Organizational identification: Extending our understanding of social identities through social networks

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Summary

Although organizational identification is founded on social identity and symbolic interactionist theories, current theories emphasize a social identity whereby organizational members categorize themselves and others based on roles and membership in an organization or work unit. In contrast, symbolic interactionism, which resides in interpersonal relationships, is rarely theorized or empirically assessed in studies of organizational identification. We use survey data collected at an academic institution to explore how the strength and structure of an individual’s social network both directly influence organizational identification as well as moderates the relation between social identity, or categorical, antecedents and organizational identification. Our results show that the size of an individual’s network as well as the interaction between relationship strength and prestige better explain organizational identification than do antecedents based solely on categorization and social comparison processes. Thus, networks of relationships, which have been a foundational but much neglected premise and process for organizational identification, are brought back into a theory of organizational identification. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Introduction

Organizational identification—the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992)—among members is essential to the success of many organizations (Pratt, 1998). For example, alumni identification with their alma mater generates financial contributions and disseminates information to potential students about the institution (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). In Direct Selling Organizations (DSOs) such as Amway Corporation, Mary Kay, and the Longaberger Company, employee identification translates into how they represent products and services to others (Biggart, 1989; Pratt, 2000). Consumer product firms such as Procter & Gamble draw upon both current and ex-employee identification to serve as sources of innovations, referrals, and recruitment (Ellison, 2003). Organizational identification is positively related to individuals’ affective organizational commitment, job and organizational satisfaction, job involvement, organizational loyalty,
occupational and work group attachment and extra-role behavior, and negatively related to individuals’ intent to leave the organization (Adler & Adler, 1988; O’Reily & Chatman, 1986; Riketta, 2005; Riketta & Van Dick, 2005). Therefore, extending our understanding of the antecedents to and processes for engendering identification among organization members is an important area for further study.

Current research in organizational identification is anchored in and builds upon social identity theory whereby individuals classify themselves and others into various social categories such as organizational membership, gender, race, age cohort, or religious affiliation and view their membership in particular groups based on social roles and role relationships (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Scholars have made significant contributions to organizational identification by illuminating different identity orientations that link an individual’s identity with others: self (e.g., I belong to a prestigious organization), relational (e.g., my boss develops his/her employees) and collective (e.g., my organization improves its community) (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Brickson, 2005; Flynn, 2005; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

Although scholars acknowledge the “personal bonds of attachment” in constructing identity, and thus highlight the importance of social relations in organizational identification (Brickson, 2005; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), these relations remain, by and large, an act of abstract categorization by individuals in their studies, suggesting that “identification can exist in the absence of interpersonal interaction and group cohesion” (Cardador & Pratt, 2006: p. 175; Friedkin, 2004: p. 414). Even if studies focus on relationships, they often use fictional vignettes and focus on roles such as supplier and customer rather than measuring interpersonal relationships (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Brickson, 2005). Few contemporary studies examine the social relations that shape and re-shape the self through communication and feedback (important exceptions include Flynn (2005), Pratt (2000), and Smidts, Pruyn, & van Riel (2001)). The dearth of research examining social relations is particularly puzzling because the earliest scholarly explorations of organizational identification emphasized the importance of communication and feedback among individuals (e.g., Burke, 1950/1969; Cheney, 1983a, 1983b; Kauffman, 1960; Simon, 1945/1976; Simon & March, 1958). Since few scholars measure the dyadic and network properties of social relationships and how these influence individuals’ organizational identification, the role of social relations remains an important black box in organizational identification.

Our goal and contribution is to examine the social relationships that surround an individual. More specifically, we assess how dyadic and structural properties of social networks directly influence an individual’s level of organizational identification as well as whether these network properties moderate the relationship between categorical antecedents and organizational identification. By introducing a social networks perspective, we extend our understanding of categorical antecedents to better predict organizational identification.

Social Identity and Social Network Perspectives on Organizational Identification

Social identity theory highlights the categorization and comparison processes that guide individuals’ perception of the organization, such as its prestige or distinctiveness, and stimulate identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Pratt, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, the individual is the level of analysis and focus of measurement. A social network perspective highlights the structure of social
relations that surround an individual (or node), providing communication, information, and feedback to shape an individual’s attitudes and behaviors.

**Social identities: Organizational identification through categorization and membership**

Although numerous antecedents to organizational identification have been explored (see Elsbach, 1999 for review), existing research suggests that individuals’ perception of their organization as distinctive and prestigious are key criteria (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Carmeli, Gilat, & Weisberg, 2006; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Simon, 1945/1976). Since we seek to extend understanding of categorical perspectives on organizational identification by including social networks, we use a replication approach and provide hypotheses about categorization processes to make our assumptions explicit and compare empirically the effects of categorization and social network antecedents on organizational identification. A replication approach is central to establishing the validity and generalizability of prior research findings (Hubbard, Vetter, & Little, 1998).

**Organizational distinctiveness**

Organizational distinctiveness taps into individuals’ need to be unique and do so through memberships in distinctive categories (Brewer, 1991). When an organization becomes “infused with value” (Selznick, 1957), its distinctiveness generates strong loyalties whereby members replace or expand their individual preferences and goals to include those of the organization. These loyalties restrict members’ focus of attention and guide decision making (Kauffman, 1960; Simon, 1945/1976; Simon & March, 1958). For example, Clark (1970) examined three “distinctive” colleges—Antioch, Reed, and Swarthmore—which were founded on charismatic leaders, a unique curriculum, a loyal social base that provided resources (money, students, moral support, and affection) and the creation of an organizational ideology. When organizational leaders make salient and reinforce individuals’ membership in and relationship to a unique group, they often spark strong levels of organizational identification (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Therefore,

**H1a:** Individuals’ perception of their organization as distinctive is positively related to the strength of their organizational identification.

**Organizational prestige**

Individuals identify with groups or organizations partly to enhance their own self-esteem (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Thus, organizational prestige aligns individual and organizational identities through a focus on self (Brickson, 2005), allowing individuals to bask in the reflected glory (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976). Several studies have found organizational prestige to predict members’ organizational identification for a college (Mael & Ashforth, 1992), art museum (Bhattacharya, Rao, & Glynn, 1995), law firms, electronics and media organizations (Carmeli et al., 2006), non-profit, bank, and utility firms (Smidts et al., 2001). Individuals’ perceptions of their organization’s prestige is enhanced and verified through the media (Deephouse, 2000). For U.S. higher educational institutions, the social comparison process is highly

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1 Cardador and Pratt (2006: p. 177) label these as “impersonal”, which means that “identification is not due to social cohesion or strong interpersonal bonds” versus “personal”, which derives from social interactions. We use the term structural rather than personal because network theorists argue the natural unit of analysis is not the individual but the social network or dyadic ties surrounding the individual (Erickson, 1988; Rice & Aydin, 1991; Wellman, 1983).
formalized with numerous ranking and rating guides for applicants, which compare, describe, and rate educational institutions on a variety of dimensions (e.g., U.S. News & World Report, Business Week, Barron’s). When these rankings highlight an organization as among elite providers of uncertain and difficult services, such as education, this referent group signals quality and status through affiliation (Podolny, 1993), enhancing potential and current members’ organizational identification. Therefore,

$$H1b:$$ Individuals’ perception of their organization as prestigious is positively related to the strength of their organizational identification.

Social networks: Organizational identification through relationship strength and structure

The few existing studies that examine the effect of social networks on organizational identification focus on centrality and tend to use qualitative research (see Bullis & Bach, 1991; Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). Social network research has been found to effect attitudes, social cohesion, knowledge transfer, and job performance. Network scholars may focus on either centrality of an actor, examining egonetworks, or the overall structure, examining whole networks (Borgatti & Foster, 2003). We are interested in individuals’ organizational identification and thus focus on egonetworks, using measures important for egonetworks: network size (also called range), relationship strength and density (also called embeddedness) (Borgatti, Jones, & Everett, 1998; Burt, 2000; Granovetter, 1982).

Network size

An individual’s centrality in a social network is measured by the size of their network, or the number of others with which that person interacts, tapping into communication activity (Marsden, 1990: p. 454) and indicating that the individual is “in the thick of things” (Freeman, 1979). An individual with a larger organizational network is in the center of “organizational or identity group affiliation” (Alderfer, 1987; Ibarra, 1993: p. 60). Research has shown that an individual’s centrality in an organization is associated with increased identification with peers, work group and division (Kuhn & Nelson, 2002). Since organizational ties are voluntary, the presence of ties to insiders anchors individuals in attachment, whereas ties to outsiders make other identities more salient and increases exit from the group (McPherson, Popielarz, & Drobnic, 1992). For example, Pratt (2000) found that Amway distributors who dis-identified were more likely to maintain their relations with non-supportive family members and friends, whereas those most committed to Amway focused on relationships that were positive toward Amway. Since larger networks also increase the diversity of attitudes, people, and behaviors (Reagans & McEvily, 2003), it is an individual’s increased claiming of organizational membership and granting of that claim (Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Morrison, 2002), rather than the similarity of attitudes among one’s social network, that strengthens an individual’s identification with an organization. Therefore,

$$H2a:$$ The size of an individual’s organizationally affiliated network is positively related to the strength of their organizational identification.

Relationship strength

Relationship strength is defined by frequency of interaction, duration, and closeness (Granovetter, 1973) and is best indicated by closeness, which measures the emotional intensity of a tie
Tie strength among social actors is a good proxy for and highly correlated with communication (Brass, Butterfield, & Skaggs, 1998; Friedkin, 2004; Reagans, Zuckerman, & McEvily, 2004), connecting the symbolic interactionists’ focus on communication with those of strong ties. In his study of Amway, Pratt (2000: p. 479) highlighted how those distributors with strong mentor-protégé ties tended to have stronger identification with Amway, whereas those distributors who dis-identified “had, at best, distant, or infrequent interaction with their upline [sponsor];” thus stronger affective interpersonal relationships formed with organization-affiliated peers are likely to strengthen an individual’s organizational identification. Therefore,

\[ H2b: \text{The strength of an individual’s relationships with organizationally affiliated peers is positively related to the strength of their organizational identification.} \]

**Network density**

Network density refers to the extent that people in a network know one another (Ibarra, 1996) and reveals how embedded or interconnected an individual’s social network is. Network density facilitates communication, trust, and social support among individuals and reinforces attitudes and perceptions (Bott, 1977; Coleman, 1988; Erickson, 1988; Feld & Carter, 1998; Krackhardt & Porter, 1985). For example, Amway distributors create “family trees” whereby distributors are related to common sponsors who then form, and often substitute for, one’s familial and social relations (Pratt, 2000). Bott (1977) showed how conjugal attitudes were most similar among those who had more closure in their social networks. Networks displaying high closure and cohesiveness are conducive to facilitating a clear social identity (Podolny & Baron, 1997) because that social identity is more easily discerned and individuals who do not conform to it are “corrected” to adapt to the groups’ shared attitude (Bienenstock, Bonacich, & Oliver, 1990). Thus, research suggests that individuals are more likely to adopt and reflect the attitudes of those around them when they have interconnected or dense relations (Bott, 1977; Erickson, 1988; Krackhardt & Porter, 1985). Therefore,

\[ H2c: \text{The density of individuals’ network relationships is positively related to the strength of their organizational identification.} \]

**Interaction of categorical and structural antecedents to organizational identification**

Recently, some organizational scholars have explored theoretically how social structures and categorizations interact to shape actions and construct identities, yet these ideas have not been empirically tested (e.g., Rao, Davis, & Ward, 2000; Scott & Lane, 2000; White, 1992). We seek to examine and compare whether network size, relationship strength and network density moderate the relationship between categorical antecedents and organizational identification.

**Network size**

Network size may moderate the relationship between the categorical antecedents of organizational distinctiveness and organizational prestige with organizational identification because the act of publicly identifying with an organization (e.g., I am a student at X) with a larger number of
others creates commitment (Salancik, 1977). To reduce cognitive dissonance, the person aligns public espousal and private beliefs. Therefore,

\[ H3a: \] The size of an individual’s organizationally affiliated network moderates the relationship between categorical antecedents of organizational distinctiveness and organizational prestige with organizational identification, strengthening a positive relationship.

**Relationship strength**

Relationship strength may moderate the relationship between organizational distinctiveness and organizational prestige with organizational identification because strong relationship ties show greater potential for persuasion and influence (Granovetter, 1982; Krackhardt, 1992; Rogers & Kincaid, 1981). As Cardador and Pratt (2006: p. 180) point out, strong ties influence behavior because “liking is a powerful base of persuasion...[and] these social bonds increase the likelihood that organizationally relevant behaviors will continue and that identification will be facilitated.” Therefore,

\[ H3b: \] The strength of an individual’s organizationally affiliated network moderates the relationship between categorical antecedents of organizational distinctiveness and organizational prestige with organizational identification, strengthening a positive relationship.

**Network density**

Network density may moderate the relationship between organizational distinctiveness and organizational prestige with organizational identification because density or embeddedness reinforces the opinions, perceptions, and attitudes among these social actors through commonly held relationships (e.g., A’s opinion is shared with B through actor C who also knows A). For example, Scott and Lane (2000) cite members of Harley Owners Group (H.O.G.) as being embedded in a “subculture of consumption,” which amplifies these individuals’ identification with Harley-Davidson because dense networks restrict and define with whom members socially compare themselves. Since social actors experience cognitive dissonance when they hold opinions different from those who surround them, they are more likely to bring their attitudes and perceptions into alignment with others (Heider, 1958). In addition, a third party reinforces attitudes and reduces the freedom of a social actor to act and believe in ways contrary to other members (Krackhardt, 1998). Therefore,

\[ H3c: \] The density of an individual’s network moderates the relationship between categorical antecedents of organizational distinctiveness and organizational prestige with organizational identification, strengthening a positive relationship.

**Methods**

**Research site**

We used an egonetwork approach to survey and “enumerate” the local networks (Marsden, 1990: p. 438) surrounding a sample of undergraduate students at a Jesuit institution in the Northeastern United States. The institution has over 8000 undergraduate students, making a roster approach used with whole networks infeasible. In addition, an enumeration method captures the strong ties of emotional closeness and communication that shape identification processes. The institution’s culture and mission focuses on a commitment to intellectual, personal, ethical, and religious development of students, faculty, and staff; uniting academic achievement with service to others. Our collective years of experience on
university wide task forces, strategic planning and activities involving students, administrators, and faculty from various departments led us to conclude that this is a “holographic organization,” where organization members across subunits share a common identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Since seminal work on organizational identification has been conducted at academic institutions (see Mael & Ashforth, 1992), a college setting was appropriate.

Research sample

We began with a pilot questionnaire soliciting information on social networks and activity involvement from a class of seventeen undergraduate students. Seven of the senior students were purposively selected for the pilot interviews based on school (three from management, two from arts and sciences, two from education) and high versus low involvement at the college. During the interview process, we discovered that six of the seven students were legacies, having a parent or sibling who had also attended the college. We used these pilot surveys and interviews to refine a survey instrument.

We distributed self-report questionnaires to 401 undergraduate students; this type of survey is a primary data collection method for social networks (Marsden, 1990). Participation in the study was voluntary and not tied to students’ grade for a course. Survey recipients were assured confidentiality and told that the survey was designed to “gather information related to different aspects of students’ experiences with (Name of College).” A total of 215 surveys were returned, of which 140 were usable, representing a sample response rate of 34.9 percent. We conducted t-tests on organizational identification to see if those students who completely and accurately filled out the survey differed from those students who did not; there were no significant differences in the organizational identification between these two groups ($t = 0.38, p = 0.71$). The student respondents reflected an approximately equal distribution of gender (53 percent male; 47 percent female) and tenure in the organization (24 percent freshmen; 26 percent sophomores; 28 percent juniors; 22 percent seniors), but an unequal distribution across schools (83 percent management versus 17 percent arts and sciences or education). Thus, we use school as a control variable in our analysis.

Variable measures

Organizational identification
Organizational identification, the dependent variable, was measured with a six-item Likert-type scale previously used by Mael and Ashforth (1992) (see Appendix 1). The coefficient \( \alpha \) of 0.79 is respectable (DeVellis, 1991).

Social identity antecedents
We examined two categorical antecedents of organizational identification derived from social identity theory: organizational distinctiveness and organizational prestige.

Organizational distinctiveness
Organizational distinctiveness was measured by a seven-item Likert-type scale developed for this study (see Appendix 1). Since the organizational distinctiveness scale used in Mael and Ashforth (1992) was created in relation to a specific organization, Dr. Fred Mael advised the authors to develop a distinctiveness scale fitting the institution under current study (personal communication). The scale items were devised through preliminary interviews with, and pilot tested on, a small sample of students at the institution. This scale assessed respondents’ perceptions regarding the uniqueness of the college’s program offerings, service to others, religion and development of the whole person in comparison to
other schools considered to be most competitive. Thus, organizational distinctiveness corresponds with Brickson’s (2005) notion of a collective identity (serving others and the community). The coefficient \( \alpha \) was 0.74 which is respectable (DeVellis, 1991).

**Organizational prestige**

Organizational prestige, indicating the “degree to which the institution is well regarded both in absolute and comparative terms,” was measured by selecting six relevant items from a perceived organizational prestige scale used by Mael and Ashforth (1992) (see Appendix 1). The coefficient \( \alpha \) was 0.68, which is considered acceptable (DeVellis, 1991). Previous research exploring the relationship between organizational prestige and identification has reported a comparable organizational prestige scale \( \alpha \) of 0.69 (Bhattacharya et al., 1995).

To ensure sufficient distinction among the dependent and categorical variables, we used LISREL 8.80 (Joreskog & Sobom, 2006) to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on organizational identification, organizational distinctiveness, and organizational prestige. We hypothesized and tested a three-factor model where the indicator and latent variables were set to correlate at 1.0. Stemming from our theoretical understanding of the indicator variables and suggestion by the LISREL program, we added error covariance terms to three pairs of organizational distinctiveness errors. Specifically, a focus on school-specific programs and religion creates a common shared variance with these unmeasured sub-dimensions that supports the inclusion of error covariance terms. Fit indices suggest that our revised hypothesized model fit the data well (\( x^2 = 192.23, df = 146, p < 0.01; \) \( \text{CFI} = 0.96; \) \( \text{RMSEA} = 0.04 \)). These fit indices conform to acceptable standards (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Taylor & Pastor, 2007; Yukl, Chavez, & Seifert, 2005), and therefore present evidence for the discriminant validity among organizational identification, organizational distinctiveness, and organizational prestige constructs.

**Social network antecedents**

We examined two general network characteristics, network size and density, and one aspect of dyadic relations, relationship strength.

**Network size**

Network size, also called range or degree centrality, is the total number of college-affiliated alters listed in a student’s network (Campbell, Marsden, & Hurlbert, 1986; Ibarra, 1995). Three name-generator questions were used to help respondents identify members of their advice, friendship, and developmental networks. More specifically, respondents were asked to identify: “the people with whom you have discussed important work or academic matters,” “closest friends...those people with whom you most like to spend your free time or with whom you would be most likely to discuss a personal dilemma,” and “those people who have contributed most significantly to your personal development during your college years.” Network size was determined by aggregating all network alters that attended, were an alumnus of, or worked at the college attended by the student. As typical in network studies, we combined these dimensions into one measure because the measures of centrality across types of networks are highly correlated (Mossholder, Settoon, & Henagan, 2005).

**Relationship strength**

Relationship strength examined the closeness of organizationally affiliated peer ties between ego and each alter, using a one-item Likert-type scale. Closeness serves as a more accurate indicator of tie strength than either duration of relationship or frequency of contact with alter (Ibarra, 1996; Marsden & Campbell, 1984). Specifically, for each person identified as part of respondents’ advice, friendship, and developmental networks, respondents were asked to “indicate the closeness of your relationship with
them by placing an “X” in one of the boxes marked Very Close, Close, Not Very Close, Distant.” The average closeness between each respondent and his or her organizationally affiliated peers was calculated and used.

Network density
Network density represents the extent to which people in a network know one another or are interconnected (Ibarra, 1996) and the respondent was asked to identify which alters they listed knew one another. We calculated density by dividing the number of actual relationships among alters by the maximum number of possible relationships among alters (Ibarra, 1996; Marsden, 1990). For dichotomous relationships, density represented the proportion of connections present relative to those possible (Marsden, 1990).

Control variables
Legacy status, choice, gender, tenure, and school were the control variables in this study.

Legacy status
Legacy status captures the overlap of familial ties and organizational ties for an individual. Respondents were asked to “Please list each relative that has attended (Name of College) (ex. father, mother, sister, brother, uncle, aunt, cousin, grandparent).” The variable was coded 1 if the respondent had/has any family members who attended the college, and coded 0 for no family members that attended the college.

Choice
Choice tapped into how free students were in choosing the college they attended. Research indicates that individuals who have more freedom to choose and make their choices public are more likely to identify with and be committed toward their choice (Salancik, 1977). Students were asked to respond to the statement “It was completely my decision to attend (Name of College)” using a five-point Likert scale identifying strong disagreement to strong agreement.

Gender
Gender, a dichotomous variable, was included as a control because of the differing importance that men and women place on relationships with others (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). We found no differences between our sample and the university’s population ($\chi^2 = 1.08$ with 1df, $p = 0.25$).

Tenure
Tenure controlled for the amount of time a student was actively involved with the organization, which serves as a positive antecedent to organizational identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Tenure was measured on a four-point scale where a score of one indicated freshman standing and a score of four indicated senior standing. We tested for differences between our sample and the university’s population and found no significant differences ($\chi^2 = 0.81$ with 3 df, $p = 0.25$).

School
School was a dichotomous variable assessing management versus non-management school since we sampled more management students relative to the student population; however, we found no difference between management and non-management students on their level of organizational identification using $t$-tests with unequal samples sizes ($t = -0.50$, $p = 0.62$).

We coded our measures to follow the same direction, where 1 is the lowest value (very weak, distant, strongly disagree) and 5 the highest value (very strong, very close, strongly agree).
We collected additional data from University administrators to assess the social perceptions of students toward the institution: were they positive or negative? This helps to ensure that our interpretations of the statistical results accurately capture the dynamics of the students’ relationship to the university and their collective values and attitudes. The university performs senior surveys each year and generously granted us access to these surveys for the time immediately before and after our study: 2001, 2003, 2005, and 2007. This extensive survey has a very high participation rate and asks a myriad of questions about the students’ attitudes toward and perceptions of their experience at the university. The survey data suggests that assuming a positive attitude toward the University in dense relations is reasonable. We summarize the key data relevant to aiding us in interpreting our results in Table 1.

Table 1. University senior survey: Select items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2007</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response rate</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>95.1%</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
<td>77.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of respondents</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2054</td>
<td>1741</td>
<td>1693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally or very satisfied with education</td>
<td>89.5%</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
<td>88.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally or very dissatisfied with education</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would choose institution again:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Definitely would/Probably would</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>72.8%</td>
<td>87.8%</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would choose institution again:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Definitely not/ Probably not</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would choose institution again:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Maybe</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career considerations: essential/very important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social recognition and status</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable, secure future</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity and initiative</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
<td>79.8%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting daily work</td>
<td>93.5%</td>
<td>93.2%</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessing social perceptions toward institution: Senior surveys

We collected additional data from University administrators to assess the social perceptions of students toward the institution: were they positive or negative? This helps to ensure that our interpretations of the statistical results accurately capture the dynamics of the students’ relationship to the university and their collective values and attitudes. The university performs senior surveys each year and generously granted us access to these surveys for the time immediately before and after our study: 2001, 2003, 2005, and 2007. This extensive survey has a very high participation rate and asks a myriad of questions about the students’ attitudes toward and perceptions of their experience at the university. The survey data suggests that assuming a positive attitude toward the University in dense relations is reasonable. We summarize the key data relevant to aiding us in interpreting our results in Table 1.

Results

Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the variables used in this study. Coefficient as are shown on the diagonal for each multiple-item measure.

We tested our hypotheses using hierarchical multiple regression analysis (see Table 3) and tested for multicollinearity using Tolerance and VIF statistics. The interaction of distinctiveness and relationship strength had a tolerance of 0.362 and VIF of 2.77; tolerances below 0.40 and VIFs above 2.5 may be problematic (Allison, 1999). Since the results did not change substantially with the interaction term included (e.g., without the interaction term the coefficient of the interaction of prestige and network density becomes −0.83 and is significant at $p = 0.08$), we included it. Following Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003), we centered all social identity and social network predictor variables prior to including them in the regression model.
Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and correlations between study variables\(^a\)

| Variable                  | Mean | SD  | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   | 6   | 7   | 8   | 9   | 10  |
|---------------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| **Dependent variable**    |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 1. Org. identification    | 3.81 | 0.63|     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     | (0.79) |
| **Control variables**     |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2. Choice                 | 4.43 | 0.76| 0.10|     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 3. Gender                 | 0.54 | 0.50| 0.09| 0.09|     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 4. Tenure                 | 2.48 | 1.09| -0.05| -0.04| -0.13|     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 5. School                 | 0.83 | 0.38| -0.04| 0.05| 0.09| -0.15|     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 6. Legacy status          | 0.30 | 0.46| -0.03| -0.02| 0.03| 0.12| -0.05|     |     |     |     |     |     |
| **Social identity predictors** |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 7. Org. distinctiveness   | 3.63 | 0.53| 0.42**| 0.16| 0.06| -0.16| -0.02| 0.05| (0.74)|     |     |     |     |
| 8. Org. prestige          | 4.03 | 0.53| 0.12| 0.07| -0.08| 0.21*| -0.17*| 0.16| 0.21*| (0.68)|     |     |     |
| **Social network predictors** |      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 9. Network size           | 7.23 | 3.29| 0.27**| -0.01| -0.02| 0.17*| -0.08| 0.29**| 0.17*| 0.14|     |     |     |
| 10. Relationship strength | 3.30 | 0.74| 0.18*| 0.04| -0.09| 0.21*| -0.04| 0.15| 0.16| 0.06| 0.26**|     |     |
| 11. Network density       | 0.50 | 0.21| -0.08| -0.06| -0.02| 0.09| -0.08| 0.06| -0.13| 0.04| -0.24**| -0.05|     |

\(^a\)Cronbach’s \(\alpha\) is in parentheses on the diagonal for each multiple-item measure; \(n = 136\). \(^* p < 0.05\) (2-tailed); \(^{**} p < 0.01\) (2-tailed).
Table 3. Hierarchical regression analysis of organizational identification on social identity and social network antecedents a,b

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
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<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.56*** (0.38)</td>
<td>3.72*** (0.35)</td>
<td>3.71*** (0.36)</td>
<td>3.80*** (0.34)</td>
<td>3.84*** (0.34)</td>
<td>3.60*** (0.33)</td>
<td>3.81*** (0.34)</td>
<td>3.63*** (0.33)</td>
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<td>Control variables</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>0.08 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.02 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.07 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.03 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.02 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.06 (0.06)</td>
<td>0.04 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.05 (0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.10 (0.11)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.11 (0.11)</td>
<td>0.10 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.13 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.13 (0.09)</td>
<td>0.09 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.11 (0.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure</td>
<td>−0.03 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.01 (0.05)</td>
<td>−0.07 (0.05)</td>
<td>−0.03 (0.05)</td>
<td>−0.02 (0.05)</td>
<td>−0.03 (0.05)</td>
<td>−0.02 (0.05)</td>
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<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>−0.11 (0.15)</td>
<td>−0.06 (0.14)</td>
<td>−0.08 (0.14)</td>
<td>−0.04 (0.13)</td>
<td>−0.05 (0.13)</td>
<td>−0.02 (0.13)</td>
<td>−0.08 (0.13)</td>
<td>0.01 (0.13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legacy</td>
<td>−0.04 (0.12)</td>
<td>−0.09 (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.17 (0.12)</td>
<td>−0.19 (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.22+ (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.21+ (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.20+ (0.11)</td>
<td>−0.22+ (0.11)</td>
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<td>Social identity predictors</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctiveness</td>
<td>0.49*** (0.10)</td>
<td>0.42*** (0.10)</td>
<td>0.41*** (0.11)</td>
<td>0.34*** (0.10)</td>
<td>0.38*** (0.10)</td>
<td>0.39*** (0.10)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prestige</td>
<td>0.05 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.05 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.06 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.11 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.11 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.11 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.10 (0.10)</td>
<td>0.11 (0.10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social network predictors</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>0.06** (0.02)</td>
<td>0.05** (0.02)</td>
<td>0.05** (0.02)</td>
<td>0.05** (0.02)</td>
<td>0.05** (0.02)</td>
<td>0.05** (0.02)</td>
<td>0.05** (0.02)</td>
<td>0.05** (0.02)</td>
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<td>Relationship Strength</td>
<td>0.13+ (0.08)</td>
<td>0.08 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.08 (0.08)</td>
<td>−0.01 (0.08)</td>
<td>0.01 (0.08)</td>
<td>0.00 (0.08)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>0.06 (0.27)</td>
<td>0.12 (0.25)</td>
<td>0.14 (0.25)</td>
<td>0.41+ (0.25)</td>
<td>0.19 (0.25)</td>
<td>0.37 (0.25)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctiveness × Network size</td>
<td>−0.01 (0.04)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prestige × Network size</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.05+ (0.03)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinctiveness × Relationship strength</td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.16+ (0.09)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prestige × Relationship strength</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.55*** (0.16)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Distinctiveness × Network density</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.93+ (0.43)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prestige × Network density</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>−0.76 (0.47)</td>
<td>−0.65 (0.47)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>−0.02</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ$R^2$ (From Model 1)</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.56***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>4.29***</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>4.14***</td>
<td>3.89***</td>
<td>5.51***</td>
<td>4.11***</td>
<td>4.58***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ$F$ (from Model 1)</td>
<td>13.26***</td>
<td>5.36**</td>
<td>7.54***</td>
<td>6.13***</td>
<td>8.85***</td>
<td>6.50***</td>
<td>6.28***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ$F$ (from Model 2)</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>9.56***</td>
<td>3.24*</td>
<td>4.25***</td>
<td>9.65***</td>
<td>3.24*</td>
<td>4.25***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a,b Unstandardized β coefficients; standard errors in parentheses. In Models 2–8 all social identity, social network, and interaction predictors have been centered. + p < 0.10; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.
Model 1 tested the effects of the control variables choice, gender, tenure, school, and legacy status on organizational identification. These controls explain little variance and are non-significant. Model 2 tested the effects of social identity antecedents—organizational distinctiveness and organizational prestige—on organizational identification, explaining a significant amount of variance in organizational identification beyond the controls (0.19 $R^2$, $\Delta F = 13.26, p < 0.001$). Model 3 tested the predictive effects of the social network antecedents—network size, relationship strength, and network density—on organizational identification, which explained a significant amount of variance in organizational identification beyond the control variables (0.13 $R^2$, $\Delta F = 5.36, p < 0.01$). Model 4 tested the combined effects of social identity and social network antecedents on organizational identification. As shown in Table 3, the change in $F$ from Model 2 is significant ($\Delta F = 3.26, p < 0.05$), indicating that social network predictors added to categorical antecedents of social identity for explaining organizational identification. Models 5 through 7 test each social network variable as moderating the relationship between categorical antecedents and organizational identification. Only moderating effects of relationship strength and network density add explained variance beyond the direct effects of categorical and network antecedents ($\Delta F$ from Model 4, 9.56, $p < 0.001$ and 3.24, $p < 0.05$ respectively, see Table 3).

We use model 8, which is significant (0.38 $R^2$, $\Delta F$ from model 1 = 6.28, $p < 0.001$), to test our hypotheses. Organizational distinctiveness was a predictor of organizational identification ($b = 0.39, p < 0.001$), whereas organizational prestige was not ($b = 0.05$, n.s.); therefore Hypothesis 1a was supported and 1b was not supported. Network size was a predictor of organizational identification ($b = 0.05, p < 0.001$), whereas relationship strength ($b = 0.00$, n.s.) and network density ($b = 0.37$, n.s.) were not; therefore Hypothesis 2a was supported and hypotheses 2b and 2c were not supported. Network size did not moderate the relationship between the categorical antecedents of distinctiveness and prestige ($b = 0.07, p < 0.10$ and $b = 0.01$, n.s respectively); therefore hypothesis 3a was not supported. Relationship strength moderated the relationship between organizational prestige and organizational identification ($b = 0.56, p < 0.001$), but not the relationship between organizational distinctiveness and organizational identification ($b = -0.19$, n.s.); therefore hypothesis 3b is partially supported. Network density did not moderate the relationships between organizational distinctiveness and organizational prestige with organizational identification ($b = 0.30$, n.s. and $b = -0.65$, n.s. respectively); therefore hypothesis 3c is not supported.

**Discussion**

Our goal was to examine the social relationships that surround an individual and assess whether dyadic and structural properties of social networks directly influenced and moderated the relationship between categorical antecedents and organizational identification. Our results showed that in addition to perceptions of organizational distinctiveness, organizationally affiliated network size positively influenced the strength of individuals’ organizational identification by promoting communication with others as a process of identity interpretation and enactment (Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Through repetitive claiming of organizational membership with multiple organizationally affiliated others, individuals reinforce and strengthen their commitment to identification with an organization (Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Furthermore, we found that relationship strength amplified the effect of organizational prestige on organizational identification; organizational prestige had no direct effect on organizational identification for this sample. Our findings suggest that adding a social networks perspective extends scholars’ and managers’ ability to better understand and predict organizational identification.

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Our study contributes to the extant research on organizational identification. We illuminate the type and structure of specific relationships that influence an individual’s organizational identification. Although organizational identification scholars have begun to focus on a “relational” perspective, which recognizes that identification can be an interpersonal or social achievement (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Bartel & Dutton, 2001), they have not yet tested these insights. Current research highlights the interpersonal level by examining identification with a particular role-relationship, such as coworker–coworker or supervisor–subordinate (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), rather than identification with specific others with whom one interacts and therefore cannot assess which aspects of relationships breed identification. Social networks provide the structural context through which individuals are proximate to the opinions, information, and behaviors of salient others. Our findings highlight the insights of symbolic interactionism which advocate a relational approach to understanding social order and posit that feedback and communication provide self-understanding about who we are (Blumer, 1966; Cooley, 1902; Fine & Kleinman, 1983; Mead, 1934). Identity theorists argue that the self is a product of society and it is in concrete social interactions that selves are produced (Stryker, 1987: p. 91). Yet, most empirical studies of organizational identification have focused on categorization and social comparison processes and suggested that identification at the collective level is “depersonalized” (Brewer & Gardner, 1996: p. 83) and can exist in the absence of interpersonal interaction or cohesion. By using a social network perspective, we illuminate that organizational identification is actively shaped through interaction—the structure and strength of relationships with others. Our findings highlight that both categorization and relational processes are at play, and that relationship strength amplifies categorizations of prestige to shape organizational identification.

Our findings also suggest new avenues for social network research. Most research in social networks, particularly on size, is based on social exchange theory and thus focuses on how size generates tangible benefits such as access to resources and information or enhanced socioeconomic status (Burt, 2000; Campbell et al., 1986; Morrison, 2002; Podolny & Baron, 1997). In contrast, only limited research has examined the impact of network size on more intangible outcomes such as attitudes, beliefs, and value systems. As Ibarra, Kilduff, and Tsai (2005: p. 362) assert in their review of network research: “Although networks have been thoroughly studied as conduits for information and resources, we still know little about the role they play in creating and shaping identities.” Our finding provides insight into how networks may shape identities and identification and lends credence to symbolic interactionists’ claim that commitment to an identity may well be based on the number of others to whom one is connected by that identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000: p. 289). In essence, social networks generate meaning and identities that underpin identification processes.

Interestingly, our findings showed that strong ties did not have a direct effect. Longitudinal survey research by Bullis and Bach (1991: p. 184) on students’ identification with their university found that individuals make a distinction between their “particular dyadic relationships and relationships with the organization,” they found that “strong mentor ties did not link newcomers to organizations.” In contrast, Pratt (2000) identified strong ties as central to Amway distributors’ organizational identification. It may be that dyadic ties are more important in DSOs which have high turnover, lacking the established set of relations of a permanent organization structure.

Contrary to previous research (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Smidts et al., 2001), organizational prestige was not significantly associated with identification except when moderated by strong relationships. This was a surprising finding considering that, since 1995, this Northeastern Jesuit Institution has been routinely ranked among the top 50 best undergraduate colleges and universities in America by media outlets such as US News and World Report. Therefore, we expected that a social comparison group had been established by the media and that the extensive media exposure would lead to a positive influence of prestige on organizational identification.
We provide three possible explanations for this unexpected finding. First, prestige may not prompt categorization processes when competitors are of equivalent prestige. In elite educational institutions, such as the one we studied, student selectivity is so competitive that most students had opportunities at other prestigious colleges. For example, eight of the ten closest competitor peers (e.g., those schools with which this institution shares 30–70 percent of enrollees) are all ranked in the top 24 to 50 of US colleges, whereas only one of these schools has a religious affiliation (e.g., Brandeis) (private communication from the Associate Dean of Enrollment). Thus prestige did not provide a basis for in-group versus out-group categorization, whereas a school’s religious mission was more likely to trigger categorization processes based on membership. Second, given the strong sense of organizational distinctiveness for the educational institution based on its programs and collective identity to improve the local and worldwide community by serving others, the pursuit of prestige, which is an individual identity orientation (Brickson, 2005), may be counter-normative and needs to be supported by strong relationships. For example, the senior survey results in Table 1 reveal that prestige or status was consistently ranked the lowest of all ten items compared to other attributes students sought in social organizations such as creativity or interesting work. Carmeli, Gilat, and Waldman (2007) found that prestige based on corporate social responsibility predicted organizational identification, whereas prestige based on market and financial perceptions did not. Their findings may help explain our results. Corporate social responsibility may be more closely aligned to the Jesuit mission of social justice, which forms the basis for the institution’s distinctiveness. Future research can tease apart whether corporate social responsibility and a collective identity orientation of social justice generates perceived organizational prestige or organizational distinctiveness that drives organizational identification. It may be that doing well by doing good generates both organizational distinctiveness and organizational prestige; however, since doing good is a collective identity orientation, whereas organizational prestige is an individual identity orientation (Brickson, 2005), this combination may be a hybrid identity that produces organizational tensions and challenges. Third, the heightened media exposure may alter social comparison processes. When social comparison is not mediated by the media, institutions can claim more prestige than is actually deserved; whereas a public ranking of schools by external media outlets reveals more clearly an educational institution’s level of prestige (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996). All the prior studies that found prestige to be a strong predictor of organizational identification (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bhattacharya et al., 1985; Carmeli et al., 2006; Carmeli et al., 2007; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Smidts et al., 2001) were for organizations not ranked and rated by external media outlets. Therefore, comparison groups were more likely to be established by the institution’s leaders and members rather than imposed on the institution by external constituents. Future research should address the impact that internally constructed versus externally imposed social comparison groups have on organization members’ perceptions of and identification with their organization.

The findings of this study also have practical implications for college and university administrators. Today, most colleges and universities focus on enhancing their institutional prestige rather than distinctiveness, as suggested by the importance placed on a school’s position in college rankings. However, our findings showed that organizational prestige engendered organizational identification for a publicly ranked institution only when supported by strong relational ties with organization members. Furthermore, we found that an organization’s distinctiveness engendered a direct effect on identification among organization members. Previous research (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) has shown that organizational identification is important for individual alumni when making decisions about financial contributions to the school. If colleges and universities focus on enhancing prestige, particularly when their closest competitors are of equivalent prestige and they do not cultivate strong relational ties to support identification with a particular organization, rather than on cultivating a unique identity in the marketplace, they may be disadvantaging themselves in the future in terms of alumni giving.
In addition to the academic setting, our findings offer practical implications for the organizational workplace. Previous research has shown that organizational identification is related to important work-related attitudes and behaviors. More specifically, organizational identification is positively related to individuals’ affective organizational commitment, job and organizational satisfaction, job involvement, organizational loyalty, occupational and work group attachment and extra-role behavior, and negatively related to individuals’ intent to leave the organization (Adler & Adler, 1988; O’Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Riketta, 2005; Riketta & Van Dick, 2005). Thus, by facilitating opportunities for social interactions and relationship development at work, organizations can assist employees in expanding their network of relationships with others in the organization and thereby help promote stronger organizational identification among employees. These insights may apply to current as well as former employees. For example, consumer product firms such as Procter & Gamble recognize the value of these ex-employees, or “alumni,” as sources of innovations, referrals, and recruitment (Ellison, 2003) and consulting firms are also starting to focus on their “alumni” of ex-employees.

Our study also has limitations. A first limitation is the cross-sectional design of this study. Collecting data at a single point in time precludes the ability to make statements about causal relationships. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to disentangle the causality among categorization and comparative processes, the structure of relationships, and organizational identification. It also limits the generalizability of our study’s findings. Empirical data gathered from undergraduate students at a single institution committed to intra and interpersonal development among students, faculty, and staff raises a potential question as to whether these findings are idiosyncratic to the institution studied. Although foundational work on identification has been conducted at academic institutions (see Mael & Ashforth, 1992), this potential limitation can only be addressed through replication in other types of organizations.

A second limitation is that the study analyzed self-reported data provided by respondents. Therefore, the possibility that our findings are influenced by common method variance must be acknowledged. However, based on our use of procedural controls, the necessity of self-report data due to the experiential and perceptual nature of our survey questions, and the frequent overstatement of common method variance in scholarly research, we have confidence that our findings are valid and not contaminated by shared variance attributable to the self-report nature of the study (Chan, 2009; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Future research on social identities and social networks would benefit from including a broader set of research methods to allow for triangulation of results.

A third limitation is that we do not control or test for the effects of personality on social networks. Although some scholars find that extraverted individuals have larger networks (e.g., Forret & Dougherty, 2001; Wanberg, Kanfer, & Banas, 2000), other studies find negative effects (Lee & Tsang, 2001) or no effect (Bozionelos, 2003). In addition, the research on personality and psychological collectivism, a measure similar to organizational identification, shows no consistent significant findings related to the relationship between dispositional variables and psychological collectivism (Jackson, Colquitt, Wesson, & Zapata-Phelan, 2006). Thus, the relationship between personality variables with psychological collectivism, organizational identification, and social networks is an important avenue for future research.

**Conclusion**

Our study extends previous work on organizational identification by examining the influence of social networks on identification processes. Social interactions and their influence on identity and identification processes are explicit in the writings of identity theorists, particularly those drawing on
symbolic interactionism. Society is defined as the durable patterns of interactions and relationships (Stryker & Burke, 2000: p. 285) and the self is produced in “concrete networks of social interaction” (Stryker, 1987: p. 91); yet, social interactions and social structures that form the durable patterns of relationships are rarely examined or measured. Thus, their influence on identity and identification has remained a black box. Our findings open up that black box. We show the direct effects of the size of social networks on generating organizational identification through claiming, as well as how strong relationships moderate the relationship between organizational prestige and organizational identification. Thus, we gain important insights into how and when an individual is more likely to identify with an organization.

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Elizabeth Hamilton Volpe is an Assistant Professor of Management at Roger Williams University. She received her Ph.D. in Organization Studies from Boston College. Her research focuses on relationships in organizations with a primary interest in understanding the impact workplace friendships have for individuals and organizations, women’s work and career choices, identity and identification, and issues surrounding the work-life interface.

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Appendix 1. Organizational Identification, Distinctiveness, and Prestige Scale Items

Organizational Identification Scale ($\alpha = 0.79$)
*Measured on a five-point Likert-type scale where 1 = Very Weak and 5 = Very Strong*

(1) When someone criticizes *(Name of School)*, it feels like a personal insult.
(2) I am very interested in what others think about *(Name of School).*
(3) When I talk about this school, I usually say “we” rather than “they.”
(4) This school’s successes are my successes.
(5) When someone praises this school, it feels like a personal compliment.
(6) If a story in the media criticized this school, I would feel embarrassed.

Organizational Distinctiveness Scale ($\alpha = 0.74$)
*Measured on a five-point Likert-type scale where 1 = Very Weak and 5 = Very Strong*

(1) When I think about *(Name of School)*, the availability of service programs such as Appalachia and 4 *(Name of City)* seems unique from other schools considered to be most competitive.
(2) *(Name of School)* programs such as PULSE, Capstone courses, and the Faith, Peace, and Justice minor are unique compared to programs available at other schools considered to be most competitive.
(3) *(Name of School)* is unique compared to other schools considered to be most competitive.
(4) The presence of Jesuits as some professors at *(Name of School)* seems unique from the faculty at other schools considered to be most competitive.
(5) The theology requirement at *(Name of School)* makes it unique from other schools considered to be most competitive.
(6) *(Name of School’s)* mission of developing the whole person (integrating intellectual, personal, ethical, and religious formation) is unique from the mission of other schools considered to be most competitive.
(7) *(Name of School)* has unique characteristics compared to other most competitive schools.

Organizational Prestige Scale ($\alpha = 0.68$)
*Measured on a five-point Likert-type scale where 1 = Very Weak and 5 = Very Strong*

(1) *(Name of School)* is considered one of the best schools that I applied to.
(2) People from other schools that I applied to look down at *(Name of School).* (R)
(3) Alumni of all schools that I applied to would be proud to have their children attend *(Name of School).*
(4) *(Name of School)* does not have a good reputation in my community. (R)
(5) A person seeking to advance his/her career in their chosen industry should downplay his/her association with *(Name of School).* (R)
(6) When other organizations are recruiting new employees, they would not want students from *(Name of School).* (R)