interaction? This chapter methodologically differs from chapters two and three by employing qualitative methods to examine counter-normative identities. Whereas the first two studies quantified the identities to empirically examine the relationship between accumulation, depression and social anxiety, this

study takes a step back and asks respondents who held all three counter-normative identities to describe their personal experience with them.

The interviews demonstrate that despite holding the counter-normative side of the identity set, individuals could still describe the normative expectations and meanings associated with the traditional roles as well as the negative views held about those who are counter-normative by society at large. When asked about their own personal meanings associated with their identities, all respondents provided positive aspects of the counter-normativity they enjoyed. In addition, no individuals described single, childless, or non-religious as important to how they think about their self, or within their top ten identities. This finding suggests that counter-normative identities, for these individuals, are low in prominence, as described by structural identity theorists. Individuals stated that these identities were not important to them, and stated that they really did not talk about them or bring them up to others.

When further pressed about specific events, interactions, or individuals who enact their counter-normative identities (i.e. family gatherings or holidays), however, all respondents recalled at least one time in which their counter-normative identity was highly important to them. This finding supports the situational salience described by McCall and Simmons (1966), in which individuals determine which identities to enact in a given situation based on the definition of the situation (Goffman 1959). Individuals do not think about these identities on daily basis, and they are not generally important to how they view their self, but in specific situations these counter-normative identities become apparent to respondents and sometimes upsetting. Daily, however, respondents state that these identities are not impacting how their go about their day and how they view their self.

An important implication, then, is that caution is needed when categorizing individuals who hold counter-normative identities with broad labels of "stigmatized" or "devalued" identities. Despite being counter-normative according to the traditional norms and expectations of society, these individuals do not experience the negative consequences described in a majority of previous research. In fact, many respondents reported positive experiences and feelings regarding their counter-normative identities. Future research should aim to identify what distinguishes those individuals who experience these counter-normative identities as stigmatizing, and those individuals who are not impacted by them in their everyday lives. It is both an empirical and theoretical question because individuals can claim the same identities within the same society, but experience them differently. Are there factors of their everyday lives or their personalities that buffer or induce the positive or negative experiences? For instance, proximate social structure, defined as the context wherein an individual is enacting their identity, has been found to impact identity retention and commitment (Merolla, Serpe, Stryker, Schultz 2012). In particular, when an individual finds themselves in a proximate social structure that is supportive and accepting of a specific identity, that identity is more likely to be retained over time. It may also be that individuals who surround themselves with others who also hold counter-normative identities, or, are at least supportive of counter-normative identities, are less impacted by the negative overall societal evaluations. Proximate social structure demonstrates the important role interaction context can play in identity processes, and, like many individuals described within the qualitative interviews, it was only when surrounded by individuals with normative identities that their counter-normative status became an issue. Future work should add a quantitative examination of the influence of proximate social structure across a large sample to evaluate its impact on the experience of counter-normative identities.

Overall, when thinking about the findings from the two quantitative studies in chapters two and three, we could conclude that counter-normative identities seem to be positively related with depression and social anxiety, or that individuals who claim multiple counter-normative identities are more likely to experience depression and social anxiety. This should come as no surprise given the large body of research suggesting these identities are negatively evaluated and stigmatized by society. Given the negative evaluations surrounding these identities, it is expected that individuals will experience some negative outcomes when thy claim them. The fourth chapter begins to contextualize these identities by incorporating prominence, but it is not until chapter five when we talk in-depth with individuals about their experiences holding these three identities that the complexities fully emerge. An important research implication of this collective work is an understanding that quantifying identities in order to empirically examine them allows insight into broad patterns amongst groups of individuals, but specific nuances within these groups may be lost. Counter-normative identities, for instance, have been relatively un-explored within identity theory, and therefore, conducting exploratory analysis on the various measures used within identity theory is an important advancement. Future research should continue to explore how counter-normative identities fit or do not fit the traditional identity theory model.

Future research should also explore outcomes beyond depression and social anxiety. The implications from the current body of research revolved around mental health derived from the work of Thoits (1983; 1986; 2003; 2013). While it is recognized in the current research that all stigmatized identities are counter-normative, but not all counter-normative identities are stigmatized, future research should explore various stigma outcomes to explore this relationship. Similar to the discussion of proximate social structure, are there personal characteristics about individuals who hold counter-normative identities that impact how the identities impact mental

health? For instance, an interesting study could examine how self-esteem impacts the relationship between accumulating counter-normative identities and perceived stigma. Part of the accumulation argument from Thoits (1983) stated that accumulating identities also buffered self-esteem by building up a well of social support and esteem via the various relationships acquired through the various identities. Could it be that individuals with higher levels of self-esteem are more likely to hold counter-normative identities? More specifically, are individuals claiming counter-normative identities more efficacious in life, generally? Including measures of self-worth, self-efficacy, and authenticity would be a contribution to the examination of counter-normative identities.

As is evident by the plethora of avenues for future research, this overall dissertation has several noteworthy limitations. First, a limitation within the analyses presented in chapters two and three is the inclusion of only two outcomes: depression and social anxiety. Both outcomes are aspects of mental well-being, with depression being a severe mental health status. There are a variety of outcomes such as emotions, use of stigma management, and stigma-related outcomes that could provide different conclusions. Second, a similar limitation appears when looking at the identity relevant concepts included. This overall dissertation examines the concepts of identity choice, prominence, and salience. There is a myriad of identity concepts applicable when exploring multiple identities and counter-normative identities such as commitment, authenticity, and proximate social structure. These other concepts may influence how individuals experience multiple counter-normative identities. Third, only three role sets are included in this dissertation (i.e. parent-childless). These three role sets do not encompass all of the possible normative and counter-normative identities an individual could hold, and the other identities that these

individuals may hold, which were not explored, may be impacting the identity process and their experience of mental well-being.

Fourth, there is a potential for selection bias within my qualitative data given that respondents had to complete the online survey in its entirety and claim all three counter-normative identities to be offered the interview option. Additionally, these individuals had to willingly agree to an hour telephone interview to discuss these three aspects of their daily lives. These individuals, then, could be more likely to include people who have not had strong negative experiences within these components of their daily lives. It is possible that those individuals who have had stigmatizing or strong negative experiences associated with one of these components of their self may have been less likely to agree to the telephone interview. The final limitation of the data is the cross-sectional nature of this data. This is problematic given the fluidity of identities across time. In particular, some individuals who claim these counter-normative identities may have them temporarily. For example, a young individual may be childless or single currently, but may decide to change this component of their self later in life. In addition to actually changing identities, individuals experience of these identities may change over time. This research is examining a snapshot of the identities these individuals currently hold as well as their current experience of those identities.

While limitations exist within this overall dissertation, there are several broad implications that emerge. First, in general, this body of research on counter-normative identities thus far has established that identities are becoming more individualized and less likely to fit the traditional mold (Scott 2009; Cragun 2013; DePaulo 2015). This phenomenon arises from the emphasis on normative identities resulting in a "normal curve of normativity" within most samples. To explain, the majority of research on identities has focused on one of two things: (1)

individuals who claim normative identities, or (2) the outliers who claim the extreme version of counter-normative identities and face stigma. Additionally, our current societal structure polarizes these identities; individuals are either parents or childless, religious or non-religious. For most, these are hard lines separating individuals, lines that impact how one experiences everyday life. Research on identities has followed this trend, examining the major components of everyday life like marriage and family, with most people falling on the normative side of the curve. Alternatively, research has focused on the extreme opposite, examining the stigmatization of the identities and how they negatively impact individuals. Even some of the identities included in the current work have been examined within this polarized view such as parents versus child-free or married individuals versus the experience of singlism. What arises from this polarization is the emphasis on the normal curve and the extreme outliers, whereas counter-normative identities likely tend to fall in the middle of these two groups. What this research demonstrates is that for individuals who hold these counter-normative identities, simply holding one does not condemn them to the negative consequences of stigmatization. In fact, findings from the current research suggest individuals with counter-normative identities do not report higher levels of depression as compared to those with normative identities. Social anxiety, however, is higher for those holding counter-normative identities, demonstrating that some discomfort or unease exists when deviating from the norm.

Researchers should take caution when studying the extreme outliers such as the staunch child-free individual who views parents as “breeders” or the adamant atheist who views religious individuals as unable to cope with reality. Research should also hesitate to focus solely on those who adhere to the normative aspects of society without including those deviating slightly away from the traditional path. While most individuals are religious and strive to become married with

children, many individuals do not hold those identities. Some individuals will eventually claim those identities, while others will remain within their counter-normative ones. This research demonstrates the need to include and/or focus on individuals who fall somewhere between the mode that is normative and the extreme outliers on the counter-normative side, because these individuals are experiencing identities in a different manner, and therefore, experiencing interaction differently as well.

This complexity is further explicated when thinking about shared meanings and expectations at the societal level and individual meanings that have been internalized. Societal norms are constantly shifting and the daily experiences of those holding identities that violate those norms are complex and vacillate depending on the individuals being interacted with. Identity theory states that identities are comprised of the internalized shared meanings that are attached to a specific component of an individual's self. These counter-normative identities are negatively evaluated overall in American society, and thus, the general shared meanings of our society for these specific identities are negative. These negative societal expectations, however, are not necessarily internalized by individuals who claim these identities. These individuals do recognize that society at large views them negatively, but do not internalize these meanings attached to their counter-normative identities.

Despite recognizing the existence of traditional norms, individuals proceed through everyday life developing and establishing a different set of meanings and expectations. In fact, many individuals in this study provided positive meanings associated with the negatively viewed counter-normative identities. This disconnect presents an issue when examining counter-normative identities because the internalized meanings are not necessarily the societally shared ones. Future research must carefully consider how meanings associated with these counter-

normative identities are measured, and researchers must be sure that they know which type of shared meaning they are evaluating. Additionally, because these individuals are not internalizing the negative meanings associated with their counter-normative identities they may not experience them as stigmatizing or detrimental to their mental health. Despite having their own personal meanings for their counter-normative identities, the recognition of the negative societal views, however, impacted respondents within the current study at the interactional level, captured through social anxiety.

The final implication is the differences that emerged between depression and social anxiety as outcomes within this process. Previous work within identity theory focused on how identities impact mental health through the concepts of depression and anxiety. These concepts capture an individual level response and experience of identities outside of specific contexts. Within the current research, in general, individuals with counter-normative identities did not report higher levels of depression, but they did report higher levels of social anxiety. Social anxiety was included within the current research to capture the experience of identities in interaction with others. Identities, after all, are social by nature and are impacted by the context within which they are enacted. Including outcomes that measure the interactional component of identities is an important step in further understanding how identities impact not only individuals, but also interaction more broadly. Future research should further explore how individuals experience identities differently with different interaction partners or in different social contexts.

This overall project was an exploratory analysis of multiple counter-normative identities, and is the beginning of a research trajectory aimed at further exploring and understanding counter-normativity beyond just the childless, single, and non-religious. Identities are complex;

and research on multiple identities is no exception. This project laid the foundation for a quantitative and qualitative approach to studying multiple identities, but ultimately more questions were established than answered. Despite James' recognition in 1890 that individuals have multiple selves/identities, researchers have yet to fully grasp what multiple identities entail and how they impact everyday life for both those holding the identities and those interacting with them. Two points of advice for future research on studying multiple identities. First, avoid the temptation to focus on identities falling within the societally expected normal curve or the extreme identities sitting as outliers. Make sure to include a variety of identities such as counter-normative ones. Second, studying identities in isolation, whether in isolation from other identities or in isolation from context, is problematic and provides only a glimpse into the complexities related to multiple identities.

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