The Identities of Employed Students: Striving to Reduce Distinctiveness from the Typical Student

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Abstract

Endorsement of the employed student identity can provide social support for employed students or protection from negative intergroup comparisons. However, not much is known about what identity aspects or characteristics comprise the employed student identity and how they become important and central to that identity. Using data from 215 employed university students in the UK, we investigated two research questions (RQ's) in this mixed-method study. RQ1. What are the identity aspects that participants ascribe to the employed student identity? RQ2. Are identity aspects that distinguish employed from non-employed students, and are considered more suitable for employed versus non-employed students, more central and more important to the employed students' self-concept? A thematic analysis categorised the identity aspects that participants selected into 14 distinct categories, with the most important categories being hard-working, being organised, having motivation, and discipline. Multilevel analyses of identity aspects within individuals revealed that distinctiveness was negatively associated with the importance and centrality of aspects, whereas suitability for employed students was positively associated with the importance and centrality of aspects. We offer practical value through revealing important identity aspects which inoculate employed students against negative intergroup comparisons, and theoretical value through suggesting future avenues for employed students' identity construction.

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