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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the potential relationships of personal identity with collective identities based on membership in socially disadvantaged groups (e.g. being Latino/a, being a woman) and socially advantaged group memberships (e.g. being a man) for Latinos and Latinas. The interrelationships among the cultural identity, gender identity, and personal identity of 279 self-identified Latinos (177 women, 102 men) were studied. Participants completed the Womanist Identity Attitude Scale (J. E. Helms, 1990) or Men's Identity Attitude Scale (J. E. Helms, personal communication, 1995) to assess gender identity, and the Personal Identity Scale (L. D. Bennion and G. R. Adams, 1986) to assess personal identity. The cultural, gender, and personal identity scales each measured different levels of conflict and resolution with respect to their identity constructs. Multiple regression and canonical correlations were used to analyze their responses. Results indicate that personal identity is significantly related to both cultural and gender identity for Latinos and Latinas. Cultural and gender identity are also significantly related to each other for Latinos and Latinas. (Contains 5 tables and 26 references.) (Author/SLD)

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**EXPLORING RELATIONSHIPS OF  
CULTURAL, GENDER, AND PERSONAL IDENTITY  
AMONG LATINOS AND LATINAS**

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### ABSTRACT

The present study explored the potential relationships of personal identity with collective identities based on socially disadvantaged group memberships (e.g., being Latino/a, being a woman) and socially advantaged group memberships (e.g., being a man) for Latinos and Latina. Thus, the current study examined the interrelationships between the cultural identity, gender identity, and personal identity of 279 self-identified Latinos/as (177 women, 102 men). Participants completed the Visible Racial/Ethnic Identity Attitude Scale (VIAS; Helms & Carter, 1985) modified to assess Latino/a cultural identity. They also completed either the Womanist Identity Attitude Scale (WIAS; Helms, 1990) or Men's Identity Attitude Scale (MIAS; Helms, personal communication, 1995) to assess gender identity, and the Personal Identity Status Scale (PIS; Bennion & Adams, 1986) to assess personal identity. The cultural, gender, and personal identity scales each measured different levels of conflict and resolution with respect to their identity constructs. Multiple regression and canonical correlations were used to analyze the responses. **Results indicated that personal identity was significantly related to both cultural and gender identity for Latinos and Latinas. Cultural and gender identity were also significantly related to each other for Latinos and Latinas.**

## EXPLORING RELATIONSHIPS OF CULTURAL, GENDER, AND PERSONAL IDENTITY AMONG LATINOS AND LATINAS

Latino/a people in the United States represent several heterogeneous social and demographic groups, as based, for example, on ethnicity, socioeconomic status, race, and gender (Atkinson, Morten, & Sue, 1989). However, Latino/a Americans share many important cultural commonalities, such as language and customs originating from a common Spanish heritage. Latinos/as also share common sociopolitical experiences of prejudice and pervasive discrimination in the United States based on being Latino/a in a predominantly Anglo society (Bernal et al., 1983; Levine & Padilla, 1980). Consequently, Atkinson et al. (1989) have argued that members of the Latino/a group have developed an identity based on being Latino/a in the United States. The current study defined **cultural identity** as a collective identity based on membership in the Latino/a group.

Cultural identity is a type of **collective identity** (i.e., thoughts, feelings, attitudes, etc.) based on psychological characteristics that presumably derive from membership in a social or demographic group (e.g., Latino/a, gender). Cultural identity has been described as a psychologically important or central aspect of a Latino/a's self-concept because Latinos/as in the United States must psychologically work to create a positive cultural identity.

**Gender identity** has been offered as another type of collective identity that might be psychologically important or central to Latinos/as' self-concept due to the differential social status of men and women in both Latino/a and the larger societies. For Latinas, gender identity might be psychologically important because of the work Latinas may engage in order to create a more positive gender identity. For Latinos, gender identity might be psychologically important within the self-concept as a means of building power, status, and self-esteem within Latino/a communities that is denied them within the larger society as a result of their ethnicity. That is, Latinos may attempt to maintain social status differences between the genders in order to maintain a positive gender identity, whereas Latinas may question such differences in their quest for a more positive gender identity.

Several collective identity development models have been proposed to describe differing qualities of intrapsychic conflict and resolution concerning membership in oppressed or dominated and nonoppressed or dominant demographic groups for both gender (Helms, 1990, in Ossana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992) and culture (Canabal, 1995). These models propose that individuals may not react identically to conditions of discrimination and exploitation, but rather develop different schema or strategies for interpreting such experience.

Collective identity models provide clues as to how collective identities may be related to other aspects of the self-concept, including personal identity. In the current study, **personal identity** was defined as an identity about oneself as a unique person with respect to a number of personally relevant domains, such as occupation, political ideology, and interpersonal relationships (Marcia, 1980). Marcia proposed that persons can have different levels of conflict and resolution regarding their personal identity.

The current study predicted that the presence of collective identity conflicts (i.e., gender and cultural) would be significantly related to the presence of personal identity conflicts for Latinos and Latinas. Similarly, the current study predicted that the positive or negative resolution of collective identity conflicts would be significantly related to the positive or negative resolution of personal identity conflicts, respectively (see Table 1). That is, due to the potential psychological importance of collective identities in the overall self-concept of Latinos and Latinas, these identities may become significantly linked with other aspects of the self-concept, such as personal identity.

The potential relationships between cultural identity and gender identity for Latinos and Latinas were also examined. Myers et al., 1991 suggested that culture and gender function similarly within the person's overall personality constellation if the groups share a similar social status (i.e., low status or high status). Conversely, Tajfel (1981) proposed that, in an effort to maintain a positive collective identity, individuals may come to emphasize some group memberships (e.g., gender for men) rather than other group memberships (e.g., being Latino/a) because these groups are more positively valued by society.

For Latinas who are both female (lower social status) and Latina (lower social status), cultural and gender identity might combine to form a single "oppressed" identity (Myers et al., 1991). In contrast, for Latinos whose collective identities are of different social statuses, male (higher status) and Latino (lower status), cultural and gender identity might function independently.

Thus, the current study predicted that for Latinas, cultural and gender identity would be significantly interrelated, whereas for Latinos, cultural and gender identity would not be significantly related.

## METHOD

### Participants

The sample consisted of 279 **Latino/a university students** (102 men, 177 women) enrolled in classes in either a large university or a community college in the Southeast. About 4 participants were also obtained through the use of a sign-up board at the department of psychology at another university in the Southeast. As incentive to participate in the study, participants were given the option to enter a raffle for three prizes of 25 dollars each.

The racial composition of the sample was 68% White, 22% racially mixed, 8% Brown or Indian, and 2% Black. The sample was fairly evenly distributed across academic class (e.g., Freshman, Senior). Participants majored in a variety of subjects, with psychology, education, and the medical sciences being the three most frequent majors. The large majority of participants were full-time students (86%) who lived off-campus (98%). Family income of participants was over \$30,000 for 69% of participants.

With respect to ethnic demographic variables, the large majority of participants were born in the United States (57%) and were U.S. citizens (81%). However, most participants ethnically self-identified as Cuban (47%) or Bicultural (21%; e.g., Cuban-Puerto Rican). A majority of participants were second generation (52%; i.e., born of first generation/immigrant parents), whereas 42% were first generation. The native language(s) of most participants was Spanish (53%) or bilingual (30%). Most participants stated they were currently bilingual (69%) or spoke English only (20%).

### **Instruments**

Participants completed a packet containing several instruments and a demographic data sheet. All instruments contained Likert items, and scores for each scale were obtained by summing the responses of the relevant items. Higher scores denoted higher expressions of the attitude being measured. Table 2 contains alpha coefficients obtained for all instruments.

**Cultural identity** was measured with a modified version of the **Visible Racial/Ethnic Group Identity Attitude Scale (VIAS)**, Helms & Carter, 1985). The VIAS measures schema (cognitive-affective strategies for processing intrapsychic and interpersonal racial or ethnic stimuli) related to different identity statuses concerning visible racial/ethnic group membership. Statuses represent different types of identity conflict and resolution. The 50-item VIAS contains the following subscales, each of which measures a different status: (a) **Conformity**, internalizing White/Anglo culture while denying/distorting one's own cultural (Latino/a) self, (b) **Dissonance/Introspection**, involving cultural identity confusion fueled by a desire to reject negative stereotypes about Latinos/as as well as negative or rigid positive stereotypes regarding Anglo culture, (c) **Immersion**, involving the embracing of Latino/a culture and the rejection of Anglo culture, (d) **Awareness**, reflecting the process of resolving cultural identity conflicts and integrating a positive cultural identity (see Table 1).

**Gender identity** was measured for Latinas via the **Womanist Identity Attitude Scale (WIAS)**, Helms, personal communication, 1995). As with the VIAS, the WIAS contains four subscales, each of which measures schema for a different status. Statuses reflect different levels of conflict and resolution with respect to gender group membership. The 55-item WIAS consists of: (a) **Preencounter**, adopting traditional male-superior, female-inferior gender roles while denying the existence of sexism, (b) **Encounter/Dissonance**, involving confusion about traditional gender roles, (c) **Immersion**, involving an idealization of women, rejection of male-superior/female-inferior gender roles, while searching for positive definitions of womanhood, and (d) **Internalization**, reflecting positive resolutions of gender-role conflicts through the adoption of positive definitions of womanhood (see Table 1).

The current study used the **Men's Identity Attitude Scale (MIAS)**, Helms, personal communication, 1995) to measure gender identity for Latinos. The 55-item MIAS contains four subscales, based on schema of four gender identity statuses for men: (a) **Contact**, involving an obliviousness to or denial of sexism and male-superior/female-inferior gender roles, (b) **Disintegration**, reflecting increased conflict due to awareness of sexism and superior/inferior gender roles, (c) **Reintegration**, involving an idealization of men and masculinity, accompanied by a denigration of women and femininity, and (d) **Autonomy**, reflecting a positively resolved and gender-integrated worldview (see Table 1).

**Personal identity** was measured through the **Personal Identity Status Scale (PIS)**, Bennion & Adams, 1986). The PIS assesses the presence of conflict or resolution in personally relevant domains (e.g., occupation, politics, dating). The 64-item PIS contains four subscales: (a) **Achievement**, involving personal identity crisis and resolution, (b) **Moratorium**, marked by a presence of crisis but an absence of commitment, (c) **Foreclosure**, reflecting personal identity commitment, as based generally on parental wishes and values, but without any period of crisis or conflict, and (d) **Diffusion**, involving neither conflict nor resolution.



## RESULTS

Regression analyses were conducted to assess if the relationships of personal identity with cultural identity and gender identity were significant for Latinos and Latinas. Separate analyses were conducted for men and women and for each set of cultural identity and gender identity statuses. For each analysis, the relevant cultural or gender identity statuses were entered together. Personal identity statuses (PIS) served as the dependent variables. **As predicted, for both Latinos and Latinas, a significant amount of variance was explained in each of the four personal identity statuses by both cultural and gender identity statuses**, except for Diffusion PIS and gender identity for Latinos (see Table 3). Table 4 summarizes the specific cultural and gender identity statuses significantly related to personal identity statuses, as indicated by the significance of their beta weights. In general, cultural and gender identity statuses reflecting conflict and resolution, respectively, were significantly related to personal identity statuses reflecting conflict and resolution.

Separate canonical correlation analyses were conducted to examine the significance and extent of shared relationships between gender and cultural identity statuses for women and men. **For both Latinas and Latinos, two canonical variates were identified, indicating that cultural and gender identity statuses were interrelated.** Specifically, for Latinas, two canonical correlations exceeded the .30 cutoff recommended by Tabachnik and Fidell (1983): .75 and .68, explaining 56% and 46%, respectively, of the variance in the two dimensions shared by gender and cultural identity statuses. Unexpectedly, for Latinos, two significant canonical correlations also were obtained: .71 and .59, explaining 50% and 35% of the variance in their respective dimensions. Table 5 presents the canonical dimensions shared by the cultural and gender identity statuses for Latinos and Latinas.

## CONCLUSIONS

Several authors have argued that because of their group's history of exposure to widespread and continuing discrimination as well as their common Spanish cultural heritage, Latinos/as in the United States develop a Latino/a cultural identity (Canabal, 1995; Padilla, 1985a; 1985b). This identity was assumed in the present study to be related to or color various other aspects of their self-concept, including their personal identity. A collective identity based on gender group membership (i.e., gender identity) was also argued to be similarly related to other aspects of the self-concept, including personal identity, for Latinas who have less social power than Latinos (Reid & Comas-Diaz, 1990; Vasquez, 1984). For Latinos, it was argued that gender identity might be related to personal identity as a means of boosting their overall self-concept (Baca Zinn, 1982).

Therefore, it was predicted for both Latinos and Latinas, cultural and gender identity would be significantly related to personal identity. It was further predicted that because of the nature of the collective identities in question (oppressed versus nonoppressed), cultural and gender identity would be significantly related to each other for Latinas, but not for Latinos.

With respect to Latinas, both cultural identity and gender identity related strongly to all four personal identity statuses (see Table 4). Regarding specific identity statuses, the study yielded several interesting findings:

- (a) Positive personal identity resolution (Achievement) was positively and significantly linked with positive cultural identity (Awareness) and gender identity (Internalization);
- (b) Personal identity conflict (Moratorium) was positively and significantly related to cultural identity conflict (Dissonance/Introspection) and gender identity conflict (Encounter/Dissonance);
- (c) Personal identity confusion (Diffusion) was positively related to cultural identity conflict and confusion (Dissonance/Introspection) and gender identity conflict and exploration (Immersion);
- (d) Negative personal identity resolution (Foreclosure) was positively related to negative cultural identity resolution (Conformity) and cultural identity conflict and exploration (Immersion) as well as negative gender identity resolution (Preencounter) and gender identity conflict and exploration (Immersion);
- (e) Positive gender identity resolution (Internalization) was significantly related to all personal identity statuses.

With respect to Latinos, both cultural identity and gender identity related strongly to all four personal identity statuses, except for Diffusion personal identity and gender identity (see Table 4). Regarding specific identity statuses, the study yielded these findings:

- (a) Positive personal identity resolution (Achievement) was positively and significantly linked with positive cultural identity (Awareness) and gender identity (Autonomy) and gender identity conflict (Disintegration);
- (b) Personal identity conflict (Moratorium) was positively and significantly related to cultural identity conflict (Dissonance/Introspection) and gender identity conflict (Disintegration);
- (c) Personal identity confusion (Diffusion) was negatively related to positive cultural identity resolution (Awareness), but not to any gender status;
- (d) Negative personal identity resolution (Foreclosure) was positively related to negative cultural identity resolution (Conformity) and negative gender identity resolution (Contact).

With respect to the interrelationships of cultural and gender identity, Table 5 summarizes the gender and cultural identity statuses that significantly loaded on the common dimensions found between the two sets of variables. For both Latinas and Latinos, two significant dimensions were found that appeared to tap into (1) confusion and exploration about one's collective identities and (2) positive identity resolution. This finding might signify that collective identity conflicts based on gender and culture are psychologically linked with each other. The same might be true for positive collective identity resolutions of gender and culture.



However, Latinos and Latinas differed from each other in several ways. For example, Conformity cultural identity was a significant component of Dimension 1 for Latinas, but not for Latinos. That is, Latinas appeared to merge Conformity (negative cultural identity resolution) with cultural identity conflict and confusion. A second difference was that collective identity statuses reflecting confusion for both gender and culture were a significant component of Dimension 2 for Latinos, but not for Latinas. Referring to the oppressed-group/nonoppressed-group framework, this finding suggests that gender and cultural identity might become linked for Latinos as they struggle to deal with collective identities based on potentially opposing levels of oppression (culture) and privilege (gender). Latinas, on the other hand, are dealing with similarly based collective identities (oppression). The resolution of "oppression" was more clearly dichotomized for Latinas into two separate dimensions found here.

### **Implications**

Despite the exploratory nature of the study, the findings presented here indicate that current models of identity and the self-concept may need revision, at least for Latinos and Latinas. That is, traditional models of the self-concept, and in particular, personal identity (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980), have tended to ignore the potential impact that experiences with racism and sexism can have on the psychological lives of members of the affected groups. That presumed psychological reactions to these experiences can have significant relationships with personal identity was demonstrated here.

The current findings also demonstrate that experiences of privileged group membership (e.g., being a man) may also have significant implications for other aspects of the self-concept. Results clearly indicated that gender identity was strongly related with another aspect of the self-concept, personal identity, for Latinos. Cultural and gender identity were further significantly interrelated for Latinos, though somewhat differently than for Latinas. This suggests that the interplay of oppressed and nonoppressed group identities may have different relationships with each other as well as other psychological components (i.e., personal identity) than if group identities are matched in levels of experienced oppression. Alternatively, these findings suggest that perhaps the notion of "oppressed" versus "nonoppressed" might not be a psychologically valid dichotomy.

Counselors must thus be aware of the psychological impact that collective experiences may have on the psyche of their Latino/a clients. That is, the current findings indicate that the processes of search and commitment at the collective identity level may affect similar processes at the personal level. The opposite might also be true. That is, personal identity search and resolution may also affect collective identity search and resolution. Or, perhaps, some theoretical combination of the two levels better represents the process of identity development.

Table 1

Descriptions of Analogous Statuses of the Cultural Identity, Womanist Identity, Men's Identity, and Personal Identity Models

Theme of Status	Identity Model			
	Cultural Identity	Womanist Identity	Men's Identity	Personal Identity
Premature or negative identity resolution; denial or distortion of self	Conformity	Preencounter	Contact	Foreclosure
Identity confusion and conflict; exploration	Dissonance/Introspection, Immersion	Encounter/Dissonance, Immersion	Disintegration, Reintegration	Moratorium, Diffusion
Positive identity resolution; inner sense of security	Awareness	Internalization	Autonomy	Achievement

**Table 2**  
**Alpha Coefficients of Instruments**

<u>Instrument</u>	<u>Alpha</u>
VIAS (Cultural Identity)	
Conformity	.71
Immersion	.83
Dissonance/Introspection	.71
Awareness	.78
WIAS (Gender Identity – Women)	
Preencounter	.70
Encounter/Dissonance	.66
Immersion	.68
Internalization	.68
MIAS (Gender Identity – Men)	
Contact	.72
Disintegration	.59
Reintegration	.75
Autonomy	.69
PIS (Personal Identity)	
Achievement	.75
Moratorium	.77
Diffusion	.73
Foreclosure	.88

Table 3

Amount of Variance Explained in Personal Identity Statuses by Gender and Cultural Identity Status for Latinos and Latinas

<u>Instrument</u>	<u>Personal Identity Status</u>		
	<u>Achievement</u>	<u>Moratorium</u>	<u>Diffusion Foreclosure</u>
Latinos			
VIAS (Cultural identity)	.12*	.31*	.15* .16*
MIAS (Gender identity)	.18*	.28*	.08 .15*
Latinas			
VIAS (Cultural identity)	.18*	.31*	.14* .15*
WIAS (Gender identity)	.17*	.21*	.16* .26*

\* p < .001

Note. VIAS = Visible Racial/Ethnic Group Identity Attitude Scale, WIAS = Womanist Identity Attitude Scale, MIAS = Men's Identity Attitude Scale.

Table 4

**Summary of Cultural and Gender Identity Statuses Significantly Related to Personal Identity Statuses\***

<u>PIS</u>	<u>Latinos</u>		<u>Latinas</u>	
	<u>VIAS</u>	<u>MIAS</u>	<u>VIAS</u>	<u>WIAS</u>
Achiev	Aware Disint	Auton	Aware	Intern
Morat	Dis/Int	Disint	Dis/Int	Enc/Dis Intern**
Diffus	Aware**		Dis/Int	Immers Intern**
Forecl	Confor	Contact Auton**	Confor Immers	Preenc Intern** Immers

Note. PIS = Personal Identity Status Scale; VIAS = Visible Racial/Ethnic Group Identity Attitude Scale; MIAS = Men's Identity Attitude Scale; WIAS = Womanist Identity Attitude Scale; Aware = Awareness; Dis/Int = Dissonance/Introspection, Confor = Conformity; Auton = Autonomy; Disint = Disintegration; Immers = Immersion; Intern = Internalization; Enc/Dis = Encounter/Dissonance; Preenc = Preencounter; Achiev = Achievement; Morat = Moratorium; Diffus = Diffusion; Forecl = Foreclosure.

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*Negatively related

Table 5

**Summary of Canonical Dimensions Shared By Cultural and Gender Identity Statuses For Latinos and Latinas**

<u>Dimension</u>	<u>Latinos</u>		<u>Latinas</u>	
	<u>VIAS</u>	<u>MIAS</u>	<u>VIAS</u>	<u>WIAS</u>
1. Confusion and Exploration	Dis/Int Immers	Disint Reint Contact	Dis/Int* Immers* Confor*	Enc/Dis* Immers* Preenc*
2. Positive Identity Resolution	Aware Dis/Int* Immers*	Auton Disint* Reint*	Aware	Intern

\*Negative loadings

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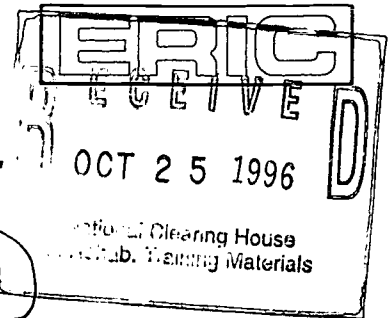
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