

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-EFFICACY, SOCIAL ISOLATION, REJECTION SENSITIVITY, COLLEGE ADJUSTMENT, AND RETENTION

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# Background Literature

- Bandura (1997) - self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to complete a task to achieve goals
- Applied to a collegiate setting:
  - ▣ Students with high levels of self-efficacy will approach school-work as a challenge to be conquered
  - ▣ Students with low levels of self-efficacy will avoid school work (Solberg, O'Brien, Villareal, Kennel, & Davis 1993; Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

# Background Literature cont.

- Rejection sensitivity and social isolation interact
  - ▣ High rejection sensitivity and high social isolation = higher level of negative college adjustment (Oberleitner, n.d)
- Social exclusion has been found to impact one's self-esteem and mood state (see Williams 2007, for review)
- People with higher social isolation have also been shown to have higher mental health symptomology (Hall-Lande, Eisenberg, Christenson, & Neumark-Sztainer. 2007)
- Those who are high in rejection sensitivity are more vigilant to possible perceived rejection and isolation.
- Walton and Cohen (2011) that found that brief interventions to increase social belonging on college campuses was associated with higher GPA in minority students

# Purpose of the Study

- Social isolation, rejection sensitivity, self-efficacy, college adjustment, and freshmen retention are related, but not widely studied.
- The purpose of this study is to explain the relationship between these factors in a first-year college population.

# Research Questions

- Is self-efficacy correlated with perceptions of social isolation?
- How does social isolation interact with self-efficacy and social rejection sensitivity in first year students?
- How do these factors impact first-year student retention?
- What is the relationship between self-reported college adjustment and retention/GPA?

# Definitions

- Self-efficacy – one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task.
- Social isolation – a state of complete or non-complete lack of contact between an individual and the other members of its environment.
- Rejection sensitivity – the tendency to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and overreact to social rejection.
- College adjustment – the degree to which students successfully cope with the stress of college and adjust to being away from home

# Instrumentation

- College Self-Efficacy Inventory (CSEI)
- Adopted from Solberg (1993), with permission
- Rating Scale, 22-items related academic and social aspects of college life.
- Asks students to rate their confidence in completing tasks associated with being a college student
- All items were on a 0-8 scale: totally unconfident to totally confident
- Sample Items:
  - ▣ Make new friends at college
  - ▣ Research a term paper
  - ▣ Talk with school academic and support staff
  - ▣ Manage your time effectively
  - ▣ Join a student organization

# Instrumentation

- **Rejection Sensitivity Scale** (Downey & Feldman, 1996)
  - Measures an individual's degree of sensitivity to social isolation on a likert scale
  - Students are asked to imagine that they are in a situation, and respond to the questions that follow. 2 questions follow each situation, with responses on a 1-7 Likert style scale from very unconcerned to very concerned and very unlikely to very likely
  - **Sample Situations/Questions**
    - **Situation: You ask your parents or another family member for a loan to help you through a difficult financial time**
      - Follow up Question 1: How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your family would want to help you
      - Follow up Question 2: I would expect that they would agree to help me as much as they can
    - **Situation: After a bitter argument, you call or approach your significant other because you want to make up.**
      - Follow up Question 1: How concerned or anxious would you be over whether or not your significant other would want to make up with you
      - Follow up Question 2: I would expect that he/she would be at least as eager to make up as I would be

# Instrumentation

- **UCLA Social Isolation Scale** (Russell, 1996)
  - Measures social isolation across 20 different items
  - Responders are asked to reply how they feel on a Likert style scale (1 - Never, 4-Always)
  - Each student begins with how often...
- **Sample Items**
  - How often do you feel that you are in tune with people around you
  - How often do you feel that there is no one that you can turn to
  - How often do you feel friendly and outgoing
  - How often do you feel close to people
  - How often do you feel that no one really knows you

# Instrumentation

- College Adjustment Test (CAT) — (Pennebaker, J. W., Colder, M., & Sharp, L. K., 1990)
  - Assesses many of the ways students adjust to the experience of college
  - 19 items, rated on a scale of 1-7 (not at all-a great deal)
  - Students are asked to respond on their experiences in the last week.
  - Each Statement begins – Within the last week to what degree have you....
  - Sample Items:
    - Missed your friends from high school
    - Missed your friends from home
    - Liked your classes
    - Liked your social life
    - Felt Angry
    - Felt Lonely
    - Felt optimistic about your future at college

# Methodology – Data Collection

- All incoming students were asked to complete all four instruments during University Welcome week, prior to the start of classes (time point 1).
  - ▣ The first instruments were paper instruments and were collected by the researchers and assistants
- The scales were repeated via Survey Monkey at the 6<sup>th</sup> (time point 2) and during the final week (time point 3) of the fall semester.
- Datatel was used to determine GPA of participants at the end of the first semester.
- 444 students in the first year class. N=139 at time point one, N=67 at time point 2, N=57 at time point 3

# Methodology – Data Analysis

- SPSS was utilized to analyze and to compare differences between the three time points.
- All four measurement instruments were measured with regard to internal consistency, reliability and construct validity, all of which yielded positive results.
- The primary statistical methodologies used to analyze the data were correlation, regression, and ANOVA.

# Student Demographics

- This school was chosen because of its at risk population
- The university enrolls approximately 2,800 undergraduate students.
- The demographic population is highly racially diverse
  - ▣ The largest percentage of students identify as black (35%). 27% of students are white, 18% are Hispanic, and 18% are international students.
- 49% of undergraduate students receive a Pell Grant.
- 75% of students attend school full-time, while 25% attend part-time.

# Findings – Time Point 1

- At the first time point it was found that higher reported social isolation was associated with significantly lower academic self-efficacy ( $p < .001$ )

# Findings – Time Point 2

- Self-Efficacy is significantly related to Rejection Sensitivity. Participants who have low self-efficacy scores also have high rejection sensitivity ( $p < .001$ )
- There is a significant interaction between rejection sensitivity and social isolation on self-efficacy ( $p < .001$ )
- Participants with higher social isolation have greater negative college adjustment ( $p < .05$ )
- Participants with higher social isolation have higher homesick scores on the CAT ( $p < .01$ )
- Participants with lower social isolation have better college adjustment overall ( $p < .01$ )

# Findings - Time Point 3

- Self-efficacy is significantly related to social isolation; with those scoring low in social isolation scoring high in self-efficacy ( $p < .05$ )
  - ▣ and vice-versa = low self-efficacy = low social isolation
- Self-Efficacy is significantly related to Rejection Sensitivity. Participants who have low self-efficacy scores also have high rejection sensitivity ( $p < .05$ )
- Participants who scored low in self-efficacy also scored lower in positive college adjustment ( $p < .01$ )
- Echoing previous work; participants who scored high in social isolation had lower overall college adjustment ( $p < .05$ )

# Notes:

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- The expected patterns existed across all relationships; but not all were significant
- This may be because of the low overall N

# Review of Research Questions

- Is self-efficacy correlated with perceptions of social isolation?
  - ▣ In this study social isolation was found to be related to self-efficacy. First year students with low self-efficacy have higher social isolation. This is evident at the beginning of the semester and at the end of the semester
- How does social isolation interact with self-efficacy and rejection sensitivity in first year students?
  - ▣ In this study, a significant interaction was found between rejection sensitivity and social isolation on self-efficacy. Students with high social isolation and high rejection sensitivity also have low self-esteem. This relationship was significant at the 6 week mark.
- How do these factors impact first-year student retention?
  - ▣ This is still in progress and will be determined in the fall
- What is the relationship between self-reported college adjustment and retention/GPA?

# Implications

- We know that social isolation, rejection sensitivity and self-efficacy are related
- We know that each of these, individually, is related to college adjustment at varying points in the semester
- Knowing how social isolation, self-efficacy, and college adjustment impact retention can be important for those designing programs for first-year students.
- The results of the study demonstrate that students need to feel a sense of belonging in order to feel like they are able to succeed academically.
- The documentation of these relationships is particularly important in designing programs for first year students
- Research Next Step – design an intervention program to improve social isolation and self-efficacy and to reduce students feelings of rejection sensitivity

# Your Turn:

- What can be done to improve students feelings of low collegiate self-efficacy, social isolation and rejection sensitivity?
- What other relationships would you want to look at?
- Do you feel that low social isolation results in lower self-efficacy, or, does low self-efficacy result in the student feeling more socially isolated? Why?
- How does this impact your own campus work?

# Questions?



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# Thank you!

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