Identity-Work Techniques Among Undergraduate Students: Coping Strategies for Academic Setbacks

by

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Abstract

Identity and narrative work both refer to the internal and external efforts social actors actively and passively engage in to negotiate and reconcile their self-concepts and experiences, as well as to alleviate emotional disturbances when faced with inconsistency or disappointments. Situating psychological theories in a sociological framework, this thesis studies how undergraduate students emotionally appraise academic disappointments (as threats to their senses of self), how they cope with or react to these disappointments, and the factors that influence both. An online questionnaire was randomly distributed to 200 undergraduate students at a university located in Ontario—a province where students have reported the highest prevalence of elevated distress nationally. Univariate and bivariate results were obtained from 47 respondents. The results suggest students most commonly employ a mix of adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. Results posit the student behaviours/attitudes variables are the most widely associated with the frequency of using various coping strategies, followed by well-being/mental health and institutional factors. However, whether a student regularly uses these strategies was most strongly associated with well-being/mental health variables. Surprisingly, a slight majority of respondents found below average grades greatly to extremely upsetting, regardless of assessment type. The student behaviours/attitudes variables, as well as social influences variables were associated with all threat appraisals, while well-being/mental health variables were not. The univariate results replicate some of the forms of identity/narrative work found in the literature, namely those suggested by Snow and Anderson (1987) and Perinbanayagam (2000); while bivariate results partially support sociological and psychological literature, with some differences. Results substantiate the strength of socialization and institutional factors for the study of identity work. A few preliminary insights for university professors and support staff are offered and further courses of inquiry are suggested.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Undergraduate Students Today

Undergraduate students today face various challenges in succeeding with their post-secondary education. One is adjustment, as university students need to navigate transitioning to living away from home, less structured educational environments, and adult responsibilities (Ontario University and College Health Association [OUCHA], 2017). Another challenge of note is technology-enabled distraction. Growing up in a time when switching attention between a number of different devices or software windows has become increasingly common, students today are oriented towards multi-tasking, yet many experience difficulty sustaining their attention to a single matter, and also have an increased need for instant gratification (Mokhtari, Delello, & Reichard, 2015). Yet another challenge is found in the contemporary job markets of Canada and the United States which encourage strategic career- and market-driven academic selections among students (Clark, Moran, Skolnik, & Trick, 2009; Marsden, 1998). Moreover, competition among students for certain jobs also necessitates achieving high grades to distinguish themselves, which generates pressure, and increases their expectations around grades, or sense of ‘entitlement’, as some suggest (Laverghetta, 2018; Lippmann, Bulanda, & Wagenaar, 2009). Some argue students today are less concerned with the development of character and intellectualism—as university founders intended (M. Arnold, 1993; Ben-David, 1972; Newman, 2008)—and more with practicality, efficiency, and outcomes (Laverghetta, 2018; Lippmann et al., 2009; Marsden, 1998). Perhaps gratification,
competition, and grade expectations set these students up for greater emotional consequences when disappointed, compared to earlier generations of students. These consequences may be particularly difficult for students who are living away from home, with less daily family support.

There has been a lapse in mental health data on Canadian undergraduate students at the national level, with the last report being published in 2005 (Adlaf, Demers, & Gliksman, 2005). Nearly a third of undergraduate students’ self-reports indicated elevated distress, with the most commonly reported symptoms including feeling under constant stress (47.3%), worry-related sleep issues (32.1%), and feeling unhappy or depressed (30.9%) (Adlaf et al., 2005). Additionally, just over a fifth of undergraduate students reported not being able to concentrate (ibid). Undergraduate students studying in Ontario universities reported the highest prevalence of elevated distress in Canada (32.8%) (Adlaf et al., 2005). In 2009, between 51 and 60% of students in Ontario indicated hopelessness while between 33 and 43% reported difficulty in functioning due to feeling so depressed (unpublished ACHA 2009 data as cited in Ontario College Health Association[OCHA], 2009). This Master’s thesis uses a socio-psychological approach to study how undergraduate students cope with academic disappointments at a particular university setting.

The Setting

Queen’s University is a research-intensive university with a student population of 23,030 (2015); slightly above the mean (20,738 students) for all Ontario universities (Common University Data Ontario [CUDO], 2017a). In 2015, Queen’s University was ranked the tenth largest student population among Ontario universities; the largest is the
University of Toronto (81,396 students)(CUDO, 2017a). It is situated in Kingston, Ontario, a city with a population of 123,798 and a population density of 274.4 people per km², (Statistics Canada, 2017b). Nearly all of its undergraduate student population live away from home, with about 95% of domestic students coming from outside the city (Office of Planning and Budgeting, 2017; Office of the Provost, 2016).

**Academic Climate and Strategic Planning**

With a mean admission average of 88.7 percent in 2015, Queen’s University is among the most elite universities of Ontario (CUDO, 2017b). About 47.8 percent of first-year undergraduate students of that academic year were admitted with average grade of 90 percent or more (CUDO, 2017b). As part of a recent strategic planning framework, university administrators plan to shift the university closer toward a ‘balanced academy’, where both academic engagement and research volume are high (Office of the Principal, 2014). To support this shift, administrators plan to improve the student learning experience, through developing student experiential and entrepreneurial learning opportunities, pedagogical innovation, increased investment in education quality, accessible learning environments, and health and wellness programs (Office of the Principal, 2014). Despite the university’s ongoing efforts, it appears very little program evaluation has been conducted; as of yet, the effectiveness of these efforts has not been measured.

**Mental Health Planning**

Following the recommendations forwarded by the University’s Mental Health Working Group and its Commission on Mental Health, efforts have been made to improve student mental health support (Principal’s Commission on Mental Health, 2012).
Since, the structure for mental health support on-campus was changed to streamline the delivery of services, awareness-promoting resources became more widely available to students and staff, peer-support and transition-to-university programs were developed, and counsellors were embedded to offer more personalized services to specific departments and on-campus living spaces (Principal’s Commission on Mental Health, 2012).

The latest institutional report on mental health was published only one year after the 2012 implementation. The 2013 Queen’s University student well-being survey data indicated anxiety (14.1%) and depression (12.1 %) as the most reported mental illness diagnoses in a 12-month span (Humphrys, Best, & Williams, 2013). While nearly two-thirds of the sample rated their ability to manage stress as ‘Good’ or ‘Very Good’, 26.5% rated their ability as ‘Fair’, and ten percent as ‘Poor’ (Humphrys et al., 2013).

Students cited academics (58.4%), intimate relationships (32.8%), and sleep difficulties (31.9%) as areas of life which are extremely difficult to manage or “traumatic” (Humphrys et al., 2013). Moreover, not only was academics the most frequently reported of these difficult situations, students in this sample report that stress significantly impeded their academic performance (Humphrys et al., 2013). About twenty-one percent of Queen’s students attributed lower grades on projects or exams and about 10 percent attributed lower grades in courses to stress (Humphrys et al., 2013). Stress experienced specifically due to academic setbacks is seldom studied despite the possible mental health and academic consequences.
Definitions

Identity and narrative work both refer to the internal and external efforts social actors (i.e. individuals) actively and passively engage in to negotiate and reconcile their self-concepts and experiences, as well as to alleviate emotional disturbances when faced with inconsistency or disappointments.

While *identity work* involves authoring (creating or altering), protecting (maintaining), or presenting one’s preferred self or self-concept, *narrative work* involves authoring, evaluating, rationalizing, contextualizing, and presenting life experiences and circumstances. *Internal efforts* are the private thoughts (silent or expressed aloud) through which a social actor develops an understanding of them self. Examples of *self-talk* include instances of one thinking or telling themselves, “You can do better than this” = facing disappointment, “Focus” = trying to remain on-task, “I have plenty of time” = rationalizing procrastination, or “I am a good student” = re-affirming a preferred self. *External efforts* operate on an interpersonal level, involving the authoring, maintenance, and presentation of a preferred public-facing self or narrative, through verbal (e.g. speech, writing, etc.) and non-verbal (i.e. appearance) expression. Examples include dressing in a manner that is normative for the identity pursued, embellishing one’s qualifications and achievements to impress a hiring manager, or de-emphasizing socially-undesirable character traits while telling a preferred version of an account. When one’s preferred self is challenged by stimuli such as *identity threats* (e.g. disrupting life events, interpersonal interactions, etc.), forms of identity and narrative work are used to understand, reconcile, and make it consistent.
These efforts can be emotionally taxing but are coping strategies to counter deleterious effects (e.g. apathy, disengagement, demotivation, depression, anxiety, etc.). While social actors may employ these coping strategies adaptively (i.e. in a pragmatic, effective fashion) or maladaptively (i.e. in an unhelpful, ineffective fashion), the inherent value of identity and narrative work is in its ability to maintain, promote, and reduce inconsistency with the preferred-self. Whether or not an individual improves the situation is generally irrelevant. For example, if a self-rated excellent student is challenged by a grade well-below their expectations, their identity work’s ability to improve their emotional state is its value, not its ability to ultimately improve performance on a later assessment. The mere effort and its characteristics are of interest. However, given the context of the university, persistence, improvement, and success are valuable outcomes. Likewise, to the carceral institution, a parolee’s identity work’s ability to ultimately resist reoffending is valuable (Opsal, 2011). This study is concerned with adaptive and maladaptive identity and narrative work students use to cope with threats to identity—namely, academic setbacks and behaviour. *Academic setbacks* are conceptualized as including disappointing academic performance (e.g. a poor grade on a test) or events (e.g. failing a course). ‘*Adaptive*’, in this work, refers to pragmatic reactions and solutions by which a student employs techniques or behaviour patterns oriented toward persistence, improvement, success, and improved emotional state. ‘*Maladaptive*’, by contrast, refers to counter-productive or negative reactions and solutions, wherein a student employs unhelpful techniques or behaviour patterns that do not address the academic disappointment, and may lead to further shortcomings or disengagement.
Purpose

In 2014, I conducted pilot interviews with five convenience-selected undergraduate students to identify and learn about the ways in which students engage in identity and narrative work when facing academic disappointments (Langshaw, 2014). Their interviews suggested that they tended toward adaptive, constructive forms of identity/narrative work (i.e. reflecting on their agency and what could have been done differently, motivational self-talk, and self-reminders of past successes and future goals). Maladaptive strategies such as blaming instructors, blaming flaws in assessments, and skipping classes were infrequently used. Parental value of education and involvement emerged as factors important to the respondents. This preliminary data and further reading on identity and narrative work inspired this thesis’ early stages of development.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the identity and narrative work techniques undergraduate students employ to alleviate anxiety and negative self-conceptions, particularly regarding their academic behaviour and performance.

Although this work will not measure persistence, improvement, and success, they are recognized in a secondary manner to benefit the academic performance, engagement, and mental health of students, and university employees’ understanding of today’s body of undergraduate university students. Moreover, this study aims to inform university support services and administration on areas which students need additional support.
Research Questions

This thesis was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do undergraduate students cope with academic setbacks?
2. How do the patterns of using these coping strategies differ among undergraduate students?
3. How distressing are academic setbacks as identity-threats?
4. What kinds of factors (e.g. bio/demographical, social, institutional, psychological, etc.) contribute to a student’s:
   a. pattern of using a coping strategy?
   b. appraisal of how distressing an academic setback is?

Brief Statement of Methodology

To answer the research questions above, a short online questionnaire was distributed to 200 randomly-selected undergraduate students. The questionnaire asked respondents about their demographic and personal characteristics, social influences (i.e. family, friends and peers), student attitudes and behaviours, mental health and well-being, ratings of academic setback/disappointment scenarios, and ways they overcome or neutralize the negative feelings of academic setbacks. The data collected was analysed to obtain univariate and bivariate results.

Overview

This Master’s thesis examines the coping strategies undergraduate students use when faced with academic setbacks. First, a literature review of identity, identity work, narrative work, cognitive dissonance, and attribution theories is necessary. Then, the methodology chapter explains the variables of interest and their operationalization, the
sampling method, the survey’s design, and analysis strategy. The results chapter presents and organizes findings by theme and by variable of interest. Finally, the discussion chapter connects these findings to the literature, posits implications, states limitations, and offers concluding remarks.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

[...] I have not been reluctant to drawn upon ideas from quite divergent sources. To some this may appear an unacceptable eclecticism, but I have never been able to see the force of this type of object. [...] If ideas are important and illuminating, what matters much more than their origin is to be able to sharpen them so as to demonstrate their usefulness, even if within the framework which might be quite different from that which helped to engender them. (Giddens, 2013, pp.17-18)

As the quote above indicates, this thesis draws from a range of literature across disciplines relevant to the study of identity and the work involved in its authoring, presentation, and protection: sociology, social psychology, and psychology. Using a multidisciplinary approach is especially crucial for approaching a fuller picture of the study of identity in a meritocratic context such as the university. In short, as outlined below, these aspects of psychology lend themselves well to both the environment and topic of this study.

The social environment this study of identity work is situated in differs from that of some previous studies. Changing attitudes and thought patterns is common to forms of identity work, yet some forms of identity work also involve concrete behaviours based on goals or setting: resisting drug use has been found to be a methods of embodying a law-abiding post-felon self for female parolees (Opsal, 2011) and wearing running gear and walking their usual running routes help runners maintain their identities as skilled running enthusiasts while recovering from disrupting injuries (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2007). In an education institution, the dynamics of institutional practices, educator-learner interactions, content-delivery, and learner motivation and behaviour are
some of the factors that contribute to the learning experience. A student’s identity(ies) can influence their activities but can also be influenced through the efforts in and outcomes of school-related activities. Thus, in a school environment identity work may manifest as internal efforts as well as external ones in response to external identity-threats such as disappointing grades. Motivation, behaviour, and attribution are involved in the internal efforts (e.g. reframing) and external efforts (e.g. doing more work, following an action plan) students may engage in to cope with threats to their identities. These are concepts prominently studied in psychology.

Discussed below, both social identity (in terms of authoring and presentation) and student experiences in education have been well-studied in sociology. It is theorized that social actors engage in identity and narrative work to reconcile experiences and expectations (or to reconcile the presented self and the preferred-self), and to reduce negative effects from identity threats. These deleterious effects include emotional and behavioural consequences (e.g. deflated mood, recidivism, relapse, and maladjustment to an environment or role (Fraser, Davis, & Ravinder, 1997; Knights & Clarke, 2014; Opsal, 2011; Tracy & Scott, 2006).

While I recognize that dynamics of presenting emotions and the conduct or activities actors engage in are socially-influenced (whether socially promoted or constrained), I would argue that psychology has a valuable understanding of the complexity of emotions and motivation to offer due to its body of empirical work on the sources and manifestations of these (Petriglieri, 2011). Motivational psychology, for example, offers explanations on how activities are entered into/avoided and sustained/abandoned. Also, both the psychology of emotions and motivation finely study,
define, and characterize some of the deleterious effects identity-threats present; the
former defines and characterizes the short-term and long-term emotional disturbances
(e.g. stress, deflation, anxiety, depression, etc.) experienced from an identity-threat, while
the latter can explain the disengagement from an activity (e.g. coursework) or course of
activity (e.g. progress in a school course).

Additionally, according to attribution theory, the perceived source of contributing
factors (i.e. from the individual or from external forces), consistency of factors, and
degree to which agency contributes to an outcome, contributes to the motivational
outcomes as well as emotional elicitation of a given stimulus (Weiner, 1986). Some of
the latent cognitive processes apparent in identity/narrative work studies cannot be
ignored. Participants in these studies sometimes employed attributions to cope with
identity threats yet there is little recognition or discussion of these attributions as identity
or narrative work (Brown & Coupland, 2015; Fraser et al., 1997; Gabriel, Gray, &

Further, if social actors engage in identity/narrative work to reduce inconsistency,
how are the strain of inconsistency and its source explained? To my knowledge, namely
psychological cognitive dissonance theories (Festinger, 1957; Inglehart, 1991) offer
explanations on how inconsistency affects social actors. These theories offer explanations
related to the stress (whether cognitive or emotional) experienced when an outcome does
not match an expectation, forming the theoretical basis related to my fourth research
question.

Overall, elements of psychology are included in this thesis for their ability to
contribute to a fuller picture of identity work and the study of it in the context of an
education institution—where earning a passing grade or higher and the persistence in actions towards this goal are paramount. Moreover, although usually seldom (if at all) discussed or highlighted, the participants of some identity and narrative work literature can be read as engaging in processes of attribution to rationalize circumstances or events they experience and protect their identities. The literature review below argues there are relationships between key sociological and psychological terms, in that identity threats are a form of cognitive dissonance, and attributions are forms of identity or narrative work.

**On the Self and Selves**

Overall, the surveyed identity literature suggests four main aspects of identity. The *self* is one’s self-authored sense of their true character qualities (i.e. colloquially, ‘Who I am’). *Personal identity* refers to one’s idiosyncratic characteristics and elements that identify and distinguish them (i.e. Which one of many individuals am I?). *Social identity* refers to the categories, groups, or roles one assigns oneself to or are assigned to by others (i.e. ‘What am I? What am I associated with?’). The *self-concept* is a holistic self-evaluation of oneself as a being (morally, spiritually, etc.) and informed by the *self* and *social identity* (i.e. ‘What kind of person am I? How am I as a person?’). As seen below, identity models differ in definitions, categorization, the arrangement of relationships, and on the issue whether a social or personal identity is self-authored/designated or imputed/designated by others.

Goffman’s (1963) account of the *self*, as influenced by Erikson (1950 as cited in Goffman, 1963) retains the term “ego identity”. While *personal identity* differentiates one actor from another via a continuity of biographical facts and life history items (including
information of one’s location in a kinship network, name, fingerprints, patterns of behaviour, body, etc.), ego identity is one’s “reflexive” feeling about their true self and qualities of character (Goffman, 1963, p.129). Ego identity as a “matter that necessarily must be felt by the individual” (p.129), contrasts with personal identity which is mostly identifiable information others use to recognize the actor and differentiate him/her from another. Like Goffman, Social Identity Theorists conceive personal identity as concerned with idiosyncratic attributes (additionally including “abilities [and] psychological traits”), while the “self-concept”—their account of self as one’s holistic view of oneself—comprised of both “personal identity” and “social-identity” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Snow and Anderson, I argue, bifurcate the self into 1) what they term “self-identity”, which is self-authored and idealized, consisting of the “meanings attributed to the self by the actor”, and 2) “self-concept”, which is the self-evaluated feelings of an actor as a person (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p.1347). The former is concerned with presentation in interactions (the discussion below), while the latter exists before, during, and after interactions (Snow & Anderson, 1987). Unlike Goffman, Snow and Anderson’s concept of self also includes self-designated group affiliation.

Despite the self-authored nature of self-identity or the self, scholars following the symbolic interactionist tradition argue that the self is not constructed independent from the contributions of other social actors or ‘imagined others’; meaning part of one’s sense of self is developed through interactions with these parties (Blumer, 1969; Cooley, 1902 as cited in Watson, 2008; Goffman, 1963; Mead, 1934). Interaction with co-present others allows a social actor not only association but, more pertinently here, differentiation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Goffman, 1963) and the assertion of “self-designations and self-
attributions” (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p.1347). Interaction with ‘imagined others’ namely involves contemplating how one would be seen in the eyes of non-co-present actors to whom one anticipates being exposed or may be exposed in everyday life, stimulating considerations of self-presentation (Cooley, 1902 as cited in Watson, 2008; Goffman, 1959).

Goffman conceived social identity to consist of categorical associations with social groups (e.g. age group, gender, sex, race, language group, social class, etc.)—partially imputed by others and partially self-authored—and the character attributes associated with these categories (1963). The attributes of an actor are assumed by others based on a first impression’s categorical placement (“virtual social identity”) and given opportunity, are proven/disproven (“actual social identity”) (Goffman, 1963, p.2). Social identity is also self-designated, in that individuals can affiliate themselves with social groups (Goffman, 1963). Stigmatized actors may accept or go as far to embrace their category assignment and join others who share a related stigma or even share the experience of stigma (Goffman, 1963). Social organizations are formed in support and solidarity of stigmatized actors (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous, mental health support groups, parolee support groups, religious cults, etc.) (Goffman, 1963). Mael and Ashforth summarize Turner’s account of self-designated social identity as follows: “[s]ocial identification, […] is the perception of belongingness to a group classification” (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p.104). These group classifications are similar to the Goffmanian examples above, but include organizations themselves (as in a corporation, an educational institution, etc.). Ashforth and Mael (1989) propose social identification functions to “cognitively [segment] and [order] the social environment, providing the
individual with a systematic means of defining others.” (pp.20-21) (which I imagine would thereby inform who is akin and who is not) and to “enable the individual to locate or define *him* or *herself* in the social environment” (p.21). Snow and Anderson’s definition of “social identity” is not self-authored, and instead consists of the categories and characteristics imputed by others to “situate [an actor] as [a] social [object]” (1987, p.1347).

Interestingly, Watson distinguished five ideal types of social identity which may overlap: social-category (i.e. class, ethnicity, etc.), formal-role (i.e. occupation, citizenship, rank, etc.), local-organizational (i.e. localized occupation; e.g. “an old-style [University of] Nottingham professor”), local-personal (i.e. localized characterization; e.g. “the life and soul” of a business, “the branch clown”, etc.), and the cultural-stereotype (e.g. “a garrulous Frenchman, a boring accountant, a devoted mother”) (Watson, 2008, p.131). In addition, the framing of self-identity informs how actors engage with social identities (2008).

**In/Consistency**

Inconsistency arises when sets of logical/attributional (i.e. cause and effect), attitudinal (i.e. personal notions, worldview), behavioural (i.e. actions, conduct), and observational (i.e. outcomes, circumstances) beliefs challenge or contradict each other. As surveyed below, the study of inconsistency ranges across the topics of cognitive dissonance, attribution, and identity.

Cognitive dissonance theories focus on the anxiety and discomfort experienced when an actor becomes overwhelmed with inconsistency or contradictions between attitudes, beliefs/expectations, outcomes, and/or behaviours (Festinger, 1957; Inglehart,
One of the ways they vary is their account for the source of inconsistency and magnitude of ensuing anxiety/tension. Festinger’s “sum rule”, as referred to by Inglehart, postulates that the magnitude of the dissonance is not only determined by the importance of the elements (or notions) involved, but also the number of conflicting elements (1991, p.66). Rosenberg and Abelson proposed that inconsistency arises when two elements believed to be positively associated are demonstrated to be negatively associated and vice-versa (1960 as cited in Inglehart, 1991). Inglehart argues that not all inconsistencies generate tension, as “we all live with inconsistencies between cognitive representations of our attitudes and our behavior, without experiencing constant tension” (1991, p.68). She postulates that tension is generated when an event is inconsistent with one’s worldview (an actor’s cognitive beliefs about him or herself, their environment, and the relationship between the two).

Identity threats were defined in the introductory chapter of this thesis as stimuli including disrupting events, interpersonal encounters, outcomes, etc. which have the potential to contradict or hinder one’s presentation of self or self-concept. Petriglieri’s definition articulates (individual-level) identity threats as “experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity” (Petriglieri, 2011, p.644). Identity threats also thereby constitute inconsistency between social identity and self-concept, such as the case with homeless persons distancing themselves from that category (Snow & Anderson, 1987). Goffman’s (1963) stigmas are information that assign a social actor into undesirable social categories, and although they tend to be extreme, they are identity threats insofar they impute attributes contrary to one’s preferred self. An actor’s presentation as a competent breadwinner for their family is
threatened in a job loss; another’s presentation as an intelligent and worthwhile conversation partner is threatened by their stutter.

Identity threats may be associated with emotional and behavioural consequences. Additionally, according to appraisal theory, the appraisal or evaluation of a stimulus’ significance to an individual’s welfare and goals, as well as the evaluation of one’s ability to pragmatically and emotionally manage the stimulus, contribute to its emotional elicitation (Petriglieri, 2011; Smith & Kirby, 2009). Social actors may encounter identity threats in their everyday life, but the frequency, manifestation, initial impact, and consequences vary.

The homeless of Snow and Anderson’s study sometimes found themselves enacting “low-status, negatively evaluated roles” which imply a social identity inconsistent or at odds with their self-concept or preferred presentation, such as a beggar, a low-wage manual/unskilled labourer, a rerun (frequent shelter user), or a ‘typical’ street person (1987, p.1350). Other deeply stigmatized actors such as parolees, face identity threats such as substance relapse, parole violation, and being reminded of their stigma when identified by employers or others, resulting in feeling emotionally hurt, profound guilt and remorse, alienated, and anxious the parole officer will discover their relapse (Opsal, 2011).

Some identity threats centre on the school environment, expression, and fitting in. Khanna and Johnson’s (2010) biracial students have dealt with racial expression from their youth to emerging adult lives, facing the stigma of whiteness/challenges to their blackness, difficulty fitting in with black or white peers, and being ‘lumped in’ with other black peers. They have experienced feeling inauthentic, constrained in their acceptable
expression (e.g. arranged appearance, speech, interests, etc.), alienated from social groups of either race, and reduced (i.e. tokenized) Khanna & Johnson, 2010). Fraser et al’s (1997) alternative high school students faced identity threats before leaving their conventional school: rumours, academic incompetence, unstimulated intellectual interests, biased treatment by staff; and after: the stigma of attending an alternative school (i.e. ‘a place for delinquents and dummies’) and the failure to fit in a conventional school.

Identity threats have been frequently studied in occupational settings. Public trivialization and denigration/disdain of their occupation made correctional officers and academics feel devalued (Knights & Clarke, 2014; Tracy & Scott, 2006). Petriglieri (2011) notes decreases in performance, self-esteem, and non-compliance. McInnes et al’s (2012) conversation analysis studied identity threats and identity management in a leadership meeting between different departments—namely where accountability was sought for an unfulfilled occupational task, threatening managerial enactment. Exasperation and strained collegial relationships ensued (McInnes & Corlett, 2012). Like in McInnes et al, Tracy and Scott (2006) observed identity threats revolving around engaging in occupational tasks or situations inconsistent with the workers’ social identity (i.e. idealized occupational duties, prestige, gender role) and self-concept (i.e. sense of fulfillment and pride) resulted in differential/biased treatment of clients (i.e. non-compliance with standard), occupational dissatisfaction, and emasculation. In addition, enacting an unpleasant or ‘feared self’ through occupational tasks, roles, or conduct also weigh on the guilt or grief of actors (Clarke, Brown, & Hailey, 2009; Ibarra, 1999; Watson, 2008). Comparisons to more successful academics or the idealized elite academic stereotype (i.e. one that is renowned, eloquent, and intelligent) and worrying
about publication metrics were observed by academics, reporting feelings of inadequacy and fraudulence (i.e. ‘imposter syndrome’), failure, fear of failure/rejection, dissatisfaction, and disillusionment (Knights & Clarke, 2014).

For enthusiast, amateur, and professional athletes, injuries which disrupt or end their activity can greatly threaten their identities, bringing about physical, emotional, and psychological disturbances when experienced or anticipated. In an autoethnography, two runners sustained long-lasting knee injuries which disrupted their normal running activities and more importantly, threatened their self-concepts as capable running enthusiasts (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2007). There are moments in their accounts that illustrate frustration and recovery uncertainty (however these were both mediated with their mutual support and coping strategies) (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2007). For professional players in another study, threats including injuries (anticipated or sustained), not being selected to play, and the short duration of careers (and the potential for their premature end) brought about anxiety, depression, high intra-team competition, feeling emasculated, and feeling marginalized (Brown & Coupland, 2015).

Life-disrupting events such as job loss, miscarriage, acquired disability, or a medical illness introduce deeply distressing threats to identity. Job loss, the ensuing displacement from the routines of the employed, challenge to the earner role, and perceived ineffectiveness of support organizations have elicited profound feelings of failure, anger, depression, alienation, hopelessness, and resentment (Gabriel et al., 2010, 2013). Reminders of infertility such as diagnoses or miscarriages were threats that elicited isolation, grief, and a sense of failed gender role enactment; while threats related
to cancer and stroke diagnoses elicited emotional distress, uncertainty of relapse, depression, and suicidal ideation (Becker, 1997).

**Rendering Consistent**

When inconsistency or dissonance occurs, individuals seek to reduce it by avoiding situations, thought patterns, and information that support it (Festinger, 1957; Inglehart, 1991). They may choose to change their cognition by changing their agency or reshaping information to reduce dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Social actors react to the tension of appraised cognitive dissonance and identity threats in many ways, some engaging in processes of recontextualization, redefinition, and reassertion, and others changing behavioural patterns. Aside from behavioural changes, the coping activities this thesis is mostly concerned with are identity work and narrative work.

Snow and Anderson (1987) hypothesized that if the relationship between social identity and self-concept render the later favourable, consistency is likely; but if the relationship between social identity and self-concept is rendered demeaning, then a presented identity inconsistent with the social identity is likely to be fashioned. Identity work, then, is defined as “the range of activities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept”, including “a) arrangement of physical settings or props; b) cosmetic face-work or the arrangement of personal appearance; c) selective association with other individuals and groups; d) verbal constructions and assertion of personal identities” (p.1348). They considered identity talk the primary form of this and distinguished three patterns: *distancing, embracement, and fictive storytelling*. Snow and Anderson’s findings suggest an association between time on the streets and type of identity talk commonly engaged in. Perinbanayagam’s (2000) reformulation of identity work
advances materialistic (i.e. physical settings, props, arrangement of appearance), associative (i.e. associations with others), and vocabularic (i.e. verbalization) forms.

Patterns of identity work found in the literature are quite consistent with either Snow and Anderson or Perinbanayagam’s typologies, summarized in Table 1. A few examples can illustrate how these manifest.

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern of Identity Work</th>
<th>Observed in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal expression (e.g. talk, humour, etc.)</td>
<td>Allen-Collinson &amp; Hockey, 2007; Brown &amp; Coupland, 2015; Goffman, 1963; Khanna &amp; Johnson, 2010; McInnes &amp; Corlett, 2012; Snow &amp; Anderson, 1987; Tracy, Myers, &amp; Scott, 2006; Tracy &amp; Scott, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing from an identity or embracing one</td>
<td>Clarke et al., 2009; Fraser et al., 1997; Opsal, 2011; Snow &amp; Anderson, 1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrangement of appearance</td>
<td>Allen-Collinson &amp; Hockey, 2007; Khanna &amp; Johnson, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reminder of goals</td>
<td>Brown &amp; Coupland, 2015; Snow &amp; Anderson, 1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspective-adjustment (e.g. focusing on the present or de-emphasizing impact)</td>
<td>Brown &amp; Coupland, 2015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As running enthusiasts recovering from long-lasting, activity-disrupting injuries, Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2007) dressed in running gear, walked their normal running routes, maintained contact with fellow runners, and supported each other with motivational phrases. Newly transitioned alternative high school students distanced themselves from the stigmatized images of their alternative school and from the negative experiences with teachers, education, peers, and controls of their previous conventional
school, and embraced the individualized and flexible organizational character, mutual acceptance with peers and educators, and positive atmosphere of the alternative school (Fraser et al., 1997). During the aforementioned confrontational leadership meeting, a manager maintained and asserted her sense of professionalism, accountability, and dominance by remaining assertive and unyielding while openly informally indicting another manager’s shortcoming (McInnes & Corlett, 2012).

Like Weber (1946), Heider (1944, 1958 as cited in Inglehart, 1991) emphasized the importance of a social actor contextualizing or knowing underlying causes for events in his or her life. Social actors make attributions in attempt to contextualize and understand why an event occurred (Weiner, 1986). When a goal is not attained, or other unexpected events occur, social actors are motivated to search for a cause. The attributional process is more likely to be stimulated according to the importance of an unexpected event (Weiner, 1986). Weiner’s (1986) attribution theory focuses on three dimensions: locus, stability, and controllability. Locus is concerned with whether internal or external factors are responsible (e.g. the actor or a force/actor external to them) (Weiner, 1986). Stability refers to how stable the internal and external factors are (e.g. effort and skill; task difficulty and chance) (Weiner, 1986). Controllability refers to the perceived degree to which agents control their behaviours in contributing to an outcome (Weiner, 1986). Inglehart (1991) critically adds that attributions are also made for positive and expected events, and that attributions are distinguishable by time: post hoc and a priori.

A priori attributions are those concerning the future, such as ‘I studied hard for the test, I am going to do well’ or ‘My writing skills are poor, I’m going fail the test’
(Inglehart, 1991). The dimensional values of an *a priori* attribution have been found to estimate one’s appraisal of the effort involved in or feasibility of changing a future outcome, and thus inform reactions to decrease tension or anxiety generated (Inglehart, 1991). *Post hoc* attributions, on the other hand, serve to contextualize past experiences and render them consistent with current circumstances and self (Inglehart, 1991). Examples of these may include, ‘I lost my job because my boss had it out for me’ or ‘I’m not surprised I failed the statistics course—I have never been good at math’. Overall, Inglehart and others have found partial support for the hypothesis that tension (i.e. distress) and *post hoc* attributions are significantly associated, and the magnitude of tension experienced by events differs significantly by *locus* (Inglehart, 1991). I argue that the processes of attribution are important to the project of narrative work and can be observed in sociological and organizational studies literature.

Narrative work refers to the project through which actors author, evaluate, rationalize, contextualize, and present life experiences and circumstances to tell an account that is consistent with or supports their self-concept in both presentation (i.e. to others, imagined others) and reflection (i.e. to oneself). The objectives of narrative work are often to make sense of experiences (i.e. everyday events, major life events/disruptions, and current circumstances) and to assert the preferred self (Becker, 1997; Gabriel et al., 2010; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Actors may rehearse and tailor accounts that emphasize or maintain a positive or socially-acceptable version of their character, while framing, deemphasizing, or omitting undesirable qualities.

Narrative work reflects Weiner’s (1986) and Inglehart’s (1991) processes of attributing perceived contributors to an outcome or circumstance, and manifest in citing
personal characteristics/ability (Brown & Coupland, 2015; Gabriel et al., 2013), an illness or physical condition (including Goffman’s ‘hooking’) (Becker, 1997; Goffman, 1963), a social-spatial-temporal context (Fraser et al., 1997; Gabriel et al., 2010, 2013), or shifting blame to another party (Gabriel et al., 2010, 2013; McInnes & Corlett, 2012; Tracy et al., 2006). Some examples include a professional rugby player citing his recent performance to explain why he was not selected to play in match (Brown & Coupland, 2015), high school students citing various external or institutional reasons why they could not stay in traditional schools (i.e. overly constraining rules, and mean-spirited staff and peers) (Fraser et al., 1997), unemployed persons citing external actors and forces to explain their job losses (i.e. the climate of the job market/industry, trends in age-discrimination, malicious associates, and the ‘interference’ of homosexuals and foreigners) (Gabriel et al., 2010, 2013), an organizational leader shifting blame to external actors (i.e. a processing centre) to transfer accountability for his mismanagement (McInnes & Corlett, 2012), and firefighters blaming ‘bullshit callers’ for obligating participation in undesirable (and identity-threatening) work (Tracy & Scott, 2006).

It should be noted that narrative work may sometimes overlap with identity talk, when actors frame and present experiences or events as transformative. In addition to ‘hooking’ (i.e. relying on a stigma or condition as an excuse), Goffman’s notion of ‘secondary gains’ describes events or circumstances that serve as ‘blessings in disguise’ (1963, p. 21-22). Some actors frame and present events or circumstances as introducing new opportunities, shaping character, and enabling an enlightened perspective (i.e. on life, aspects taken-for-granted, people, etc.) (Becker, 1997; Fraser et al., 1997; Gabriel et al., 2010; Goffman, 1963; Opsal, 2011). For example, parolees state they have a
newfound sympathetic understanding for convicts (Opsal, 2011), while a terminated employee saw herself better able to connect with her spirituality and remain an authentic person (Gabriel et al., 2010).

**Structure and Agency**

Giddens’ (Giddens, 2013) structuration theory reconciles the structuralist and agentic theoretical positions in attempt to resolve an enduring debate between which category of forces determine social life. On one hand, structures are not external to actors or agents, nor are they inherently stable or longstanding. On another, actors both consciously and knowledgeably act within the context produced by social structures, reinforcing these structures in turn. Thus the dialectic of structure supposes that while agency is constrained by structure, it also reproduces and shapes it. This is observed in routinization—the process of developing patterns of conduct (i.e. routines).

According to Giddens, routinization is not undertaken by single actors, nor is it simply a project of an abstract institution. Agents in co-presence co-develop patterns of conduct (which I liken to norms) in the processes of reflexive monitoring and rationalization (i.e. resulting in the conscious evaluation of one’s own or others’ courses of action—which are intentional—and their outcomes), and the dynamics of control (i.e. a matter of which group has claim of proposing ways of conduct). Agents are aware to most of these patterns and should be able to verbalize them, while other patterns are taken-for-granted and not readily reflected on. Goffman’s work, to some degree, illustrates this with an example of a criminal using an alias to avoid being identified by others or state authorities, yet retaining his initials: “Of course, the individual constructs his image of himself out of the same material from which others first construct a social
and personal identification of him, but he exercises important liberties in regard to what
he fashions” (Goffman, 1963, p. 129). Overall, social life is co-created. Actors draw upon
mutual knowledge of routines and social systems (including other agents involved) in
their everyday lives but also contribute to routines, sustaining them.

Similar in spirit to structuration theory, Bandura’s social-cognitive theory
forwards a model of recursive and reciprocal relationships between personal factors,
behaviour, and environmental factors (i.e. social or structural) (Bandura 1997 as cited in
Oppong, 2014). To account for macro-level structural influences on Bandura’s relatively
micro-level relationships, Oppong (2014) proposes an integrated model arranging the
following relationships: 1) person characteristics influence and are influenced by macro-
structural factors; 2) person characteristics inform agency (via perceived efficacy or
ability) and macro-level structure shapes/influences the micro-environment; 3) agency,
outcomes, and micro-environment are involved in a reciprocal and recursive relationship;
4) both agency and the micro-environment influence and are influenced by intention; and
5) there are reciprocal relationships between intention (i.e. expected outcome) and
behaviour, and between the latter and outcomes.

Applied to an organization or institution, Giddens’ (2013) structuration and
Oppong’s (2014) integrated theories suggest that actors are to some degree constrained in
their agency by organizational/institutional factors yet maintain the freedom of
reinforcing or resisting organizational/institutional routines/norms and interaction with
available resources. Actors dissatisfied or disturbed by organization-imposed roles or
duties may engage in identity or narrative work which bring tangible behavioural
consequences to organizations such as devaluation of resources (Gabriel et al., 2010;
Snow & Anderson, 1987), resistance/non-compliance (Brown & Coupland, 2015; Fraser et al., 1997; Knights & Clarke, 2014), unprofessionalism (Brown & Coupland, 2015; Tracy & Scott, 2006), or attrition (Fraser et al., 1997; Snow & Anderson, 1987).

Summary

This review of literature has shaped this study in a few ways. First, some forms of identity threats, identity work, narrative work (with which I have linked ‘attribution’), and other courses of action observed therein have been adapted to the context of university student life. Second, the term ‘coping strategies’ was used to collectively refer to identity work, narrative work, and related behaviours. Third, the generalization of psychological and social psychological literature’s theories informed the measurement of inconsistency and emotional disturbance. Fourth, the literature on the socio-psychological approach to structure and agency inspired the selection of socio-environmental, personal characteristics, and agency variables. Finally, guided by the literature, I first use univariate frequencies to examine the perceived emotional impact of identity threats and the use of coping strategies. I then explore for the factors associated with identity threat emotional levels. This will be followed with a probe for the indicators that relate to the various possible coping strategies. These bivariate analyses exploit Chi-Square, Cramer’s V, Goodman-Kruskal’s Gamma, and Kendall’s Tau-C tests to help determine the significance and strength of these types of associations.
Chapter 3

Method

Research Design and Data Collection

A mixed-methods approach was employed to conduct this research. Data was collected through an anonymous and confidential online survey hosted on the Qualtrics survey platform (Qualtrics, 2018a). The vast majority of the survey’s design was informed deductively, from selected literature (Ben-Nun, 2008; Bryman & Bell, 2016; Hochheimer et al., 2016; Snow & Anderson, 1987; Statistics Canada, 2017a) and my related pilot study involving in-depth interviews (Langshaw, 2014). However, one survey question allowed respondents to describe coping strategies unanticipated in survey development.

Sampling

Although an institutionally-drawn random sample from Queen’s University was preferred, time constraints and institution-wide recruitment saturation rendered it unavailable at the time. Participants were undergraduate students randomly drawn from participating classes. I relied on key informants in this immediate network to access undergraduate students. Professors in the Department of Sociology, and Department of Geography and Planning were informed of the study and were asked if they would provide their list(s) of undergraduate student email addresses and could allocate time during their sessions for a classroom visit to introduce the study to prospective respondents (see Appendix A). A brief introduction to the study was provided during classroom visits. The purpose of the study was presented, as was a description of the
survey and sampling technique. The opportunity for compensation was also presented (see Appendix B).

**Survey Design**

**Authentication and Security Measures**

A few measures were taken to prevent illegitimate access to the survey and to a draw for a Starbucks gift card which was to act as an incentive. The incentive is discussed in more detail below. Measures were also taken to prevent a single respondent completing the survey more than once, and a respondent entering themselves into the draw more than once.

Following the link to the survey provided in their recruitment email, respondents were required to confirm via an authentication task that they were randomly selected to participate. Those attempting to access the survey were asked to enter their student email address. Their input here was not recorded (and they were informed of this), but it was compared to the list of email addresses in the sample. If a match was found, access to take the survey was granted, and the email address in the sample would become coded ineligible for a new survey. Only ten authentication attempts were given. The only way to access the draw was through being redirected at the end of the survey. Users following the hyperlink in an environment outside of the survey (i.e. in the event a respondent copied and shared the hyperlink with them) were refused access. To protect anonymity, IP addresses were not collected.

**Compensation**

To encourage participation, an incentive was offered to respondents. After completing the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to enroll themselves into
a random draw for a chance to win one of ten $25 Starbucks gift cards. Steps were taken to prevent linking a respondent to their responses. Upon completing the survey, respondents were automatically redirected to another online survey page unassociated with their completed survey session where they could enter their preferred email address into the draw. Respondents were asked to confirm their decision to not enroll if they either selected this option or left the input field blank.

This page also provided a list of on- and off-campus support services and how to contact them, for two reasons: it was recognized that sensitive topics in the survey may trigger negative feelings, and since part of the survey asked about a respondent’s knowledge about on-campus support services (academic and mental health), informing a respondent of available services was considered added value.

Shortly after closing the survey, the email addresses submitted into the draw were re-entered into the Qualtrics random sample generator to obtain ten draw winners. As the survey closed at the end of the semester, electronic gift cards were purchased and sent via email with a brief message of appreciation. No further interaction between myself and respondents was required. I was automatically notified when each gift card was opened.

Ethics

This study was approved by the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board (see Appendix C). Respondents were given the letter of information in their recruitment email, and again before starting the survey. They were informed of the potentially sensitive nature of the questions.
Survey Experience

The survey targeted undergraduate students at Queen’s University, thus the wording of questions and references to support services was tailored to this population. Four undergraduate students outside the sampling frame were recruited for full survey test sessions. Testers were asked to complete the survey under observation, while providing oral feedback during (i.e. thinking aloud) and after the survey. The testers completed the survey in an average of 14.5 minutes. An educational research consultant, a supervisor, and fellow graduate students provided feedback on the survey’s flow and design.

Although the survey was only offered in English, the language used was intended to be as straightforward and concise as possible, with examples in brackets offering further illustration. It was hoped that English language learners in the university population could understand the survey. The wording of Likert response categories was consistent—eight variants were repeated. Bold-type and sometimes all-capitals were used to distinguish similar looking questions or Likert items (i.e. before university and during university).

Balancing data collection and survey length was a concern, particularly since many of the questions asked for respondents to rate their degree of agreement with statements, of possessing a characteristic, etc. through Likert-style items. Some steps were taken to mitigate respondent fatigue (Ben-Nun, 2008; Hochheimer et al., 2016), anticipated as a consequence of question timing and overall time to complete the survey.

The survey was designed to require 10 to 15 minutes to complete and was divided into thematic sections. The early sections, demographic and basic information, were
designed simply and to require relatively less mental taxation. The middle sections contained questions on student mental health and support services, institutional influences/barriers, and student engagement required more contemplation and introduced respondents to longer series of Likert questions. Contemplation was expected to peak during the two focal sections that followed: impact of given academic setbacks and coping strategies—which involved longer Likert questions and brief situations to consider. The final section before submitting the survey—academic behaviours—was brief and easy to complete.

To expedite the survey-taking experience, non-applicable questions were automatically hidden based on responses to preceding questions (i.e. ‘branching’). For example, a respondent who reported not having experience with teaching assistants would not be asked about their experience with them. Much of the mental health and support services section may have been hidden from a particular respondent if it was irrelevant to them (i.e. if they reported not experiencing mood and anxiety disorder symptoms, and if they reported not knowing about the support services in question). Some follow-up questions piped-in (i.e. inserted) parts of previous responses to clarify referents. For example, the major and medial (double-major) department names were automatically inserted in a later question about feelings of belongingness in these departments, Queen’s University, and university in general, respectively.

**Survey Sections**

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked to read the letter of information and consent, and to indicate whether they consented or not. Respondents who
provided consent continued the survey (Appendix D) but were free to discontinue their participation any time before submitting.

In the demographic and basic information section, respondents were asked for their age, gender, citizenship status, ethnic identity, most proficient language, socioeconomic status (SES), and basic information about their student status (i.e. Major/Medial department(s), year of study, current grade-point-average (GPA), educational level aspirations, etc.). Responses to these questions were either input-based or single-response from a selection of categories. Gender was chosen instead of sex because gender identity and socialization were pertinent to this study with regard to identity protection and management. The exhaustive list of response categories for ethnic identity was sourced from a recent census (Statistics Canada, 2017a).

The social influences section mostly consisted of Likert-type and multiple-response questions on respondents’ parents/guardians, siblings (if applicable), close friends, and peers. Socialization was conceptualized as the process whereby external agents (namely family, friends, and peers) influence the values, attitudes, and behaviour of a social actor. While social institutions, whether abstract (i.e. university/higher education) or specific (i.e. Queen’s University), can be powerful socialization agents, institutional influences were excluded from this conceptualization to be asked later in an institution-centric section.

Respondents were asked to provide their perceptions about these social agents’ level of involvement and value of post-secondary education, to collect data related to socialization. Additionally, for parents and siblings each, two questions asked about their involvement in the respondent’s studies before and during university. Although it was
recognized that pre-university was a broad timeframe to use, the contrast between the two periods was of interest. Respondents were asked how much they perceived their peers in their Major or Medial programs to value their university education. Respondents that indicated participating in at least one university-related extracurricular activity (i.e. group/club membership, an on-campus job, organized recreation, etc.) when prompted by a multiple-response question were asked a similar question about how much their peers in these activity groups value their university education.

The next major section of the survey collected information on student mental health and disabilities, and university support services—mostly using Likert-type scales. This section briefly measured a student’s history and recent experiences with anxiety disorder and mood disorder (including depression and bipolar-depression) symptoms, their recent ability to manage stress and moods, their feelings of belongingness in their program of study and university, their experiences with disabilities/impairments, and their experiences and satisfaction with university support services. The primary goal of this section was to provide the university with information on the mental health condition of their undergraduate students, the diversity of disabilities and impairments students live with, and the utilization of on-campus support services. The secondary goal was to use mental health condition to control for variations in the perceived impact of identity-threatening situations (i.e. an academic setback) and coping strategies used. For example, it was important that a respondent’s appraisal of academic setbacks and tendency toward certain coping strategies could be measured accounting for their mental health condition.

Another survey section asked respondents about their perceived departmental expectations, their engagement as students, the availability of professional development
opportunities, and their satisfaction with teaching staff and coursework. Overall, this section collected data on institutional influences (at the departmental level), satisfaction with coursework, and potential barriers in the student-instructor relationship, through single-response, multiple-response questions, and Likert scales. Departmental expectations were measured by what GPA a respondent perceived their department(s) to expect from its students. Likert-type questions asked respondents how engaging and worthwhile their coursework was, how clear the requirements of their courses and instructions for their assessments are, how fairly they perceived they were assessed, and how available their instructors are for questions or clarification.

A focal section revolved around emotional appraisals of, and reactions to threats to identity. It was a concern that the meanings of discomfort and stress, as emotional reactions, in the context of cognitive dissonance theories (Festinger, 1957; Inglehart, 1991) would not be understood by respondents in a straightforward enough fashion, so the language of feeling upset was used instead. Brief scenarios involving goal inconsistency and academic setbacks were used as threats to identity. The goal inconsistency was a scenario wherein the respondent’s actions contradicted their academic goals. It was intended to evoke the cognitive-emotional discomfort experienced when one’s agency contradicts their goals or expectations (Festinger, 1957). Emotional reactions to academic setbacks were expected to vary by type of assessment, since exams are typically worth more than quizzes, for instance. Considering the grade-weight differences, the scenarios included receiving a below average grade on given assessment types (i.e. quiz, assignment, exam) and a below average final grade. Respondents were
asked to rate how upsetting each of the scenarios would be to experience in a matrix of Likert-type questions.

Another focal section asked respondents about their coping strategies when facing a given academic setback: either a disappointing performance or receiving a disappointing grade. Coping strategies were defined as behaviours or actions engaged in to rationalize threats to identity or reduce deleterious, upsetting feelings. A Likert-matrix included a mix of adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies along its vertical axis, while respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point scale how often they would employ or engage in these strategies. This section was intended to collect data on the forms of coping strategies respondents relied on or tended to use, and the degree to which respondents rely on adaptive strategies compared to maladaptive ones. Many of these strategies emerged in the pilot project’s interview data (Langshaw, 2014), however, an open-ended question asked respondents to describe coping strategies they tend to use that were not listed in the survey.

Some of the adaptive strategies included behaviours such as motivational self-talk, making action plans, self-reminders of future goals, seeking and utilizing a support service (e.g. mental health, academic support, etc.) (Table 2). Maladaptive strategies, for example, included behaviours such as negative self-talk, making excuses, skipping the next or future in-class sessions, and perceiving the assessment as unfair. Adaptive strategies were conceptualized as being characterized by accountability, goal-setting, positive/motivational ideation; while maladaptive ones were characterized by their opposite. Attribution theory (Weiner, 1986) notions of locus, stability, and controllability defined the concept of *fairness* (as an appraisal) in this study, which was represented by
two indicators: perceiving the assessment was unfair, and perceiving the instructor was unfair. The adaptive strategy of seeking support services was conceived as mutually exclusive from utilizing support services, as it was recognized that even only seeking a support service is a pragmatic behaviour, and one whose relatively low level of commitment (compared to booking and attending an appointment) may be more attractive.

Table 2.

*Coping Strategy Typology*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptive</th>
<th>Maladaptive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking a setback more seriously around friends/peers</td>
<td>Taking a setback less seriously around friends/peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational self-talk</td>
<td>Negative self-talk/ideation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting the instructor</td>
<td>Blaming the instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making an action plan</td>
<td>Blaming the assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reminder of past successes</td>
<td>Making excuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reminder of future goals</td>
<td>Demotivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking an on-campus support</td>
<td>Self-distraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using an on-campus support</td>
<td>Skipping subsequent session(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Downplaying impact privately</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The coping strategies and typology emerged from Langshaw, 2014 and were updated for this study.

The final survey section asked respondents about their personal academic engagement. It used a brief series of Likert-style questions presented in a matrix to ask respondents to indicate how often they engaged in behaviours such as attending class sessions, completing coursework on time, completing readings on time, and reading or writing beyond what was required. These behaviours were used as indicators of academic engagement—a concept defined here as timely (i.e. the student follows the course’s
progress), driven, and inspired (i.e. meaningful; intrinsically rewarding) participation in academic activities.

**Major Study Variables**

A few things should be noted about the variables. First, shortly after data collection, preliminary univariate results suggested the need for some variables to undergo transformations as well as the need for derived variables. Second, the response categories for the variables below exclude missing-coded and (only in some cases) ‘Prefer not to say’ responses. Third, the prevalence of psychological diagnoses and symptoms were self-declared and rated and were not informed by psychometric tests. The use of valid psychometric test items was considered to require more survey real-estate as well as more time and skill to implement and analyze.

**Demographics**

The main demographic variables include age, gender, citizenship status, ethnic identity, pursuing the first post-secondary degree, current year of study, Major department (two if the respondents are pursuing a Medical), student status, education level aspiration, GPA, and socioeconomic status of the household from which the respondent was raised.

Respondents were asked to input their age in years. Considering possible differences in engagement between traditional and non-traditional students (Chen, 2014), age was recoded to create a new variable, ‘is traditional undergraduate student age’ (0: Non-traditional, 1: Traditional). In the 2014/2015 academic year, nearly 83 percent of part-time and full-time undergraduate students enrolled in Canada were aged 18 to 24
(Statistics Canada, 2017c), thus respondents aged 18-24 were recoded as being the traditional undergraduate age, while all other ages were recoded as non-traditional.

Gender (0: Male, 1: Female, 2: Outside the gender binary) was recoded into a binary variable (0: Male, 1: Female) due to the small degree of non-binary prevalence in the sample. Citizenship status was recoded into domestic student status after preliminary univariate results suggested two meaningful categories (0: Non-domestic student, 1: Domestic student). Respondents identifying as Canadian citizens or permanent residents of Canada were recoded as domestic students, while others as non-domestic students. Ethnic identity was recoded into minority status (0: Non-minority, 1: Minority), where the white category was recoded to non-minority, while all others minority. Respondent GPA was recoded into ascending order, and Major department (nominal input), Medial department (nominal input) were both recoded to pursuing at least a major and pursuing a medial (0: No, 1: Yes).

The variables educational level aspiration (ranging from 0: Some university but less than Bachelor’s, to 4: PhD or Professional Degree), and socioeconomic status (ranging from 0: Poverty line or below, to 5: Upper class) were not transformed.

**Social Influences**

Social influences were conceived as the meaningful external agents respondents interact with on a more or less regular basis, including their nuclear family members (as a source of constant socialization at least until they move away), closest friends (whether in their hometown or at their university), departmental peers, and extracurricular activity with peers/co-members. Social influences were measured by variables such as the highest level of education of parents, value of post-secondary education (for each of the
following groups: parents, siblings, friends, departmental peers, and extracurricular peers), involvement in pre-university studies (of parents and of siblings), involvement in university studies (of parents, of siblings, of friends/peers), having siblings, and participation in extracurricular activities.

For the highest level of education of parents, respondents were asked, ‘What is the highest level of educational attainment of your most educated parent (or guardian, if applicable)?’, with ordinal response categories ranging from 0: Unfinished high-school or less, to 6: PhD Professional degree, or Post-Doctoral. The variables concerning value of post-secondary education were measured using a Likert-scale (0: Very little, 1: Little, 2: Moderately, 3: Highly. 4: Very highly). Variables relating to involvement in pre-university and university studies were measured with another Likert-scale (0: Not involved, 1: Minimally involved, 2: Moderately involved, 3: Greatly involved, 4: Too involved). The wording of the final response category was suggested by an interview in the pilot project and supported in the test sessions as conveying an extremely high level of involvement that contrasts with no involvement.

Having siblings and participating in the extracurricular activities listed (fraternity or sorority membership, varsity athletic club/team, academic group such as a study group, student government/administration, religious group on campus, etc.) were measured as binary variables (0: No, 1: Yes). The ‘participates in extracurriculars’ variable (0: No, 1: Yes) was created post-collection and scored based on a respondent selecting at least one of the extracurricular activities.
Student Well-Being, Mental Health, and Impairments

Well-being was defined for the purpose of this study as a condition of emotional and psychological wellness, including the presence or absence of mood or anxiety disorder symptoms, the ability to manage moods and stress, and feelings of belongingness to a setting. Impairments were defined as conditions which may make a respondent’s engagement in learning activities more difficult and require adaptation, such as learning disabilities, psychological disorders, sensory impairments, and mobility impairments. The variables of this category were primarily used as controls.

The selected study variables of this section are diagnosis of an anxiety disorder (for each of the following: in lifetime, and in the last 12 months), experiencing anxiety symptoms in the last 12 months, diagnosis of a mood disorder (in lifetime, and in the last 12 months), experiencing mood disorder-symptoms in the last 12 months, ability to manage moods in the last 12 months, ability to manage stress in the last 12 months, level of stress for the last 6 months, feelings of belongingness (in Major, Medial, university in general, and their current university), type of impairment diagnosed with, diagnosis of a disability or impairment, suspicion of a learning impairment (if not yet diagnosed), and impact of disabilities and impairments (whether suspected or diagnosed).

The variables concerning diagnoses and experiencing symptoms were binary (0: No, 1: Yes), whereas those concerning ability to manage moods/stress, feelings of belongingness, and impact of disabilities/impairments were measured on 5-point Likert-scales.
Institutional Influences

A set of variables was concerned with institutional expectations, barriers, and university support services. For instance, would the consulting the instructor be discouraged by a perceived unavailability? Would a departmental expectation perceived as low influence the use of coping strategies differently than one perceived as high?

Institutional expectations were represented at the departmental level and operationalized as the GPA respondents perceive their major and medial departments expect from its students (recoded to range from 0: C or lower to 7: A+). Institutional barriers included the clarity of instructions, the clarity of what is needed to succeed, availability of teaching staff for help, the perception of instructors and teaching assistants grading fairly, the overall feeling of courses being worthwhile, and the overall feeling of courses being engaging. These were rated on a 5-point scale (0: Completely disagree, 1: Somewhat disagree, 2: Neither agree nor disagree, 3: Somewhat agree, 4: Completely agree).

The use of university support services such as on-campus mental health, academic, and language support services or programs was rated on a scale (0: Never but I know about them, 1: Little, 2: Some, 3: Much, 4: Very much). The original scale bifurcated ‘Never’ in offering ‘Never and I don’t know about them’ and ‘Never but I know about them’. The former response was used to create a binary variable of support service awareness (one for academic support services and another mental health support services) – selecting Never and I don’t know about them was recoded into 0: No, while all other responses were recoded into 1: Yes. Usage was also recoded into a binary, where both variations of ‘Never’ were coded as 0: No, while the other responses were
recoded into 1: Yes. For both types of support services, the variable measuring frequency of use did not include respondents who were unaware of the service but includes them for the binary variables measuring use and awareness.

**Student Behaviours and Attitudes**

The habits and attitudes of students were of interest, too. Since they are conceptualized as being influenced by socialization on one hand, and as habits preceding coping strategies on the other, they are considered as outcome variables when compared to the former (i.e. *how are student behaviours socialized by close relationships?*) and independent variables when compared to the latter (i.e. *what kinds of students choose certain coping strategies?*).

The selected study variables are frequency of attendance, completing coursework on time, completing readings on time, engaging with course material beyond requirements, enjoying challenging coursework, and reaching out to the instructor for clarification (i.e. 0: Never, 1: Seldom, 2: Sometimes, 3: Often, 4: Almost always). The personal value of university education was rated on another Likert-scale, 0: Little, 1: Somewhat, 2: Moderately, 3: Highly, 4: Very highly.

**Impact of Identity Threat**

Academic setbacks and goal inconsistency were used to represent threats to identity. The main variables of interest in this category are perceived level of emotional disturbance (feeling upset) for each of the following events: actions contradicting academic goals and receiving below average grades for a quiz, test, exam, assignment, and course. Emotional disturbance is defined as the stress and discomfort experienced when faced with threats to one’s identity. In other words, this is the extent to how
upsetting a given identity threat is to a respondent and was measured on a Likert-scale with responses ranging from 0: Minimally, to 4: Extremely.

**Coping Strategies**

Since both the frequency of using and regular (or characteristic) use of coping strategies were of interest, selected coping strategy variables are largely divided into two sets: the use of each strategy measured on a Likert-scale ranging from 0: Never, to 4: Almost always, and the habitually (or regular) use of each of strategy (0: No, 1: Yes) being derived from the former. The derived variable is concerned with relying on the given coping strategy often or more, thus responses including ‘often’ and ‘almost always’ were recoded to indicate ‘Yes’. The tendency toward both the respective adaptive and maladaptive types of coping strategies were derived. The tendency toward using adaptive strategies was defined as the extent to which a respondent tends to rely on adaptive strategies and was indicated by the frequent use (often or more) of more than half of the adaptive strategies listed. A similar process was used to derive the maladaptive counterpart to this variable. An open-ended question asked: *What are other things you often do to help yourself feel better about a disappointing grade or academic performance? Please describe them below.*

**Analysis Plan**

Two sets of analysis schemes were devised for the quantitative and qualitative data collected from this survey. The open-ended description of other coping strategies was analyzed using Atlas.ti (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2018), while the rest of survey data was analyzed using IBM SPSS 24 (IBM Corporation, 2016).
**Quantitative Analyses**

The first quantitative analysis was univariate, involving frequencies for all variables and descriptive statistics for the only ratio-level variable: age. This aimed to produce data on the characteristics of respondents, prevalence of mental health conditions and other barriers to learning activities, perceived emotional impact of various identity-threatening situations, and types of coping strategies used. ‘Prefer not to say’ responses and the like were excluded from analyses beyond this phase.

The second was bivariate and involved cross-tabulations between the predictor variables (i.e. from the demographic and basic student information, social influences, and mental health categories) and the outcome variables (i.e. from the emotional impact of identity-threatening situations and coping strategies categories). Statistical methods such as Cramer’s V, Goodman-Kruskal’s Gamma, and Kendall’s Tau-C were used to determine the strength of the associations between these variables, while Chi-Square was used to determine the significance of said associations. These were selected due to the low frequency counts of attributes in many variables, and the predominance of ordinal and nominal variables. Odds ratios (ORs) were obtained from binary logistic regression and were used to assess the extent to which a predictor can increase or decrease the odds of an outcome occurring. Only significant ORs were reported.

A planned third analysis was multivariate, involving logistic regression between the predictor and outcome variables (i.e. particularly the binary versions of the coping strategy-related variables), controlling for mental health and impairments. Barring control variables, beta values (standardized and unstandardized, where applicable) were planned to assess the independent variables’ ability to predict the outcome variables, while odds
ratios assessed the extent to which predictors in a model could affect the odds of an outcome occurring. However, many preliminary results were not significant, thus multivariate analysis was abandoned.

**Qualitative Analyses**

Qualitative analysis only concerned the open-ended responses describing coping strategies respondents engaged in not listed in the survey. These responses varied in length, from a single word to two sentences. Open-coding was used to gather coping strategies from the written responses, followed by coding to organize these coping strategies into the adaptive and maladaptive groups. This data was intended to broaden the range of and present patterns of coping strategies undergraduate students use.
Chapter 4

Findings

Univariate

Demographics and Student Information

The response rate was 23.5 percent (N=47), despite my efforts. The gender distribution in the sample is unrepresentative. In 2017, 64.7 percent of the registered undergraduate student body identified as female (Office of Planning and Budgeting, Queen’s University, 2017). In comparison, the sample obtained is overwhelmingly female (89.1 percent), with 6.5 percent male and surprisingly 4.4 percent non-binary or undeclared (2.2 percent each). The mean age (n = 46) is 21 years, with 89.1 percent being 19 to 21 years old. The vast majority of the students in the sample conform to the traditional undergraduate age (95.7%), as the non-traditional students (4.3%) were aged 25 to 40. Just over a fifth of the sample are minorities, with the two modal ethnic groups being white (78.3%) and mixed-race (13%). Nearly all were domestic (95.7%) and anglophone (93.5%) students. The only other primary language group reported was English-French bilingual (6.5%).

All the respondents are pursuing Faculty of Arts and Science majors—the three most represented are Sociology (70.2%), Psychology (8.5%), and Political Studies (8.5%). Nearly 60% of the sample had grade point averages in the B range (2.7 to 3.3 GPA), while 30.5% had GPAs in the A range (3.7 to 4.3) and 10.9% in the C range or lower (2.3 or less) (Figure 1). In terms of academic standing, the majority of the students in this sample are doing well, as 56.6% reported having a GPA between B+ and A+.
Obtaining a Master’s (28.9%) and Bachelor’s degree (26.7%) were the most reported aspired level of education. However, most of the sample aspires to obtain a level of education up to a graduate diploma or certificate, with 40% aspiring to achieve degrees at the Master’s and PhD (or other professional degree) levels (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Bar Chart: Letter Grade and Grade Point Averages

Social Influences

Figure 2. Bar Chart: Education Level Aspiration
The majority of respondents were raised in middle (29.5%) to upper-middle class (34.4%) households. The proportion of respondents raised in households considered to be poverty line or below to lower-middle class was 27.2%, with 4.5% of this from the poverty level or below category and 13.6% from the lower class category. Compared to the educational aspirations of respondents, the highest level of education achieved between their parents is similarly concentrated between the Bachelor’s (24.4%) and graduate diploma (24.4%) levels (Figure 3). Including these proportions, most (68.8%) of the highest educated parents (of each respondent) participated in and earned their highest degrees from higher education, with 13.3% earning a Master’s degree and 6.7% earning a PhD, professional, or post-doctoral degree. Further, post-secondary education was completed among most of the parents (84.4%).

Post-secondary education is quite important to the parents and siblings of respondents (Figure 4). Ratings of parental value of post-secondary education are more clearly concentrated between high (27.3%) and very high (61.4%), whereas the ratings for sibling value are concentrated among moderate (34.1%) and very high (39%).
Figure 3. *Bar Chart: Highest Level of Education between Parents*

Figure 4. *Bar Chart: Parental and Sibling Value of Post-Secondary Education*
Parental involvement in respondent education decreased from pre-university to during university (Figure 5). Parents were rated as being moderately (33.3%) to greatly involved (42.2%) in respondents’ studies before university, dropping to minimally (28.9%) and moderately involved (31.1%) during university. The proportion of parents not being involved increased with time by 9% while the proportion of parents being greatly involved decreased by 22%. Sibling involvement from pre-university to during university, in comparison, was concentrated at not involved (increasing from 26.8 to 41.5%), minimally involved (decreasing from 31.7 to 19.5%), and moderately involved (remaining at 26.8%). It was not common for siblings to be greatly involved (decreasing from 14.6 to 12.2%).

Figure 5. Parental and Sibling Involvement in Education
Friends and peers endorse and are involved in respondents’ post-secondary studies, appearing to be potential influences (Figures 6 and 7). Friends, whether from a respondent’s hometown or on campus, are mostly perceived to value university studies highly and very highly (together accounting for 75.6% of responses). The majority of respondents (61.4%) indicated they participated in at least one extracurricular activity or group on campus, exposing them to peers potentially taking other courses or programs. Although these activities/groups can range from recreational (e.g. sports club or sorority) to professional (e.g. student government, on-campus job) and academic (e.g. study group), respondents reported that, compared to their friends, a larger proportion of the peers they engage in these activities with value university education highly and very highly (together accounting for 81.4% of responses). While these two groups of friends and peers were more concentrated between highly and very highly, respondents’ departmental peers in their major vary in their value of university studies more, between moderately (29.5%), highly (34.1%), and very highly (31.8%). Still, the proportion of respondents who report their departmental peers value university education highly or very highly is 65.9%.
Figure 6. *Bar Chart: Value of University Education, by Friend and Peer Groups*

Figure 7. *Bar Chart: Friend and Peer Involvement in University Studies*
In terms of involvement, it may be that as family becomes less involved in a student’s university studies, friends and peers fill this gap, as they are reported to be moderately (28.9%) to greatly involved (35.6%) in a student’s university studies. This will be examined in bivariate analysis (see Implications).

**Student Well-Being, Mental Health, and Impairments**

Impairments in this sample of undergraduate students merit consideration, for their prevalence and impact. Nearly half (52.2%) of the respondents reported being diagnosed with at least one type of impairment or disability, with the most prevalent type being a psychological disorder (30.4%), followed by learning disabilities (15.2%) (Figure 8). The impact of impairments or disabilities on learning activities varies largely, with 59.2% of respondents rating the impact as great or extreme (Figure 9).

![Figure 8. Bar Chart: Self-Reported Impairment Diagnoses](image)
Figure 9. *Self-Rated Impact of Impairments (Suspected or Diagnosed) on Learning Activities*

On mental health, the experience of anxiety and mood disorders is fairly prevalent in this sample, but the majority of respondents report they have managed their stress and moods at least moderately well recently. Just over a third (35.6%) of the sample reported being officially diagnosed with an anxiety disorder sometime in their life, with 15.6% diagnosed within the span of a year. Similarly, just under a third (31.1%) had been diagnosed with a mood disorder in their lifetime, 13.3% diagnosed in the span of a year. A considerable proportion of the sample reported suffering from anxiety symptoms (i.e. uncontrollable stress, panic-attacks, feelings of dread, extreme nervousness, etc.) in the span of a year (84.4%), compared to the proportion suffering from mood disorder symptoms (i.e. severe hopelessness, long-lasting sadness, highly varying mood-swings, etc.) in the same period (57.8%) (Figure 10). While 22.2% of respondents reported being moderately stressed in the last six months, 46.7% and 26.7% reported being stressed and
extremely stressed in the same period (Figure 11). Despite 31.1% of respondents rating their stress management in the last 12 months as poor, a larger proportion rated their stress management as moderate (37.8%) and 22.2% rated it as good (Figure 12).

Figure 10. *Bar Chart: Experience of Anxiety and Mood Disorder Symptoms in Last 12 Months*

Figure 11. *Bar Chart: Typical Level of Stress Experienced in the Last 6 Months*
Another facet I have considered to be part of well-being is feeling of belongingness. Self-rated feelings of belongingness to one’s Major varied quite considerably. Compared to the proportion that reported not feeling like they belonged at all in their Major (11.4%), 27.3% reported feeling like they mostly belonged, and a quarter absolutely. Although 13.3% believed they did not belong at all at their university, 26.7% believed they mostly belonged, and 20% absolutely. In contrast, only 6.7% felt they did not at all belong in university (in general), 31.1% felt they mostly belonged, and 33.3% felt they absolutely belonged. The combined proportion of students who feel slightly or completely out of place doubles from talking about university in general (11.1%) to their university (22.2%). Although they feel like they should be in university, some students feel completely or slightly out of place at their current one (Figure 13).
Institutional Influences

Respondents were asked about their perceived departmental expectations (in letter grade), their perception of teaching staff, and their experiences with on-campus support services. They generally perceived departmental expectations from B to B+ (a combined 56.8%), while a third perceived their department expecting A- to A (Figure 14). Respondents also perceived their instructors or professors to be available to help—60% agreed somewhat, while a third completely agreed (Figure 15). They felt that fairness in grading differed from their personal experiences to those others might have, as for example, more disagreed with professors and instructors grading fairly when considering their personal experiences (11.1% compared to 6.8%). Professors and instructors were largely perceived as grading fairly in both cases. Less respondents felt they had been
graded fairly by teaching assistants (a combined 70.4% vs 75.6% for professors and instructors), and more respondents disagreed with the statement. Half of the respondents at least somewhat agreed that instructions on assessments (e.g. tests, assignments, etc.) are generally clear, with a third that disagreed. More respondents at least somewhat agreed that how to succeed in courses was clear (57.7%), but 26.6% disagreed.

Figure 14. *Bar Chart: Perceived Departmental Expectation (in Letter Grade)*
Figure 15. *Bar Chart: Perception of Institutional Practices*

For on-campus support services, the vast majority of respondents were aware of both on-campus academic and language (77.8%) and mental health support services (88.9%) (Figure 16). Still, a considerable proportion (22.2%) of respondents were completely unaware the university had academic or language support services. Just over half of respondents had used an on-campus mental health support at least once, while 37.8% had used an academic/language one. For those who know of these services, few reported they have used these services beyond ‘much’ (Figure 17). Only a combined 12.5% of respondents who were aware of the mental health services rated using the services ‘much’ to ‘very much’, as 40% answered ‘never’. Only one respondent preferred not to answer the source questions.
Figure 16. *Bar Chart: Support Service Awareness, by Type*

Figure 17. *Bar Chart: Support Service Usage, by Type*
Student Behaviour and Attitudes

The majority of respondents nearly always attend classes and complete coursework on time (75% and 84.1%) (Figure 18). By contrast, completing readings on time varied—while the majority did this often (27.3%) and almost always (25%), a considerable proportion of respondents did this seldom (25%). The respondents do not usually engage with coursework or material beyond their requirements, as seldom was the most reported category (29.5%), followed by sometimes (25%). More respondents reported enjoying challenging coursework and material sometimes (38.6%) than seldom (20.5%), but 18.2% reported ‘often’. Responses on the frequency of contacting teaching staff for clarification were concentrated on the bimodal categories ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’ (27.3%), followed by ‘almost always’ (22.7%).

Figure 18. Bar Chart: Frequency of Student Behaviours and Attitudes
Respondents valued their university studies highly (47.7%) and very highly (45.5%), with the only other category reported being ‘somewhat’ (6.8%), coded between the lowest and middle categories (Figure 19). The majority of respondents find the activities in their courses engaging, as 48.9% somewhat agreed and 13.3% completely agreed (Figure 20). However, 24.4% somewhat disagreed with the statement. The distribution of responses varied for the next two statements. When asked if they felt their course activities were worthwhile overall, 37.8% somewhat agreed, 22.2% completely agreed, while 20% somewhat disagreed. Just over a quarter of respondents (26.7%) somewhat agreed that they have enjoyed their coursework overall, with as many completely agreeing as somewhat disagreeing (22.2%).

![Figure 19. Bar Chart: Respondent Value of University Education](#)
Impact of Identity Threats

Respondents were asked to rate how upsetting each scenario in a series would be. Less than half of respondents rated the emotional disturbance an instance where their actions had been discordant with their goals to be significantly (22.2%) and extremely upsetting (24.4%) (Figure 21). Additionally, although 28.9% said it would be minimally upsetting, 20% said it would be moderately upsetting. Overall, these results indicate that the majority of respondents find inconsistencies between actions and goals to be moderately to extremely upsetting.

In each scenario concerning below average grades, the proportions of respondents who indicated the two most elevated levels of emotional disturbance/impact (‘significantly enough’ and ‘extremely’) ranged from 46.7 to 55.6% (Figures 21 and 22).
The most upsetting of these scenarios were receiving a below average final grade
(55.6%), test grade (55.6%), and exam grade (53.3%). Surprisingly, a below average
grade on a quiz was slightly more upsetting than on an assignment (48.9% in the two
most elevated levels, compared to 46.7%). A possible explanation reveals a limitation:
although quizzes were intended to represent a lower grade-weight than an assignment,
this assumption may not have been shared by respondents (whereas it was for the testers).
In contrast, a proportion of respondents that ranged from 24.4 to 31.1% indicated they are
minimally to somewhat upset when faced with these scenarios. Of the respondents
indicating minimally to somewhat upsetting responses, the scenario where the greatest of
these percentages was found was receiving a below average quiz grade (31.1%), yet
closely followed by the others. Surprisingly, the percentage of respondents indicating
they would be minimally upset was equal between receiving a below average quiz, and
final grade (15.6%). Nearly to just over the majority of respondents found below average
grades significantly to extremely upsetting, regardless of assessment type.
Figure 21. Bar Chart: Impact of Identity-Threat, by Scenario

Figure 22. Bar Chart: Impact of Identity-Threat, by Scenario (Collapsed)
Coping Strategies

Given a pre-selected list of 17 coping strategies, respondents were asked to indicate how likely or often they would choose each of them when faced with the scenario of receiving a below average grade. The frequencies for all categories are reported in Table 3 and further summarized into three categories in Table 4.

Table 3.

*Frequency Table: Coping Strategy Frequency of Use*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Strategy</th>
<th>Never (Row %)</th>
<th>Seldom (Row %)</th>
<th>Sometimes (Row %)</th>
<th>Often (Row %)</th>
<th>Almost always (Row %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking a setback more seriously around friends/peers</td>
<td>13 (29.5%)</td>
<td>14 (31.8%)</td>
<td>7 (15.9%)</td>
<td>6 (13.6%)</td>
<td>4 (9.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational self-talk</td>
<td>5 (11.4%)</td>
<td>5 (11.4%)</td>
<td>9 (20.5%)</td>
<td>14 (31.8%)</td>
<td>11 (25.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting the instructor</td>
<td>12 (27.3%)</td>
<td>8 (18.2%)</td>
<td>13 (29.5%)</td>
<td>4 (9.1%)</td>
<td>7 (15.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making an action plan</td>
<td>4 (9.3%)</td>
<td>4 (9.3%)</td>
<td>15 (34.9%)</td>
<td>11 (25.6%)</td>
<td>9 (20.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reminder of past successes</td>
<td>9 (20.5%)</td>
<td>8 (18.2%)</td>
<td>10 (22.7%)</td>
<td>13 (29.5%)</td>
<td>4 (9.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reminder of future goals</td>
<td>5 (11.4%)</td>
<td>6 (13.6%)</td>
<td>9 (20.5%)</td>
<td>16 (36.4%)</td>
<td>8 (18.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking an on-campus support</td>
<td>26 (59.1%)</td>
<td>10 (22.7%)</td>
<td>5 (11.4%)</td>
<td>2 (4.5%)</td>
<td>1 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using an on-campus support</td>
<td>27 (61.4%)</td>
<td>8 (18.2%)</td>
<td>7 (15.9%)</td>
<td>1 (2.3%)</td>
<td>1 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a setback less seriously around friends/peers</td>
<td>16 (36.4%)</td>
<td>8 (18.2%)</td>
<td>11 (25.0%)</td>
<td>9 (20.5%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative self-talk/ideation</td>
<td>3 (6.8%)</td>
<td>6 (13.6%)</td>
<td>15 (34.1%)</td>
<td>14 (31.8%)</td>
<td>6 (13.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming the instructor</td>
<td>8 (18.2%)</td>
<td>16 (36.4%)</td>
<td>16 (36.4%)</td>
<td>4 (9.1%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming the assessment</td>
<td>9 (20.5%)</td>
<td>11 (25.0%)</td>
<td>17 (38.6%)</td>
<td>5 (11.4%)</td>
<td>2 (4.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making excuses</td>
<td>5 (11.4%)</td>
<td>10 (22.7%)</td>
<td>20 (45.5%)</td>
<td>6 (13.6%)</td>
<td>3 (6.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demotivation from future coursework</td>
<td>8 (18.2%)</td>
<td>13 (29.5%)</td>
<td>8 (18.2%)</td>
<td>11 (25.0%)</td>
<td>4 (9.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-distraction via another activity</td>
<td>4 (9.1%)</td>
<td>3 (6.8%)</td>
<td>17 (38.6%)</td>
<td>15 (34.1%)</td>
<td>5 (11.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipping subsequent session(s)</td>
<td>17 (38.6%)</td>
<td>15 (34.1%)</td>
<td>10 (22.7%)</td>
<td>2 (4.5%)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downplaying impact privately</td>
<td>3 (6.8%)</td>
<td>7 (15.9%)</td>
<td>12 (27.3%)</td>
<td>17 (38.6%)</td>
<td>5 (11.4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.

*Frequency Table: Coping Strategy Frequency of Use (Collapsed into Three Categories)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Strategy</th>
<th>Frequency of use (Row %)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never to Seldom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a setback more seriously around friends/peers</td>
<td>27 (61.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational self-talk</td>
<td>10 (22.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting the instructor</td>
<td>20 (45.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making an action plan</td>
<td>8 (18.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reminder of past successes</td>
<td>17 (38.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reminder of future goals</td>
<td>11 (25.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking an on-campus support</td>
<td>36 (81.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using an on-campus support</td>
<td>35 (79.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a setback less seriously around friends/peers</td>
<td>24 (54.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative self-talk/ideation</td>
<td>9 (20.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming the instructor</td>
<td>24 (54.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming the assessment</td>
<td>20 (45.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making excuses</td>
<td>15 (34.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demotivation</td>
<td>21 (47.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-distraction</td>
<td>7 (15.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipping subsequent session(s)</td>
<td>32 (72.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downplaying impact privately</td>
<td>10 (22.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The six coping strategies most reported to be used often to always are: engaging in motivational self-talk (56.8%), self-reminder of future goals (54.5%), downplaying impact (50%), making an action plan (46.5%), self-distraction with another activity (45.5%), and engaging in negative self-talk/ideation (45.5%).
The six least-used—that is, most reported as used never to seldom—are: seeking support services (81.8%), utilizing support services (79.5%), skipping the next or future in-class sessions (72.7%), taking the setback more seriously around peers/friends (61.4%), perceiving the instructor was unfair (54.5%), and taking the setback less seriously around peers/friends (54.5%).

Strictly concerning the extremes, the three coping strategies most reported as being used almost always/always are motivational self-talk, making an action plan, and self-reminder of future goals; while the three most reported as being never used are utilizing a support service, seeking a support service, and skipping.

The coping strategies were conceived in the typology as being adaptive or maladaptive ways of dealing with an academic setback (Table 1). Although the two most reported coping strategies used often to always are adaptive ones, the top-six are a mix of both adaptive and maladaptive. The difficulty in determining whether adaptive or maladaptive coping strategies are favoured more is also reflected in the observation that the majority of respondents did not rely on either group of strategies often. Only 14% of the sample are scored as tending toward using the majority of the adaptive strategies in response to their academic setbacks at least often, while 15.9% are scored as tending toward using the majority of the maladaptive strategies at least often.

**Bivariate**

Cramer’s V ($\phi_c$), Goodman-Kruskal’s Gamma ($\gamma$), Kendall’s Tau-C ($\tau_c$) were used to test the strength of associations between variables, while Chi-Square was used to determine statistical significance. Some associations were further analyzed with odds ratios (ORs) to determine the effect a predictor has on increasing or decreasing the
likelihood of an outcome’s occurrence. Only results statistically significant at or below \( \alpha=0.05 \) (i.e. where the probability of a result being due to random chance is less than five percent) are reported here.

**Emotional Appraisal/Impact of Identity Threat**

The emotional impacts of identity threats were moderately associated with certain demographic variables and weakly to moderately with social influences. Greater seniority in current degree was moderately associated with less upsetting appraisals of receiving below average grades on a quiz (\( \gamma = -0.412, p = .016 \)), test (\( \gamma = -0.442, p = .014 \)), assignment (\( \gamma = -0.381, p = .024 \)), exam (\( \gamma = -0.394, p = .028 \)), and final grade (\( \gamma = -0.37, p = .047 \)). Whether a student was traditionally-aged (18-24 years old) or not was strongly associated with the impact of receiving a below average grade on a test (\( X^2(4)= 11.362; v= .502, p= .023 \)).

Higher sibling involvement in pre-university studies was moderately associated with less severe emotional appraisals of a below average grade on a quiz (\( \gamma = -0.385, p= .013 \)), test (\( \gamma = -0.343, p= .025 \)), assignment (\( \gamma = -0.308, p= .046 \)), and course (\( \gamma = -0.348, p= .047 \)). Higher sibling involvement in university studies was similarly associated with less severe emotional appraisals of a below average grade on a quiz (\( \gamma = -0.365, p= .028 \)), test (\( \gamma = -0.379, p= .026 \)), assignment (\( \gamma = -0.39, p= .031 \)), and course (\( \gamma = -0.422, p= .019 \)). There were weak associations between greater parental level of education and more severe emotional appraisals of receiving below average grades on a quiz (\( \tau_e = .284, p= .001 \)), assignment (\( \tau_e = .227, p= .028 \)), exam (\( \tau_e = .258, p= .011 \)), and course (\( \tau_e = .27, p= .005 \)); with a similarly positive but moderate association with a below average test grade (\( \tau_e = .321, p= .001 \)).
Lastly, greater seniority in current degree ($\gamma = -0.36$, $p = 0.034$) was moderately associated with less severe emotional appraisals of acting inconsistently with one’s goal. Greater parental level of education was weakly associated with more severely rated impact of an agency-goal inconsistency ($\tau_c = 0.235$, $p = 0.015$).

**Taking the Setback More Seriously Around Friends and Peers**

The frequency of taking a setback more seriously around friends and peers was associated with the value of university studies ascribed by peers in one’s major and the perceived fairness of instructors’ grading. Greater value of university education by these peers was strongly associated with using this coping strategy more frequently ($\gamma = 0.588$, $p < 0.001$), while stronger beliefs that instructors grade fairly was associated with using this coping strategy less often ($\gamma = -0.365$, $p = 0.039$).

Beyond the frequency of engaging in certain coping strategies, identifying the strength of the relationships between independent variables and whether or not students favour or rely on particular coping strategies (that is, use them often or almost always) was also of interest. In this case, participating in extracurricular activities is very strongly associated with frequently using this coping strategy ($\gamma = 0.789$, $p = 0.01$) and the perception of being fairly graded by instructors is moderately associated with whether or not this coping strategy is favoured ($X^2 (3) = 8.649$, $\phi_c = 0.443$, $p = 0.034$). The former of these two is unsurprising and may be attributed to students participating in extracurricular groups or activities may have more opportunities (or necessity) to engage in this coping strategy due to their expanded social network.
**Motivational Self-Talk**

The frequency of using motivational self-talk as a coping strategy was only significantly associated with one variable. More frequent use of motivational self-talk was moderately associated with less faith in being or having been graded fairly by teaching assistants ($\gamma = -0.363$, $p = 0.036$).

**Consulting the Instructor**

Higher frequency of consulting the instructor to cope with an academic setback was strongly associated with engaging beyond requirements in course activities more frequently ($\gamma = 0.557$, $p < 0.001$), preferring challenging coursework more frequently ($\gamma = 0.564$, $p < 0.001$), completing readings on time more frequently ($\gamma = 0.719$, $p < 0.001$), and attending in-class sessions more frequently ($\gamma = 0.723$, $p < 0.001$). It was moderately associated with enjoying course activities more ($\gamma = 0.326$, $p = 0.017$), higher sense of belonging in one’s major ($\gamma = 0.351$, $p = 0.018$) and in university in general ($\gamma = 0.377$, $p = 0.018$), and less faith in having been graded fairly by their instructors and professors ($\gamma = -0.39$, $p = 0.036$). Using this coping strategy more frequently was also moderately associated with higher letter grades ($\tau_c = 0.358$, $p = 0.001$), but the relationship’s temporality (order of events) is unclear. This relationship could either mean that students who achieve higher grades engage in adaptive actions like this to secure continued success, or that students that more frequently use these coping strategies earn higher grades.

Whether a student relied on consulting the instructor as a coping strategy was strongly associated with frequency of engaging with course activities beyond requirements ($X^2 (4) = 11.99$, $\phi_c = 0.522$, $p = 0.017$), sibling involvement during university studies ($X^2 (3) = 12.955$, $\phi_c = 0.569$, $p = 0.005$), sibling involvement in pre-university studies
\( \chi^2 (3) = 15.627, \phi_c = .625, p= .001 \), and frequency of completing readings on time \( \chi^2 (4) = 20.364, \phi_c = .68, p< .001 \).

**Making an Action Plan**

Making an action plan more frequently was only strongly associated with more frequently completing coursework on time \( \gamma = .515, p= .041 \), but moderately associated with higher sense of belongingness to major of study \( \gamma = .367, p= .023 \) and university in general \( \gamma = .394, p= .004 \), more frequently engaging with course activities beyond requirements \( \gamma = .378, p= .015 \), and more frequently completing readings on time \( \gamma = .399, p= .006 \). Although it is not clear whether a higher achieving student more frequently copes by establishing a plan of action or students that more frequently establish action plans tend to earn higher letter grades, the two variables were weakly associated \( \tau_c = .229, p= .04 \).

Whether a student characteristically relies on establishing an action plan was strongly associated with a student’s faith in instructors and professors grading fairly in general \( \chi^2(4) = 11.418, \phi_c = .515, p= .022 \).

**Self-Reminder of Past Sucesses**

More frequently coping with self-reminders of past success was moderately associated with higher parental involvement in pre-university studies \( \gamma = .314, p= .044 \), higher ability to manage stress \( \gamma = .327, p= .042 \), and higher sibling involvement in university studies \( \gamma = .452, p= .008 \). It was also weakly associated with higher sense of belongingness to one’s major \( \gamma = .263, p= .043 \).

A student’s characteristic use of this coping strategy was quite strongly associated with not having been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in their lifetime \( \gamma = -.749, p= \)
Moreover, a logistic regression showed that having been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in one’s lifetime decreases the odds of characteristically using this coping strategy by 85.6% (OR .144, 95% CI: .027-.753).

**Self-Reminder of Future Goals**

Reminding oneself of future goals more frequently was strongly associated with higher sibling involvement during university studies (γ= .519, p= .001) and moderately associated with a higher ability to manage stress (γ= .382, p= .02) and higher sense of belongingness in one’s major (γ= .4, p= .005).

Relying on self-reminders of future goals, was also strongly associated with never having been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder (γ= -.719, p= .171), and even more strongly associated with never having been diagnosed with a mood disorder (γ= -.75, p= .004). Following-up with logistic regressions showed that students who had been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in their lifetime were 83.6% less likely to rely on this coping strategy (OR .164, 95% CI: .041-.656) and those who had been diagnosed with a disorder in their lifetime were 85.7% less likely (OR .143, 95% CI: .032-.636).

**Seeking Support Services**

The frequency of choosing seeking support services as a coping strategy was most strongly associated with whether or not the student was traditional undergraduate age (X²(4)= 23.257, φc= .727, p< .001). Higher frequency of choosing this strategy was strongly associated with attending classes more frequently (γ= .538, p= .039).

Whether a student regularly uses this coping strategy or not differs by their friends’ value of post-secondary education, and this association is strong (X²(3)= 15.078, φc= .585, p= .002).
Utilizing Support Services

Like the previous coping strategy, there was a strong association with whether or not the student belonged to the traditional undergraduate age group ($X^2(4) = 23.833, \phi_c = .736, p < .001$), and high frequency of choosing to use support services in response was strongly associated with attending classes more frequently ($\gamma = .751, p = .003$).

A student regularly using this coping strategy or not differed the most and was quite strongly associated with their friends’ value of post-secondary education ($X^2(3) = 22.393, \phi_c = .713, p < .001$). It was also moderately associated with sibling ($X^2(3) = 9.737, \phi_c = .493, p = .021$) and parental value of post-secondary education ($X^2(3) = 10.044, \phi_c = .483, .018$).

Taking a Setback Less Seriously Around Friends and Peers

Downplaying the impact of a setback around friends and peers more frequently was not significantly associated with friend and peer influences initially. It was however moderately associated with a lower sense of belongingness in university ($\gamma = -.362, p = .012$), lower ratings on the clarity of course requirements ($\gamma = -.387, p = .031$), and higher sibling value of education ($\gamma = .388, p = .022$).

Whether or not a respondent relies on this coping strategy was moderately associated with the degree they perceived their friends valued post-secondary education ($X^2(3) = 7.869, \phi_c = .423, .049$).

Negative Self-Talk or Ideation

Higher frequency of engaging in negative self-talk/ideation in response to a setback was strongly associated with lower ability to manage moods ($\gamma = -.549, p = .001$) and moderately with higher levels of stress reported ($\gamma = .384, p = .048$).
A student relying on negative self-talk or ideation as an immediate response or way to cope with a setback was quite strongly associated with experiencing anxiety disorder symptoms in the recent year ($\gamma = .727$, $p = .048$). There was also a strong association between whether or not a student regularly engages in this response and their peers’ perceived value of university education ($X^2(2) = 6.533$, $\phi = .501$, $p = .038$) and a moderate one with their parents’ level of involvement in their university studies ($X^2(3) = 7.869$, $\phi = .427$, $p = .046$).

**Blaming the Instructor**

Attributing blame on the instructor more frequently was strongly associated with completing coursework on time more frequently ($\gamma = .67$, $p = .03$). Blaming the instructor more frequently was also moderately associated with attending courses more often ($\gamma = .482$, $p = .04$), but less faith in teaching assistants grading fairly ($\gamma = -.451$, $p = .011$) and being less senior in one’s current degree ($\gamma = -.368$, $p = .043$).

Whether or not a student typically engages in this behaviour as a coping strategy was strongly associated to their perception of what letter grade their department expects ($X^2(5) = 11.393$, $\phi = .515$, $p = .044$) and the value they perceive their extracurricular peers (e.g. in/on a study group, sports team, student government, etc.) to have on university studies ($X^2(2) = 7.63$, $\phi = 542$, $p = .022$). Perhaps students striving to meet higher (perceived) departmental expectations feel more bitter toward or slighted by their instructors when they receive a below average grade.

**Blaming the Assessment**

Compared to blaming the instructor, the perception of teaching assistants grading fairly was more strongly associated with attributing the setback to a flaw in the
assessment (i.e. in its structure or demands). Attributing blame to the assessment more frequently was strongly associated with less faith in teaching assistants grading fairly ($\gamma = -0.548, p = 0.001$) and moderately associated with attending classes more frequently ($\gamma = 0.49, p = 0.034$). The moderate positive association with one’s ability to manage their moods ($\gamma = 0.361, p = 0.043$) could either indicate that this coping strategy may be used to manage moods better, or students with a stronger ability to manage their moods use this coping strategy more often.

Whether a student regularly blames the assessment or not was moderately associated with the value they perceive their extracurricular peers to have on university education, only ($X^2(3) = 7.943, \phi = 0.488, p = 0.045$).

**Making Excuses**

Using excuses to cope with academic setbacks frequently was moderately associated with less frequently reaching out to one’s instructor or teaching assistant for clarification ($\gamma = -0.415, p = 0.009$) and less faith in teaching assistants grading fairly ($\gamma = -0.395, p = 0.021$).

Relying on this coping strategy was very strongly associated with having experienced mood disorder symptoms in the span of a year ($\gamma = 0.789, p = 0.012$). Whether or not a student relied on this coping strategy was greatly associated with rating course activities more engaging ($X^2(4) = 15.67, \phi = 0.597, p = 0.003$) and moderately associated with parental involvement pre- ($X^2(3) = 7.943, \phi = 0.425, p = 0.047$) and during university ($X^2(3) = 10.486, \phi = 0.488, p = 0.015$).
Demotivation for Future Course Activities

Losing motivation for future course activities more frequently was associated strongly with less frequently completing coursework on time ($\gamma = -0.587$, $p = .02$). It was moderately associated with less frequently reaching out to an instructor for help ($\gamma = -0.476$, $p < .001$), engaging with course activities beyond requirements less often ($\gamma = -0.396$, $p = .001$), less frequently completing readings on time ($\gamma = -0.369$, $p = .003$), enjoying overall course activities less ($\gamma = -0.3065$, $p = .019$), difficulty managing moods ($\gamma = -0.357$, $p = .032$), lower sense of belongingness to their particular university ($\gamma = -0.339$, $p = .017$), and a less frequent preference for challenging work ($\gamma = -0.319$, $p = .027$). Together these associations portray students already less engaged from course activities tending to make demotivation a more frequent response to academic setbacks.

Regularly engaging in this behaviour was most strongly associated with experiencing mood disorder symptoms within the recent year ($\gamma = 0.801$, $p = .001$) and not being aware of on-campus academic support services ($\gamma = -0.705$, $p = .036$). Further, separate logistic regressions for each association show that the odds of habitually responding with this behaviour are 9.2 times higher for students who have experienced mood disorder symptoms in the recent year (OR 9.208, 95% CI: 1.747-48.527) and .17 times lower for students who know about on-campus academic support services (OR .173, 95% CI: .036-.84).

Self-Distraction with Another Activity

The frequency of distracting oneself with another activity was very strongly associated with how often the student completed coursework on time ($\gamma = -0.907$, $p = .001$) and strongly with how often they completed readings on time ($\gamma = -0.585$, $p < .001$), and
despite whether or not this coping strategy is used habitually being moderately associated with these variables, it is uncertain whether, for example, 1) an existing habit of completing coursework/readings on time less frequently contributes to responding to an academic setback with self-distraction more often, or 2) more frequently using self-distraction to cope with setbacks contributes to completing coursework/readings less often (i.e. procrastination). A logistic regression indicates that a student who completes readings on time more frequently is less likely to habitually cope with self-distraction -- .41 times less likely for every unit increase on the frequency scale for completing readings on time (OR .414, 95% CI: .227-.755).

**Skipping Immediate or Future Class Sessions**

More frequently responding to an academic setback with skipping the following or future in-class sessions was quite strongly associated with a habit of attending in-class sessions less often already ($\gamma = -.751$, $p = .001$) and completing coursework on time less often ($\gamma = .743$, $p = .024$). However, the direction of causality in these associations could not be clarified with a significant logistic regression result.

**Downplaying the Impact of the Setback to themselves**

Downplaying the impact of the setback through self-talk more often was moderately associated with less frequently engaging with course activities beyond requirements ($\gamma = -.455$, $p = .02$) and less frequently completing readings on time ($\gamma = -.406$, $p = .007$).
Summary of Analyses

The univariate results position motivational self-talk, self-reminder of future goals, downplaying impact, making an action plan, self-distraction with another activity, and negative self-talk/ideation as the six strategies most commonly-shared frequent strategies to cope with academic setbacks, such as receiving a below than average grade (Table 5). The three strategies most commonly reported as used ‘almost always’/always were motivational self-talk, making an action plan, and self-reminder of future goals (Table 7).

Table 5. Coping Strategies Most Commonly Reported as Often to Almost Always Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Coping strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Motivational self-talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Self-reminder of future goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Downplaying the impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Making an action plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Self-distraction with another activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Negative self-talk/ideation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: There is a tie for the 5th position.

Table 6. Coping Strategies Most Commonly Reported as Never to Seldom Used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Coping strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Seeking support services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Using support services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Skipping subsequent classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Taking the setback more seriously around friends and peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Blaming the instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Taking the setback less seriously around friends and peers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: There is a tie for the 5th position.

Seeking support services, utilizing support services, skipping subsequent class sessions, taking the setback more seriously around peers and friends, perceiving the instructor as unfair, and taking the setback less seriously around peers and friends were the six most commonly-shared infrequently (never to seldomly) used strategies (Table 6). The three strategies most reported as never used were using an on-campus support service, seeking an on-campus support service, and skipping subsequent classes (Table 8).
Table 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Coping strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Motivational self-talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Making an action plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Self-reminder of future goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Coping strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Using a support service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Seeking a support service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Skipping subsequent classes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although a small proportion of the respondents habitually used the majority of either adaptive or maladaptive strategy sets, habitually using the majority of adaptive strategies or not was strongly associated with sibling involvement pre- and during university studies ($X^2(3)= 16.187$, $\phi_c=.644$, $p= .001$; $X^2(3)= 19.068$, $\phi_c=.699$, $p< .001$).

When respondents were asked to describe other coping strategies they use when faced with academic setbacks, just over a third of the responses included self-distraction through activities like entertainment media, substance use, social gatherings, physical recreation, and creative outlets. Excluding strategies already listed in the questionnaire, some responses described seeking reassurance from friends, family, and significant others, identifying and learning from the mistake, crying, and discussion with peers for support and comparison. Slightly fewer described unacknowledging or ‘moving on’, and comfort eating.

While only some of the independent variables (IVs) within each set or theme were found significantly associated with the frequency of coping strategy use, at least some of the associations were moderate to strong (Table 9; see Appendix E for a compact version). More frequent use of motivational self-talk, the coping strategy most commonly reported as often to almost used, was most strongly associated with less faith in teaching assistants grading fairly. Perhaps motivational self-talk is used to overcome this
perception. Seeking an on-campus support service, the strategy most commonly reported as never to seldom used, was most strongly associated with whether a student is traditional undergraduate age (18-24).

Table 9.

**Summary of Significant Associations with Coping Strategies’ Frequency of Use and Habitual Use**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Strategy</th>
<th>Strongest Association (+/- direction)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking a setback more seriously around friends/peers</td>
<td>Major peers’ value of education (+)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitably taking a setback more seriously around friends/peers</td>
<td>Extracurricular participation (+)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational self-talk</td>
<td>Perception of TAs grading fairly (-)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitably engaging in motivational self-talk</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting the instructor</td>
<td>Freq. of attendance (+)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitably consulting the instructor</td>
<td>Freq. of completing readings on time (n/a)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making an action plan</td>
<td>Freq. of completing coursework on time (+)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitably making an action plan</td>
<td>Perception of instructors generally grading fairly (n/a)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reminder of past successes</td>
<td>Parental involvement pre-university (+)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitably engaging in self-reminders of past successes</td>
<td>Anxiety disorder diagnosis in life-time (-) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reminder of future goals</td>
<td>Sibling involvement during university (+) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitably engaging in self-reminders of future goals</td>
<td>Mood disorder diagnosis in life-time (-)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking an on-campus support</td>
<td>Being traditional UG age (n/a)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitably seeking an on-campus support</td>
<td>Friends’ value of post-secondary education (n/a)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using an on-campus support</td>
<td>Freq. of attendance (+)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitably using an on-campus support</td>
<td>Friends’ value of post-secondary education (n/a)**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This table is continued on the next page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Strategy</th>
<th>Strongest Association (+/- direction)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking a setback less seriously around friends/peers</td>
<td>Sibling value of post-secondary education (+)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habituallly taking a setback less seriously around</td>
<td>Friends’ value of post-secondary education (n/a)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friends/peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative self-talk/ideation</td>
<td>Ability to manage moods (-)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habituallly engaging in negative self-talk/ideation</td>
<td>Having anxiety disorder symptoms in last 12 months (+)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming the instructor</td>
<td>Freq. of completing coursework on time (+)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habituallly blaming the instructor</td>
<td>Extracurricular peers’ value of university education (n/a)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming the assessment</td>
<td>Perception of TAs grading fairly (-)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habituallly blaming the assessment</td>
<td>Extracurricular peers’ value of university education (n/a)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making excuses</td>
<td>Freq. of reaching out to instructor for clarification (-)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habituallly making excuses</td>
<td>Having mood disorder symptoms in last 12 months (+)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demotivation</td>
<td>Freq. of completing coursework on time (-) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habituallly becoming demotivated</td>
<td>Having mood disorder symptoms in last 12 months (+)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-distraction</td>
<td>Freq. of completing coursework on time (-) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habituallly engaging in self-distraction</td>
<td>Freq. of completing coursework on time (n/a)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipping subsequent session(s)</td>
<td>Freq. of attending classes (-)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habituallly skipping subsequent session(s)</td>
<td>Freq. of completing coursework on time (n/a)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downplaying impact privately</td>
<td>Freq. of engaging beyond requirements (-)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habituallly downplaying impact privately</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: +: both variables increase or decrease together; 
-: one variable increases as the other decreases (or vice-versa); 
Freq.: frequency; 
TA: teaching assistant; 
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001
Table 10 shows that the student behaviours and attitudes variables were the most widely associated with the frequency of different coping strategies, followed by well-being, and institutional factors. Overall, student behaviour/attitude and social influences variables were found to be associated with every identity threat outcome (Table 11). Surprisingly, the well-being variables (e.g. history of anxiety disorder diagnosis) were not significantly associated with how upsetting these identity threats were rated.

Table 10.

*Independent Variable Coverage of Coping Strategies, by Set*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV Set</th>
<th>Significantly associated coping strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic</td>
<td>Consulting the instructor, seeking support services, utilizing support services, blaming the instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social influences</td>
<td>Taking the setback more seriously around friends and peers, consulting the instructor, self-reminder of past successes, self-reminder of future goals, taking the setback less seriously around friends and peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-being</td>
<td>Consulting the instructor, making an action plan, self-reminder of past successes, self-reminder of future goals, taking the setback less seriously around friends, negative self-talk/ideation, blaming the assessment, demotivation from course activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student behaviours and attitudes</td>
<td>Consulting the instructor, making an action plan, seeking support services, using support services, blaming the instructor, blaming the assessment, making excuses, demotivation from course activities, self-distraction, skipping subsequent sessions, privately downplaying the impact of the setback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional influences</td>
<td>Taking the setback more seriously around friends and peers, motivational self-talk, consulting the instructor, taking the setback less seriously around friends and peers, blaming the instructor, blaming the assessment, making excuses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11.

*Independent Variable Coverage of Identity Threat Impacts, by Set*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV Set</th>
<th>Significantly associated identity threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic</td>
<td>Agency-goal inconsistency; receiving a below average quiz, test, assignment, exam, and final course grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social influences</td>
<td>Agency-goal inconsistency; receiving a below average quiz, test, assignment, exam, and final course grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-being</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The other independent variable sets were not included in the analysis

Some independent variables were shown to significantly affect the odds of regularly using or relying on certain strategies (Table 12; see Appendix E for a flipped version). A student who had been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in their lifetime was less likely to regularly use self-reminders of past successes and self-reminders of future goals to cope with receiving a below average grade, compared to those who had never been diagnosed with this type of disorder. Moreover, the odds of regularly using self-reminders of future goals were lower for students diagnosed with a mood disorder at any point in their life than those who had never been diagnosed with one. Students who had been diagnosed with a mood disorder in the recent year were more likely to regularly become demotivated from future coursework, than those who had not. Being aware of the academic and language support services available on campus decreased the odds of a student regularly becoming demotivated. The odds of a student regularly distracting themselves decreases the more frequently they typically complete their readings on time. Surprisingly, knowing of the on-campus support services did not affect the odds of regularly seeking or using on-campus support services. Despite being planned, multivariate analysis results (i.e. including control variables) were not significant.
Table 12.

Likelihood of a Coping Strategy's Regular Use, by Independent Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Odds</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in one’s lifetime</td>
<td>Greatly decreases their odds of</td>
<td>Regularly using self-reminders of past successes (by .14 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greatly decreases their odds of</td>
<td>Regularly using self-reminders of future goals (by .16 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greatly decreases their odds of</td>
<td>Regularly using self-reminders of future goals (by .14 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having been diagnosed with a mood disorder in one’s lifetime</td>
<td>Greatly increases the odds of</td>
<td>Regularly becoming demotivated from future coursework (by 9.2 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having been diagnosed with a mood disorder in the last year</td>
<td>Greatly decreases the odds of</td>
<td>Regularly becoming demotivated from future coursework (by .17 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing of academic/language support services offered on-campus</td>
<td>Progressively decreases their odds of</td>
<td>Regularly distracting themselves (by .414 times)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The more frequently a student typically completes readings on time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5

Discussion

This chapter explores a discussion of this study’s limitations, connections between the findings and literature, implications for the study of identity work and higher education, followed by concluding remarks.

Limitations

Appraisal of this study’s findings (significant or otherwise) must also account for its limitations. I recognize these findings’ ability to describe and associate the usage of coping strategies students use when faced with academic disappointments is constrained by limitations in conceptualization, design, and the research process.

The Coping Strategies

Although space was given to collect participant-described coping strategies, the pre-selected list of coping strategies was central to this study. Considering the adaptive/maladaptive typology definition in the methodology chapter, the seventeen pre-selected coping strategies reflect their respective orientation. However, a number of omissions, additions, and divisions made to this list during development resulted in an uneven distribution of coping strategies between the adaptive (eight) and maladaptive (nine) orientations. The adaptive orientation of coping strategies would have been disadvantaged if compared to its maladaptive counterpart in a mere comparison of sum of frequent uses. The variable, tendency, was defined by often or more frequent usage in at least half of the coping strategies in a given orientation and functioned as an attempt to salvage a comparison of frequent usage between either adaptive or maladaptive strategies.
in the sample. However, this variable was hindered due to many coping strategies being frequently reported as used ‘sometimes’. Another limitation concerns the mutual exclusivity of the coping strategies. The pre-selected coping strategies and their orientations may not be as mutually exclusive as originally thought. An excerpt from the open-ended responses illustrates overlap between both in describing the use of contextualization (particularly a reminder of a future goal) to downplay the impact of a setback: “I think about the big picture. The assignment does [not] matter in the long run. I want to become a preschool teacher so failing an essay on some sociology theory [isn’t] going to have an impact in 20 years from now”. A similar sentiment was seen in an interview from the pilot study that preceded the current one: “I don’t plan on going to graduate school” (Bill, Interview, Langshaw, 2014). Yet another issue concerns the definition of certain coping strategies—namely self-distraction. Some short-answer responses described healthy distractions such as exercise or meditation, from which actors may return refocused, challenging my implication that self-distractions are unproductive and avoidant.

**The Instrument**

Using a survey as a data collection instrument brought limitations and benefits. The closed, multiple-choice nature of most of the questions on the survey yielded responses suited for quantitative analyses. This type of survey was a wider-reaching, resource-inexpensive (i.e. time, labour, compensation) option compared to in-depth interviews, and although it offers frequencies and associations, it limited how students described the coping strategies they use and their significance in their own learning experiences and broader lives (Bryman & Bell, 2016). To compare, interviews from the
pilot study yielded richer and continuous accounts. One respondent named an identity threatening situation when she presented the early stages of her honours research project to her supervisor feeling underprepared and behind her peers: “It felt, like, awful. That was, like, the worst. I went home and was like, ‘I have to drop honours’, ‘I can’t do this’. I know. I went crazy […] I catastrophize. That’s my thing.” (Jane, Interview, Langshaw, 2014). When she arrived home, she “checked out from life […] I didn’t volunteer the next day. Didn’t go to school the next day. Stayed home and watched […] Christmas movies or something […] I just stayed in bed all day”, but “got up the next day and said, ‘Well you have to do this; it’s passed the Add/Drop [deadline]’” (Jane, Interview, Langshaw, 2014). To benefit from both instruments, with more resources, I would have still distributed a survey to the sample, additionally holding interviews with a small number of them.

Some limitations emerge from the survey design. Although it appeared that myself and the survey testers shared the same understanding of the grade-weighting of different assessments (e.g. quizzes, tests, etc.), I assumed this mutual understanding would extend to respondents. Upon reflection, I have contemplated the measurement of the phrase ‘below average grade’. Considering a grade to be below average may be more a function of some sort of external expectation (e.g. class average, department average, etc.) rather than an internal expectation (further, whether a grade is disappointing to a student). To more accurately measure how students cope with personally disappointing grades, the wording of ‘disappointing grade’ should have been used. It would have been interesting to know the correlation between an internal expectation and perceived external (i.e. departmental/institutional) expectation.
Sampling

Sample size was a readily apparent issue. Just under a quarter of the sample recruited answered the survey (N=47). As sample size increases, so does its semblance to a normal distribution (until a point of diminishing benefit) (R. Arnold, 2015; Bryman & Bell, 2016; McHugh, 2008). Although it was randomly selected, this sample size would be considered to have a low statistical power (R. Arnold, 2015). It was estimated that a sample size of 377 would have been sufficient to represent the university’s undergraduate population at a confidence level of 95% and margin of error equal to 5%, and a sample size of 220 to represent the sampling frame of students at the same standards (Qualtrics, 2018b). Currently, the estimated margins of error in representing the sampling frame the sample was drawn from and the university’s undergraduate population ranges from 13.63 to 14.28%. The chi-square statistic used to obtain the p-value in my bivariate analyses is sensitive to sample size (due to being based on frequencies), meaning an increased threat of Type II error occurring—results that appeared non-significant in this sample may have been significant in a different or larger sample (R. Arnold, 2015).

The sampling frame was constrained not only to undergraduate students who were enrolled in Sociology courses but to those professors provided me access. A few consequences of this are apparent. First, sampling from only one university limits generalizability to undergraduate students of other universities (Bryman & Bell, 2016). Second, only a few departments of the Faculty of Arts and Science were represented, missing an opportunity to compare differences from one faculty’s institutional culture to another (i.e. how do Faculty of Arts and Science students differ from Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science students?). The impact of below average grades in
different assessment types (e.g. assignments, tests, etc.) could differ between students of different faculties due to differences in course activities, assessment, and grade standards. Since some institutional factors were widely associated, it would have been interesting to observe differences between different departments/faculties in the use of coping strategies (i.e. are some more viable/relevant in one context, compared to another?), for example. Third, in terms of gender distribution, the sample (89.1% female) was unrepresentative of the undergraduate population at the institution at large (64.7% female). This could have been related to the previous consequence, as 86.85% of undergraduate Psychology students are female (Office of Planning and Budgeting, 2017).

Although cultural influences were hypothesized, neither visible minority status nor whether a student was domestic/international were significantly associated with student behaviours/attitudes, coping strategy usage/preference, or identity-threat impact rating. This may be attributed to the low frequencies of minority (n=10) and international (n=2) respondents in the sample.

Results and their Interpretation

There are a few caveats and surprises to note about the results. First, the results are solely correlative and with respect to the theoretical model, temporality is only clear between obvious events (e.g. early socialization in upbringing precedes university education). Beyond those, temporal relationships are ambiguous. For example, between bivariate analyses, GPA is neither firmly nor consistently either the independent or dependent variable. Does a lower GPA discourage students from consulting their professors, or does neglecting to consult their professors limit their GPA attainment? Second, unlike the literature, demographic variables such as age and gender were not
associated with stress level or being diagnosed with an anxiety or mood disorder (Faravelli, Alessandra Scarpato, Castellini, & Lo Sauro, 2013; Kessler, 2003; Kessler, Keller, & Wittchen, 2001; Norr, Albanese, Allan, & Schmidt, 2015; Wittchen, Zhao, Kessler, & Eaton, 1994). Third, although hypothesized, being aware of support services was not shown to significantly increase the odds of using them as a coping strategy. Similarly, the availability of help from professors was not significantly associated with consulting one’s professors. Neither result supports the value of awareness and availability in encouraging use, unfortunately. Fourth, as aforementioned, this study’s data appeared largely ill-suited for multivariate analysis.

**Connections**

As with the exploratory study that inspired this thesis, motivational self-talk, devising an action plan, and self-reminders of future goals emerged as the most frequently used coping strategies (Langshaw, 2014). Even beyond this, the results reflect observations and theoretical elements found in the literature to some extent.

The coping strategies used reflect those observed and defined by Snow and Anderson’s (1987) and Perinbanayagam’s (2000) respective models in a few ways. Motivational self-talk emerged as the most frequently-used coping strategy among this sample and is similar to the use of motivational phrases in Allen-Collinson’s (2007) ethnography, both representing Perinbanayagam’s (2000) vocabularic form. Reminding oneself of future goals—the second most frequent coping strategy used—was not unlike rugby players keeping their aspirations in mind after performance issues or not being selected to play (Brown & Coupland, 2015) and homeless persons indulging their aspirations or fantasies (i.e. part of the fictive storytelling category) (Snow and Anderson,
1987). The third most frequently-used coping strategy—downplaying or devaluing the impact of an identity threat privately—may be partly similar to Brown and Coupland’s rugby players’ reluctance in thinking about their potentially short careers (2015). One of the least-used coping strategies—skipping subsequent classes (i.e. avoiding the classroom environment)—may be related to Anderson and Snow’s (1987) arrangement of physical settings or Perinbanayagam’s (2000) materialistic identification (which are not mutually exclusive). Like in Snow and Anderson (1987), institutional distancing via cynicism is replicated, albeit less commonly, as blaming the instructor and perceiving teaching assistants to grade unfairly. Further, on exposure, frequenters of homeless shelters and food lines were observed to engage in cynical or derogation of these support organizations (Snow & Anderson 1987), while blaming the instructor more frequently was strongly associated with greater attendance.

There may be partial support for the cognitive theories relating to inconsistency. Five of the six most frequently-used coping strategies neither address the threat’s practical resolution directly nor involve much effort (especially self-distraction), supporting the ‘principle of least effort’—easier responses to reduce tension are favoured more (Abelton & Rosenberg, 1958 as cited in Inglehart, 1991, p.69; Rosenberg & Abelton, 1960 as cited in Inglehart, 1991, p.69). Also, the disengaging coping strategies (i.e. self-distraction, skipping classes, and demotivation for classwork) may be related to ‘shutting out’ or avoiding the tension and situations likely to incite it (Abelton & Rosenberg, 1958 as cited in Inglehart, 1991, p.69; Rosenberg & Abelton, 1960 as cited in Inglehart, 1991, p.69). Yet another replication can be found in the inconsistency between actions and goals not being appraised as upsetting as the disappointing grade scenarios,
thereby reflecting Inglehart’s suggestion that not all agentic inconsistencies elicit tension (1991, p.68).

However, the impact of identity threats were not shown to be significantly associated with aspired level of education, personal value of university studies, nor any other academic attitudes and behaviours; which runs contrary to Petriglieri’s proposition that the importance of an identity being threatened partially predicts greater disturbance (2011, p.648).

**Implications**

Several implications for the general study of identity work are suggested. First, finding moderate to strong associations between sibling influences (i.e. value of university studies and involvement in pre-university or university studies) among threat appraisals, the frequency or habitual use of certain coping strategies, and tendency toward adaptive types of strategies—where parental influences were sometimes not found to be associated—promotes the potential importance of sibling socialization. Regarding an earlier question on whether siblings fill a gap as parental involvement tends to decrease during university: they either increase or decrease together ($\gamma = .444$, $p =.005$). Second, the influence of peers may also be promoted, as both exposure to extra-curricular peers (through participation) and perceived departmental peer value of university studies were strongly associated with more frequently taking a setback more seriously. Perhaps the latter indicates performatively matching the perceived academic value or commitment of departmental peers. Third, institutional factors being so widely associated with coping strategy usage may affirm the potential strength of structural influence (i.e. the cultural/social micro-environment of a department or faculty). Fourth, mental health and
well-being variables were not shown to be associated with appraisals of identity threat responses, limiting the role of (‘abnormal’ or compromised) psychological condition in influencing responses to identity threats, and thereby normalizing actors’ appraisals. Fifth, the impact of mental health and well-being variables on coping strategy usage should be noted. Poorer mental health was associated with habitually or regularly responding to an academic setback with negative self-talk/ideation, demotivation, or fashioning excuses. The frequency and likelihood of reminding oneself of past successes and future goals were negatively associated with and impacted by one’s ability to manage stress and having been diagnosed with mood or anxiety disorders.

Lastly, as the pioneers of identity work studies, Snow and Anderson (1987) and few others used mixed qualitative and quantitative approaches. For example, Snow and Anderson learned that the use of different forms of identity talk among the homeless differed significantly by their length of time on the street (1987). Since, the literature seems to have been predominately qualitative-focused. There are potentially practical advantages (especially for organizations) in knowing what factors influence responses to identity threats, therefore this work attempts to re-stimulate interest in mixed-methods approaches.

Concluding Remarks

Situating relevant psychological theories in a sociological (socio-psychological) framework, this thesis studied how undergraduate students appraise threats to their identities (e.g. as university students, as smart and good university students, as ‘A-students’, as students in their discipline, etc.), how they cope or react to an identity threat (in the form of a below average grade), and the factors that influence the two. Students
use coping strategies to overcome emotional and cognitive disturbances when faced with academic setbacks. While these provide at least momentary relief, it is uncertain for how long these are effective, and what subsequent behaviour, emotional states, and grades these may generate.

My first two research questions asked: How do undergraduate students cope with academic setbacks? and How does the frequency of using these coping strategies differ among undergraduate students? Students employ a mix of adaptive (i.e. addressing the threat itself and its source) and maladaptive coping strategies. The six coping strategies most commonly reported as often to almost always used were motivational self-talk, self-reminder of future goals, devaluing the impact privately, devising an action plan, self-distraction with another activity, and negative self-talk/ideation. In contrast, seeking and utilizing support services, skipping subsequent classes, and indulging externalized attributions were among the seldom to never used coping strategies.

My third research question asked: How distressing are academic setbacks as identity-threats? Below average grades on quizzes, tests, assignments, exams, and final grades were generally regarded as more emotionally distressing than acting discordantly with one’s goals. A slight majority found below average grades significantly to extremely distressing, regardless of the assessment type. However, approximately between a quarter and a third of respondents found those identity threats minimally to somewhat distressing.

Finally, my fourth research question asked: What kinds of factors (e.g. bio/demographical, social, institutional, psychological, etc.) contribute to a student’s a) pattern of using a coping strategy, and b) appraisal of how distressing an academic
setback is? Generally, student behaviours and attitudes variables were the most widely associated with the frequency of different coping strategies, followed by well-being/mental health, and institutional factors. Whether or not a student regularly or habitually uses the six most frequently used coping strategies (i.e. motivational self-talk, self-reminder of future goals, etc.) as part of their repertoire was most strongly associated to mental health/well-being variables such as having been diagnosed with anxiety or mood disorders in one’s lifetime or in the recent year, along with one’s faith in instructors grading fairly.

As the coping strategies most reported as seldom to never used, seeking and utilizing support services were not found to be significantly associated with perceived or experienced effectiveness. Fortunately, being aware of available academic or language support services greatly reduced the odds of a student habitually becoming demotivated from coursework. Additionally, consulting professors, seeking or utilizing services were strongly associated with attending class more frequently. This may mean that their presence in class inspires comfort to seek and consult these supports.

Student behaviours and attitudes as well as social influences were associated with all identity threat appraisals, while well-being/mental health variables were not. Greater seniority in degree was moderately associated with lower identity threat ratings, perhaps suggesting students develop their identity/narrative work’s effectiveness through experience or as they mature.

Although I hoped to offer more at this time, a few preliminary insights for educators and support staff/administrators are outlined in Table 13.
Table 13.

**Preliminary Insights/Recommendations for Professors and Support Staff**

| Professors | a) Lower-year students (i.e. first and second year) students tend to be more sensitive to academic setbacks than upper year—educators teaching first or second year courses, consider helping students manage their expectations.  
b) Improving the perception of teaching assistants grading fairly may reduce student complaints directed towards professors.  
c) Reinforce the importance of completing readings to maintain engagement with your course.  
d) The students who appear the keenest may feel the most slighted by or bitter towards their professors for receiving disappointing grades. |
| Support Staff | a) Students with poor mental health or mental health conditions are more at-risk of disengaging from course activities—continue promoting services and self-mental health literacy.  
b) Lower year students tend to be more sensitive than upper year students to academic setbacks. |
| Both | a) Promote academic and language support services |

Further courses of inquiry should expand the sample size and include a range of departments, faculties, and/or universities to better understand institutional or micro-environment influences (as these were widely associated with the outcome variables), investigate the association between threat appraisal and coping response used, explore any associations between the grade-weight of assessments and their appraisal as setbacks, and investigate the role of siblings in socializing coping strategy choices. Significant associations were found among the independent variables (e.g. demographics, social influences, and student attitudes and behaviours), but were not included here due to being outside the thesis’ scope. Sampling graduate students would be an interesting direction, since even established academics contend with identity threats often (Knights & Clarke 2014).
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https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508807084488


Appendix A
Study Introduction for Class Visits

Fred Langshaw’s Master’s Thesis
Undergraduate Coping Survey
Quick Fact Sheet

WHAT

An online survey targeted to undergraduate students at Queen’s University, to examine how they cope with disappointing grades and academic performance. It forms a large part of Fred’s Master’s in Sociology Thesis.

SAMPLING

Student email addresses were provided from some of your professors, and by the second week of February, 200 of these students will be randomly selected to participate. If selected, you will receive a recruitment email and a link to the survey hosted on Qualtrics.com (the Informed Consent document will be provided on the second page, before starting the survey). It will be ready to start.

DURATION

It is designed to take 10-20 minutes! The survey is planned to end by the first week of April. A reminder may be given 2 weeks before the survey closes and 1 week before it closes.

COMPENSATION

When you complete the questionnaire and submit your answers, you will be redirected to another page to enter yourself into a draw to win one of ten $25 Starbucks gift cards. Your email address cannot be connected to your survey answers.

CONTACT

Students are not required to contact Fred Langshaw. However, if they have questions or issues, they can contact him at 16fkl@queensu.ca.
Appendix B
Recruitment Email

Dear Undergraduate Student,

You are receiving this letter to inform you about a Master’s Thesis study in Sociology, and to request your participation. Your professor has introduced the study to your class and has granted access to your class’ email addresses. You have been randomly selected to participate.

This pilot study is designed to examine the ways undergraduate students cope with academic setbacks, and how parental, peer, and institutional influences on attitudes toward education predispose students toward certain types of coping strategies (e.g. making a pragmatic plan, skipping classes, disinterest, etc.). This stage of the study involves an anonymous online questionnaire intended to span 10 to 20 minutes.

The study is being led by Frederick Langshaw (16fkl@queensu.ca), under the supervision of Dr. Annette Burfoot (burfoota@queensu.ca) from the Department of Sociology.

Respondents who complete and submit the questionnaire will be instructed to enroll themselves in a draw to win one of ten $25 Starbucks gift-cards.

Please refer to the letter of information and consent form for further details.

You may access the survey at: https://queensu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6V7fHk0ZuXFQZpi

Kind Regards,

Fred Langshaw

Master’s of Arts Student
Department of Sociology
Queen’s University
Appendix C
Research Ethics Board Clearance

November 10, 2017

Mr. Frederick Langshaw
Master’s Student
Department of Sociology
Queen’s University
Kingston, ON, K7L 3N6

GREB Ref #: GSOC-161-17; TRAQ # 6022100
Title: "GSOC-161-17 Ego-Salvaging Techniques Among University Undergraduate Students (Working Title)"

Dear Mr. Langshaw:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GSOC-161-17 Ego-Salvaging Techniques Among University Undergraduate Students (Working Title)" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS 2 (2014)) and Queen's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Article 6.14) and Standard Operating Procedures (405.001), your project has been cleared for one year. You are reminded of your obligation to submit an annual renewal form prior to the annual renewal due date (access this form at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Annual Renewal/Closure Form for Cleared Studies"). Please note that when your research project is completed, you need to submit an Annual Renewal/Closure Form in Romeo/traq indicating that the project is 'completed' so that the file can be closed. This should be submitted at the time of completion; there is no need to wait until the annual renewal due date.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Adverse Event Form"). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example, you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To submit an amendment form, access the application by at http://www.queensu.ca/traq/signon.html; click on "Events"; under "Create New Event" click on "General Research Ethics Board Request for the Amendment of Approved Studies". Once submitted, these changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Ms. Gail Irving, at the Office of Research Services for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, Ph.D.
Interim Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c: Dr. Annette Burlott, Supervisor
   Dr. David Murakami Wood, Chair, Unit REB
   Ms. Michelle Underhill, Dept. Admin.
Appendix D
Survey Questions

Note: Page breaks have been removed. Survey logic is highlighted in blue and grey.

**Start of Block: Basic Demographic**

Q3 What is your age? _____

Q4 How do you self-identify, in terms of gender?
  - Male
  - Female
  - I do not identify within the gender binary (You may indicate your gender in the text box if you like)
  - Other (Please specify): ____________________________________________
  - Prefer not to answer

Q62 What language are you best at communicating in?
  - English
  - French
  - I am English and French bilingual
  - Other (Please specify): ____________________________________________

Q5 What is your citizenship status?
  - Canadian Citizen
  - Permanent Resident of Canada
  - Citizen from another country with a student visa or non-immigration visa
  - Exchange student (typically for 1-2 semesters, and where a Study Permit is required)
  - Student refugee
  - Other (Please use text box to specify) ____________________________________________

**Display This Question: If Q5 = Other (Please use text box to specify)**

Q63 Please indicate your citizenship status if you wish: ____________________________________________

Q6 Are you:
  - Mixed-Race
  - White
  - North American Indian
  - Metis
  - Inuit
  - Chinese
  - South Asian (e.g. Pakistani, East Indian, Sri Lankan, etc.)
  - Black
  - Filipino
  - Latin American
  - South East Asian (e.g. Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese, etc.)
  - West Asian (e.g. Iranian, Afghani, etc.)
Q7 Are you pursuing your first university degree?
- Yes
- No

Q8 What is your current year of study?
- First
- Second
- Third
- Fourth
- Fifth or more

Q22 Which department is your Major from (e.g. Sociology, Geography, Psychology, etc.)? Please state it in the first text box below. If you are currently in a Medial (AKA Double Major), please state one department in the first text box and the other in the second text box.
- Major: _______________________________
- Second Major in your Medial (if applicable): ______________________________________
- Undeclared major (i.e. "I don't have one yet") [Mutually Exclusive Option]

Q9 Which of the following best indicates your usual student status at Queen’s University?
- Part-time
- Full-time

Q10 What is the highest level of education you expect to complete?
- Some university but less than Bachelor's
- Bachelor's
- Graduate Diploma/Graduate Certificate
- Master's
- PhD or Professional Degree

Q11 What would you estimate your current GPA to be nearest?
- 4.3(A+)
- 4.0(A)
- 3.7(A-)
- 3.3(B+)
- 3.0(B)
- 2.7(B-)
Start of Block: Socialization Agents

Q12 What socioeconomic level best describes your permanent household (i.e. the home where you were raised)?
  o Poverty line or below
  o Lower class
  o Lower-Middle Class
  o Middle class
  o Upper-Middle class
  o Upper class

Q13 What is the highest level of educational attainment of your most educated parent (or guardian, if applicable)?
  o Unfinished high school or less
  o High school or equivalent
  o CEGEP (for Quebec residents), College, or Trade School
  o Bachelor's
  o Graduate Diploma/Graduate Certificate
  o Master's
  o PhD, Professional degree, or Post-Doctoral

Q15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very little</th>
<th>Little</th>
<th>Moderately involved</th>
<th>Highly</th>
<th>Very highly</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall, how highly do your parents value post-secondary education?</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not involved</th>
<th>Minimally involved</th>
<th>Moderately involved</th>
<th>Greatly involved</th>
<th>Too involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall, how would you rate your parents’ level of involvement in your studies <strong>BEFORE</strong> university (e.g. helping, encouraging, etc.)?</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, how would you rate your parents’ level of involvement in your studies <strong>DURING</strong> university?</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q16 Do you have siblings?
  o Yes
  o No
### Display This Question: If Q16 = Yes

**Q17**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall, how involved were your siblings in your studies <strong>BEFORE</strong> university (e.g. helping, encouraging, etc.)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall, how involved are your siblings in your studies <strong>DURING</strong> university?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Display This Question: If Q16 = Yes

**Q18**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How highly do your siblings value post-secondary education?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q19**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall, how involved are your <strong>friends and peers</strong> in YOUR university education (e.g. helping, encouraging, sharing notes, etc.)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q20**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much do you think most of your <strong>friends</strong> value post-secondary education?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**If Q22 Major: Is Not Empty**

**And Q22 is not Undeclared major (i.e. "I don’t have one yet")**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much do you think most of the <strong>peers</strong> in [Q22 Major input] value their university education?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**If Q22 Medial Is Not Empty**

**And Q22 is not Undeclared major (i.e. "I don’t have one yet")**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much do you think most of the <strong>peers</strong> in [Q22 Medial input] value their university education?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q23 Which of the following extracurricular activities are you a part of? Select all that apply. **If none of these apply, select None.**
- Fraternity/sorority
- Varsity athletic club/team
- Academic group (e.g. study group, research group, paper-writing group, etc.)
- Student government/administration
- Religious club on campus
- Student job on campus
- Student activist group
- Other type of student organization (Specify): ______________________________________________
- None [Mutually Exclusive Option]

Skip To: End of Block If Q23 = None

Q24

| How much would you say most of the peers you spend time with in these extracurricular activities value their university education? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Very little | Little | Moderately | Highly | Very highly | Don't know |
| o | o | o | o | o | o |

Start of Block: Mental Health and Emotions

Q26 Have you ever been officially diagnosed with an **anxiety disorder** (i.e. by a physical or mental health professional)? (Note: if you have only suspected you may have one, another question below will ask this)
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

Display This Question: If Q26 = Yes

Q27 In the last 12 months have you been officially diagnosed with an **anxiety disorder**?
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

Q28 In the last 12 months, have you suffered from any **anxiety-symptoms** (i.e. seemingly uncontrollable stress, panic-attacks, feelings of dread, extreme discomfort/nervousness)?
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

Q29 Have you ever been officially diagnosed with a **mood disorder** (i.e. depression, bipolar)?
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer
Q30 In the last 12 months, have you been officially diagnosed with a mood disorder (i.e. depression, bipolar)?
  o Yes
  o No
  o Prefer not to answer

Q31 In the last 12 months, have you suffered from any depression or bipolar-symptoms (i.e. severe hopelessness, long-lasting sadness, extremely low motivation, highly varying mood-swings, extreme feelings of joy followed by extreme sadness)?
  o Yes
  o No
  o Prefer not to answer

Q32

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely poor</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q33

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely poor</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Very good</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q34

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Stressed</th>
<th>Extremely stressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q35

If Q22 Major: Is Not Empty
How much do you feel you belong in [Q22 Major input]?
  o Not at all
  o Slightly
  o Moderately
  o Mostly
  o Absolutely

If Q22 Medial: Is Not Empty
How much do you feel you belong in [Q22 Medial input]?
  o Not at all
  o Slightly
  o Moderately
  o Mostly
  o Absolutely
Q36

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much do you feel you belong in university?</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Absolutely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much do you feel you belong at Queen's University?</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>Slightly</td>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>Mostly</td>
<td>Absolutely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Start of Block: Learning Difficulties

Q38 Which kinds of disabilities or impairments have you been diagnosed with? Select all that apply. If you do not have any, select None. If you prefer not to answer, please select Prefer not to answer.

☐ A sensory impairment (e.g. vision or hearing)
☐ A mobility impairment
☐ A learning disability (e.g. ADHD, dyslexia, etc.)
☐ A mental health disorder
☐ A disability or impairment not listed (Please indicate if you wish): _____________________________
☐ None [Mutually Exclusive Option]
☐ Prefer not to answer [Mutually Exclusive Option]

Display This Question: If Q38 = None
Or Q38 = Prefer not to answer

Q39 If you have not been diagnosed with a learning impairment, do you strongly suspect you might have one?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Prefer not to answer

Display This Question: If Q39 was not answered with: No

Q40

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you rate the impact of your disabilities and/or learning impairments (whether diagnosed or suspected) on your learning experiences?</th>
<th>Very little</th>
<th>Little</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Great</th>
<th>Extreme</th>
<th>Prefer not to answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Start of Block: Institutional Support

Q42

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much have you used Queen's academic/language support programs (e.g. QSuccess, BounceBack, tutoring, Writing Centre, ESL services)?</th>
<th>Never and I don't know about them</th>
<th>Never but I know about them</th>
<th>Little</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Much</th>
<th>Very much</th>
<th>Prefer not to answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Q43 Please rate the following statements regarding Queen's academic/language support programs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completely disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Completely agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In my experience,** Queen's academic support programs have been helpful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q42 was not answered with: Never but I know about them And Q42 was not answered with: Prefer not to answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In my experience, Queen's academic support programs have been accessible and dependable. Overall, Queen's seems like it has accessible academic support programs. Overall, Queen's seems like it has reliable academic support programs. Overall, I would recommend Queen's academic support programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In my experience,** Queen's academic support programs have been helpful.

<table>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In my experience,** Queen's academic support programs have been accessible and dependable.

Overall, Queen's seems like it has accessible academic support programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q42 was not answered with: Never but I know about them And Q42 was not answered with: Prefer not to answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In my experience, Queen's academic support programs have been helpful. Overall, Queen's seems like it has accessible academic support programs. Overall, Queen's seems like it has reliable academic support programs. Overall, I would recommend Queen's academic support programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, Queen's seems like it has accessible academic support programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q42 was not answered with: Never but I know about them And Q42 was not answered with: Prefer not to answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In my experience, Queen's academic support programs have been helpful. Overall, Queen's seems like it has accessible academic support programs. Overall, Queen's seems like it has reliable academic support programs. Overall, I would recommend Queen's academic support programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, Queen's seems like it has reliable academic support programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q42 was not answered with: Never but I know about them And Q42 was not answered with: Prefer not to answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In my experience, Queen's academic support programs have been helpful. Overall, Queen's seems like it has accessible academic support programs. Overall, Queen's seems like it has reliable academic support programs. Overall, I would recommend Queen's academic support programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, I would recommend Queen's academic support programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q42 was not answered with: Never but I know about them And Q42 was not answered with: Prefer not to answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In my experience, Queen's academic support programs have been helpful. Overall, Queen's seems like it has accessible academic support programs. Overall, Queen's seems like it has reliable academic support programs. Overall, I would recommend Queen's academic support programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q44

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much have you used Queen's mental health support (e.g. counselling, peer mentoring, psychiatry, crisis-counselling, etc.)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Skip To:** End of Block If Q44 = How much have you used Queen's mental health support (e.g. counselling, peer mentoring, psychiatry, crisis-counselling, etc.)?
Q45 Please rate the following statements regarding Queen's mental health support programs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Completely disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Completely agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In my experience</strong>, Queen's mental health support programs have been helpful.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In my experience</strong>, Queen's mental health support programs have been accessible.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In my experience</strong>, Queen's mental health support programs have been reliable.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen's mental health support programs meet my mental health needs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, Queen's seems like it has available mental health support programs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, Queen's seems like it has reliable mental health support programs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, I would recommend Queen's mental health support programs.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Start of Block: Experiences with Teaching Staff and Department

Display This Question: If Q22 Major: Is Not Empty

And Q22 was not answered with: Undeclared major (i.e. "I don't have one yet")

Q47 What GPA do you believe [Q22 Major input] really expects from its students?
   - 4.3(A+)
   - 4.0(A)
   - 3.7(A-)
   - 3.3(B+)
   - 3.0(B)
   - 2.7(B-)
   - 2.3(C+)
   - 2.0(C) or lower

Display This Question: If Q22 Medial: Is Not Empty

And Q22 was not answered with: Undeclared major (i.e. "I don't have one yet")

Q68 What GPA do you believe [Q22 Medial input] really expects from its students?
   - 4.3(A+)
   - 4.0(A)
   - 3.7(A-)
   - 3.3(B+)
   - 3.0(B)
   - 2.7(B-)
   - 2.3(C+)
   - 2.0(C) or lower

Display This Question: If a neither a major nor medial were named in Q22

Q69 What GPA do you believe your department really expects from its students?
   - 4.3(A+)
   - 4.0(A)
   - 3.7(A-)
   - 3.3(B+)
   - 3.0(B)
   - 2.7(B-)
   - 2.3(C+)
   - 2.0(C) or lower

Q64 Have you ever had Teaching Assistants (TAs) in your courses at Queen's University?
   - Yes
   - No
Q48 Please rate the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Completely disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Completely agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My instructors/professors have been/are satisfactorily available for me to ask questions, etc.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teaching assistants have been/are satisfactorily available for me to ask questions, etc.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My instructors/professors grade and have graded me fairly.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teaching assistants grade and have graded me fairly.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructions for assessments (e.g. assignments, quizzes, tests, etc.) have been/are clear.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The requirements for how to do well in my courses have been/are clear.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q49 Which of the following extracurricular academic and professional development activities are you interested in? Select all that apply.

- None [Mutually Exclusive Option]
- Internship/Co-op
- Working with a faculty member on a project
- Community projects related to my course work
- Study groups
- Other (Please specify): ________________________________________________

Q50 Which of the following extracurricular academic and professional development activities are you participating in? Select all that apply.

- None [Mutually exclusive Option]
- Internship/Co-op
- Working with a faculty member on a project
- Community projects related to my course work
- Study groups
- Other (Please specify): ________________________________________________
**Q51 Please rate the following statements:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Completely disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Completely agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall, my course activities (e.g. lectures, tutorials, other course activities) have been engaging (i.e. stimulating, inspiring).</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, I feel my course activities have felt worthwhile.</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, I find enjoyment in doing my coursework.</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Start of Block: Academic Setbacks**

**Q52 Please rate how upsetting the following events are to you, typically:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Minimally</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Significantly enough</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your actions and choices have contradicted your academic goals (i.e. skipping classes, not handing-in assignments, preparing less than you intended, etc.).</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have received a below average quiz grade.</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have received a below average test grade.</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have received a below average exam grade.</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have received a below average assignment grade.</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have received a below average final grade for a course.</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Start of Block: Coping Strategies

Please consider the following as immediate reactions.

Q54 How often do you do the following when you receive a disappointing grade or are disappointed in your academic performance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Almost always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act like you care <strong>less</strong> about your studies when around peers, friends, and/or your extracurricular co-members.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act like you care <strong>more</strong> about your studies when around peers, friends, and/or your extra-curricular co-members.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actively try to downplay the impact to yourself.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell yourself you can do better or otherwise 'pump' yourself back up.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have an excuse for why it happened (i.e. you had a bad day or had an inconvenience, preventing you from doing your best).</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult the instructor/professor.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make an action plan to do better.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think the <strong>assessment</strong> was unfair (e.g. test questions, assignment instructions, etc.).</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think the <strong>instructor/professor</strong> was unfair.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remind yourself of <strong>past successes</strong>.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remind yourself of <strong>future goals</strong>.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skip the next class or more for that course</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seek</strong> a Queen's support service.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Utilize</strong> a Queen's support service.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distract yourself with another activity.</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think negative thoughts about yourself</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become less motivated to do future work in that course</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q60 What are other things you often do to help yourself feel better about a disappointing grade or academic performance? Please describe them below.

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

Start of Block: Student Behaviour and Attitudes

Q55 How much do you value your university studies?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Little</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Highly</th>
<th>Very highly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How much do you value your university studies?</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q56 How often do you do the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Almost always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attend classes.</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete <strong>coursework</strong> on time.</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete <strong>readings</strong> on time</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach out to a course's instructor/professor or teaching assistant for clarification, etc.</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read or write beyond what is required (e.g. reading additional material, writing highly inspired and exceptional work).</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy challenging yourself with course material or coursework.</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Start of Block: Confirm Submission

Q59 You have reached the end of the questionnaire. Are you ready to submit your responses? (Note: They cannot be changed after this. After clicking continue, please wait to be automatically redirected to the draw)

- I am ready to submit my responses.
**Appendix E**
**Alternate Tables**

Table 8-b.

Summary of Significant Associations with Coping Strategies’ Frequency of Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping Strategy</th>
<th>Strongest Association (+/- direction)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking a setback more seriously around friends/peers</td>
<td>Major peers’ value of education (+) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational self-talk</td>
<td>Perception of TAs grading fairly (-) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consulting the Instructor</td>
<td>Freq. of attendance (+) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making an Action Plan</td>
<td>Freq. of completing coursework on time (+) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reminder of Past Success</td>
<td>Parental involvement pre-university (+) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reminder of Future Goals</td>
<td>Sibling involvement during university (+) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking an On-Campus Support</td>
<td>Being traditional UG age (n/a) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using an On-Campus Support</td>
<td>Freq. of attendance (+) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a setback less seriously around friends/peers</td>
<td>Sibling value of post-secondary education (+) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative self-talk/ideation</td>
<td>Ability to manage moods (-) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming the instructor</td>
<td>Freq. of completing coursework on time (+) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blaming the assessment</td>
<td>Perception of TAs grading fairly (-) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making excuses</td>
<td>Freq. of reaching out to instructor for clarification (-) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demotivation</td>
<td>Freq. of completing coursework on time (-) *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-distraction</td>
<td>Freq. of completing coursework on time (-) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipping subsequent session(s)</td>
<td>Freq. of attending classes (-) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downplaying impact privately</td>
<td>Freq. of engaging beyond requirements (-) *</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: +: both variables increase or decrease together; 
-: one variable increases as the other decreases (or vice-versa); 
Freq.: frequency; 
TA: teaching assistant; 
*p< .05, **p< .01, ***p<.001
### Alternate Tables (cont’d)

Table 11-b.

Likelihood of a Coping Strategy’s Regular Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Odds</th>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regularly using self-reminders of past successes</td>
<td>Much less likely for students</td>
<td>Who had been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in their lifetime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly using self-reminders of future goals</td>
<td>Much less likely for students</td>
<td>Who had been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in their lifetime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly becoming demotivated from future coursework</td>
<td>Much more likely for students</td>
<td>Who had been diagnosed with a mood disorder in their lifetime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regularly engaging in self-distraction</td>
<td>Progressively less likely for students</td>
<td>Who had been diagnosed with a mood disorder in the last year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Who were aware of on-campus academic/language support services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>For every increase in typical frequency of completing readings on time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>