

# IDENTITIES IN HARMONY: GENDER–WORK IDENTITY INTEGRATION MODERATES FRAME SWITCHING IN COGNITIVE PROCESSING

Vera Sacharin, Fiona Lee, and Richard Gonzalez  
*University of Michigan*

Professional women's identity integration—the perceived compatibility between work and gender identities—plays a role in how task or relationship information is processed. Seventy female business school students were primed with either their professional or their gender identity. Business women with higher identity integration showed an assimilation effect to the primed cue. Specifically, they showed higher task orientation than relationship orientation in a recognition task when primed with their professional identity, but less so when primed with their gender identity. Business women with lower identity integration showed a contrast effect to the primed cue: Their recognition reflected a task-relationship orientation opposite to the primed cue. We discuss the implications of these findings for understanding women's performance at work.

People have several selves. Asked who they are, individuals name various identities: groups to which they belong and roles that are important to them. Yet, not all identities interplay harmoniously together. For example, it may be incompatible to be both homosexual and Catholic, to be both pro-choice and Republican, or (as former Harvard president Lawrence Summers suggested) to be both a woman and a scientist (Rimer & Healy, 2005).

Traditional division of labor between the sexes has resulted in gendered occupations and potential strain between being a working professional and being a woman. However, women are now mainstays in corporate America. For example, women held 42.7% of management, business, and financial operations occupations in 2007 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008), and the percentage of female corporate officers and chief executive officers in the Fortune 500 continues to increase (Black, 2003). Nevertheless, women are frequently stereotyped negatively as professional workers (Burgess & Borgida, 1999), often viewed as more warm than competent (Fiske, 2002). Such findings suggest that combining gender and professional identities

might continue to be problematic. Thus, as we describe in more detail later, women in professional and managerial occupations can experience considerable anxiety and difficulty in negotiating between their work and gender identities (London, 2004; Marshall, 1984; Miller, 2004).

Conflicting identities can be managed in a variety of ways. Central to our research is the concept of identity integration, which is the degree to which two social identities are perceived as compatible or in opposition to each other (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002). We argue that the integration between gender and work identities influences how professional women react to gender and professional cues in the environment.

In this paper, we examine how a woman's integration of her professional and gender identities affects her task performance on judgment and memory tasks. Reasoning and information processing are central elements in a variety of contexts, such as leadership and negotiation. The impact of a woman's level of identity integration on basic cognitive processes should therefore be relevant to a variety of other, more complex tasks.

## *Identity Integration*

A 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, 1981, p. 255). Identities provide a lens through

Vera Sacharin, Fiona Lee, and Richard Gonzalez, Department of Psychology, University of Michigan.

We are extremely grateful to Chi-Ying Cheng and Amy Trahan.

Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Vera Sacharin, University of Michigan, Department of Psychology, 3020 East Hall, 530 Church Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1043. E-mail: vsachari@umich.edu

which the world is perceived and behavior is organized (e.g., Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). For example, identification with a group leads to the reinforcement of the group's values and practices, conformity to group norms, attribution of characteristics typical for the group to oneself, and behaviors that are congruent with the salient social identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Individuals belong to multiple social groups and, thus, have many social identities. Some of these social groups can have conflicting values and practices. An intensely discussed issue in the social sciences is the discord between gender and work identities (e.g., Eagly, 1995). In studies of professionals across a variety of occupations, including business, medicine, law, government, and academia, researchers have found that the values associated with the typical worker in these occupations are in fundamental conflict with the values associated with the typical woman (Fox & Hesse-Biber, 1984; Simpson, 1991). Although there are different stereotypes of subgroups of women, such as the housewife or the career woman, the global stereotype of women across multiple cultures shares few features with a career-aspiring professional worker (Adler & Izraeli, 1994; Schein, 2001).

These value clashes are reflected in women's experiences at work. They can lead to a sense of internal conflict, feelings that one has to choose one identity or another but not both (London, 2004; Marshall, 1984), and beliefs that professional women have to strategically alter their usual behavior to find approval as a member of their work group (Driscoll & Goldberg, 1993; London, 2004; Miller, 2004). For example, Miller (2004) demonstrated that female engineers use various strategies to separate their gender and work identities, such as avoiding bringing a purse to work. According to Miller, these women walked "a very fine line between being 'like' the valued masculine prototype and avoiding any implication that they were not 'really women'" (p. 68); they defined themselves "not (as) a woman engineer, (but as) an engineer that just happens to have the body of a woman" (p. 65). Furthermore, Gherardi (1995) provided an account of how women are traditionally separated from the sphere of masculinity in male-dominated organizations, which creates a distance between women's gender and work roles.

Although perceptions of conflict and distance between one's gender and work identity are prevalent among professional women, not all women perceive these identities to be in conflict. Indeed, some women see their gender and work identities as compatible and synergistic. For example, some female managers who highly identified with being both a woman and a manager "seemed personally untroubled," even though they were aware of the conflict between their work and gender identities in general (Marshall, 1984, p. 153).

Identity integration refers to an individual difference in the degree to which two social identities are perceived as

compatible or in opposition to each other (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Benet-Martínez et al., 2002). More integrated individuals do not find it problematic to identify strongly with two groups simultaneously. In contrast, less integrated individuals feel caught between the two identities and prefer to keep them separate, despite the fact that they strongly identify with both identities.

Although identity integration draws from previous frameworks examining multiple social identities, the construct of identity integration is distinct from other constructs involving multiple social identities. For example, self-complexity (Linville, 1987) and self-concept differentiation (Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993) examine the degree to which social identities (or the roles associated with different identities) are perceived as different. Identity integration does not refer to cognitive perceptions of the difference between identities, but to feelings of conflict between identities. Other theories focus on the composition of the individual's in-group and the dominance of one identity over another identity (e.g., Berry, 1990; Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Rather than examining the overlap or the attributes of members of two social groups the individual belongs to (e.g., Roccas & Brewer, 2002), identity integration measures individuals' feelings of the compatibility of their social identities. Furthermore, whereas other constructs also include individuals who do not self-identify with both social identities, identity integration focuses more narrowly on individuals who strongly identify with both social identities. As Berry (1990) and Roccas and Brewer (2002) argued, one strategy individuals use to deal with multiple, conflicting social identities is to dis-identify with one or both identities. In contrast, identity integration specifically examines individuals who remain strongly identified with both social groups, even when they have conflicting values and goals. In fact, conflicts between identities can become more pronounced when the identities are important to the individual and vice versa (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). We propose that individual differences in how well women integrate work-gender identity will impact women's cognitive frame switching.

### *Cognitive Frame Switching*

Identities give behavior a frame through which the environment is perceived, understood, and acted upon. Given that individuals belong to multiple social groups and, thus, have many social identities, the salience of one identity in relation to other identities can influence thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (e.g., cultural frame switching; Hong et al., 2000). The immediate environment can cue which identity is most relevant in a given situation (e.g., Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). However, identity salience is not a straightforward result of environmental cues that trigger an identity. Instead, research with individuals who strongly identify with two cultural identities shows that the

level of identity integration is an important moderator for predicting which identity guides behavior.

Individual differences in the integration of two cultural identities has been shown to relate to a variety of psychological processes, such as understanding external cues, reasoning about causality, and inter-group perceptions (Benet-Martinez, Lee, & Leu, 2006; Benet-Martinez et al., 2002; Cheng, Lee, Benet-Martinez, 2006). For example, among individuals who identify with multiple cultural identities, lower integration is associated with higher ratings of stress, experienced discrimination, cultural isolation, and lower well-being (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Downie, Koestner, ElGeledi, & Cree, 2004; Haritatos & Benet-Martinez, 2002).

Of particular relevance for the current study, identity integration moderates how individuals with two cultural identities shift between their identities in response to cues in the social environment. Higher integration is associated with an “assimilation” effect in response to identity primes (e.g., Benet-Martinez et al., 2002). For example, Chinese-American biculturals behave more like Americans when they are exposed to American cues and behave more like Chinese when they are exposed to Chinese cues. However, Chinese-American biculturals with more conflicting identities show a “contrast effect.” They behave more like Americans when they are exposed to Chinese cues, and behave more like Chinese when they are exposed to American cues (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002).

A reason for this effect could be that highly conflicted individuals expend an inordinate amount of time and cognitive energy negotiating between their identities. An effortful and deliberate processing of identity cues to avoid activating the “wrong” identity can ironically lead to over-activation of the “unwanted” identity, leading highly conflicted individuals to exhibit a “contrast,” or reverse priming effect, in response to identity cues (Glaser & Banaji, 1999; Herr, Sherman, & Fazio, 1983; Sherif & Hovland, 1961).

We argue that level of identity integration between gender and work identities affects how professional women react to identity cues. When gender and work identities are perceived as highly integrated, women professionals should switch to the identity frame that is indicated by environmental cues. However, we expect women who have lower gender/work integration to activate the identity that is inconsistent with the demands of the external environment.

### *Present Study*

To observe frame switching in professional women, we examined participants’ orientation to task or relationship information in two cognitive tasks. Stereotypically, being a woman is associated with being interpersonally oriented, whereas being a worker is associated with being task oriented (Deaux & LaFrance, 1998). Women are expected to

be nice, nurturing, soft-spoken, warm, deferential, caring, interpersonally skilled, affectionate, kind, gentle, sympathetic, and sincere (Eagly, 1987; Fiske, 1998; Hofstede, 1994). However, these qualities diverge from the qualities embraced by most business organizations (Fiske, 1998; Kanter, 1977; Lipton, 1986). In the North-American context, business workers and professionals are expected to be aggressive, independent, nonemotional, and rational (Hood & Koberg, 1994). Although women might not consciously endorse these stereotypes, they may nevertheless influence women’s gender and work role expectations and behaviors. For example, when asked to name personally meaningful projects, female managers are more likely to name people-related projects, in contrast to male managers who name projects related to the development and implementation of policies (Phillips, Little, & Goodine, 1997).

We assessed task and interpersonal orientations with justification and recognition tasks. A justification task assesses how decisions are explained and therefore what type of information is weighted more heavily to justify a decision. A recognition task assesses memory. First, task and interpersonal orientations should affect how judgments are made and justified. Individuals with a strong interpersonal orientation are more likely to make judgments based on relationships, and individuals with a strong task orientation are more likely to make judgments based on task efficiency or effectiveness. However, responses in a justification task can be strategic. For example, individuals could be motivated to emphasize work styles (e.g., multi-tasking versus doing one thing at a time), although relationship issues are very salient to them, in an effort to appear task oriented. Therefore, we included a recognition task as a second measure of task versus interpersonal orientation, which is less open to impression management efforts. When a particular schema is dominant, people tend to make intrusion errors consistent with that schema—that is, they mistakenly remember items that were not provided earlier but that are consistent with the schema (Cohen, 1981). In a recognition task, task orientation can be indicated by intrusion errors of task items, such as recognizing information related to work interest and work styles, and interpersonal orientation by intrusion errors of relational items, such as recognizing information focused on interpersonal liking and compatibility.

We proposed that professional women with higher identity integration between their gender and professional identities would assimilate to primes; when primed for gender identity, they would exhibit higher interpersonal orientation (a more prototypical female orientation) by making more relationship-related justifications and intrusion errors of relational items. Similarly, when primed for professional or work identity, they were expected to exhibit higher task orientation (a more prototypical work orientation) by making more task-related justification and intrusion errors of task items. Individuals with less integrated identities were expected to show a “contrast” effect: higher task orientation

when primed for gender identity and higher interpersonal orientation when primed for work identity.

## METHOD

### Participants

Seventy<sup>1</sup> female students at a top-ranked business school participated in our study for a \$10.00 incentive. Participants were solicited with an open email to all business school students about a study on women in business. Their median age of the sample for the analysis was 24 years ( $SD = 4.8$ ; range = 19–43); 73% percent were Caucasian, 17% Asian, 4% Latina, 3% Middle Eastern, and 3% of other ethnicities. Although our sample was not currently active in the workforce, participants had a median of 1.5 years of business experience ( $SD = 2.4$ ; mode = 1; range = 1–16), and they reported having the goal of being a business person for a median of 5 years ( $SD = 5.63$ ; mode = 3, range = 0–25). With 70 participants, a regression with three predictors has power (.80) to detect a medium effect ( $f^2 = .11$ ; medium effect using Cohen's, 1988, criteria) for a regression coefficient using a two-tailed Type I error rate of 0.05.

### Procedure

Participants were tested individually. They completed the identity integration scale and were then randomly assigned to the gender or professional identity prime condition. Participants then listened to an audio tape<sup>2</sup> of a conversation between a man and a woman chatting over lunch about the personal and work relationships of four different characters. To assess how this information was processed, participants were instructed to make judgments about these characters and justify their decisions. The content of participants' responses in this justification task was the first measure of task versus relationship orientation. In the following recognition task, participants read 16 statements and were asked to recognize which of the statements had previously been presented in the story. This was the second measure of task versus relationship orientation. To ensure that participants identified with both gender and professional identities, we assessed participants' strength of identification with being a woman and a business person before debriefing them. Participants indicated how strongly they identified with being a woman and how strongly they identified with being a business person on a scale from 1 (*very weak*) to 6 (*very strong*). The experiment lasted about 30 minutes. Participants' names were not associated with any of their responses.

### Measures

*Identity integration.* The identity integration scale was modified from previous measures of bicultural identity integration by Haritatos and Benet-Martinez (2002)<sup>3</sup> and

consisted of four items: "I am conflicted between doing things like a woman and like a business person" (reverse coded), "I feel like someone moving between the world of women and the business world" (reverse coded), "I feel caught between the business world and the world of women" (reverse coded), and "I do not feel trapped between the world of women and the business world." Each item used a Likert response scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). In the present sample, the scale reached adequate levels of reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .77$ ).

*Identity prime.* Participants were randomly assigned to write a short paragraph about what it means for them to be either a woman or in business. Participants took about 10 minutes to write this essay.

*Task and relationship orientation in the justification task.* Participants listened to an audio tape lasting five minutes of a conversation between Susan and Jeff chatting over lunch about personal and work relationships among themselves and two colleagues, Ann and Bill. With four people (Susan, Jeff, Ann, and Bill), six possible dyads can be formed. The information provided during the lunch conversation characterized three dyads as high in interpersonal liking but low in work style compatibility, and the remaining three dyads as low in interpersonal liking but high in work style compatibility. For example, Ann and Jeff enjoyed sharing meals and spending leisure time together (interpersonal liking), but Ann preferred a linear work style while Jeff was a multi-tasker (incompatible work styles).

Participants rated how well each dyad would work together in the future. Each participant then generated one justification for their rating of each of the six dyads. Participants had two lines to write their justifications. Each justification was coded by two raters (unaware of experimental condition) as task oriented, interpersonally oriented, both, or neither. For example, justifications such as "They have similar project goals and will need the other's expertise," or "Seem to have similar styles of work" were coded as task oriented. Justifications such as "They both have mildly negative feelings about each other but don't communicate about it," or "Good old friends, relax each other" were rated as interpersonally oriented. Statements that were ambiguous because they included both task and interpersonal orientation were coded as both, and statements that did not fall into either category (e.g., "I am not sure") were coded as neither.

The ratings for the 4 categories (task, interpersonal, both or neither) were summed across the six justifications for each participant. Inter-rater reliability for the total scores was high (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .995$  for task orientation, .997 for interpersonal orientation, .996 for both, and 1 for neither). Ratings across coders were averaged. The difference score of task minus relationship justifications served as our measure of relative task orientation, with maximum values

of  $-6$  to  $6$  so that positive scores indicated a stronger task orientation.

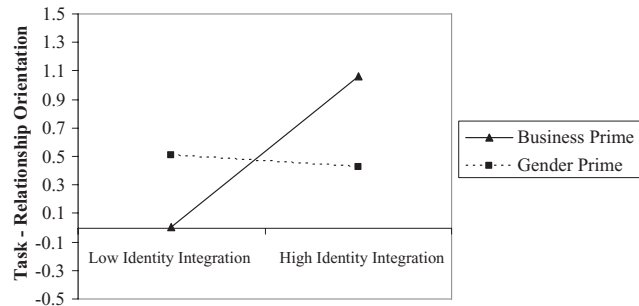
*Task and relationship orientation in the recognition task.* Participants were given 16 statements and asked to determine whether each statement had been on the tape. Of the 16 statements, 8 referred to the work interests and work styles of the characters (4 were on the tape and 4 were not), and 8 referred to the personal relationships of the characters (4 were on the tape and 4 were not). Intrusion errors refer to falsely recognizing elements not on the tape. An intrusion error was coded as consistent with task orientation when it involved false recognition of work related information, and it was coded as interpersonal orientation when it involved false recognition of personal relationship information. Intrusion errors for each orientation were summed. We used the difference score of task minus relationship orientation intrusion errors to measure relative task orientation, with maximum values of  $-4$  to  $4$  so that positive scores indicated a stronger task orientation.

## RESULTS

Participants who reported that they had wanted a business career for a longer period of time had more work experience,  $r(69) = .37$ ,  $p < .01^4$  and stronger professional identities,  $r(69) = .44$ ,  $p < .01$ . Also, professional identification was positively associated with gender identification,  $r(69) = .28$ ,  $p = .02$ . However, identity integration was independent of these variables; it was not correlated with strength of identification with gender or professional identity, the difference in the identification with these two identities, length of work experience, or desire to be a business person. In the sample, identity integration ranged from 2.25 to 5. In the two tasks given to participants, task orientation was higher overall in the recognition task ( $M = 0.51$ ;  $SD = 1.15$ ) and relationship orientation was higher in the justification task ( $M = -1.69$ ;  $SD = 2.72$ ).

### *The Effect of Identity Prime and Identity Integration on Justifications and Recognition*

The regression of task orientation in the recognition task on prime, identity integration (both variables centered), and interaction term using simultaneous entry showed that only the interaction term predicted task orientation,  $\beta = -.36$ ,  $p = .04$ ,  $R^2 = .06$ . Decomposing the interaction into simple slopes, in the business prime condition, the association between identity integration and task orientation was positive,  $\beta = .63$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $R^2 = .15$  (see Figure 1). However, in the gender prime condition, identity integration was not significantly associated with task orientation,  $\beta = -.09$ ,  $p = .71$ ,  $R^2 = .01$ . The regression lines intersected at an identity integration level of 3.74, very close to the sample median of identity integration, 3.75. We supplemented the simple slope analysis using the Johnson-Neyman tech-



Note. The regression is plotted following the procedure by Aiken and West (1991).

**Fig. 1.** Difference score of task-relationship orientation in the recognition task by identity integration and identity prime condition.

nique described by Aiken and West (1991). We tested if women in the business and gender prime condition differed in their predicted values of task orientation at various scores of identity integration. We found that identity integration scores of 4.75 or 5 resulted in marginally more task orientation in the business than gender prime condition,  $ps = .07, .08$  respectively. Twenty percent of the women in the sample had these scores. Identity integration scores of 2.25 and 2.5 (11.4% of women in our sample) resulted in marginally less task orientation in the business than in the gender prime condition,  $ps = .08, .09$  respectively.

For the justification task, a regression of task orientation on prime, identity integration, and the interaction term (both variables centered) using simultaneous entry showed no significant effect. The interaction did not reach acceptable levels of significance,  $\beta = -.65$ ,  $p = .12^5$ .

### *Strength of Identification*

Identity integration is conceptualized as identifying with two identities rather than having one dominant identity. We recruited women to our study with strong gender and business identities, but we had also asked participants to indicate how strongly they identify with being a women and being in business. Thus, we were able to investigate the importance of relative strength of identification in the sample. The analyses described above were computed on the entire sample (one participant had been excluded because she explicitly did not identify with being in business).

Additionally, we analyzed the data excluding participants with low identification at various cut-off points. We also computed the difference score of identification with gender minus professional identification. Overall, it was unclear whether to exclude participants with a large difference between identities *and* low identification or those with a large difference score *or* low identification. Regardless of the criteria for excluding participants, the significance of the interaction effect of identity prime and identity integration on task orientation in the recognition task did not change. For the justification task, excluding participants with a large

difference score between gender and professional identity yielded a significant interaction effect. However, the effect was not robust: the pattern of significance depended somewhat arbitrarily on the cut-off point.

### *Valence of Identity Essays*

As mentioned in the introduction, low identity integration in bicultural individuals is associated with negative acculturation experiences (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Haritatos & Benet-Martines, 2002). To examine in a post-hoc analysis if low identity integration is associated with negative experiences of being a woman or being in business, we examined the essays written by participants about what it means to be a woman or a business person. Two coders unaware of participants' level of identity integration coded the valence of each essay from 1 (*negative*) to 5 (*positive*). Essays rated as positive included statements such as "I enjoy being a woman," "For me, being a woman is wonderful," "I like being a woman, especially in a field of study and work dominated by men. In a way I kind of stand out and offer a unique perspective," and "Being in business gives me a sense of control over my life and its trajectory. . . both these aspects of my life help keep me in balance, and they work together to keep me moving forward and growing." Essays rated as negative included statements such as "When I think about what it means to me to be a woman, the word struggle comes to my mind," "Sometimes in business, being a woman means 'You are damned either way,'" "Being a woman means working two jobs and fitting in nowhere," and "By focusing solely on career, a woman is somehow deemed uncaring. It's not only how society views me, but also how I feel about myself." Coders provided one score for each essay with an agreement of Cronbach's  $\alpha = .77$ . Ratings were averaged across raters for the final analysis.

Identity integration was positively associated with positive essays,  $r(70) = .25$ ,  $p = .04$ . The correlation of essay valence with task orientation across and within prime conditions was not significant.

## DISCUSSION

We applied the concept of identity integration to examine how women in business manage their gender and work identities. We found that identity integration moderated how women reacted to identity primes in a recognition task. Identity integration and task orientation were positively associated in the work prime condition, but not associated in the gender prime condition. The resulting pattern showed that business women with higher identity integration reacted more consistently with the identity prime and showed higher levels of task orientation in the work compared to the gender prime condition. For women with lower identity integration, the reverse was true. These women exhibited a contrast effect and showed lower task orientation

in the work prime condition compared to the gender prime condition.

However, this effect was significant only for the task assessing memory and not for the task assessing justifications. The lack of a significant effect for the justification task may be due to a lower sensitivity of the measure. Participants had only two lines to provide justifications for their judgments, which could have limited the sensitivity of this measure. Instructing participants to write all their ideas and providing more space could help with this issue. In comparison, this is less problematic in the recognition task because the task requires only making check marks. An alternative explanation for the difference in the two tasks is that the justification task allows for strategic responding, but the recognition task does not. For example, a participant might use interpersonal issues as a basis for her decision, but might report work related explanations in an effort to appear task oriented. However, our results suggest that it is unlikely that strategic concerns vary systematically with participants' level of identity integration: Although the effect of the predictors in the justification task was not significant, the direction of the coefficients was the same in the justification and the recognition task. Thus, responses were not systematically different in the two tasks. Instead, it seems that the justification task is less sensitive, but more research is needed to assess the difference between the two tasks.

### *Limitations of the Study*

The difference in task orientation between individuals with lower and higher identity integration was stronger in the professional compared to the gender prime condition. It is possible that individuals are more sensitive to primes in the environment regarding a relatively recent identity. A professional identity is generally acquired later in life than a gender identity, and this is particularly true for a sample of business students. Therefore, sample specific effects could increase differences in reactions to professional and gender identity cues. Alternatively, the setting of a laboratory study might be a work prime in and of itself, adding to the professional prime but reducing the power of the gender prime. Future studies with different samples (e.g., women in the workforce) and in different settings (e.g., in people's houses) could shed light on these issues.

Other sample specific effects on the present findings are possible. Participants volunteered to participate from an open e-mail about a study of women in business. The sample could be over-represented with conflicted women if those who struggle with work/gender conflict were more likely to respond to the e-mail or may be overrepresented with integrated women if those who struggle with work/gender identity integration tended to avoid our study. Future research can address these issues by focusing on women in the workforce and using a more representative sampling method to avoid such selection biases.

### *The Role of Strength of Identification for Identity Integration*

Identity integration refers to individuals who strongly identify with more than one identity. While it is theoretically difficult to determine at what point identification should be considered “strong,” we examined the importance of relative strength of identification with each gender and professional identity. Furthermore, we analyzed if the difference between gender and professional identification strength matters for identity integration effects. Overall, we did not find effects of strength of identification even though the critical interaction effect of identity integration and identity prime was fairly robust.

Limitations of our procedure could have prevented us from confirming the importance of identification strength for identity integration. Our study was not designed to test the importance of strength of identification, and the question wording in our study could be responsible for not finding an effect. In our study, the question about individuals’ identification with being a woman and being in business was worded in a way that left the referent unclear. Some women might have compared themselves to other women / business persons in general, other respondents might have compared themselves to their peers, and yet others might have compared themselves to people in general. Depending on the referent, participants’ answers on a scale assessing strength of identification have a different meaning. Therefore, future research is necessary to determine in more detail the importance of strength of identification for identity integration.

### *Antecedents of Identity Integration*

Although identity integration has been shown to predict a variety of cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes within different identity domains, we understand very little about the underlying predictors of identity integration, or whether and how it can be changed. There is some evidence suggesting that individuals might experience more identity conflict because of negative experiences associated with their multiple identities (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Haritatos & Benet-Martines, 2002). Consistent with this idea, recent evidence shows that identity integration increases when biculturals are asked to recall positive past events associated with their cultural identities and that identity integration decreases when biculturals are asked to recall negative past events associated with their cultural identities (Cheng & Lee, under review).

Although the current research did not address these questions, we were able to examine, in a post-hoc fashion, whether identity integration is similarly related to a negative perception of being a woman in business. We found that, indeed, identity integration was positively associated with the valence of participants’ essays. Although causation cannot be determined from this study, the relation is consistent with past research of biculturals in which the recall of

relevant experiences was correlated with identity integration (Cheng & Lee, under review). The valence ratings did not predict task orientation, suggesting that the negative perceptions of gender and work identities do not account for the hypothesized effects.

Although more research is needed to understand the antecedents of identity integration, this finding suggests that focusing on positive aspects of being a woman in business may increase one’s integration, whereas focusing on hardships and challenges might increase conflict. Understanding whether and how identity integration can be changed is important for developing effective teaching and mentoring tools for young women entering the field of business. For example, future research might examine how different mentoring styles relate to mentees’ identity integration, or how different socialization programs influence subsequent identity integration.

### *Implications of Identity Integration for Women at Work*

The present results have implications for understanding the possible benefits and problems associated with different levels of identity integration that should be explored in future research. Prior research suggests that compared to individuals with identity conflict, individuals with higher integration experience many benefits, such as assimilation to situational demands, less anxiety and depression, and generally a more positive outlook toward their dual identities (Haritatos & Benet-Martinez, 2002; Trahan & Lee, 2004).

We suggest that integrating one’s gender and work identities can have both benefits and costs. In this study, we find that women with more integrated identities exhibit behaviors that are aligned with cues from the environment, such as becoming more task oriented at work. This might be helpful for staying focused on the work at hand and for tackling challenging business problems. However, psychological research suggests that it may be costly to behave in ways that are contrary to the *prescriptive* gender stereotype, or beliefs others hold of what women should be like (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Because gender is a very salient category (e.g., Stangor, Lynch, Duan, & Glass, 1992), behavior that is not in line with the associated stereotype can lead to a perceived lack of fit (Heilman, 1983) as well as dislike and hostility from others (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Jackson & Cash, 1985). An example of such sanctioning was evident in the case of Ann Hopkins, who “was denied partnership at Price Waterhouse, despite her stellar performance record, because she was deemed to be lacking ‘femininity’ (*Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins*, 1989)” (Burgess & Borgida, 1999, p. 665).

Similarly, one could speculate that being a woman with lower gender-work identity integration can have advantages and disadvantages. In contrast to more integrated individuals, women with identity conflict tend to be more interpersonal when exposed to work-related cues. Although these women feel less integrated about their identities, their

behavior brings aspects of their gender identity into a setting where a professional identity is appropriate. Paradoxically, on a behavioral level the dual identities seem here more “integrated,” even if these women do not feel harmoniously about their dual identities and have low identity integration. As a consequence of acting more professionally, business women with more identity conflict seem less likely to violate prescriptive gender stereotypes. However, this does not mean these women are free from discrimination. Due to the relationship-oriented behavior they show in task settings, it is likely that others may stereotype these women as lacking masculine, job relevant attributes, resulting in discrimination based on descriptive stereotypes, or beliefs others hold of what women are like (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Such stereotyping can lead to women being perceived as having lower potential for leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002), which, in turn, adversely impacts hiring, performance ratings, and promotion decisions (Heilman, 1983). At this stage of the research, possible benefits and disadvantages of identity integration can only be speculative. Future research is required to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of women’s identity integration in depth.

#### *Identity Integration in Other Professions*

Our rationale for the present study stems from the basic premise that gender and work identities often conflict. We chose the business domain as a setting to examine our hypothesis, arguing that professional values in the business domain (task orientation) conflict with values associated with being a woman (relational orientation). Specifically, we used task and interpersonal orientations as cognitive indicators of frame switching between work and gender identities. Implicit in this approach is the assumption that each identity—work or gender—requires individuals to take on different and even mutually exclusive orientations or points of view.

Yet, in some professions, work and gender identity may not conflict. For example, in medicine, a primary professional value is care-giving, and a physician is described as someone who is “concerned about people, someone who cares for the sick, not just treats them but cares about them” (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006, p. 246). Thus, although there can be heavy work loads and work-family conflict (Firth-Cozens, 1991), there may be less inherent conflict between the values associated with gender (i.e., being a woman) and some professions. When the values and norms of a gender and work identity are more similar, identity switching may not be necessary. In other professions, where professional values are more female than male oriented (such as being a nurse or a teacher), managing gender and work identities is likely a more salient issue for men than women. Future research is needed to examine differences in identity integration across professions and gender.

#### *Conclusion*

Psychologists have long examined how individual behavior, affect, and cognition are influenced by a dominant social identity, yet comparatively less work has focused on how individuals manage multiple social identities. Research on bicultural individuals provides evidence that individual differences in identity integration predict how multiple cultural identities are managed in their everyday lives. Drawing from this work, we suggested that identity integration also predicts how professional women manage their work and gender identities.

Our results show that individual differences in the integration between gender and work identities influence how women in business process information after their work identity is made salient through stimuli in the environment. Identity integration was positively associated with processing task oriented information in the work prime condition, but not in the gender prime condition. That is, women who see their gender and work identities as more compatible exhibit an assimilation effect and behave in a more task oriented fashion when primed with their professional identity than those primed with their gender identity, but women who see their gender and work identities as more conflicting exhibit a contrast effect and behave in a less task oriented fashion in the work prime condition than those in the gender prime condition. These findings demonstrate that identity integration is a useful concept for understanding how individuals manage different, conflicting social identities in and across multiple domains, such as culture, gender, and profession.

*Initial submission: December 13, 2007*

*Initial acceptance: September 5, 2008*

*Final acceptance: February 3, 2009*

#### **NOTES**

1. The initial sample was 103. However, one participant was excluded because she explicitly did not identify with being in business as indicated by her essay, and 32 participants were not included in hypotheses test because they did not comply with the manipulation instruction. To ensure that gender or professional identity was successfully primed, two independent coders rated the content of participants’ priming essays to check compliance with the instruction to write about being in business or being a woman (coder reliability was high,  $\kappa = .91$ ). A substantial sub-sample did not write about being a woman or being in business, but about being a business woman ( $n = 32$ ). Although the noncompliers had lower identity integration compared to participants who followed the instructions (3.37; 3.83),  $t(100) = 2.62$ ,  $p = .01$ , identity integration of participants for whom the manipulation was successful varied sufficiently to test the hypotheses (range 2.25–5). Thus, we conducted hypothesis testing only with those participants who were successfully primed with either their professional or gender identity ( $n = 70$ ).
2. A full transcript of the tape is available by request from the first author. Some participants read a transcript of the tape instead



of listening to the tape. Subsequent analyses showed no effect of medium on task orientation or on the relationship between identity integration, identity prime, and task orientation.

3. The Bicultural Identity Integration Scale by Haritatos and Benet-Martinez (2002) consists of two subscales, conflict and distance. In our sample, only the adapted conflict subscale reached acceptable reliability. The distance subscale (items: "I am simply a woman who is in the field of business," "I keep everything about being a woman and being a business person separate," "I am a business woman," and "I feel part of a specific culture, resulting out of a combination of being a business person and being a woman") exhibited low reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .32$ ), so that it was dropped from further analyses.
4. One participant did not provide information for these variables.
5. Regressions on relationship orientation and task orientation separately for both the recognition task and justification task showed that the results were not driven by either relationship or task orientation across tasks.

## REFERENCES

- Adler, N. T., & Izraeli, D. (1994). *Competitive frontiers: Women managers in a global economy*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Johnson, S. A. (2001). Which hat to wear? The relative salience of multiple identities in organizational contexts. In M. A. Hogg & D. J. Terry (Eds.), *Social identity processes in organizational contexts* (pp. 31–48). Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of Management Review*, *14*, 20–39.
- Benet-Martinez, V., & Haritatos, J. (2005). Bicultural identity integration (BII): Components and psychological antecedents. *Journal of Personality*, *73*, 1015–1050.
- Benet-Martinez, V., Lee, F., & Leu, J. (2006). Biculturalism and cognitive complexity: Expertise in cultural representations. *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology*, *37*, 386–407.
- Benet-Martinez, V., Leu, J., Lee, F., & Morris, M. W. (2002). Negotiating biculturalism. Cultural frame switching in biculturals with oppositional versus compatible cultural identities. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *33*, 492–516.
- Berry, J. W. (1990). Psychology of acculturation. In N. R. Goldberger & J. B. Veroff (Eds.), *The culture and psychology reader* (pp. 457–488). New York: New York University Press.
- Black, J. (2003). The women of tech. *Business Week Online*. Retrieved February 20, 2005, from [http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/may2003/tc20030529\\_2635.tc111.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/may2003/tc20030529_2635.tc111.htm)
- Burgess, D., & Borgida, E. (1999). Who women are, who women should be. Descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotyping in sex discrimination. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, *5*, 665–692.
- Cheng, C.-Y., & Lee, F. (under review). *Who is your ingroup? Shift of cultural identity and ingroup favoritism tendency*. New York: Columbia University Graduate School of Business.
- Cheng, C.-Y., Lee, F., & Benet-Martinez, V. (2006). Assimilation and contrast effects in cultural frame switching: Bicultural identity integration and valence of cultural cues. *Journal of Cross Cultural Research*, *37*, 597–622.
- Cohen, C. E. (1981). Person categories and social perception: Testing some boundaries of the processing effects of prior knowledge. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *40*, 441–452.
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Deaux, K., & LaFrance, M. (1998). Gender. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 788–827). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Donahue, E. M., Robins, R. W., Roberts, B. W., & John, O. P. (1993). The divided self: Concurrent and longitudinal effects of psychological adjustment and social roles on self-concept differentiation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *64*, 834–846.
- Downie, M., Koestner, R., ElGeledi, S., & Cree, K. (2004). The impact of cultural internalization and integration on well-being among tricultural individuals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *30*, 305–314.
- Driscoll, D., & Goldberg, C. R. (1993). *Members of the club: The coming of age of executive women*. New York: Free Press.
- Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Eagly, A. H. (1995). The science and politics of comparing women and men. *American Psychologist*, *50*, 145–158.
- Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. T. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice towards female leaders. *Psychological Review*, *109*, 573–598.
- Firth-Cozens, J. (1991). Women doctors. In J. Firth-Cozens & M. West (Eds.), *Women at work: Psychological and organizational perspectives* (pp. 131–142). Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Fiske, S. T. (1998). Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (pp. 357–414). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Fiske, S. T. (2002). A model of (often mixed) stereotype content: Competence and warmth respectively follow from perceived status and competition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *82*, 878–902.
- Fox, M. F., & Hesse-Biber, S. (1984). *Women at work*. Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield.
- Gherardi, S. (1995). *Gender, symbolism and organizational cultures*. London: Sage.
- Glaser, J., & Banaji, M. R. (1999). When fair is foul and foul is fair: Reverse priming in automatic evaluation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *77*, 669–687.
- Haritatos, J., & Benet-Martinez, V. (2002). Bicultural identities: The interface of cultural, personality, and socio-cognitive processes. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *36*, 598–606.
- Heilman, M. E. (1983). Sex bias in work settings: The lack of fit model. In B. M. Staw & L. I. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior* (Vol. 5, pp. 269–298). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Herr, P. M., Sherman, S. J., & Fazio, R. H. (1983). On the consequences of priming: Assimilation and contrast effects. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *19*, 323–340.

- Hofstede, G. (1994). Management scientists are human. *Management Science*, 40, 4–13.
- Hong, Y., Morris, M. W., Chiu, C., & Benet-Martínez, V. (2000). Multicultural minds: A dynamic constructivist approach to culture and cognition. *American Psychologist*, 55, 709–720.
- Hood, J. N., & Koberg, C. S. (1994). Patterns of differential assimilation and acculturation for women in business organizations. *Human Relations*, 47, 159–182.
- Jackson, L. A., & Cash, T. F. (1985). Components of gender stereotypes: Their implications for inferences on stereotypical and nonstereotypical dimensions. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 11, 326–344.
- Kanter, R. M. (1977). *Men and women of the corporation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Linville, P. W. (1987). Self-complexity as a cognitive buffer against stress-related illness and depression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 663–676.
- Lipton, M. (1986). Successful women in a man's world: The myth of managerial androgyny. In L. L. Moore (Ed.), *Not as far as you think* (pp. 163–180). Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- London, C. G. (2004). A qualitative study of women in male-dominated careers: Young women's experience of their mothers' conflict about dual roles and how it affects their conflict about working and parenting. *Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 65(2), 727.
- Marshall, J. (1984). *Women managers: Travelers in a male world*. Chichester, UK: Wiley.
- Miller, G. E. (2004). Frontier masculinity in the oil industry: The experience of women engineers. *Gender, Work and Organizations*, 11, 47–73.
- Phillips, S. D., Little, B. R., & Goodine, L. A. (1997). Reconsidering gender and public administration: Five steps beyond conventional research. *Canadian Public Administration/Administration Publique du Canada*, 40, 563–581.
- Pratt, M. G., Rockmann, K. W., & Kaufmann, J. B. (2006). Constructing professional identity: The role of work and identity learning cycles in the customization of identity among medical professionals. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49, 235–262.
- Rimer, S., & Healy, P. (2005, February 18). Furor lingers as Harvard Chief gives details of talk on women. *New York Times*, p. A1.
- Roccas, S., & Brewer, M. B. (2002). Social identity complexity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 6, 88–106.
- Schein, V. E. (2001). A global look at psychological barriers to women's progress in management. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57, 675–688.
- Sherif, M., & Hovland, C. I. (1961). *Social judgment: Assimilation and contrast effects in communication and attitude change*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Simpson, S. M. (1991). Women entrepreneurs. In J. Firth-Cozens & M. West (Eds.), *Women at work: Psychological and organizational perspectives* (pp. 113–130). Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Stangor, C., Lynch, L., Duan, C., & Glass, B. (1992). Categorization of individuals on the basis of multiple social features. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 62, 207–218.
- Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories: Studies on social psychology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Trahan, A., & Lee, F. (2004, September). *Extending the identity integration model to the workplace: The experience of women in male-dominated fields*. Presentation at The University of Michigan Organizational Psychology Brown Bag, Ann Arbor, MI.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2008). *Current population survey. Table 11: Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity*. Retrieved August 7, 2008, from <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.pdf>