

Daniel W. Robertson, Peter R. Grant

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Bicultural identity: A social identity review

Daniel W. Robertson and Peter R. Grant

The number of people identifying with more than one culture is increasing and so too is the need to have the theoretical and methodological tools to investigate bicultural identity. We provide a review of the major theories in social psychology that address bicultural identity and evaluate them from a social identity perspective. Models of biculturalism such as acculturation, alternating and fused/blended identities, frame switching, and bicultural identity integration are discussed, highlighting the theories' respective conceptualizations of identity. We touch on the strengths and limitations of the theories and highlight opportunities to align insights from the social identity literature into the study of bicultural identity. Finally, we conclude by providing an integration of the models from social identity approach as well as reflections and commentary for future research.

Having exposure to multiple cultures is becoming the norm rather than the exception and, as a result, many people in the world now identify with more than one culture (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; West et al., 2017). Although biculturalism is becoming more prevalent in society, there is still much to be understood about it from a psychological standpoint. A challenge for researchers is accounting for the various facets of culture and social identification that comprise bicultural identity since the current models used to study bicultural identity explore different components of the bicultural experience: some look at behavioural markers

of identity, some are concerned with the phenomenological experience, whereas others approach it from a socio-cognitive stance. Herein, we review theories of bicultural identity and argue that studying bicultural identity from a social identity lens would enhance current conceptions of bicultural identity.

1. A social identity approach to bicultural identity

The study of identity within social psychology has been strongly influenced by Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Notably, the prop-

ositions of SIT focus on the extent to which individuals meaningfully identify with, and feel an emotional attachment to, their group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The most commonly cited definition of social identity is «that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [*sic*] knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership» (Tajfel, 1978, p. 63). Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) was developed as an extension of SIT and focuses more on contextual and cognitive aspects of identity (Turner et al., 1987). According to the theory, social contexts create meaningful group boundaries resulting in different social identities becoming salient depending on the situation. This salience is the result of the context which makes a specific identity particularly pertinent (category fit) and the person's motives which evoke that same identity (category accessibility). For example, in a situation in which a person faces discrimination as a member of a cultural group, her membership in that group is especially relevant and she is strongly motivated to counter such discrimination. When a social identity with a particular social category is salient, then it is expected that the individual, as a member of that category, will engage in both self-categorization and categorization of others as ingroup members or outgroup members.

A social identity approach makes it clear that there is cognitive awareness of one's group membership (self-categorisation), but there is also the extent to which one feels emotionally involved with the group (affective commitment). Consequently, people who belong to the same social group may have different conceptions of their group identity depending on the extent to which they feel affectively committed to that group (Ellemers et al., 1999). Building on Tajfel's (1978) definition of social identity, subsequent researchers (Cameron, 2004; Ellemers et al., 1999; Jackson, 2002; Leach et al., 2008) have proposed that social identity should be considered a *multidimensional* construct comprising cognitive, evaluative, and emotional components.

Of the many possible social identities, one particularly important and influential one is ethnic or cultural background (Phinney, 1990). The term *cultural identity* refers to when individuals identify with the social norms, customs, values, and behaviours of a given group. Some researchers use the terms culture and ethnicity interchangeably (McLean & Syed, 2014), although ethnic identity is ultimately a form of cultural identity (Maffini & Wong, 2012). Cultural identity equally applies to groups other than ethnicity as the notion of culture is also relevant to a number of meaningful social dimensions, including gender, sexual orientation, life stage (e.g., student, worker, retiree), economic sector (e.g., technology, service, academic, professional), religion, political ideology, and recreational preferences (Miller et al., 2009). Inasmuch as a person can identify with and have a meaningful attachment to multiple groups, by extension many bicultural individuals likely have not just two, but multiple cultural identities. From a social identity perspective, thus, we conceptualize *bicultural identity* as self-categorization with, and an emotional attach-

ment to, two or more cultural groups in which the individual adopts and integrates the norms and the normative attitudes, values, and behaviours into their collective self-concept (Taylor & Louis, 2004). Understood this way, we review some of the more prominent theories of bicultural identity in social psychology with suggestions on how a social identity approach could supplement the understanding of the construct.

2. Conceptualizing bicultural identity

2.1. The acculturation model

The work of Berry and his colleagues (Berry, 1984, 1997; Berry et al., 2006) is notable for the early development of bicultural identity as part of an acculturation model that focused on the process of group and individual adaptation in multicultural settings. In the model, there are four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. When there is an interest in maintaining one's original culture while simultaneously seeking interaction with the dominant group, this is deemed an *integration* strategy. This strategy reflects the process whereby the individual remains engaged in both a mainstream and ethnic culture and is, thus, considered to be the *bicultural* form of adaptation. In a bicultural scenario, the acculturating individual integrates the social norms and associated normative attitudes, values and behaviors pertaining to each of their two cultures in some way (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). There is a clear pattern, both theoretical and empirical, that those with a bicultural identity prefer the integration strategy (Berry, 1997; van Oudenhoven & Benet-Martínez, 2015; Verkuyten, 2005). Berry's theorizing was constructive for opening doors for bicultural identity research and the acculturation typology, as either a springboard or a point of divergence, is often present in bicultural theory (e.g., Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Birman, 1994; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997).

2.2. Alternating vs. fused/blended identity

After the acculturation model, an influential treatment of bicultural identity came from a review by LaFromboise et al. (1993). They theorized that maintaining more than one culture can be psychologically problematic unless one develops *bicultural competence* in both cultural domains. In their view, achieving competence in any culture implies familiarity with the beliefs and values of the culture, as well as an ability to perform socially sanctioned behavior including speaking the culture's language. Ultimately, LaFromboise et al. (1993) emphasized two models of bicultural negotiation: the alternation model and the fusion model. In the alternation model,

cultures are conceived as two separate domains and the individual alternates or switches between cultural schemata in different situations similar to how a bilingual person switches language depending on the context. On the other hand, identity fusion represented a new hybrid combination of the two cultural identities (e.g., Chicano culture which is a unique melding of the Mexican and American cultures).

Contributing to the alternation/fusion model, Birman (1994) rightly noted that existing models of bicultural identity did not distinguish *psychological identification* with a culture from behavioral participation in a culture. She expanded the alternation/fusion model by suggesting four modes of bicultural identity: blended (the person is able to competently participate in, and strongly identifies with, both cultures – a conditions which is most likely to result in a «fused» new identity); instrumental (the person is able to competently participate in both cultures without identifying with either); integrated (the person is able to competently participate in both cultures but only identifies with his/her ethnic culture); and explorers (the person is behaviorally adept in the dominant culture but only identifies with the his/her ethnic culture and is exploring lost cultural roots). Birman's (1994) model effectively synthesized ideas of bicultural identity from Berry's (1990) acculturation typology with the alternation/fusion model (LaFromboise et al., 1993) while making the distinction between behavioural acculturation and psychological identification.

Subsequently, Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) investigated an integration of the bicultural conceptual models of Berry (1990), LaFromboise et al. (1993), and Birman (1994) by exploring how adolescents from ethnic minority groups (African-American and Mexican-American) think about and handle their relationship with the two cultures in which they live. They found that alternating individuals could function in two cultural settings, but this behavioural adaptability was not necessarily indicative of psychological identification. Further, in the way that identities interacted, they found evidence more consistent with Birman's (1994) idea of blended biculturalism as the adolescents found ways to combine their separate cultural identities.

2.3. Frame switching

Veering somewhat from the traditional treatment of biculturalism, Hong et al. (2000) contended that the established theoretical models of biculturalism focused on the outcome of acquiring a new cultural identity more than on the process of how bicultural individuals actively navigate different cultural identities. Hong et al. (2000) proposed that bicultural individuals switch cultural lenses in a process called frame switching. When frame switching, the individual shifts between cultural interpretive frames (i.e., cultural schemas) in response to the social context in which situational cues prime different aspects of an individual's cultural knowledge specific to one culture or the other. In essence, bicultural individuals

will then have access to culture-specific cognitive structures depending on the sociocultural context. The original research on frame-switching, however, did not comment on how frame switching may result in shifts in one's sense of self.

2.4. Bicultural identity integration

While Hong et al.'s (2000) work was sociocognitive in nature and not specifically focussed on identity, Benet-Martínez and her colleagues (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002) fleshed out the findings from frame-switching research and emphasized that more could be done to understand how maintaining and integrating two cultural «frames» relates to identity processes. All bicultural individuals identify with more than one culture, however, their perception of the tension between those cultures will differ. When shifting from one cultural frame to another, having identities that are harmonious creates very little dissonance, but comfortably maintaining the two identities becomes complex when cultural frames conflict. Whereas some biculturals will perceive their cultural identities to be complementary, others might describe their identities as being contradictory. These individual differences are related to one's bicultural identity integration (BII) which Haritatos and Benet-Martínez (2002) suggest moderates cultural frame-switching. It was theorized that BII comprises the psychological constructs of cultural conflict (*vs.* harmony) and cultural compartmentalization (*vs.* cultural blending). Cultural conflict represents the affective component of feeling torn between two seemingly incompatible cultural identities. On the other hand, cultural compartmentalization captures the degree of «blendedness» (e.g., being Chinese-American) compared to dissociation between cultural identities (e.g., being Chinese in America) (Huynh et al., 2011).

3. Bicultural identity as a social identity

Our contention is that using a social identity lens could bolster the study of bicultural identity. More precisely, many of the shortcomings of existing theories stem from the fact that identity is not considered in a comprehensive way. The different theories touch on different components of bicultural identification but arguably could be more integrated with a more fulsome, multidimensional, conceptualization of identity. That is, there are many questions regarding identity related processes that could be addressed if a social identity approach is adopted. Considering this view, we have indicated in Table 1 several strengths and limitations of bicultural theories as it pertains to studying identity.

It is noted that some theorists from the social identity tradition have indeed developed models that apply to bicultural identity. Thus, before addressing how rely-

Table 1*A comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of the theoretical approaches to bicultural identity*

Theoretical approach	Strengths	Limitations
Acculturation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bicultural identity is an outcome of the integration acculturative strategy 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cultural identity is confounded with cultural behaviour 2. Cultural identities are treated as independent of one another overlooking the multifaceted, interrelated, and dynamic nature of identity 3. The individual or sociocultural antecedents of integration are not well developed
Alternating <i>vs.</i> fused/blended identity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognizes that cultural identification and behaviour are distinct and relatively independent 2. Recognizes that identity can alternate, but also can be blended or fused 3. Treats bicultural identification as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon 4. Proposes that being bicultural has qualitatively different meanings, both within and across ethnic groups 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A lack of a systematic schema for different combinations of cultural identification and competence 2. Does not consider the compatibility of two cultural identities 3. No in-depth account of the different dimensions of bicultural identity 4. Despite that the models are presented as independent typologies of bicultural identity, a person with a blended identity could still alternate cultural frames 5. Underdeveloped as to when an identity will be blended or when it will be a new fused identity
Frame switching	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provides a framework for when and why people alternate between identities 2. The evidence that biculturals can move between different interpretive frames set a precedent for future empirical and theoretical work on biculturalism 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not used to address identification 2. Does not acknowledge fused or blended identities 3. Does not consider the compatibility of two cultural identities 4. How biculturals perceive cultural cues in a setting with ambiguous or mixed cultural cues is not elaborated 5. Frame-switching becomes complicated in multicultural settings and with multicultural individuals
Bicultural identity integration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gives an explanation for when individuals fuse their cultural identities (they are compatible) versus when they alternate (they conflict) 2. Designed to speak to identity per se, and is not inferred from bicultural competency 3. The principles of BII are not necessarily restricted to ethnocultural, racial or national identities 4. Provides an explanation as to what moderates cultural priming 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No in-depth assessment of the multidimensional nature of bicultural identities 2. Needs elaboration on when and why individuals perceive harmony or disharmony between their cultures 3. BII scales are oriented toward the perceived overlap of identities and endorsement of a blended identification while neglecting to look at the independent elements of each identity

ing on a social identity approach might enhance the study of bicultural identity, we highlight some of the contributions, as well as the shortcomings, of theories rooted in social identity as they might apply to bicultural identity. We then discuss how a social identity approach might expand on existing theory as well as help integrate the different frameworks.

3.1. Social identity complexity

Developed from a SIT perspective, Roccas and Brewer's (2002) model, suggests that a person's identities vary in the extent to which they overlap or are embedded within each other. The *complexity* stems from the process of recognizing and interpreting information about one's own ingroups and the perceived amount of overlap between multiple group memberships. When one's social identity is low in complexity, it indicates that one perceives a high degree of overlap between the actual members of his/her various group memberships as well as high similarity among the typical characteristics of his/her various group memberships. A complex identity structure is, hence, more inclusive than a low complexity identity which represents a narrower more homogeneous perception of the ingroup (Prati et al., 2016).

Roccas and Brewer (2002) proposed four types of social identity and related these categories to the literature on biculturalism. Intersection, which is a compound of one's different identities, is similar to Birman's (1994) blended identity. Dominance, where one identity predominates, has parallels to Berry's (1997) assimilation and separation concepts in which the person only identifies with the dominant or the cultural group respectively. Compartmentalization, when an identity is activated in a specific context, can be likened to a person alternating between identities depending upon the context (LaFromboise et al., 1993; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). The merger identity, in which multiple group memberships are simultaneously recognized and embraced, shares common theoretical ground with a blended identity and relates to the concept of BII. Indeed, Huynh et al. (2011) noted that Social Identity Complexity is a construct relevant to BII that may provide further insight into individual differences in biculturalism. In some ways, then, social identity complexity incorporates many aspects of the existing theories on bicultural identity.

Notwithstanding, social identity complexity can only indirectly assess the degree of overlap between different ingroup memberships. The related measures either assess the perceived overlap between members of various ingroups, or the similarity of the prototypical representations of the different ingroups. Thus, there is no examination of the relative importance of these groups or how these bicultural identities are internalized in the self-concept. Thus, the theory has mainly been used for studying the reduction of intergroup prejudice (Ashforth et al., 2008). Early investigations of Social Identity Complexity solely focussed on the overlap of group identities and not the attachment to those various group memberships. Since then,

some work has been done to address identity strength (Reimer et al., 2022; van Dommelen et al., 2015) although other crucial components of identity such as sense of belonging, importance and commitment have not been accounted for.

3.2. Dual identity

Despite rarely employing the term «bicultural» the phenomenon of *dual identification* is a social identity perspective on individuals with dual group membership. Whereas the bicultural literature has largely focussed on the management and negotiation of identities, the study of dual identity has gained attention in intergroup relations, political action, and acculturation. The operationalization and measurement of what dual identity is, however, has been approached from different angles.

In the Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM, Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), dual identity represents a dual identification with an ethnic group as well as a superordinate national group and this pattern of identification is commonly pursued by minority group members since they can retain an ethnic identity meanwhile holding an inclusive superordinate identity that ties them to the larger national ingroup. A dual identity allows members of different groups to see themselves as members of a more inclusive superordinate group thereby increasing positive intergroup attitudes.

Although this concept is useful in understanding ingroup bias, there is not currently consensus in the literature on what dual identification is and how it should be measured (Ng Tseung-Wong et al., 2019). In line with early acculturation theory, one standpoint is to classify those with high levels of identification on two different identities as dual identifiers (Ng Tseung-Wong & Verkuyten, 2013). In contrast, Simon and Ruhs (2008) contended that a dual identity need not consist of high levels of identification with both identities, but some level of identification with both groups was sufficient for a dual identity. Lastly, Fleischmann and Verkuyten (2016) found that self-identification measures of a blended dual identity (feeling both «X and Y») differed from a measure reflecting identification with the two constituent identities. One explanation of this discrepancy is that the multidimensional nature of social identities accounts for different configurations of an individual's identity and the research on dual identity tends to ignore the possible importance of making a distinction between various dimensions (Fleischmann & Verkuyten, 2016). Indeed, the lack of multidimensional measures has been a limitation in the dual identity literature (Fleischmann et al., 2019; Ng Tseung-Wong et al., 2019; Wiley et al., 2019).

3.3. Multidimensional social identity

We maintain that, as a form of social identity, bicultural identity should be considered a multidimensional construct and will include cognitive, evaluative and

emotional facets. The reviewed conceptualizations of bicultural identity, even those drawing from an SIT background, touch on aspects of the nature of identity, but we argue that none of the models do so comprehensively. In the area of social identity research, several authors have put forward multidimensional models that could be considered (Roccas et al., 2008). For example, Cameron (2004) suggested that there are several factors: centrality (how often the group «comes to mind»), in-group affect (emotional significance of the group) and ingroup ties (how much the individual feels part of the group). Using slightly different terms, Ashmore et al. (2004) similarly postulated that, in addition to self-categorization, social identity comprises the perceived importance of a group as well as the personal attachment to and social embeddedness within a group. The reviewed models of bicultural identity account for self-categorization, behaviour and social cognition to varying extents, but any examination of bicultural identity should also take into account factors such as the level of attachment to the group and the nature of the intergroup situation (Verkuyten & Pouliasi, 2006). Granted the different models vary in their stated focus, and cover different areas of bicultural identity such as the structure (e.g., types, patterns), the experience (e.g., harmony *vs.* conflict) or the dynamic aspects of bicultural identity (e.g., frame switching), but all these areas could be supplemented by a more rigorous investigation of the multiple dimensions included in a bicultural identity.

4. Social identity theory expanding on existing theories

4.1. Acculturation

In the acculturation literature, bicultural identity is based on the ability to speak one's native language as well as the language of their cultural context, have friends from both cultural backgrounds, and maintain connection with both cultures through various media outlets (e.g., magazines, television programs, and the Internet). The experience of bicultural identity, however, involves more than just behavioral navigation of two different cultures. Indeed, some researchers have rightly noted that levels of psychological identification are only weakly correlated to acculturation patterns in behaviour (e.g., Hutnik, 1991), while others have put emphasis on the importance of assessing identification with the cultural group apart from solely behavioural acculturation (Hurtado et al., 1994; Liebkind, 2006; Snauwaert et al., 2003). While there has been increased interest in psychological identification, the nature and measurement of bicultural identity in the acculturation literature has been contentious (Rudmin, 2003).

Acculturation theory would be best served by acknowledging that the group identification is an important part of a person's collective self-concept (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Assessing the strength of identification in

different facets of one's cultural identifications would add to the ability for acculturation research to study the nature of bicultural identity. For example, different acculturation strategies may be used according to level of identification in more central as opposed to peripheral domains of an individual's identities, and these types of complexities can be accounted for by expanding how identity is conceptualized (Mancini & Porretti, 2017).

4.2. Blended/alternating identity/frame-switching

Using a social identity framework to expand on the concept of blended identity, there is likely a theoretical connection to the need to achieve optimal distinctiveness whereby an individual feels a sense of belonging, but also feels a sense of being different (Brewer, 1991). A bicultural person can benefit from a blended identity by achieving a sense of being different through a minority identity, but also feel a sense of similarity through an equally held majority identity. In the case of a recent immigrant, for example, a blended identification that simultaneously maintains aspects of the host culture and one's ethnic culture might help them meet both the need for differentiation and for similarity, and this is beneficial as they become acculturated into their adopted country (Ferguson et al., 2014).

What also needs to be taken into account, however, is that the ability to develop a blended identity might be somewhat dependent on the intergroup situation and the attitudes toward diversity among the majority group. A context where the majority group does not accept a minority member's blended identity leads to identity threat for the bicultural individual (Brown & Zagefka, 2011). This «dual identity threat» is experienced when facing discrimination or the perception that an attempt to bridge two identities is not accepted by the larger society (Branscombe et al., 1999; Deaux et al., 2007). There is now a great deal of evidence that such threats result in a deterioration of intergroup relations (Esses et al., 2001; Riek et al., 2006; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Therefore, in some instances, a blended identity may only be helpful in low threat contexts while producing more negative outcomes in high threat ones (Baysu et al., 2011). Accounting for the desire for optimal distinctiveness and the potential for the presence of threat, then, might help explicate when a blended identity might develop as opposed to the potential for a fused or alternating identity.

With regard to both alternating identity and frame-switching, there are several implications that can be drawn from those lines of research that relate to identity. Like alternation, SCT considers the relationship among one's identities to be fluid and dynamic, but the salience of these identities function in a predictable way. When someone is aware of different practices or values between one of their cultural groups compared to another in a particular context, that person is more likely to self-categorize in terms of a cultural group membership which matches the context (category fit) and their particular motives (accessibility). Assuming a cultural

«frame» represents key components of the culture such as systems of values, beliefs, norms, and knowledge shared by a cultural group, when that cultural frame is made salient individuals will think and behave as group members who share that culture.

In contrast to SCT, alternating or frame-switching does not necessarily assume that the cultural frames have any emotional significance to the individual. However, given that frame switching occurs at the sociocognitive level, it is likely that the issue of emotional attachment and affect may serve to moderate the extent to which frame-switching can influence the behaviour and perceptions of biculturals as SCT would predict. This is because such affective factors will often motivate the selection of a particular cultural frame (category accessibility). There has been some support for the idea that bicultural individuals, when motivated to conform to a particular cultural group prototype, will shift cognitive frames to align with that culture but also increase identification with that culture (Schindler et al., 2016). Assessing the impact of frame-switching on the expression of various dimensions of identity, and vice versa, would be useful for understanding how shifting cultural frames relates to identification.

One point of the frame-switching theory requiring elaboration is how biculturals perceive cultural cues in a setting with ambiguous or mixed cultural cues and this might be explained by SCT. Frame-switching relies on «if-then» scripts (e.g., if Chinese icons are displayed, then a Chinese schema will be salient) which may work for structured environments characterized by one prominent culture, but if the individual is in a setting where the cues are not clear or there are cues from several cultural scripts, then how does the person cleanly and effectively frame-switch (West et al., 2017)?

In this case, SCT proposes that individuals will identify with a particular social category at a given time because of the social context and their motivations and, hence, the theory predicts which situational factors and motives contribute to fluctuating identifications. Specifically, the salience of a specific social identity should be based on the metacontrast principle. That is, in a comparison of the respective groups in the situation, the intergroup differences would need to be greater than the intragroup differences for self-categorization to occur. Social identifications, therefore, are viewed as being inherently comparative and when an individual would frame switch would depend on the outcome of comparison between intergroup and intragroup differences (Amiot et al., 2007). Such an explanation gives an SCT account for how frame-switching would work for multicultural individuals when alternating the salience of multiple cognitive structures as suggested by the frame-switching model.

4.3. Bicultural identity integration

While BII accounts for the importance of psychological identification, the construct was designed to look at perceived harmony of dual identities and, naturally,

most items included in the BII scales are oriented toward the perceived overlap of identities and endorsement of a blended identification (e.g., I feel Chinese-American). A more thorough measure of identity, however, could be used to look at the independent elements of each identity. For instance, one might have identities that are harmonious, but still differ in the commitment to each cultural group. In line with SIT, group commitment is a key aspect of social identity that will affect people's tendency to behave in terms of their group membership (Ellemers et al., 1999), thus, the level of group commitment might be an aspect of identity related to frame-switching behaviour and may be relevant to the expression of BII.

Scholars from the social identity tradition have also proposed that the BII model may need to be adapted to address some of the complexities of bicultural identity. As a response, Yampolsky et al. (2016) used Amiot et al.'s (2007) cognitive-developmental model of social identity integration (CDSMII), which was developed from a social identity framework (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987), to create additional dimensions to the BII model. These authors developed that Multicultural Identity Integration Scale (MULTIIS) to apply to situations where an individual belongs to multiple cultural groups. The theory behind the scale is that there should be more identity configurations beyond just «integration» (i.e., high *vs.* low), that cultural identities should not be limited to two alone and that identities are reconciled, organized and arranged in different ways than captured by BII.

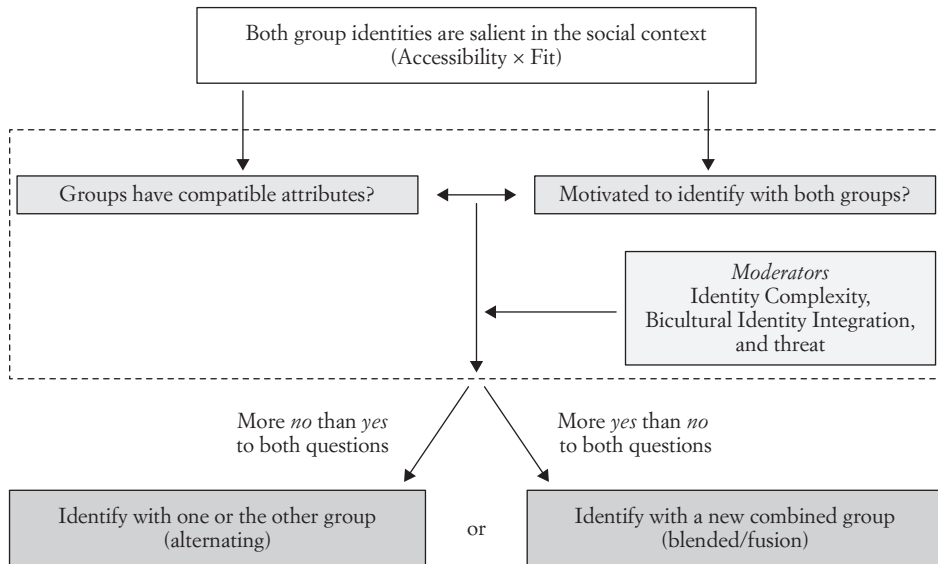
Benet-Martínez et al. (2002) indeed noted that BII should be studied in the context of a social identity approach. Exploring identity from this perspective also allows identity to be understood in terms of its implications for intergroup relations. Biculturals who perceive more cultural blendedness (High BII) perceive themselves, in effect, to be similar to two different ingroups and integrate both of these groups into their self-concept. The new combination of two cultural identities in a blended identity may work to lessen ingroup biases and promote positive relations as the ingroup may now comprise both cultural groups (Huff et al., 2017; Miramontez et al., 2008; Mok, Morris et al., 2007; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Alternatively, someone low in BII is more inclined to experience identity threat which would increase ingroup bias (Mok & Morris, 2013).

4.4. A theoretical integration

In addition to supplementing the existing theories, it is our view that the diversity of perspectives reviewed above can also be integrated using a social identity approach. Specifically, we note that the process with which an individual categorizes him/herself as a member of a particular group is described by self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987). The theory postulates that the particular group selected is appropriate for the social context and is congruent with that person's motives in the situation (category fit \times accessibility). That is, the person's membership in

Figure 1

An integration of bicultural identity theories using a social identity approach



that particular group is cognitively salient. Figure 1 shows how this general process might apply when two groups are salient in this way. In the original formulation of SCT, Turner et al. (1987) suggest that the person self-categorizes in terms of one of these groups and then might actively suppress the other (functional antagonism). This process, effectively, is the alternating bicultural strategy. The alternative to the alternation is to categorize the self in terms of the two blended groups (e.g., a French-Canadian) or at the intersection between the two groups (e.g., Quebecois – the name for the new fused group). This fusion, as opposed to a blending is most likely to occur when the two groups have compatible attributes and the person is motivated to highlight their identity with this fused group as opposed to one of the original groups. Two identities that are important and are often salient together within a variety of social contexts are more likely to become «fused» as opposed to blended. SIT predicts that this is particularly likely to happen when a person is consistently categorized and responded to as a member of both groups simultaneously as is the case for Latinos/Latinas in the United States who were originally from a Latin America, but who are also American.

Following the meta-contrast principle, bicultural individuals are most likely to identify with a group defined by the intersection of two cultures when they believe that they are similar to others categorized by this intersection but are uniquely different from members of either of the original cultural groups. For example, French Canadians have many similarities with each other created by their shared history

and language (important intra-category similarities) and, because they are constantly fighting threats to their language and culture in North America, they also perceive a clear contrast between themselves and other Canadians as well as between themselves and French people in general (important inter-category differences). It is, therefore, not surprising that many people in this cultural group have a very strong French-Canadian identity as Quebecois.

Consistent with this view, a recent study by Nicolas et al. (2019) in the United States showed that blending photographs of African American and Caucasian faces into a «mixed race» stimuli led white students to categorize the person in the photograph as either Hispanic or Middle Eastern and to stereotype them as such. These findings suggest that mixed race individuals may often be responding to such stereotyping as a member of this distinct social category. That is, the social context (fit) and their desire to combat such stereotyping (accessibility) may be predisposing them to categorize themselves in this distinct way.

From our review, we highlight three mediators that alter the probability that the person will act as a member of a fused group. The first of these is threat. In the above example, it is clear that French Canadians are threatened within the North American context and that this motivates them to view being Quebecois as particularly important and socially relevant. Only Canadians of French origin are threatened in this way, making this subgroup of Canadian society especially salient for them. Hence, it is hardly surprising that the group has a unique name and are uniquely interdependent. Indeed, given their common fate, people identifying as Quebecois are likely to be particularly loyal to that group and work for its betterment, with some even advocating sovereignty. Similarly, in the United States, Hispanic peoples who originate from various countries in South America face discrimination and, therefore, many of them choose to label themselves as Latino/Latina and band together as they work for greater equality and opportunity in their country. That is, they face threat as a member of an unfairly disadvantaged cultural group.

The second and third mediators highlighted in our review are individual difference variables. The first of these is BII. Those who believe that two salient group identities are compatible with one another in a given social context are more likely to identify with a fused group that has these compatible characteristics. The second is identity complexity. Those who believe that their group identities are complex and have many different dimensions, are more easily able to pick out compatibilities and understand how being a member of an intersectional group can have unique value within a particular social context.

This social identity perspective on bicultural identity has applied value given that the interaction that biculturals have with the larger social environment is important to consider (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). The examples discussed in the above section illustrate that status differences often characterize different groups in society and for a bicultural to identify with both groups might result in a loss of social status. For example, although they were born in the United States

and have citizenship, people of South American origin face discrimination because they are labelled as Latinos/Latinas. Social identity theory postulates that these circumstances may result in some members of the disadvantaged group trying to «pass» into mainstream society by denying their cultural roots. Those unable to do so because of superficial physical features or accent must, therefore, face this discrimination. Hence, the causal relationship between identification with a disadvantaged group and social activism (Agostini & van Zomeren, 2021; Thomas et al., in press; van Zomeren et al., 2008). Given this relationship, it is important to know which group identity is salient for disadvantaged cultural groups in society as they respond to discrimination. To date, the assumption has been that it is identification with the cultural group as a whole or a politically active subgroup. However, recent research, especially research on immigrants, reveals that this is too simplistic a view (see Verkuyten, et al., 2019). For example, a study of Hispanic immigrants illustrates that a strong blended identity («I feel that I am both Latino and American») was their motive for social activism (Wiley et al., 2014). Further, intriguingly, research with Canadian immigrants show the importance of their new Canadian identity in predicting their collective efforts to combat discrimination (Grant, 2008; Grant et al., 2015).

Our model can address these complexities because it describes how different group identities are salient within different social contexts for different cultural groups. That is, in the United States Hispanic peoples are labelled as Latino/Latina and identify as such when responding to discrimination. In contrast, where discrimination is much less severe and where the support for multiculturalism, human rights, and large-scale immigration is reflected in long standing official Canadian government policies, immigrants choose to emphasize their new national identity with Canada when they respond to discrimination.

5. Reflections and future directions

We recognize the extensive work of many researchers who have made considerable efforts toward understanding the experience of bicultural identity. Since bicultural identity is such a complex concept, we make some observations and considerations for future research agendas based upon our understanding of the reviewed literature.

5.1. Bicultural identity measurement

A consistent theme throughout has been the way in which bicultural identity has been operationalized. With respect to measuring bicultural identity, Nguyen and Benet-Martínez (2007, 2010) have reviewed various ways in which identity was as-

sessed and highlighted some of the concerns about internal validity. One of the simplest classifications of bicultural identity is to consider a self-identified label (e.g., Iranian-American *vs.* Iranian or American) as a marker of bicultural identity or to measure biculturalism with one or two questions regarding how much one feels part of a group (e.g., Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). Traditionally, identity was assessed from a unidimensional point of view assuming that bicultural identity falls in the middle of a continuum of exclusive identification with either one or the other culture. In contrast, the later developed, and more accepted, bidimensional perspective considers the two cultures as independent and a bicultural would be someone who identifies highly with both cultures (Berry, 1997; Ryder et al., 2000). This bidimensional approach, however, has been critiqued for tending to treat cultural identities as independent of one another and overlooks the fact that biculturals' identities are multifaceted, interrelated, and dynamic (West et al., 2017; van Oudenhoven & Benet-Martínez, 2015).

Whereas identity might be inferred by one's ability to function in a cultural setting, adherence to cultural norms or the ability to speak a language is not necessarily indicative of someone's cultural identity. Further, directly asking about a person's bicultural identification can be fraught as the experience of multiple identities will have different psychological meaning from person to person (Verkuyten et al., 2019). Alternatively, asking about identification can also be too inclusive since people can identify with groups without fully understanding the specific knowledge, values, and norms of that culture (e.g., the grandchildren of immigrants) (Vora et al., 2019). Hence, we have argued throughout that bicultural identity should more appropriately be measured with a multidimensional perspective as this is a more robust way to capture the cognitive and emotional component of identity. Accordingly, there has been movement toward multidimensional acculturation, for example, which gives focus to multiple dimensions of behavior, cultural identity, knowledge, and values (Celenk & Van de Vijver, 2011; Vora et al., 2019).

Further, a multidimensional SIT approach allows for bicultural theory to be applied to other social identities. For instance, Cresswell and Cage (2019) proposed that navigating as an autistic person in a non-autistic world is a similar to a bicultural experience. Similarly, Cox et al. (2010) overlaid the experience of LGB youth living in a heterodominant society to the bicultural integration that occurs in acculturation. Often, bicultural identity is portrayed to be the experience of having *two* ethnic or national identities when other significant cultural identities should also be considered (Verkuyten et al., 2019). The notion of bicultural identity seems somewhat limiting for those who may have more than two cultural identities and, in some areas, research is beginning to be conducted on issues regarding multicultural identity. Huynh et al. (2011) noted that the theorizing of BII may equally apply to any other type of dual identities, such as sexual, religious, or professional identities. Effectively, then, this theory has a broader relevancy for individuals in wider range of bicultural situations. The BII model has since been extended to a «multicultural

identity integration» model in order to accommodate for more than two cultural identities such as in the case of Chinese Canadians living in English or French Quebec (Huynh et al., 2011). Similarly, the scale for bicultural identity styles was also developed as a multicultural identity scale (Szabó et al., 2020; Ward et al., 2018).

5.2. Intersectional identities

The social identity approach suggests that individuals do not have only one or two identities of importance, but rather possess multiple identities simultaneously and their sense of self is formed by the unique combination of cultural variables. While the study of *intersectionality* of identities has been a focus of critical theorists (Crenshaw et al., 1995), this type of examination of multicultural identities also extends to social psychology when exploring how individuals develop a sense of group membership in situations where there may be cultural clashing, mixing, and integration (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2010). In this way, a Chinese-Canadian might be considered to have a bicultural identity along ethnic or national lines, but there are additional dimensions of status, gender, occupation etc. to consider. For example, two female Chinese-Canadian accountants from the same neighbourhood will likely have a different ingroup interaction than just two Chinese-Canadians without any other overlapping ingroup memberships. Even the notion of Social Identity Complexity, which theoretically grapples with nature of having multiple identities, in practice is usually used in the context of studying only two identities similar to traditional models of bicultural identity (Chao & Moon, 2005).

When multiple identities are integrated in the self, they are organized such that they can be simultaneously important to the self-concept and this multiplicity of identity is a crucial issue for investigators to consider (Amiot et al., 2007; Ashmore et al., 2004). A social identity approach considers the importance of all group-membership based identities, since an individual can maintain as many identities as groups that matter to them (Hogg, 2006). Of course, the idea of considering all possible identity intersections may be problematic, but a multidimensional assessment of social identity can indicate key identity categories, in addition to national or ethnic identity, whose influence is sufficiently strong to warrant closer investigation (Deaux, 2001).

5.3. Expanding the definition of bicultural identity

When speaking of a cultural identity, a definition of «culture» can reasonably extend beyond ethnic or national categories as the experience of multiple cultural identities may not be only relevant to *ethnic* identity, but also includes social identities related to, for example, profession, geography, religion, political affiliation,

sexual orientation, and peer group (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002). For instance, Nguyen and Benet-Martínez (2010) remarked that an individual coming from the Southern US could be considered bicultural when adapting to the norms and negotiating the culture shift of living in a Northern region. Indeed, in a complex society, each person can be differentiated along many meaningful social categories and each of these divisions provides a basis for shared identity and group membership that may become an important source of social identification (Brewer, 2010). The concept of BII has begun to be applied to diverse social identities finding that the assimilation and contrast effects suggested in BII can be observed in other types of identities (Huynh et al., 2011; Schwartz et al., 2017). For instance, bicultural theory has been employed, in various areas such as first-generation students dealing with the new cultural milieu of a post-secondary educational institution (Hermann et al., 2018), or cultural shifts experienced by deaf adults following a cochlear implant (Goldblat & Most, 2018).

Thus, future research directions need to be more thorough in defining identity and culture as well as considering the intertwined nature of multiple identities (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2010). For instance, Pekerti et al. (2015) built on the bicultural and multicultural identity literature, to lay out a theory of multicultural identity labeled *n-culturalism* («n-cultural» indicating the presence of any number of cultures). The taxonomy they created includes various stages of behavioural and psychological markers of identity. The ability to access and harness internalized knowledge and cultural skills according to the social context, and to manifest appropriate behaviors for a given situation differentiate n-culturalists from other types of multicultural individuals. The strength of the n-cultural theory, for example, is that it acknowledges that identity is multidimensional and that individuals internalize, and are committed to, several cultures simultaneously.

Despite approaching bicultural identity from a social identity perspective, we acknowledge that it has its limitations as a theory of identity (Brown, 2020). Being that cultural identity is a social identity, however, there are opportunities to align insights from the social identity literature into the study of bicultural identity. Throughout this paper we have attempted to highlight some areas where theory could be supplemented or enriched by having a conceptualization of identity from a social identity approach.

6. Conclusion

The study of bicultural identity is relatively recent with the bulk of the reviewed literature having taken place in the last 20 years. This field of research, therefore, is still developing and the task of determining definitions for the key constructs as well as creating appropriate strategies for measurement remains a challenge for researchers. We used a working definition of bicultural identity derived from a social

identity approach and reviewed the literature from that perspective. Being that cultural identity is a social identity, we believe there are opportunities to align insights from the social identity literature into the study of bicultural identity. Throughout this paper we have attempted to highlight some areas where theory could be supplemented or enriched by having a more fulsome conceptualization of identity. Overall, the theoretical and empirical work that has been conducted has provided insight into understanding how identities are integrated and maintained, but more attention will need to be given to addressing identity more comprehensively. Given the elusive nature of identity, it will be important to examine different dimensions of identity and to employ innovative methods of investigation that can access the varied aspects of the bicultural experience. In an increasingly diverse world, the intersection and combination of bicultural identities, if not multiple identities, will be germane, especially considering that the notion of cultural identity could be applied beyond ethnic and national identities. Although originally developed in the area of acculturation and ethnic identity, the research on bicultural or multicultural identity could be applied more widely and have theoretical and practical implications for understanding the broader human experience.

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Bicultural identity: A social identity review

The number of people identifying with more than one culture is increasing and so too is the need to have the theoretical and methodological tools to investigate bicultural identity. We provide a review of the major theories in social psychology that address bicultural identity and evaluate them from a social identity perspective. Models of biculturalism such as acculturation, alternating and fused/blended identities, frame switching, and bicultural identity integration are discussed, highlighting the theories' respective conceptualizations of identity. We touch on the strengths and limitations of the theories and highlight opportunities to align insights from the social identity literature into the study of bicultural identity. Finally, we conclude by providing an integration of the models from social identity approach as well as reflections and commentary for future research.

Keywords: bicultural identity, social identity, acculturation, ethnic identity, multicultural identity.

Corresponding author: Daniel W. Robertson, Department of Psychology, University of Saskatchewan, 9 Campus Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7N 5A5, Canada.

d.robertson@usask.ca

ORCID: 0000-0002-6684-2628

Peter R. Grant, Department of Psychology, University of Saskatchewan, 9 Campus Drive, Saskatoon, SK S7N 5A5, Canada.

peter.grant@usask.ca

ORCID: 0000-0002-1962-9162