

Original Research

Nested, Place and Relational Multiple Social Identities among Latinx and White College Students in California, USA

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ABSTRACT

Aim

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine the relationships of nested concentrically enlarged social identities of family (most proximal), neighborhood, cognitive-ethnic, affective-ethnic, state (California), national (American), and global-human (most distal) identities among a diverse group of American undergraduate college students in California, as well as within groups of self-designated Latinx (instead of Latino/a to replace gender notation) and White students.

Method

Participants were 256 ethnically diverse college undergraduate students in a long-established non-profit private university in California (179 women and 77 men). Each social identity was measured using established scales that showed good internal consistencies for the current sample with Cronbach alphas ranging from 0.75 to 0.89.

Results

The results showed that in the overall sample, the relative strength (rank) of the social identities going from most proximal (strongest) to the most distal (weakest) are as follows: Family, national (American), cognitive-ethnic, State (California), global-human, affective-ethnic, and neighborhood. The rankings (relative strength) based on the mean identity scores were somewhat different for Latinx and White samples but significantly correlated. Also, for the Latinx sample family identity and ethnic identity appear to have both relational and place attributes. For the White sample, family and global-human identities were polarized.

Conclusion

The findings suggest the complexity of the ways nested identities may be related rather than being related in a concentrically linear fashion, and may be different for different groups and collectives.

Keywords

Social Identities; Nested identities; Place identities; Relational identities; Nested concentricity model.

INTRODUCTION

Social identities have been widely studied by a social and behavioral scientist with significant theorizing related to a variety of identities such as ethnic, racial, professional, national, cosmopolitan, and role identities.¹⁻³ Early works by Mead,⁴ Erikson,⁵ and Tajfel,⁶ have often been used as anchors for theorizing and empirical research on social identities.

Brewer⁷ has proposed a model where social identities are seen as a means of incorporating opposing needs for differentiation from others and the tendency to promote group cohesion to adopt and assimilate. Capozza and Brown⁸ have reviewed the historical development of theories and research on multiple identities and their influence in intergroup relations and conflict. Gamst, Liang and Der-Karabetian⁹ have

compiled and reviewed empirical measures of identities for different ethnic/racial groups as well as disabilities, and their utilization in multicultural research and practice. Herb and Kaplan¹⁰ have examined the relationships of social identities as they are concentrically enlarged from local to national to regional identities. Leary and Tangney¹¹ in their edited volume have highlighted the importance of social identity in the development of the self throughout the lifespan and its implications for self-regulation and well-being. Phinney¹² and Sue and Sue¹³ have presented a collection of research to propose an integrated approach to understanding the implications of multiple social identities for personal development and use in applied settings. Furthermore, the symbolic interactionist approach has provided an early theoretical framework in the examination of multiple nested identities emphasizing the importance of situational contexts that influence the relationships among different socially constructed identities.¹⁴

The theoretical framework of concentrically nested identities has not received much empirical attention in the study of multiple identities.^{10,15,16} The nested concentricity framework of multiple identities stipulates that identities concentrically closest to each other tend to be related more strongly than those further away from each other. Goyder¹⁷ has examined such relationships among Canadians. Medrano and Gutierrez¹⁸ have studied European and national identities in Spain. Kalin and Berry^{19,20} have shown the importance of social context in determining the nature of the relationship of multiple identities.

In the nested identity framework family and ethnic identity would be considered proximal (closest) to the center of concentricity. They would also be considered relational identities concentrically closest to each other, generating a strong sense of belonging and would be correlated by virtue of being relational.²¹⁻²³ The state and national identities would be more concentrically distal identities generating a relatively weaker sense of belonging but would be correlated more strongly with each other and would be less strongly related to more proximal identities of family or ethnicity. According to Laczko²¹ and Dixon and Durheim²⁴ attachments to different identities also tend to be inversely proportional to the distance from everyday life and tend to be less relational.

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship of conceptually identified concentrically enlarged nested identities of family, neighborhood, cognitive and affective ethnic identities, state (California), nation (America) and global-human (cosmopolitan) identities. Here the family would be considered closest to the center of the expanding concentric circle and may be the strongest sense of identity, and the global-human identity would be considered the most distant and relatively weakest among the nested identities. Moreover, the relationship and hierarchy (relative strength) of these nested identities will be examined among a group of diverse California undergraduate college students overall, as well as separately within subgroups of Latinx and White undergraduates. Even though the concentrically nested identities framework suggests the nature of the relationship

among the identities it is difficult to hypothesize such relationship because of the lack of strong empirical literature base.

It is important to recognize that social identities tend to be influenced by social situations and circumstances.^{14,25} Contextual factors of social composition of settings where identity is studied such as school, workspace, church, cultural events or organizational setting may impact the salience of social identities.^{26,27} Given the potential impact of such situational and contextual factors it is desirable to assess multiple social identities in a relatively neutral setting such as a classroom where the impact of context is minimized.

METHODS

Participants

Volunteer participants were 256 ethnically diverse college undergraduate students in a long-established nonprofit private school in California (179 women and 77 men). Of the total sample, based on self-identification, 39% were Latinx (N=100), 27% White (N=70), 14% multiracial or multiethnic, 7% African American, 6% Pacifica Islander/Asian, and 7% were other/unspecified. "Latinx" notation is relatively new in use and is used to reflect an undifferentiated gender designation. Ethnic/racial identity was obtained by an open-ended question where participants had to write in how they identified. Participants who identified ethnically with a Latin American country (i.e. Mexican-American) or some other traditionally used labels, such as Hispanic or Latino, were included in the Latinx group. This approach is commonly used, even though racially some Latinx may consider themselves White. If they happened to identify themselves as "White" they would have ended up in the White group. Participants who identified with self-designations such as White, Caucasian, or European-American were placed in the White group.

Measures

Family identity was measured using a somewhat modified form of Vazsonyi et al. Family Closeness subscale that had 6 items and an overall alpha=0.82 (95% CI=0.78-0.85) for the current sample;²⁸ example of an item is: "I am closer to my family than are a lot of young people my age." Neighborhood identity was measured using a somewhat modified version of Vazsonyi et al.'s Neighborhood Attachment subscale that had 10 items and an overall alpha=0.90 (95% CI=0.88-0.92) for the current sample;²⁸ example of an item is: "Living in this community gives me a sense of community." Ethnic Cognitive identity was measured using the Phinney and Ong Multiethnic Identity Measure (MEIM-R) that had 6 items and an overall alpha=0.87 (95% CI=0.85-0.90) for the current sample.²⁹ Cognitive ethnic identity may be considered a bit more distal and less relational than Ethnic Affective identity (below); an example of an item is: "I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic/racial group, such as its history, traditions,, and customs."

Der-Karabetian et al scales in somewhat modified form

were used to measure affective ethnic identity, state (California) identity, national (American) identity, and global-human identity.^{30,31} Affective ethnic identity had 6 items and an overall alpha=0.76 (95% CI=0.71-0.80) for the current sample. Affective ethnic identity may be considered as more proximal and relational; an example of an item is: *"I feel members of my ethnic/racial group all over the world are like relatives to me."* Both cognitive and affective ethnic identities were measured since they tend to be correlated but not very strongly, suggesting that they may be related but reflect somewhat different aspects of ethnic identity.^{9,26} California identity had 7 items and an overall alpha=0.75 (95% CI=0.70-0.79) for the current sample; an example of an item is: *"My fate and future are bound with all Californians."* National (American) identity had 7 items and an overall alpha=0.75 (95% CI=0.70-0.80) for the current sample; an example of an item is: *"If I were to be born again, I would wish to be born in the United States."* Global-human identity had 7 items and an overall alpha=0.75 (95% CI=0.70-0.80) for the current sample; example of an item is: *"I think of myself as a citizen of the world."* The minor modifications of items from the original included making references to the target identity such as "California" or to "my ethnic/racial group" instead of "Mexican" to make them more applicable. Another modification was the rating scale for consistency. Each of the 49 items across all the measures were rated on a 6-point Likert scale, 6=Strongly Agree, 1=Strongly Disagree, since some of the measures in their original formats used different Likert scales. This was important to do since the items of the different measures were randomly distributed in the survey form to control for potential order effect. (All the items of the survey may be obtained by contacting the corresponding author).

Procedure

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board. The survey forms were administered anonymously mostly in psychology classroom settings where participants signed a consent form that was separated from the survey form. Students in the lower division and introductory classes came from different academic departments since these courses met general education requirements. They could decline participation with no consequences. Summary of the findings was sent to participants who requested them on the consent form.

RESULTS

Rank and Relative Strength of Nested Identities

The relative strength of each identity was based on the mean scores of the total sample and the two subgroups of Latinx and White samples (Table 1). The highest mean identity score was given the rank of 1; the next highest score was given the rank of 2, and so on. In Table 1 the numbers to the left of the name of the identity represent the conceptually nested rank of the identity. The numbers next to the right of the means with a slash represent the rank of that identity. Using Rank Order correlation (Rho), The rankings were correlated to examine if the rankings of the total, Latinx and White samples were similar or comparable to the

conceptual ranking (relative strength) of nested identities and if the rankings were comparable between the two subgroups. A significant correlation would indicate the rankings (relative strength) of the nested identities to be similar or comparable.

Table 1. Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-tests Comparing Means of Latino/IA and White Samples on Nested Identity Measures

Identities (Conceptually Nested Rank)	Total Sample (N=256)	Latinx (N=100)	White (N=70)
	Mean/SD Rank	Mean/SD Rank	Mean/SD Rank
1. Family	5.05/1 0.85	5.07/1 0.84	5.01/1 0.81
2. Neighbor	2.10/7 1.03	2.96/7 1.02	3.15/6 1.02
3. Ethnic/ Cognitive	3.97/3 1.09	4.12/3 1.04	3.39/5 0.90
4. Ethnic/Affective	3.61/6 0.94	3.76/5 0.88	3.15/6 0.76
5. State/California	3.74/4 0.85	3.87/4 0.84	3.58/4 0.87
6. Nation/America	4.27/2 0.85	4.36/2 0.86	4.18/2 0.92
7. Global-Human	3.64/5 0.87	3.66/6 0.81	3.66/3 0.88

The conceptually identified concentricity ranking of nested identities of family (1), neighborhood (2), affective ethnic (3), cognitive ethnic (4), state (California) (5), nation (America) (6) and global-human (cosmopolitan) (7) identities did not match well (not statistically significant) with the rankings of the total sample (Rho=0.29), Latinx sample (Rho=0.43), or the White sample (Rho=0.08). This finding fails to support the conceptual concentricity of nested identities. However, Latinx sample and White sample rankings matched well and appear to be comparable (statistically significant) (Rho=0.72, $p<0.05$). Family was the highest ranked (strongest) identity in the total, Latinx, and White samples matching the nested concentricity framework. Family, national, and cognitive ethnic identities were highest (strongest) in the total sample that matched with the Latinx sample. Family, national and global-human identities were highest (strongest) in the White sample. Neighborhood and affective ethnic identities were ranked lower (weaker) in the total, Latinx, and White samples. The empirically obtained concentricity of the identities did not fall quite in line with the conceptual nested concentricity and varied somewhat within the two ethnic samples.

Inter-correlations of Identities

Identity scores were inter-correlated to examine if conceptually nested identities close together were more strongly related to each other, and if relational identities and place identities were more strongly related to each other within their categories. Table 2 shows the correlations for the total sample; Table 3 shows the correlations for the Latinx sample, and Table 4 shows the correlations for the White sample.

Stronger relationship of concentrically closer identities was present but was not uniformly true for the total, Latinx and White samples, partially supporting the nested concentricity framework. Identification as American (national) and Californian (state) correlated significantly with all other identities for the Latinx sample, perhaps serving as super (enlarged) inclusive identi-

Table 2. Inter-Correlation of Nested Identity Scores for the Total Sample (N=256)

	Family	Neighbor.	Ethnic/ Aff.	Ethnic/ Cog.	State	Nation	Global
1. Family	-						
2. Neighborhood	0.12*	-					
3. Ethnic/Affective	0.26**	0.37**	-				
4. Ethnic/Cognitive	0.26**	0.30**	0.78**	-			
5. State/California	0.20**	0.29**	0.37**	0.26**	-		
6. Nation/America	0.25**	0.21**	0.28**	0.22**	0.63**	-	
7. Global-Human	0.07	0.41**	0.40**	0.28**	0.22**	0.27*	-

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

Table 3. Inter-Correlation of Nested Identity Scores for the Latinx sample (N=100)

	Family	Neighbor.	Ethnic/ Aff.	Ethnic/ Cog.	State	Nation	Global
1. Family	-						
2. Neighborhood	0.14	-					
3. Ethnic/Affective	0.16	0.23*	-				
4. Ethnic/Cognitive	0.15	0.41**	0.77**	-			
5. State/California	0.24*	0.23*	0.31**	0.25**	-		
6. Nation/America	0.30**	0.22*	0.37**	0.30**	0.75**	-	
7. Global-Human	0.13	0.59**	0.53**	0.35**	0.26**	0.40**	-

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

Table 4. Inter-Correlation of Nested Identity Scores for the White Sample (N=70)

	Family	Neighbor.	Ethnic/ Aff.	Ethnic/ Cog.	State	Nation	Global
1. Family	-						
2. Neighborhood	0.11	-					
3. Ethnic/Affective	0.29*	0.46**	-				
4. Ethnic/Cognitive	0.19	0.46**	0.76**	-			
5. State/California	0.32**	0.41**	0.67**	0.41**	-		
6. Nation/America	0.28**	0.22	0.53**	0.43**	0.63**	-	
7. Global-Human	-0.12	0.12	0.12	0.11	0.11	0.11	-

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

Table 5. Factor Analysis with Principle Components and Varimax Rotation of Seven Nested Identity Scores for the Total, Latinx and White Samples

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Overall Sample (N=256)			
Chi Square=558.56 (df=21), p<0.001; KMO Sampling Adequacy=0.676			
Eigenvalues	2.91	1.17	1.01
Percent of variance explained	42%	17%	14%
Total variance explained=73%			
MEIM-R	0.840		
Ethnic/Affective	0.777		
Family	0.645		
National/America		0.884	
State/California		0.837	
Global-Human			0.785
Neighborhood			0.701
Latinx Sample (N=100)			
Chi Square=284.90 (df=21, p<0.001); KMO Sampling Adequacy=0.684			
Eigenvalues	3.20	1.33	
Percent of variance explained	37%	27%	
Total variance explained=64%			
Ethnic/Affective	0.867		
Neighborhood	0.782		
MEIM-R	0.782		
Global-Human	0.727		
National/America		0.876	
State/California		0.871	
Family		0.547	
White Sample (N=70)			
Chi Square=164.99 (df=21, p<0.001); KMO Sampling Adequacy=0.762			
Eigenvalues	3.21	1.13	
Percent of variance explained	46%	16%	
Total variance explained=62%			
Ethnic/Affective	0.889		
State/California	0.814		
MEIM-R	0.803		
National/America	0.716		
Neighborhood	0.629		
Global-Human		-0.762	
Family		0.683	

Note: There is no conflict of interest in the data collection and publication of this manuscript

ties. The range of correlations for national identity ranged from 0.22-0.75, and from 0.24 to 0.40 for state identity. Identification with family appears to be the most separated identity from the others for both the Latinx and the White samples, perhaps serving as an exclusive sense of belonging, which is also reflected in its being the strongest (top-ranked) most proximal identity. For the Latinx sample family identity was significantly correlated only with state and national identities ($r=0.24$ and 0.30 , respectively). For the White sample it was correlated with affective-ethnic, state and national identities ($r=0.29$, 0.32 . and 0.28 , respectively).

Noticeable difference between the two groups was identification with the global human community. For the Latinx sample, it was connected to the other identities except for family identity (correlations ranged from 0.26 to 0.59), even though it was ranked low (6th). For the White sample, global human identity was connected to none of the other identities but was ranked relatively high (3rd ed), suggesting a separated but important sense of belonging. The pattern of correlations suggests that relational identities (family, ethnic) and place identities (state, national, and neighborhood) might have overlapping aspects of a sense of belonging and affiliation.

Factor Analysis of Identities

To take the examination of the nature of the relationships among the identities a step further, the mean scores of the identities were factor analyzed separately for the total, Latinx and the White samples using principle components and varimax rotation to determine how the identities were grouped (Table 5). The KMO sample adequacy indicator showed an adequate sample size for all three of the analyses. The total explained variances were quite high for the total, Latinx, and White samples, 73%, 64% and 62%, respectively. In general, relational and place identities tended to group together within their categories, partially supporting the conceptual nested concentricity. However, the factor structures of the Latinx and the White groups differed somewhat.

In the total sample, as expected, the first two factors that emerged reflect the grouping or clustering of proximal/relational identities (Factor 1) and distal/place identities (Factor 2). The grouping in Factor 3 seems to suggest that neighborhood identity may have more in common with the conceptually most distal global-human identity, perhaps reflecting the impersonal and distanced nature of neighborhoods.

In the Latinx sample, only two factors emerged. The first factor reflects the grouping of the mixture of place and relational identities: ethnic, neighborhood and global-human Identities. The inclusion of the neighborhood identity may suggest its relative salience and importance along with ethnic identity in reinforcing a sense of belonging that may be enhanced by living in a neighborhood (place) near other members of one's own ethnic group. The second factor seems to suggest the core nature of identification with the family that is nested with place identities of state and nation. It appears that family identity may have both a relational as well as place attributes, and may reinforce the sense of place attachment.

In the White sample, two factors emerged. In the first factor, similar to the Latinx sample, relational and place identities appear to be clustered together. Ethnic identity as a relational identity shares a connection with the place identities of the neighborhood, state and national identity. It is likely that ethnic identity also like family identity may carry both relational and place attributes. The second factor includes the family and global-human identities that are polarized since the former has a positive factor loading and the latter a negative factor loading. This is not surprising since the two identities represent the two most distant identities consistent with the nested concentricity framework.

DISCUSSION

The concept of multiple social identities stipulates that sense of belonging and identity may be tied to geographical and territorial entities.^{32,33} They may also be relational identities that involve intergroup and comparative interactions that enhance in-group distinctiveness and cohesion.³⁴⁻³⁷ Another element that contributes to understanding multiple identities is the notion that identities vary in terms of enlarged and superordinate identities impacted by minority-majority statuses, sociopolitical conditions, and situational

variations.³⁸⁻⁴⁰ The nested concentricity framework provides yet another possible way of conceptualizing the way multiple identities can be related in addition to other conceptual frameworks.^{10,17,41}

The results here suggest that conceptually identified concentricity dimensions do not necessarily line up going from the proximal intimate and relational identities to the distal and geographic or territorial identities. In the total sample relative strength (rank) going from most proximal (closest to the center of concentricity) to the most distal were as follows: Family, national (American), cognitive-ethnic, State (California), global-human, affective-ethnic, and neighborhood. Ranking of the strength of identities in the total, Latinx, and White sample do not match well (uncorrelated) with the conceptual expectation of the concentrically expanding identities. However, the ranking of the strength of identities was comparable (correlated) between Latinx and White college students. It is possible that the nested concentricity may be influenced by the primary dimensions of social identity proposed by Jackson and Smith that involve attraction to the in-group, belief in common fate and depersonalization of the self as group member and less as a unique person.⁴¹ The in-group attribute of common fate may be extended to a sense of belonging to a more enlarged sense of identity as a Californian and as an American.

Separate factor analyses of the mean scores for the total, Latinx and White samples showed a somewhat different grouping of the seven social identities. In the total sample, as expected, relational identities were grouped together (ethnic and family), place identities (national and state) were grouped together, and neighborhood and global-human were grouped together. Consistent with such grouping the results also showed that relational and place identities were more strongly correlated within their categories. Moreover, proximal identities tended to generate a stronger sense of belonging than distal identities in line with findings by Laczk regarding local and national attachments.²¹

It was noteworthy to see that in the two ethnic samples the identities were grouped somewhat differently in the factor analyses. For the Latinx sample family identity and ethnic identity appear to have both relational and place attributes since they were nested close to place identities. For the White group ethnic and place, identities nested together, while family and global-human identities were polarized in a separate factor. Such ethnic group difference in the nesting of identities and their relative strength may be partially due to the social contextualization of the groups as suggested by de Rivera and Carson,³⁹ Harwood et al⁴² and Pollman.¹⁵ The social-political contexts experience by the Latinx (minority status) and the White samples (majority status) may partially be implicated in understanding the differences in the way social identities are endorsed. It is also reasonable to think of relational and place identities as co-extensive rather than differentiated or independent.

CONCLUSION

The compelling conclusions from the current data suggest the complexity of the way relational and place identities may be related rather than being related in a concentrically linear fashion. Also,

the nested concentricity of multiple relational and place identities may differ within different collective groups due to various social and contextual factors. Future research could examine the way relational and place identities may be related within different, national, ethnic/racial, regional, organizational or professional entities using the nested concentricity framework of multiple identities. The notion of concentrically enlarged social identities may be constructed differently for different social groupings and entities. How such constructions may be reflections of the cultures and social-political status of different groups or organizational entities provide ample opportunity for further research.

One of the limitations of this study is the limited generalizability of the findings because of the nature of the samples. While it was assumed that the classroom setting was relatively neutral in elevating one identity over another, it is not possible to establish such neutrality. However, the classroom settings where the data were collected represented good diversity of ethnic/racial backgrounds. Whereas if there was a homogenous representation of one group or another it may have elevated that group's sense of affiliation over others.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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