

## **Social Identity: Clarifying its Dimensions across Cultures**

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### **Abstract**

Social identity has been linked to a number of work-relevant constructs. Specifically, researchers have investigated the role of social identity in cross-function teams, its impact on team performance and willingness to engage in OCBs, just to name a few. Furthermore, this construct has been cited as one of the most relevant constructs when understanding inter-group relations (Sohrabi, Gholipour, & Amiri, 2011). Given the theoretical and empirical importance of this construct, this paper reviews the construct of social identity and theorizes about how this construct may differ across cultures. First, we review social identity dimensions and propose how they may have different meanings and be perceived differently across cultures. Next, we delineate ways to pursue the measurement of social identity when conducting cross-cultural research. We conclude by providing insight for future research that compares social identity across cultures.

**Keywords:** social identity, culture, measurement

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### **Introduction**

The world's boundaries are becoming more transparent each day, leading to more frequent intercultural interactions in the workplace. However, cultural

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differences add a great deal of complexity to interactions within current organizations (Brett, Behfar, & Kern, 2007; Chatman, 2010; Luijters, van der Zee, & Otten, 2008). As a result, uncovering the factors that promote harmonious and effective inter-cultural collaboration is increasingly important (Martins, Milliken, Wiesenfeld, & Salgado, 2003). A potential underlying mechanism of effective inter-cultural interactions is the extent to which an individual identifies with his/her social group(s).

Social identity theory (SIT) suggests that belonging to certain groups occurs through categorization and affective components that are associated with group memberships (Tajfel, 1978). Social identification to a group provides individuals with a certain level of comfort that can lead to positive outcomes when interacting with fellow group members, for instance agreement and information sharing (Levine & Moreland, 1998). Additionally, social identity is a relevant construct that can help us to understand and avoid detrimental real-world consequences. These include phenomena, such as peer pressure, faulty decision-making, and intergroup hatred (Jackson & Smith, 1999). These are some of the reasons why researchers, such as Gaertner and colleagues, have investigated identity models as a strategy to mitigate negative consequences, such as intergroup bias (e.g., common ingroup identity model, in Dovidio, Gaertner, & Validzic, 1998; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000, 2009; Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993; Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989, etc.). As a result, this construct is becoming more commonplace in the understanding of multicultural team processes and outcomes.

However, before insights from social identity theory can be of a greater contribution to modern-day organizations, a better understanding of how this construct is viewed across cultures is needed. For instance, Ashforth and Mael (1989) have long pointed out that knowing if a person identifies with one given category (e.g., organization, religious affiliation, gender, etc.) is not enough to understand one's social identity; this information should be collected in parallel to the strength of the identification. Hopkins and Reicher (2011) also emphasize how social identities can signal which behaviors are appropriate. They argue that these behaviors can be shaped differently across social contexts. Similarly, we know that individuals across the globe hold different cultural orientations in regards to views of power and group memberships (Hofstede, 1991), which in turn leads to the assumption that identity emerges differently across cultures.

Regardless of the theoretical and structural discrepancies, social identity continues to gain popularity in research and practice. For instance, recent literature has highlighted SIT as a potential way to integrate frameworks, such as the different yet overlapping fields of diversity and cross-cultural work psychology (Feitosa, Grossman, Coultas, Salazar, & Salas, 2012; Ferdman & Sagiv, 2012), and even to function as an explanatory mechanism in a meta-analysis of identities and work hours (Ng & Feldman, 2008). Consequently, the importance of this construct calls for a better understanding of its cross-cultural role and its operationalization.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is three-fold. We intend to (a) briefly review social identity theory and its measurement, (b) formulate propositions on social identity differences across cultures, and (c) provide a research agenda in order to guide future investigation.

### *Social Identity Theory*

As mentioned before, SIT refers to an individual's sense of belonging to group memberships. Furthermore, social identity has been cited as one of the most relevant constructs when understanding inter-group relations (Sohrabi, Gholipour, & Amiri, 2011). Social identity is often referred to as collective identity (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004) or group identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). However, this construct is not to be mistaken with personal identity, commitment, or even collective self-esteem. Social identity is not defined in terms of one's relationship with other individuals as personal identity (Hogg, 2001). Personal identity has its target in the individual instead of the group identification (Swann, Gómez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009), commitment is more often thought of through its affective, continuance, and normative components (Allen & Meyer, 1990), and collective self-esteem is limited to individual's drive to keep a positive image of his/her group(s) (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990).

Social identity, on the other hand, refers to how individuals define themselves based on group memberships (Hogg & Williams, 2000). The motivation that drives individuals to join groups is due to their need for self-enhancement and reduction of uncertainty about people's feelings, perceptions, and behavior (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Aside from social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) and social categorization perspective (Turner, 1982), similarity/attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971) is also built on the rationale that individuals are more attracted to similar others, which in turn leads to more positive feelings towards ingroup members. Consequently, people seek encounters with similar individuals because they are perceived as more predictable (Brewer, 2002; Pelled & Xin, 1997), which is the basis for the formation of ingroups and outgroups (Gerard & Hoyt, 1974). People feel more attracted and make favorable evaluations of those who share attributes with them to a greater extent.

### *Current Challenges*

However, the pattern of having greater ties amongst those that belong to similar groups imposes a significant threat when teams are culturally diverse. Individuals may create hypothetical divides according to their correlated homogeneous attributes, defined in the literature as faultlines (Lau & Murnighan, 1998). The formation of faultlines is associated with individuals' favoritism towards their subgroup members, especially when the divide is strong (Thatcher & Patel, 2011). Consequently, diversity is likely to bring differences to the forefront when

opportunities for faultlines exist, and outgroups are made more salient. This becomes more of an issue when societies are pluralistic. In addition to the diversity within groups, there is the multiplication of social affiliations available to individuals. Intergroup conflict can then be common in these societies. This is due to how people relate to one another; for example, preference for assimilation of individuals who are part of the majority group may be greater than for those in the minority groups (Al Ramiah, Hewstone, & Schmid, 2011).

Furthermore, these types of differences will become increasingly important in today's society as globalization requires employees from different cultures to collaborate with one another. This has led to the concern towards remediating intergroup conflict. For example, previous research has found that teams were more likely to consider and use the knowledge of a previous outgroup member when contextual conditions highlighted the salience of the superordinate group rather than the subgroups (Kane, 2010; Kane, Argote, & Levine, 2005). Furthermore, different identities, such as team and professional identities, moderate the relationship between diversity and effectiveness (Mitchell, Parker, & Giles, 2011).

In addition to these findings that bring the importance of social identity to the forefront, the degree of social identity in recently formed teams is also important. This can vary and lead to differences in an individual's perceptions of resources. For example, teams that had a brief interaction before the task, underperformed those teams that had no prior team interaction or worked individually (Cleveland, Blascovich, Gangi, & Finez, 2011). Social identities are the foundation of effective social networks, which is a crucial social capital (Clopton & Finch, 2010). Hence, social identities can have a wealth of consequences and serve as explanatory mechanisms to important work outcomes.

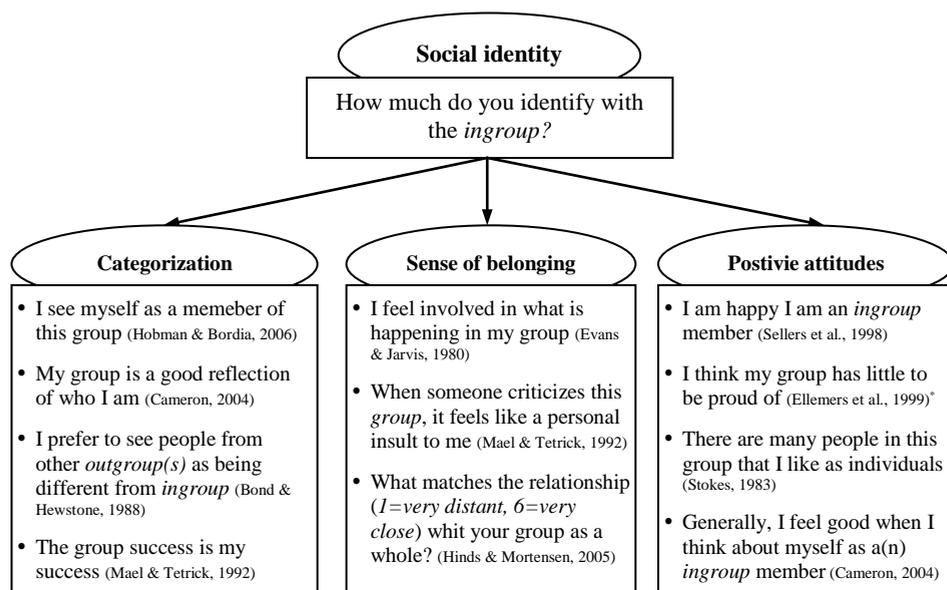
An important question that still remains is *how do multiple identities interact?* The increase in social affiliations and the potential overlap amongst individuals result in innumerable scenarios. For instance, more than a decade ago, interracial marriage and dating was already becoming common (Fiebert, Karamol, & Kasdan, 2000). Additionally, technology gives individuals access to other cultures that they did not previously have. In order to capture the breadth of potential identity possibilities, Brewer and colleagues have started to conceptualize cultural identity according to its complexity (e.g., Miller, Brewer, & Ar buckle, 2009; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Instead of looking at social identity as a single construct, they measure the extent to which identities overlap. Similarly, Chao and Moon (2005) described culture as being dependent on the context, suggesting that different situations will trigger certain facets of an individual's identity (i.e., cultural tiles). Therefore, we are moving away from the thought that social identity is a static construct, and starting to investigate the dynamic and complex phenomenon of multiple identities. Identity may not be as homogeneous as once it was. This approach, however, is still in its premature stages. In order to expand on this, we would like to encourage research to investigate the extent to which culture may or

may not distort measurement of social identity. With this future agenda in mind, we will now discuss the current state of measurement of social identity.

*Operationalization of Social Identity*

The operationalization of social identity is still not clear, this is also said to be true of the theoretical advancement of most constructs across cultures. The structure of social identity measures include unidimensional (i.e., group identification scale, in Kelly, 1988), two factors (i.e., cognitive and affective, in Stets & Burke, 2000; van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008), three factors (i.e., centrality, ingroup affect, and ingroup ties, in Cameron, 2004), four factors (i.e., perception of the intergroup context, attraction to the in-group, interdependency beliefs and depersonalization, in Jackson & Smith, 1999, and even up to seven factors (i.e., self-categorization, evaluation, importance, attachment and sense of interdependence, social embeddedness, behavioral involvement, and content and meaning, in Ashmore et. al., 2004). In order to integrate these discrepancies, we have looked for trends in some of the already developed measures of social identity. As you will see in the figure below, we have identified three dimensions: (a) categorization, (b) sense of belonging, and (c) positive attitudes.

Figure 1. *Social identity dimensions and sample items*



These three dimensions seem to widely capture the social identity construct, which was defined as "the part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the

emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1974, p. 69). Therefore, we can easily identify that there is the cognitive and affective component in this definition of the construct, and most of the SI measures cover them to a greater or lesser extent. This structure of social identity seems to be the most inclusive for allowing us to cluster most of the items in a more complete manner. It is important to mention, however, that when cognitive and affective components are part of a construct, it is common to include questions about a behavioral component as well. Despite seeing social identity as a multidimensional construct, it is a psychological phenomenon that will likely drive behaviors. Consequently, a behavior component was not included as one of the social identity dimensions.

For instance, in the racial identity literature, authors have started to identify expectations of behavior or even the intentions to behave in a certain way as part of this construct. For example, these items would include "Blacks should strive to integrate all institutions which are segregated" and "Black people should treat other oppressed people as allies" (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998, p. 38-39). Furthermore, engaging in common behaviors will likely increase the salience of identity, which may shape the cognitive representation of one's group. Therefore, we find this to be another avenue that requires additional research in order to solidify the influence of behavioral components to this construct. We will now only focus on the more established components; the cognitive and affective factors of social identity.

First, we identified the cognitive component of this construct. *Categorization* refers to the knowledge about one's membership. The context becomes highly important in determining how individuals cognitively see their ingroup. This is a question of whether the group is seen as one or as fragmented parts, such as the divide amongst its members. Beyond the sample items given in the figure, this dimension entails the comparisons individuals make cognitively between themselves and either the group as a whole or the ingroup members. For example, Mael and Tetrick (1992) identified in their 10-item scale, although unidimensional, some relevant categorization items with both targets in mind. There are items targeted towards the entire group (e.g., When I talk about this *group*, I usually say "we" rather than "they"), as well as towards the group members (e.g., I have a number of qualities typical of *ingroup* members). Consequently, if one wants to further split this construct, the categorization could be further broken down into (a) self-categorization in relationship to the group, and (b) self-categorization in relationship to the group members.

In addition to the cognitive component, social identity has an affective component that is further divided into one's *sense of belonging* and *attitudes towards the ingroup*. The first is related to the extent to which a member is committed to the group and feels a part of it, whereas a member's attitude is more related to his or her personal feelings about being a member of that group. In other

words, a sense of belonging refers to the connection level amongst the individual and the organization, while attitudes towards the ingroup refers to the value a specific group membership has to the individual's life. Similar to the cognitive component, these two factors can be further split into emotional attachment to the group and/or the group members. Evans and Jarvis (1980) focused on items that target the group as a whole (e.g., I feel included in this group). Conversely, Sellers and colleagues (1998) developed more group member-targeted items, such as "I have a strong sense of belonging to *ingroup* people". Hence, the ties can be assessed at a group-level or even with a social networking analysis at the dyadic level.

Besides the attention towards the different targets, researchers should also be mindful of the different terminologies that may be used to describe similar constructs. On the one hand, ingroup ties (Cameron, 2004), attraction to the ingroup (Stokes, 1983), and centrality (Cameron, 2004; Sellers et al., 1998), are all related to a sense of belonging. On the other hand, group self-esteem (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999), private regard (Sellers et al., 1998) and commitment to the group (Ellemers et al., 1999) are more likely to be related to positive attitudes towards the ingroup. The wealth of potential subscales that may fall under the affective component of social identity still does not cover all subscales under social identity measures. Therefore, we will briefly discuss additional dimensions that do not fit under the cognitive and affective framework in order to identify potential variables that can be included in the nomological network of social identity.

#### *Additional dimensions*

Even though we are certain that the three dimensional measure (i.e., categorization, sense of belonging, and attitudes) is the most appropriate factor structure, other measures of social identity brought to light peripheral concepts that are worth consideration. Specifically, we would like to explore (a) comparison to outgroup, (b) ingroup homogeneity, (c) viability of group membership, and (d) one-item identification measure.

Tajfel (1974) remarked on the importance of assessing the feelings of belonging to the ingroup first, and then to consider the feelings towards the outgroup. However, researchers often include questions regarding the status of the ingroup either from the ingroup member's perspective (e.g., "Compared to other groups I know, I feel my group is better than most" in Evans & Jarvis, 1980) or the outgroup member's perspective (e.g., "In general, others respect *ingroup* people" in Sellers et al., 1998). This type of question can have tremendous impact on how marginalized one may feel for belonging to a social group that is perceived as socially inferior. Furthermore, Tajfel has also criticized the one direction research pointing out that the dynamic study of social identity processes are already in place.

Another potential dimension that has been mentioned across measures (e.g., Simon & Brown, 1987) is the level of similarity within the social group, which we

called ingroup homogeneity. Mael and Tetrick (1992) developed items, such as "I act like *ingroup* person to a great extent." Evans and Jarvis (1980) included items, such as "In spite of individual differences, a feeling of unity exists in my group," and Cameron (2004) designed items, such as "I have a lot in common with other *ingroup* members." All of these items assess the commonality amongst members; in other words, how similar they are to each other. This dimension may then be more related to concepts brought up by Bewer and colleagues, in which non-overlapping identities would lead to more complex identities. Along these lines, if there is a great deal of homogeneity amongst group members, this social identity is likely to be a less complex one due to similarities that go beyond being part of the same group. Thus, knowing individuals' perspective on other members' likeness that is not captured through categorization, sense of belonging and attitudes towards the ingroup can be a valuable addition to the understanding of SI development.

Another dimension that is related to the affective component of social identity is the viability of group membership. Instead of asking how individuals currently feel towards their social group(s), items refer to the willingness to continue to be part of the group(s). Accordingly, questions are more focused on future ties and not present ones. Samples items include "I want to remain a member of this group" and "I wish it were possible for the group to end now" (Evans & Jarvis, 1980).

Lastly, we would like to address the benefits of social identity dimensions all being derived from the overarching common question of "How much do you identify with group X?" Determining this link could save researchers time in case broader behaviors are variables of interest. We are not implying that scales with multiple questions and dimensions should be banished, instead one should investigate the potential to answer different research questions depending on the specificity of the social identity construct. However, as previously mentioned in this paper, the clear consensus of social identity structure is yet to be established. Furthermore, one-item measures would make the comparison of this construct across cultures very difficult. Multiple items are crucial for reliability and validity (Peter, 1979), especially in the context of a complex construct such as social identity. The one-item measure would become even more of an issue when comparing different cultures. It is known that translations can have errors, and having multiple items when the construct is going to be measured across languages can mitigate the confusion by expressing the construct in different wording. Thus, we hope these additional dimensions can be further explored in the near future. Additionally, we took into consideration some of the papers that tried to integrate the dimensions (c.f., Jackson, & Smith 1999; Leach et al., 2008), and added culture to the mixture. Cultural orientation is likely to shape one's cognitive representation as well as affectivity towards social groups, which then leads to doubts about how this three dimensional structure would fit social identity measures across cultures.

*Social Identity Measurement across Cultures*

Social identity differs from self-identity to the extent that the former refers to feelings towards a group membership, whereas the latter refers to the individual himself. However, it is common to include social membership as a description of part of one's social identity. These are likely to vary from individual to individual, and more importantly it is also probable that multiple categories shape an individual's identity. Specifically, results from a study conducted by Sevig, Highlen and Adams (2000) showed that 81% of their sample mentioned more than one identity as part of their self-description. Considering culture an important motivator of behavior, it is logical to assume different cultural orientations can lead to differences in social identity development and structure. Even though this seems like a sound statement, the conceptualization of social identity has not been juxtaposed across cultures quite yet. For instance, a thorough study has identified a number of different metaphors across cultures, but for a different construct: teamwork (Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2001). These authors pointed out that different cognitive frameworks lead to variance in how they conceptualize constructs. Consequently, the conceptualization of social identity is likely to vary across cultures due to diversity in context and experiences. Keeping this rationale in mind, along with the recommendation of Betancourt and López (1993) regarding the necessity to insert culture into mainstream psychology theories "to broaden its theoretical domain" (p. 633), we will now propose how culture can influence social identity.

*Individualism-Collectivism*

The most studied of Hofstede's cultural dimensions is individualism-collectivism. This refers to the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as independent from one another (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). These two terms are not separate constructs, but two opposite sides of a continuum in which the degree of collectivism and individualism can vary rather than be dichotomous. Individuals will systematically modify the way in which they look at social affiliations and make comparisons to themselves. Extrapolating this thought to the social identity nomological network, the differentiation between the individual and social affiliation may be minimal for who is considered individualistic. In this situation, researchers may even consider rewording items to "we" instead of "I" in order to capture a better psychological representation of social affiliation in collectivistic cultures. However, if items remain as initially worded, reactions from different cultures will likely vary when questions refer to the associations between social affiliation and the self. Specifically, items from the cognitive dimension of social identity, such as "The group's success is my success," as well as items from the affective dimension, such as "When someone criticizes this *group*, it feels like a personal insult to me (Mael & Tetrick, 1992)" will have a higher impact on those individuals that have already internalized the reference from

the group to themselves. However, we should point out that the type of affiliation is very important. For instance, individuals from collectivist cultures will be more likely to have social affiliations due to altruistic reasons, whereas more individualistic people will favor career-related affiliations (Finkelstein, 2010). Beyond the type of social affiliation and the motives to be a part of them, the sense of belonging and positive attitudes can be driven by cultural orientation. Consistent to Brewer's (2001) definition of social identification, which refers to the importance and role of the social affiliation to the self, we expect collectivistic individuals to embrace this affective component to a greater extent than individualistic people. Hence, we propose:

*Proposition 1: Individuals from collectivistic cultures will have higher scores within both affective dimensions – sense of belonging and positive attitudes – of social identity measures than individuals from individualist cultures.*

#### *Interdependence-Independence*

Closely related to the aforementioned dimension, individuals may possess a more independent view of the self or alternatively, a more interdependent view of self. The interdependent view of self-construal is closely related to high levels of collectivism, which in turn is likely to be associated with the sense of belonging and fitting-in feelings towards a social affiliation. From a neuroscience perspective, an empirical study found that individualism and collectivism led to the activation of different patterns when investigating the self-representation for one's social identity (Sul, Choi, & Kang, 2012). Markus and Kitayama (1991) stated that those in which an interdependent view of self prevails tend to merge the self and the other. These authors also pointed out that how one feels towards others can have important consequences for cognition. For instance, interdependence leads to more cognitive elaboration due to greater attention towards the other. Furthermore, researchers have also found that collectivism led to a more distinctive motive, but with a different basis underlying the way in which they approach this motive (Becker et al., 2012). Thus, we propose:

*Proposition 2: Individuals with an interdependent view will have higher scores within the cognitive dimension of social identity measures than individuals with an independent view.*

### *Social Complexity*

However, the greater cognitive elaboration from those with interdependent self-construal does not necessarily mean that these individuals have a more complex social identity. This is quite the opposite when considering Roccas and Brewer's (2002) view on cognition in which more overlapping identities will lead to a simpler subjective representation of group memberships. Collectivistic individuals are more often expected to form and be highly involved in social affiliations, and the differentiation amongst these groups and the self is far more difficult than the social affiliations joined by individualist people. Along with this argument, Triandis (1989) brought to light that cultural complexity tends to be greater as society advances and they have more choices about the groups they would like to join. However, the choices made are dependent upon whether the individual has a holistic or analytical approach to his or her decision-making. Nisbett, Peng, Choi, and Norenzayan (2001) define holistic approaches as more concrete, whereas analytical approach is a more abstract way of reasoning. Specifically, these authors state that the holistic approach of some cultures makes individuals more lenient towards compromising, while at the same time, the analytic approach leads to more extreme views. Consequently, social affiliations of collectivistic and holistic individuals are more likely to overlap, whereas individualistic and analytical people will seek groups according to their own attributes that may not correlate with other individuals. Knowing that the complexity of social identity is associated with the existence of more divergent social identities, we propose:

*Proposition 3: Individuals from collectivistic and holistic cultures will have a less complex social identity in comparison to individuals from individualist and analytical cultures.*

### *Tightness-Looseness*

Another outlet that can help explain discrepancies in social identity scores is how individuals adhere to group norms in their society. Gelfand, Nishii, and Raver (2006) have expanded the terms of tightness and looseness, coined by Pelto (1968), as the strength of social norms, and applied this to organizational research. More specifically, tightness-looseness refers to how "modern societies vary considerably in their strength of norms and sanctioning (p. 10)." A tight society will be more likely to implement and follow a more formal set of rules, whereas loose societies allow for wider variability in acceptable behaviors. In other words, tight cultures will be more homogeneous and norms will be clearer (Triandis, 1989).

There are other characteristics associated with tightness-looseness of cultures beyond the clarity of norms, including kinship, density (Pelto, 1968), homogeneity and isolation (Chan, Gelfand, Triandis, & Tzeng, 1996). Consequently, considering, for instance, the geographic location of certain countries, it becomes more logical how, on the one hand Japan is considered tight, and Thailand on the

other hand, located amongst two major countries (i.e., China and India), is then more used to different perspectives and changes (Triandis, 2004). Being more tolerant of deviant behavior is likely to influence the amount of choices one may have regarding possible social memberships. Therefore, we propose:

*Proposition 4: Loose cultures will be more likely to have greater variety in their social identity affiliations, whereas tight cultures will have a more limited number of social identity affiliations.*

Furthermore, researchers have made the attempt to compare and contrast tightness-looseness with other cultural dimensions (e.g., Gelfand et al., 2006; Triandis, 2004). More specifically, societies that are more individualistic and low in uncertainty avoidance tend to lie within the loose (versus tight) side of the continuum. We have previously discussed how individualist cultures will be more independent, which in turn may lead to lower levels of social identification. However, we have not pointed out the importance of uncertainty avoidance yet. Considering one of the main motivators of social identity to be the reduction of uncertainty (Hogg & Terry, 2000), the cultural orientation of uncertainty avoidance is likely to have tremendous influence in the formation of social identity across different social norms. Specifically, uncertainty avoidance is defined as the extent to which preference for clear rules and instructions exists instead of a tolerance for ambiguous circumstances (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). Consequently, individuals with a high uncertainty avoidance orientation will be more likely to adhere to social norms. On a similar note, when an individual cannot tolerate ambiguous situations, they will more likely possess a tight frame of reference in regards to social norms. As Triandis (2004) pointed out, deviant behavior or breaking of rules are strictly reprimanded amongst individuals in tight cultures. Considering that the adherence to group norms is influenced by social identity (Adarves-Yorno, Postmes, & Haslam, 2007), we propose the following:

*Proposition 5: Tight cultures will be more likely to have higher cognitive and affective levels of social identities in comparison to loose cultures.*

#### *Steps for SI Measurement across Cultures*

As mentioned before, we argue that there is a need for a structural consensus of the construct of social identity as well as the consideration of cultural influences in this construct. Finally, the recommendation we would like to point out is the assessment of measurement equivalence before making erroneous or misleading conclusions. Measurement equivalence occurs when there is congruence regarding the observed and true scores in a certain attribute across different groups (Drasgow, 1984). The importance of establishing measurement equivalence quantitatively is to provide confidence in one's interpretation of raw score comparisons across two populations. Otherwise, the comparison of an attribute that does not exhibit

measurement equivalence may lead to erroneous conclusions. In other words, comparing scores across groups when there is measurement non-equivalence is analogous to comparing "apples and spark plugs" (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000, p. 9). Hence, it is important to assess measurement equivalence when one is trying to make meaningful comparisons across groups.

The social identity construct is often used to compare groups. Different contexts in which this construct has been investigated in such a way include virtual vs. co-located teams (Webster & Wong, 2008), cultural contexts (Samy Alim, Lee, & Carris, 2011), biographical contexts (Stapleton & Wilson, 2004), and others. Furthermore, subsets of social identities are often used to improve our understanding of individual's psychological affiliations. For instance, racial identities were found to be malleable across contexts (Sanchez, Shih, & Garcia, 2009), and ethnic identities were not related to constructs (e.g., self-efficacy) in a similar manner across countries (Johnson et al., 2012). These findings point to how social identities can differ across groups. Drawing from the rationale that context can serve as a potential indicator of differences in social identities, Smith (2007) has identified different patterns in individuals' responses regarding the importance of their social identities based on societal values.

Taken these findings together, research on social identities across nations is then expected to provide insightful information in regards to social identity formation and changes. Gouveia, de Albuquerque, Clemente, and Espinosa (2002), for example, found similarities and differences in the relationship of social identities and values across two collectivistic countries: Brazil and Spain. However, these authors did not include any measurement equivalence tests prior to interpreting mean differences and making conclusions regarding how these countries experience these constructs. Therefore, social identity measurement equivalence is important because as organizations are becoming more culturally diverse, cultural differences in social identity need to be detected in order to make appropriate comparisons.

More than a decade ago, Hogg and Williams (2000) called for social identity research to expand by investigating this construct across groups. Shortly after, Gouveia and colleagues (2002) investigated the relationship between social identities and values in collectivistic cultures, but the inclusion of a comparison between individualistic and collectivistic cultures is yet to be done. However, Van de Vijver and Leung (2000) pointed out the importance of equivalence, bias, and other methodological issues in psychological research on culture. The intent of responding to a research question with an appropriate methodological and statistical technique (i.e., measurement equivalence) is what these authors foresaw as a way to improve cross-cultural research. In order to address these calls and supplement the literature in social identity measurement, we will outline the three major steps a researcher should take before moving on to comparisons cross-culturally: configural, metric, and scalar invariance.

### *Configural Invariance*

First, one should look at the factorial structure across the two or more cultural groups in order to assess configural equivalence. More specifically, this step targets the extent to which these groups possess similar frames of reference when completing a social identity measure. In other words, evidence of configural invariance would indicate that the items on the measure mean the same thing to both groups (Riordan & Vandenberg, 1994; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). However, if configural variance is not established, comparing scores across the groups can be misleading, or at worst, meaningless. Consequently, this is the first and most important step before utilizing these scales across cultures. The factor structure of the social identity measure, although, will likely fit cultural groups when they are more similar in regards to their cultural orientation, which drives their social identities. Hence, we call for attention towards the following:

*Guideline #1: Assess factor structure before assuming that different groups see the construct in a similar manner.*

### *Metric Invariance*

Furthermore, after configural equivalence is established, one should target the extent to which the factor loadings are similar across the cultural groups. Specifically, metric equivalence suggests the items are calibrated similarly across groups. The relationship between scores and the underlying attribute, even though it may contain different means, can still have the same relationship and thus allow a meaningful comparison. Therefore, this is also a crucial step due to the fact that a confirmation of such type of invariance can result in providing further evidence towards measurement invariance across groups. Thus, we suggest the following:

*Guideline #2: Assess factor loadings before assuming that different groups calibrate each item in a similar manner.*

### *Scalar Invariance*

On a different note, the scalar invariance refers to the item-level intercepts. Similar to configural and metric invariance, scalar invariance is a necessary step in order to make comparisons across the groups (Nye & Drasgow, 2011). Furthermore, when there are systematic latent mean differences on a construct across subgroups, scalar non-equivalence is likely to arise (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). In addition to true difference, some factors, including extreme response sets, translation problems, and language ability are potential sources of scalar invariance issues (Robert, Lee, & Chan, 2006). Considering people from countries with widely different cultural orientation, language and probably social identification, scalar non-equivalence across these cultures may be of common occurrence. For example, Brazil is high in Hofstede's dimensions of uncertainty avoidance, whereas the United States is low. Accordingly, the preference for clear and non-ambiguous

situations may drive Brazilians' responses towards the extreme of the scale (e.g., strongly disagree, strongly agree), whereas Americans may be more likely to use the whole scale including neutral/neither agree nor disagree options. Thus, we highlight the following:

*Guideline #3: Assess item-level intercepts before assuming comparisons are cross-culturally meaningful.*

## **Discussion**

This paper addressed a number of areas related to social identity, cross-cultural differences, and measurement issues of social identity. We reviewed, synthesized and suggested relationships that are not currently established. There are, then, theoretical and practical implications to each of those aforementioned areas. From a theoretical perspective, we have advanced social identity frameworks by reviewing available measures and suggesting dimensions of cognitive and affective nature. More specifically, categorization as the cognitive dimensions of social identity, and the sense of belonging as well as positive attitudes towards the ingroup as the affective component reflect a more holistic way of operationalizing this construct. Furthermore, we propose the addition of culture orientation to the social identity nomological network in order to expand its theoretical domain, as suggested by (Betancourt & López, 1993). Individualism-collectivism, as well as tightness-looseness were used to highlight potential differences in interpreting and responding to social identity measures and propositions were created to guide future cross-cultural investigations.

Lastly, our measurement steps were based on theory and widely influenced by Vandenberg and Lance (2000). These steps, even though part of the last section of our paper, should be the first preoccupation for cross-cultural researchers that are trying to make meaningful comparisons across groups. In the event that the measure of social identity is not considered equivalent across the groups of interest, one should consider a more cultural-specific measure. Church and Katigbak (1988) have broken down steps on how to build an emic (versus etic) measure. Additionally, Cohen (2010) earlier identified the four themes of methodological challenges as causality, operationalization, sampling, and interpretation. We are glad to delve into two of these challenges: causality (e.g., Will cultural orientation influence one's social identity?) and the steps that will allow for a more accurate interpretation (e.g., Is the construct of social identity viewed similarly across all cultures?).

On a different note, this paper also has its research implications, such as (a) fine-tuning of the social identity dimensions, (b) potential explanatory mechanisms to differences in social identity, and (c) measurement tips across groups. First, three dimensions of social identity require fine-tuning based on Tajfel's (1978) definition.

This can guide the implementation of social identity measures in a more proper and adequate manner. Second, we highlighted propositions on the relationship amongst cultural orientation and social identity. These propositions, once tested, can then be used in studies to educate managerial staff on potential differences in deviant behavior in regards to not only the organizational norms, but also memberships of different levels (e.g., work teams, department, and outside clubs). Third, we synthesized into three steps the basis of measurement equivalence. Consequently, the measurement steps should be of direct relevance to those that intend to improve current state of cross-cultural measurement. Hence, this paper can aid with the assessment as well as the theoretical advancement of social identity. Further research should continue to investigate the relationship between the social identity construct and other variables, especially using the previously stated propositions regarding cultural differences, and validate better.

## Conclusion

While attempting to gain a better grasp of social identity, authors disagree on the conceptualization and measurement of this construct. Consequently, we reviewed the current state of this construct by summarizing its dimensions into categorization, sense of belonging, and positive attitudes towards the ingroup. Furthermore, we call for an added complexity in the construct when we emphasize this construct in a cross-cultural context. Thus, we strived to delineate cross-cultural propositions that will help broaden our theoretical knowledge of social identity and guide research in a fruitful and integrated direction.

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