Understanding multiple group identities: inserting women into cultural transformations.

by Aida Hurtado

The study of cultural transformations in the United States has been studied predominantly from an assimilation/acculturation framework. There are several drawbacks to this theoretical perspective, chief among them being the exclusion of gender in examining what happens to different ethnic/racial groups when they come into contact. Feminist writings in the last twenty years provide a rich discussion of how inserting women into this social process would enrich our knowledge about human behavior in general and cultural change specifically. This paper reviews the literature on the assimilation/acculturation framework and integrates the most recent developments in feminist theory to provide a new alternative to studying cultural transformations. The social engagement model takes into account gender as well as other significant social identities, such as ethnicity/race, class, and sexuality to study how groups change as they come into contact with each other. "What happens when peoples meet," as the phrase goes? Such meetings in the modern world are likely to take place under a variety of circumstances: colonial conquest, military conquest, military occupation, redrawing of national boundaries to include diverse ethnic groups, large-scale trade and missionary activity, technical assistance to underdeveloped countries, displacement of an aboriginal population, and voluntary immigration which increases the ethnic diversity of a host country. In the American continental experience, the last two types have been the decisive ones" (Gordon, 1964, p. 60).

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Gordon (1964) indicates that "sociologists and cultural anthropologists have described the processes and results of ethnic meetings under such terms as 'assimilation' and 'acculturation,'" terms that many times have been used interchangeably. In the United States the "ethnic meetings" have resulted in cultural transformations that have not taken into account the role of women in negotiating these massive social and economic changes. In this article I combine my own personal experiences in terms of how my identification as a Chicana and as a woman has evolved over the years and how my own quandaries about multiple group identifications find their echo in the research on assimilation/acculturation for the last 35 years. I conclude by using the most current feminist scholarship to propose the Social Engagement Model to study the complexity of multiple group identifications and their role in cultural transformations.

Assimilation: The Early Years

I started first grade in Toledo, Ohio in the early 1960s because my parents were part of the migrant stream that headed to the Northern United States from South Texas to pick crops during the summer months. Like many labor migrants, we eventually settled in the Midwest, and I attended an elementary school experiencing "White flight" as African Americans moved into the neighborhood. There was only one other Mexican family living in the area. At the time, the predominant ideology in research about ethnicity was that we should all be the same; that like the European immigrants before us, we too should strive to be Americans, forget our language and culture, and become part of the great American melting pot. This was not a malevolent position in the schools I attended; rather it was offered as the solution to becoming part of the middle class and bettering our lives.

This was especially the case for students like me who learned English quickly without the aid of bilingual education and who did very well in school. The cost to me, however, was very high. Like most kids, I hated being different in any way. I pretended I didn't speak Spanish, and I wanted my mom to wear pearls like June Cleaver. There was always an uneasiness I felt in school despite my success, and certainly it was not a place where my parents, or their history and culture were welcomed. My emerging multiplicity due to my many significant group memberships was not recognized in school. Certainly prior to the 1960s, scholars had written about the dislocation that results from crossing class boundaries; however, the experiences explored were exclusively male (Schulberg, 1952; Hoggart, R. 1957; Podhoretz, 1967; Rodriguez, 1982). How these dislocations would be experienced by a dark-skinned, working-class, Mexican, Spanish-speaking, daughter of immigrant parents had not been explored.

During the 1960s the impetus of research on ethnicity was the measurement of assimilation, especially for Mexican Americans. Assimilation was generally defined as "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a
common cultural life" (Park & Burgess, 1921, p. 735). Many of the assimilation scales were being developed to measure the quickest and most efficient way to assimilate immigrants. The assimilation framework had no gender and was uncritically applied to all groups regardless of race, history in the U.S., forms of incorporation in the U.S., or reasons for immigrating.

Acculturation: The Middle Years

By the time I graduated from high school in 1972, and certainly by the time I graduated from college in 1975, the impetus of the research on ethnic minorities had changed. In 1964 Milton Gordon published his influential book, Assimilation in American Life, in which he made the important conceptual distinction between assimilation and acculturation and highlighted the fact that there could be different dimensions to both of these social processes. According to Gordon (1964):

"1) cultural assimilation, or acculturation, is likely to be the first of
the types of assimilation to occur when a minority group arrives on the scene; and

2) cultural assimilation, or acculturation, of the minority group may take

place even when none of the other types of assimilation [structural, marital,

identificational, attitude receptional, behavior receptional, and


civic] occurs simultaneously or later, and this condition of

`acculturation only' my continue indefinitely" (p. 77)

Gordon (1964) cemented the paradigm that took what I call the "trait approach" to the study of cultural diversity.

In this approach, the goal of empirical work is to find those traits each group has in common with the dominant White group. Depending on how similar the minority groups are to the dominant group, the ethnic/racial group is perceived to be more or less acculturated/assimilated to the dominant culture. For example, African Americans have language and citizenship in common with Whites, while Asians have educational and achievement values in common with Whites, and Latinos may have race in common with Whites. The trait approach allows for variation in levels of acculturation as well as variations in levels of assimilation of individuals and groups. Gordon's greatest contribution was the notion that even if an individual is highly acculturated (or culturally assimilated), say, speaks English, graduates from college, and is socially skilled in the dominant culture, he or she can still remain unassimilated on other dimensions. The lack of assimilation, Gordon argues, is due to the fact that this individual lives in a predominantly ethnic neighborhood, marries a member of her or his own group, and belongs mostly to civic organizations within her or his own community. Although this may seem commonsensical in current thinking about ethnicity, it was revolutionary at the time because Gordon's paradigm allowed for nuance of cultural adaptations, for empirically measuring these different dimensions, for possible levels and combinations of acculturation and assimilation, and most importantly, it allowed for structurally assimilated individuals, as measured by income and education, to remain ethnic and loyal to their communities of origin rather than joining the ranks of "marginal men."

The "trait approach" to the study of cultural differences, however, ignores contextual and historical factors in determining gender/ethnic/racial differences between groups. In my case, being of Mexican descent, a girl, and starting first grade in the Midwest speaking only Spanish, the issue of acculturation was something that I had to negotiate the first time I entered a classroom and it had to be negotiated differently than the boys in the same context. By the time I was in high school, my family had moved back to South Texas--a geographical area where Spanish was spoken almost universally. The question of my ethnicity and language were posed very differently than if we had remained in the Midwest, where I would have been part of a minority dealing with these issues.

Also, the historical context made an enormous difference as to how to negotiate the issue of acculturation. By the time I was in college, my ethnicity was not something to hide or be ashamed of, but something to be flaunted and glorified. This was the height of the Chicano Movement, which advocated a nativist return, not to Mexican culture but even further back to our Aztec roots that we actually knew very little about. Nonetheless, we wore them as icons of our Chicano identity. This was the era when many Chicano activists named their children unpronounceable Aztec names such as Tizoc, Xochitl, and Saguache (Castillo, 1995, p. 94). Similarly, much of the research on ethnic groups was experiencing a revolution of sorts. Instead of proclaiming that assimilation was the solution to ethnic diversity, the concept of acculturation reached its height of popularity. In fact, the prevalent view was that minorities could become culturally and linguistically acculturated to the mainstream without becoming
completely assimilated, and biculturally was a viable option. We thought we had found a nifty solution.

This is not to imply, however, that the assimilation/acculturation framework disappeared, but rather it became a bit more refined and, at times, co-existed with the beliefs about acculturation. Of course, gender was nowhere to be found in this paradigm even though this was the height of the White feminist movement. Many Chicanas and other women of Color embraced aspects of the feminist movement to understand their role as women, but their concerns were never fully integrated into their respective ethnic/racial movements, nor were feminists’ concerns integrated into our understanding of cultural transformations in the scholarship of the time.

Critical Review of the Assimilation/Acculturation Framework

The Internal Colonial Model

By 1983, when I arrived at the University of California at Santa Cruz by way of the graduate program at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, I thought I had a firm grasp on how cultural transformations took place. I argued through my years in graduate school, where the predominant non-White group was African Americans, that people of Mexican origin were different from European immigrant groups because we were a domestic minority that had been conquered on its own land. We had gone through a psycho-historical development of social identity that began as a conquered native population, who subsequently became an immigrant population, and who then tried to assimilate shortly after World War II. As a group, however, we discovered that, in fact, we could not assimilate because of our historical heritage of conquest (Alvarez, 1973).

The experience of conquest that began in 1848 was somewhat akin to what Native Americans had experienced with the taking of their lands. Furthermore, although we were not as racially distinct as African Americans, our mixed heritage of Spanish and Indian blood made us mestizos and subject to race discrimination, regardless of how we were classified in the U.S. Census. This was known as the internal colonial model (Almaguer, 1974; Blauner, 1972). From this perspective, the problems encountered in the cultural adaptations of ethnic/racial groups were not the result of “culture conflict” generated by the differences in traits between dominant and subordinate groups, as the assimilation/acculturation framework would have us believe. Rather, the internal colonial model sees the cultural adaptations of ethnic/racial groups as the outcome of “the organization of the economic structure of U.S. capitalism and from the labor relationships that generate that particular mode of production” (Almaguer, 1974, p. 43).

Again gender was nowhere to be found in this paradigm. This was a tidy package of ideas that had substantial empirical and theoretical evidence from what Baca Zinn (1995) calls the revisionist scholarship that prevailed in ethnic studies during the late 1970s and into the early part of the 1980s (Baca Zinn, 1995; Hurtado, 1995; Zavella, 1987).

Despite this hard conceptual work and empirical backing, I was not prepared for the complexities I was to find in California and what these complexities meant for my own identity. I was hired as an assistant professor in 1983 at the University of California, Santa Cruz. In my classroom I came face-to-face with Tizoc, Xochitl, and Saguache. The children of the activists of the ’60s had grown up and were demanding a reconceptualization of how we examined different group memberships. Unlike their parents, Tizoc, Xochitl, and Saguache did not desire a nativist return to their Aztec past, although by no means did they reject that past. But they were not interested in glorifying it, nor were they as concerned about keeping group boundaries as we were during the ’70s, when assimilation was so feared that we condemned all intergroup contact. The concepts of acculturation and assimilation, albeit with the Marxist twists I acquired at the University of Michigan through the scholarship on internal colonialism, were not sufficient to understand the situation in California.

The “Trait Approach” in the Study of Cultural Transformations

In the original definition of acculturation, which was used interchangeably with the concept of assimilation until Gordon’s book (1964) was published, there was the notion that when different ethnic groups come in contact, there is the possibility that the culture of both groups will be affected by the contact. The anthropologists Redfield, Linton and Herskovits in the 1930s declared that acculturation “comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (1936, p.61). In the actual research on assimilation/acculturation, however, the process has been empirically conceptualized as being unidirectional where the “ethnic group” changes to look more like what is variously called “dominant,” “mainstream,” and “White” group. This type of approach effectively blocks the possibility that cultural contact can indeed bring change in
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both the minority and the majority groups.

Another inherent conceptual problem with the "trait approach" to the study of cultural transformations is the assumption that there is one "dominant" culture, or one set of values that is "White," or that in fact we as a society can agree what constitutes "the mainstream." One could argue that perhaps it was an assumption that was plausible prior to the 1960s when there was not such a complex view of what constitutes "family" and where there seemed to be much more consensus about what constitutes basic "American" values. But even this is a contested assumption (see Coontz, 1992, for the complexities of families through time). Since the 1960s, however, there have been enormous changes in the basic unit of society--the family. Dominant families no longer look the way they did in the 1950s or early 1960s (Staples & Miranda, 1980, p. 892). Massive cultural and economic changes modified White families to look more like ethnic/racial families: more female-headed households, higher rates of divorce, more children living in poverty, and higher school dropout rates (Staples & Miranda, 1980). Married White women are now entering the labor force at a rate that, until recently, was seen exclusively among women of Color (Smith, 1987; Baca Zinn, 1990). As a result, different family arrangements have mushroomed, creating such alternatives as nonmarital cohabitation, single-parent households, extended kinship units and expanded households, dual-wage earner families, commuter marriages, gay and lesbian households, and collectives (Baca Zinn, 1990, p. 71). All of these factors increase the number of overlapping social categories between groups.

Moreover, the "trait approach" rests on the notion of having a White majority population and a minority population that is composed of various groups of Color. That is no longer the case in many areas of the United States, especially California, the most multicultural state and where the majority of Latinos reside. For example, in 1940, Latinos were indeed a minority, constituting only 6% of California’s population or approximately 374,000 California residents. By 1980, however, the Latino population reached 4 million and has nearly doubled by 1990 to over 7 million. Currently, one out of every four Californians is Latino. By the year 2000, nearly one-third of the state will be Latino. Nationwide, by the year 2050, only 53% of the population is projected to be White, down from 74% today (Preston, 1996). Of course, when that day comes, examining Latinos as if they were a minority will no longer make sense (Hayes-Bautista, Hurtado, Valdez, & Hernandez, 1991).

The concepts of assimilation and acculturation assume that immigrants will not only be a numerical minority, but that they will not have extensive contact with their country of origin. Again, that is not the case. Immigrants are now the majority in California, and the majority of immigrants are Latinos. As recently as 1960, Latino immigrants were relatively rare; less than 20% of Latinos were foreign born. By 1980, however, 37% of Latinos were foreign born, with increasing numbers of immigrants from all parts of Mexico and other countries of Latin America. Since 1980, immigration from Latin America continues at a rapid pace. The 1990 Census shows that immigrants make up the majority of the California Latino adult population (Hayes-Bautista et al., 1991). Furthermore, the majority of immigrants are Latinos and the majority of immigrant Latinos are of Mexican descent (fortes & Rumbaut, 1990). Mexican immigrants are characterized by their extensive contact with their communities of origin through family visits, phone calls, and by encouraging immigration of members of their extended family. This is a situation quite different from the one experienced by European immigrants at the turn of the century when an ocean and unreliable modes of communication often meant cutting all ties with their native countries--at least for a generation or two (Alvarez, 1973). Extensive and frequent contact with Mexico leads Latino immigrants to increase their language and cultural vitality, renewal, and modernization--a situation that is less likely to lead to complete assimilation (Gurin, Hurtado & Peng, 1994).

Multiple Social Adaptations to Cultural Transformations

The greater number of Latinos, most of whom are immigrants, has implications for their cultural adaptations and their social and ethnic identification. These changes also influence how willing ethnic/racial groups are to relinquish their ethnic distinctiveness. Unlike the turn of the century when the dominant ideology was to make all ethnic groups into nonethnic Americans, now ethnic/racial groups do not necessarily perceive their ethnicity as a barrier to their social and economic integration (Hurtado, Rodriguez, Gurin, & Beals, 1993). The social and historical context in the U.S. currently favors multiculturalism. Regardless of how much the concept of multiculturalism is contested, the feet remains that there is a vibrant debate that encourages at least some ethnic group members (with some White group members agreeing) that ethnic cultural maintenance should not be a detriment to their economic and social advancement (Phinney, 1996). Furthermore, the debates around multiculturalism have problematized the notion of free choice in cultural adaptation inherent in the concepts of acculturation and assimilation. Although all assimilation/acculturation theorists discuss the role of prejudice and discrimination,
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These two processes are analyzed separately rather than as integral parts of the negotiation in cultural adaptation (Hurtado, Gurin & Peng, 1994). In other words, the concepts of assimilation and acculturation do not take into account how power differentials in society affect cultural adaptation. Accordingly, also absent is the integration of racial differences between ethnic groups and the dominant society and how they affect cultural adaptation. Rarely is ethnic identity theoretically or empirically tied to class, race, gender and sexual identification, or to any other significant group memberships (Hurtado, Rodriguez, Gurin, & Beals, 1993; Rodriguez-Scheel, 1980). Most importantly, the study of gender has been segregated from the study of ethnicity, especially for Latinos, currently the largest ethnic group in the United States.

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Separate Is Inherently Unequal: The Study’ of Ethnicity/Race Separate from Gender

But where is gender in all of this? Empirically, gender has been studied in the assimilation/acculturation framework as a "background" or "control" variable, or as an interesting way to highlight differences in assimilation/acculturation patterns between women and men (for a recent example see Leaper, 1996). Gender has not been central to the conceptualization of cultural transformations that take place when different ethnic/cultural groups come into contact--cultural transformations that the assimilation/acculturation framework is supposed to explain. Even among the most recent reviews on the conceptualization and measurement of ethnicity, there is no discussion of gender (see Phinney, 1990, 1996, for an example although she is by no means alone in this practice). The study of ethnicity/race, class, and cultural transformations has been segregated from the study of gender despite the fact that the theoretical and empirical literature on gender has mushroomed in the last fifteen years.

My own grappling with how gender was integrated into thinking about ethnicity, class, and sexuality did not happen until I arrived in California in 1983 and was forced by Xochilt, Tizoc, and Saguache as well as by the Santa Cruz feminist and gay communities to expand my thinking about multiple group identities. This development also paralleled the explosion of writing by women of Color such as bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldua, Cherrie Moraga and by the publication of pathbreaking books like This Bridge Called My Back (1981) which highlight the interdependence of multiple group identities (Sandoval, in press).

What this work made obvious is that gender and other group differences cannot be studied independent of the dynamics of political and social power in the United States (Sandoval, 1991). The dilemma presented by studying these differences is largely the result of this circular question: Do differences in power create gender differences or do gender differences create differential access to power? Mainstream scholarship has assumed the natural ordering of groups based on "innate" biological superiority such that the impetus of most scholarship is to document exactly how, and by how much, subordinate groups are deficient. The classic example is Herrnstein and Murray’s book The Bell Curve (1995). It is important to note that the biological assumption of superiority of dominant groups has not been substantiated--it is simply an assumption. Most importantly, it is an assumption imbedded in what Gould (1996) calls the unexamined bias in most of our scientific thinking of the inevitable progress of evolution. According to Gould, biological evolution in general, and human evolution in particular, is perceived as an inevitable process toward higher order "progress." Progress is deemed as higher levels of biological complexity and differentiation. Homo sapiens are the pinnacle of this inevitable striving toward progress. What I argue, a point which Gould does not pursue, is that even within this fallacy of inevitable evolutionary progress, many people believe this progress has occurred unevenly among different ethnic/racial and gender groups in society. Consequently, mainstream psychology attempts to document "objectively" this uneven progress, bypassing the fundamental question that Gould attacks head on--whether this model of biological "progress" is the correct one to pursue. I agree with Gould that a more fruitful approach is to examine the "full house" of the "spread of excellence."

But what kind of scholarship would be produced if we take Gould’s (1996) proposal seriously—that indeed we conceptualize "progress" not as an inevitable linear process where "lower" organisms are less complex and less differentiated, but rather that we should be studying "variation in the entire system" (he refers to this as the "full house"--the title of his book) and "its changing patterns of spread through time" (p. 15). He argues that trends in data should not be viewed as cornerstones of evolutionary "progress" but rather "trends properly viewed as results of expanding or contracting variation rather than concrete entities moving in a definite direction.... In other words, [this book] treats the ‘spread of excellence,’ or trends to improvement best interpreted as expanding or contracting variation" (pp. 15-16).

Gould’s (1996) project is to apply this analysis to our reasoning about Homo sapiens and other biological organisms such that Homo sapiens are placed at the top
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of the evolutionary ladder—which he views as incorrect. He also applies it to other social issues like the disappearance of 0.400 hitting in baseball, or to Gould’s own chances of survival from a fatal cancer when he properly placed himself in the full spread of possible outcomes of the disease rather than the inevitable statistic of death. More to the point of this paper, I believe that in psychology, as well as other social sciences, we have inadvertently applied this inevitable linear evolutionary perspective to human behavior such that certain groups of humans (female, of Color, poor, homosexual) are considered inferior to others (White, male, educated, not poor, heterosexual). Such a limited perspective has concealed the internal variation in these groups and has prevented us from taking into account the “full house” of human behavior.

Social Identity versus Personal Identity

An important theoretical distinction that allows the integration power to the study of group memberships and their role in cultural transformations is that between personal and social identities. Tajfel (1981), and others, posit that personal identity is an aspect of self composed of psychological traits and dispositions that give us personal uniqueness. Personal identity is derived from intrapsychic influences, many of which are socialized within family units (however they are defined). From this perspective, we have a great deal in common as human beings precisely because our personal identities comprise certain universal processes such as loving, mating, and doing productive work. These processes are universal components of the concept of self. Personal identity is much more stable and coherent over time than social identity. Most individuals do not have multiple personal identities, nor do their personal identities change from one social context to another (Hurtado, 1996b).

Following Tajfel (1981), personal identity is viewed differently from social identity as depicted in the model in Figure 2. Social identity is deemed as those aspects of the individual’s self-identity that derive from one’s knowledge of being part of categories and groups, together with the value and emotional significance attached to those memberships. Tajfel argues that the formation of social identities is the consequence of three social psychological processes. The first is social categorization. Nationality, language, race and ethnicity, skin color or any other social or physical characteristic that is meaningful in particular social contexts can be the basis for social categorization and thus the foundation for the creation of social identities. The second process that underlies the construction of social identities is social comparison. The characteristics of one’s group(s) such as status or degree of affluence, achieve significance in relation to perceived differences from other groups, and the value connotation of these differences.

[Figure 2 ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

The third process involves psychological work, both cognitive and emotional, that is prompted by what Tajfel assumes is a universal motive—to achieve a positive sense of distinctiveness. The groups that are most problematic for a sense of positive distinctiveness—ones that are disparaged, memberships that have to be negotiated frequently because they are visible to others, ones that have become politicized by social movements and so on—are the most likely to become social identities for individuals. Moreover, it is these identities that become especially powerful psychologically. They are easily accessible, individuals think a lot about them, they are apt to be salient across situations, and they are likely to function as schema, frameworks or social scripts (Gurin, Hurtado, & Peng, 1994). Unproblematic group memberships—ones that are socially valued or accorded privilege, those that are not obvious to others—may not even become social identities. For example, until very recently, being White was not the subject of inquiry and is still not widely thought of as a social identity (Fine, Weis, & Marusza, 1994; Hurtado & Stewart, 1996; Phinney, 1996).

When the top box in Figure 2 is left unexamined, that is, when social categorization is not explicitly construed as a social process, then these social group memberships seem "natural," God-given, and unalterable, and, for many researchers, biologically determined. Haraway (1988) calls this the "God-trick," when claims of "objectivity" allow scientists to ignore or deny their own social positioning, which inherently influences not only how they "see" a problem but how it is conceptualized, measured, and ultimately solved. From this God-given universe we then study differences—mostly differences in personal identity— which are attributed to the God-given social identifications the individual holds (Haraway, 1988). We end up relying too much on the so-called characteristics attributed to these social identifications as our explanatory variables without exploring how and why those social identifications originated and are maintained in our society. Virginia Dominguez (1992), a cultural anthropologist, calls this culturalism—that we ignore large social and structural forces in favor of a cultural explanation, which leaves the existing social arrangements unexamined, and therefore untouched. An addendum to culturalism is biological essentialism—that is, social and psychological differences between groups are the result of their biological differences. Classic examples are cases in which differences in IQ between African Americans and Whites,
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or language differences between women and men, are attributed to biological make-up (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Tannen, 1990; Gray, 1992) rather than environmental differences in socialization and in social power (Newby, 1995; West, 1995).

The other result of this type of paradigm is that we fail to examine those group memberships that confer power and dominance in the same critical way in which we examine stigmatized group memberships (Hurtado, 1996a). For example, we, as psychologists, sit around and debate the merits of such books as The Bell Curve, but fail to equally address books that question dominant groups such as Men Are Not Cost Effective (Stephenson, 1991). Stephenson argues that it is really men who are responsible for most of our social problems from war, to selling drugs, to abuse of alcohol and abuse of children, to corporate crime and even to such things as the federal deficit since they are, and have been overwhelmingly in charge of Congress. That is, we fail to see men, and more specifically White men, as a group which should be held accountable for the behavior of each member of the group. In fact, they meet all the required characteristics to be thought of as a group and yet we see them as individuals or as members of other social categories that supersede the most basic of their memberships which is that of gender. We see them as Republicans, Democrats, Independents, basketball fans, members of the NRA, and so on, but not as members of the dominant and most powerful group in the United States, which has historically held more power and resources than any other group in the history of our country. Consequently, many of the group differences found by scientists trained by White men favor (White) men on the characteristics that (White) men hold and value and that are rewarded in this society. Furthermore, this paradigm also does not allow us to understand diversity among (White) men. For example, gay men are seen often as "failed men" (Kimmel, 1993) or as biological aberrations. This paradigm also does not allow us to expose situations where members of dominant groups, say heterosexual White men, perceive themselves as a group with privileges that are not entirely legitimate, and therefore should be changed. Tajfel (1981) shows the way in which the presence of this critical lens allows dominant group members to perceive cognitive alternatives to the existing intergroup power differentials that can lead to social change. In other words, Tajfel's paradigm allows us to understand men who are committed to race/ethnic, gender, sexual, and class equality and who denounce the privilege of their group(s).

What Is Included and What Is Excluded in the Study of "Group Differences" between Women and Men

The political movements of the 60s provided the aperture for a broader participation of different groups in creating knowledge (Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, & Belenky, 1996). Those individuals that were theorized about, written about, and objectified are "talking back," to quote bell hooks (1989), so as to expand who, what, and for what purpose, knowledge is constituted (Harris, 1990; Crenshaw, 1993). Until individuals like these had access to academic production, multiple group identifications were seen as aberrations rather than as a richer perception of our social realities. From these latter authors’ perspectives, multiple group identifications now are potential avenues for dismantling previous prejudices and unfair practices. Before scholars like Gloria Anzaldua, Cherrie Moraga, Chela Sandoval, and Patricia Williams began writing, the main concepts used to understand multiple social group identities included "culture conflict," "self-hate," "marginal man," "internalized oppression," "oppositional identity," and "assimilation," to name a few. These negative cultural adaptations existed or do exist, but what remained undocumented was the other side of the coin—that individuals can also survive and, in fact, thrive under existing power disparities. These writers raised the question of whether researchers looking from without might not be able to see the complexities from within and that the "looking" is not independent of the researchers’ social position (Hurtado & Stewart, 1996). This standpoint theory has guided the critique of the scientific method in general. As Stewart (1994) points out:

Feminists theorists have brought through a specific perspective to these observations: a sensitivity to the ways in which gendered features of

our world are taken for granted and therefore invisible

and an awareness that this invisibility serves those with

more power and resources and not those with

less. Thus, feminists theorists have examined the specific ways in which

traditional scientific methods permit or require the systematic exclusion of

some knowledge, particularly knowledge about things important to women and

knowledge of the ways in which taken-for-granted aspects of our world are in
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The normal distribution, presented in Figure 3, provides a useful conceptual tool for illustrating what has been excluded in the study of group differences, either through claims of "objectivity" (Haraway, 1988) or simply by ignoring how the social categories of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality organize our social world with its concomitant distribution of economic and social power.

Historically, the emphasis in assimilation/acculturation research has focused on the left tail of the distribution--that is, it has focused on cultural adaptations that are not particularly healthy, ones for which the only solutions are to assimilate to the dominant mainstream or spend a lifetime of psychological and social alienation. Feminist writers have reacted to this tradition by emphasizing the right tail of the distribution of successful adaptations to cultural transformations in spite of the costs involved in rejecting assimilation (some writers argue, that indeed there is a much higher cost to assimilation than to remaining an outlier, (e.g., Rendon, 1992; Cuadraz, 1996). The ability to successfully negotiate multiple group memberships has been called "mestiza consciousness" (Anzaldúa, 1990), a "differential consciousness" (Sandoval, 1991), and a state of "concientizacion" (Castillo, 1995). The uncharted territory is in the middle. We have ignored the "spread of diversity" (Gould, 1996), that is, how large numbers of individuals deal with multiple group identifications and how this variety of adaptations is related to psychological outcomes.

The distribution of these cultural adaptations has changed through the process of history and by changing demographics, as can be seen in Figure 4.

As previously mentioned in the section on the assimilation/acculturation framework, as multiculturalism has become more acceptable in our society, non-White groups are less likely to see their ethnicity/race as a source of stigma. The cultural adaptation encompassed in the concept of "marginal man" is less likely to happen in the 1990s than it was in the 1950s when complete assimilation was perceived as the only "normal" adaptation to cultural transformations. Also, as mentioned earlier, the fact that people of Color are rapidly becoming the majority of residents in many states also increases their numbers in various occupations and professions. Their increased numbers provide a critical mass that helps individuals circumvent feeling "marginal," at least within specific social contexts (Cuadraz & Pierce, 1994; Rendon, 1992). This is illustrated by how the increasing number of women, mostly White, in almost all of the professions has created niches, thereby decreasing women's "token" status (Pettigrew & Martin, 1987). As these changes occur for different groups, we can expect the normal distribution of cultural/social adaptations to widen so as to include greater, not fewer, variations to cultural transformations (see Figure 4). To be sure, we will still have the "marginal man" among us, but there will be more movement of the distribution towards the right tail, increasing the number and variety of positive cultural adaptations. We may even reach "excellence through diversity," one of our favorite slogans in higher education. If a priori we limit our "lens" in ways that prevent our including all significant group memberships, social scientists will be unable to explain, let alone predict, what a multicultural society will look like.

Let me propose something even more radical in Figure 5, that White men, White women, women of Color, and men of Color may indeed have more overlap in their personal identities than what we have traditionally measured in psychology (Phinney, 1996). In fact, researchers have already pointed out that there is greater variation within ethnic/racial groups than between groups (Friedman, Mont-Reynaud, & Rosenthal, 1992; Jones, 1991; Reid, 1994; Zuckerman, 1990). The differences in personal identities that still remain may, in fact, be nothing more than an artifact of differential access to social and economic power (see Figure 5). I argue that we may have relied too much on culturalism as an explanatory variable because that is what is newsworthy (Hyde & Plant, 1995), and because it inadvertently reinforces our world view about which groups are superior in our society.

Research on Differences between "Men" and "Women"

Gender has been studied in psychology independent of other group memberships (Marecek, 1995). The debate in psychology has been whether women and men differ on cognitive and social aspects of behavior as if people were nothing more than their sex (see Eagly, 1995, for a thorough review of this debate). Furthermore, the research literature on "sex differences" is based on hundreds of studies examining one or several (but not more than that) psychological dimensions one at a time. For example, "mate selection" between men and women is studied independent of objective levels of attractiveness, levels of education, family history, family composition, or hundreds of other variables that co-vary with the main focus of the study. In order to truly understand the significance of gender for human behavior, we would have to study a
substantial number of variables simultaneously. Instead, we have used meta-analysis to substitute for a more careful study of gender and other significant group memberships at the same time. Meta-analysis is an incredible advancement in our methodology for helping identify overall trends based on a body of empirical literature. Meta-analysis, however, should be a tool used only to measure central tendencies of mostly individual variables. Instead, the meta-analytic "group personality" for "women" compared to the meta-analytic "group personality" for "men" is summarized by Eagly (1995):

It is clear that some sex-difference findings warrant being described as large.... These large effects, which should be considered large relative to typical phenomena examined by psychologists, occur with respect to at least one test of cognitive abilities (e.g., Shepard-Metzler test of mental rotation), some social behaviors (e.g., facial expressiveness and frequency of filled pauses in speech), some sexual behaviors (e.g., incidence of masturbation and attitudes toward casual sexual intercourse), one class of personality traits (tenderminded and nurturant tendencies), and some physical abilities (e.g., the velocity, distance, and accuracy of throwing a ball). (p. 151)

Psychology, as a field, has ignored Gould's warning that we not treat mean differences between distributions as a "thing" or contained phenomenon. We need to examine entire distributions because mean differences blind us to possible similarities between distributions. That is exactly what has happened in the study of gender in psychology: the emphasis on significant mean differences within a very narrow set of individual traits that are studied separately as if that constituted gender. Even if one were to take all the psychological traits studied in hundreds of studies, they would hardly constitute the full range of complex behavior of even competent five-year-olds.

These results are further rarefied by presenting them as differences between "men" and "women." In fact, the results are not representative of human complexity generally, and specifically, participants in almost all studies are mostly White, college-age, college-educated, men and women (Eagly, 1995). (In fairness, some of these dimensions have been examined in "37 cultures" [Buss, 1989], which makes me wonder about the depth of the examination and the culturally appropriate measures, let alone the overseeing of such data gathering to insure cross-cultural validity.) Only recently have psychology journals been urged to provide, in detail, the sociodemographic characteristics, including ethnicity, of their study samples (Phinney, 1996).

Ironically, in spite of the intense debates in psychology of whether there are sex differences, on what traits there are sex differences, and whether sex differences are negligible or large (Archer, 1996; Buss, 1995b; Eagly, 1995; Hyde & Plant, 1995; Marecek, 1995), White women keep making impressive strides in almost all arenas in our society. White women are filling the halls of higher education, constituting almost half of all students in professional and graduate schools (except in the natural sciences), are increasing their numbers in elected offices, have entered space, and are out-performing their prominent husbands, as witnessed in the most recent presidential race where political pundits were advocating that Elizabeth Dole relieve her husband from his duties as presidential candidate. It may be that psychology, as a field, is barking up the wrong tree by simply dichotomizing gender into a binary variable of "men" vs. "women." Indeed, there is ample evidence of profound differences in how gender is manifested in different social groups in our society (let alone in 37 cultures!). The variation in gender, of course, is again influenced by our ongoing mantra of race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality (Almaguer, 1991; Collins, 1991; Connell, 1995; Hurtado, 1996a; Kimmel, 1993).

In the study of multiple group social identities the field of psychology has taken context out of the study of individuals so that the mainstream, which favors dominant groups, is indeed, the context that is "natural" (although never acknowledged as explicitly gendered and racialized) for all individuals regardless of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. By ignoring social identities in our study of individual psychological characteristics, we have a priori made dominant social identities the only "normal" context for all human beings--an implicit bow to the assimilation/acculturation framework.

Contributions of Feminist Scholarship to the Understanding of Cultural Transformations

The Gap between Theoretical Developments and Measurement
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Feminist scholars have been especially important in charting new intellectual paradigms that have revolutionized how we think about stigmatized groups in society. But there is a lag between our new conceptual understandings and our empirical tools. Similar to the way that existing paradigms did not allow us the flexibility to think of multiple group identifications that are fluid and situationally contingent at the same time they have permanence, our empirical tools for capturing these phenomena are even more limited. The gap between the observed social phenomena, say gender, and what our empirical tools can capture is disheartening to say the least (Franz & Stewart, 1994; Stewart, 1994). The challenge for those of us who are active researchers in the area of how stigmatized group identities affect group differences is simultaneously to develop new theoretical paradigms as we invent the empirical tools to measure those ever-evolving theoretical accounts.

Feminists scholars almost unanimously advocate multidisciplinary research as necessary to understand fully the implications of group memberships. The paradigm that is emerging from this interdisciplinary scholarship, and which is radically different from even progressive scholarship of the past, is that it is non-hierarchical in nature--the purpose is not to replace one dominant group with another or to essentialize one group over another (Harris, 1990; Morrison, 1992), but to understand fully the shifting nature of social categories and the concomitant shift in authority and power that is situationally based. Most important, the new scholarship, unlike its predecessor of the 60s, does not glory group membership as the source of solace and enrichment without simultaneously recognizing the pain and strain of multiple stigmatized group memberships. The constant shifting that is required of individuals with multiple stigmatized group identifications has the potential both for liberation as well as for defeat and sometimes all within one social interaction. Matsuda (1992), in her discussion of how multiple group identifications are helpful in expanding our understanding of the social psychological aspects of multiple group identities and their implications for behavior has come from reading extensively in feminist theory, ethnic studies, critical legal race studies, political theory, economics, social psychology, sociology, anthropology and history. I believe these theoretical and methodological wanderings range from quantitative analysis of large-scale surveys, theoretical essays, ethnographic studies, focus groups, to my most recent research project, a one-hundred-year archival study of the images of people of Color in the fashion magazine Vogue, the longest running women’s magazine in the United States. My understanding of the social psychological aspects of multiple group identities and their implications for behavior has come from reading extensively in feminist theory, ethnic studies, critical legal race studies, political theory, economics, social psychology, sociology, anthropology and history. I believe these theoretical and methodological migrations are the only way, for me at least, to capture the complexities of multiple group identities without falling prey to either culturalism, biological determinism, or deficit-reductionist thinking.

The reward of such broad scholarship is the inherent value of pushing methodological and theoretical envelopes. Many of us now understand that gender is a relational social location rather than a fixed biological entity. The content of what constitutes a woman is in relationship to other women in the social context and their respective significant social group memberships (Hurtado, 1996a). From this paradigm, the research on gender, race/ethnicity, and class has become much more nuanced and textured and, therefore, a more accurate portrayal of the actual phenomenon under study. A central part of feminist scholarship is the development of alternative methodologies or new ways of doing established methodologies. For example Stewart (1995) proposes seven mechanisms derived from feminist theory to study
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Women's lives and not commit the same errors of exclusion when studying gender. The strategies she proposes are not "unique to a feminist perspective, but each of them has arisen from feminist theory" (p. 12). The seven strategies she proposes are: "look for what's been left out, analyze your own role or position, identify agency in the context of social constraint, use the concept of gender as an analytic tool, treat gender as defining power relationships and being constructed by them, explore other aspects of social position (such as race, class, and sexuality), and avoid the search for a unified self" (p. 12).

The strategies proposed by Stewart were invaluable in helping me to develop the Social Engagement Model, a framework for studying multiple group identifications. Figure 6 summarizes the different theoretical perspectives I have discussed in this article for studying cultural transformations. All of these theoretical perspectives still exist and are layered on each other--it is not possible to reach the next level of theoretical development without relying on previous frameworks. Furthermore, some researchers, especially in psychology, have never relinquished the assimilation/acculturation framework; it is perhaps still the most common way to study cultural transformations.

[Figure 6 ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Social Engagement: An Alternative Framework for Studying Cultural Transformations

An alternative framework for understanding cultural transformations is to examine the groups' spheres of social engagement. This is akin to what Lewin (1948) proposed as a life space. Furthermore, rather than focusing on group comparisons on a standard definition of a particular sphere of social engagement, a more productive avenue is to take a definitional approach from the perspective of the group participants. To do this requires the researcher to systematically ask participants in a social sphere to define the phenomena under study rather than a priori assuming the researcher's definition is the definition. Furthermore, participation in any sphere of social engagement is either facilitated or hampered by the individuals' significant social identities such as gender, class, ethnicity/race, and sexuality. The significance and relationship between these different social identities varies from social sphere to social sphere. In some circumstances one particular group membership or set of memberships may be more important than others. In some circumstances, for example, when functioning within a homogenous group with no variation in their significant group social identities, that particular social identity(ies) may be irrelevant. (This is illustrated by the proverbial example of the fish not knowing they are in water until they encounter a land-roving mammal.)

Let me provide a concrete example of research that illustrates the difference between using an assimilation/acculturation framework and a social engagement framework. Research findings indicate that Latino parents do not participate in their children's schools as much as White parents do. School participation is usually deemed as attending PTA meetings, parent/teacher conferences, and back-to-school nights, participation in the children's classrooms, and individual parent/teacher and parent/principal meetings. This definition of school participation is from the dominant group's perspective and not from the Latino parents' view of what is possible or desirable for them. In our study of Latino parents in an elementary magnet school in a rural, northern California town, we approach school participation from a social engagement framework (Hurtado, 1994). The White parents in the school indeed participated in the school through the usual avenues described above. Latino parents had much more variation in their participation, however. In examining the Latino sample's significant social identities, this group was further divided into two groups: immigrant Latino parents who spoke predominantly Spanish and second generation (and beyond) Latinos who spoke predominantly English. If we were following the assimilation/acculturation framework and only measured the conventional indicators of school participation, we would have concluded the following as diagrammed in Figure 7: Immigrant parents do not participate in their children's schools, which leads to their higher academic failure rate. Second generation and beyond Latino parents become more acculturated by learning English and therefore begin to participate in their children's school with similar behaviors to those of their White counterparts. White parents participate far more in their children's school in ways that lead to higher educational achievement. Accordingly, we need to urge immigrant parents to assimilate/acculturate as quickly as possible to increase their children's achievement.

[Figure 7 ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

The assimilation/acculturation framework assumes that all groups of parents have an equal opportunity to participate in their children's school. The school and the staff remain constant in the equation of educational achievement, and our measures of school participation are assumed, as previously noted, to be the correct ones for all groups of parents. Furthermore, because White parents score the highest in our scales of school participation, they are inadvertently set up as the model that Latino parents should emulate. Using an assimilation/acculturation framework does not allow Latino parents to contribute their
own perception and definition of what constitutes school participation nor for those definitions to influence the definitions of White parents. We also do not discuss the internal variation of each group of parents to gain further insights beyond the standard mean distributions for each of the groups. Most importantly, even though White students have, on average, higher academic achievement than Latino students, we have a substantial number of immigrant children and second-generation children who also perform well in school. There are also White students who perform as poorly as Latino students. Again, by focusing on mean differences between groups, we de-emphasize areas of similarity, and by ignoring gender we also fail to notice that girls, on average, do better than boys academically, regardless of ethnicity/race.

How would these results be different if we took a social engagement model which has at its core the definitional approach to differences in social cultural adaptations? First of all, besides the standard measures of school participation, there have to be measures that allow different groups of parents to provide their own definitions of what they consider school participation and why. Figure 8 is a visual representation of how the social engagement model would reconceptualize the above findings.

[Figure 8 ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Taking this perspective in our study, we find that most Latino parents, regardless of generation in the United States, view cultural activities held on school facilities after hours as a very important part of their connection to the school. These cultural activities include a weekly Mexican folkloric dancing class and a weekly Mexican folkloric music class. The parents had also organized a performance group which gave students the opportunity to display their talents in various community events. The activities were largely organized by the parents themselves and were funded through bake sales and donations. These activities were conducted at great cost to the Latino parents, since most of them worked very long hours at minimum and below minimum wage (many of the immigrant parents were farmworkers).

Furthermore, when asked why they didn’t take part in the activities the study defined as school participation, Latino parents indicated such things as language barriers, conflicts between work schedules and school activities, and intimidation because they were unfamiliar with school etiquette. Most of the immigrant parents spoke only Spanish and most of the teachers spoke only English. Even the teachers who spoke Spanish were mostly White, which intimidated most of the immigrant parents. No such barrier was expressed by any of the White parents.

Furthermore, most of the immigrant and Latino parents worked very long hours in mostly unskilled and semi-skilled jobs which prevented them from attending the back to school nights and some of the parent/teacher conferences. Scheduling according to Latino parents’ particular work demands was never considered in the school. The school’s status as a magnet elementary school attracted White students from an affluent suburb some distance from the school. The White families either had moms who stayed at home or professional parents with flexibility to rearrange their work schedules to attend school functions.

Lastly, the immigrant parents who had tried to approach teachers reported that they had been rebuffed because they did not understand the etiquette for approaching mostly White professionals. The non-immigrant Latino parents did not feel this distance from teachers as much as their counterparts and neither did White parents. Teachers were very surprised to see the differences in frequencies reported by the parents for the number of times they spoke to teachers. The teachers felt they had equal amount of contact with all parents regardless of ethnicity/race. Teachers were even more surprised to find out that out of 609 students, there were only 120 White students and the rest were almost entirely Latino (there were a few Asian American and a few African American students). The White parents, as a group, had such a strong presence in the elementary school that they thought the student composition was more evenly distributed among the different ethnic/racial groups.

Our results indicate that if we examine what kind of students parents want the schools to produce, there is not much variation among the three groups of parents: all parents want schools that produce students who can read, write, follow rules, are timely on their assignments, are held accountable to just rules, and who can develop critical judgments when they are out in the world. That is, parents, regardless of their different social group identities, are in agreement about what kind of personal identities they want their children to develop within a school setting. Again, an assimilation/acculturation framework would not allow for this kind of finding concerning dimensions of similarities from which these three sets of very different parents can work to enhance all of their children’s education.

These results were presented in a meeting with the teachers, school staff, and school administrators. Parent representatives were also present at the meeting. All of these differences and similarities generated a lively and cooperative discussion with simultaneous translation occurring for the Spanish-speaking parent representatives. One of the main findings concerning household
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composition that most surprised the participants in this meeting was that immigrant households and White households had two-parent families whereas non-immigrant Latino households were mostly composed of single moms. The Latina moms felt particularly stressed because of their lack of support to involve their children in all school activities, including the cultural ones. Parent representatives suggested organizing a group to address this need. Some White parent representatives became intrigued with the after school cultural activities and inquired about their children being incorporated into these events. The other finding that surprised all participants in the meeting was the fact that almost all school participation, regardless of how it was defined, was done by women. Fathers, regardless of ethnicity/race, rarely participated in these students’ activities. Furthermore, almost all socialization tasks at home that we asked about, such as making children do their homework, keep a regular bedtime schedule, and taking responsibility for insuring a consistent school attendance, were deemed as women’s responsibilities in almost all families, including the ones where women worked outside the home for very long hours. This finding generated a great deal of discussion and concern about fathers’ lack of school participation and socialization responsibilities. At the same time, it also generated strategies for increasing the participation of all fathers in future school events.

This is not necessarily a story with a happy ending but a story that has begun to address seriously multiple group identifications and how these affect individuals’ behaviors differently. There are many ways to participate in school activities to benefit children. No one type of school participation is set up as the ideal whereby deviation from it is deficient. Instead, the researcher’s task is to carefully document the social sphere under study with complete attention to all different groups involved and design interventions that take this diversity into account. The job requires nothing more and nothing less. The next challenge is to study how the diversity in one’s school can be used to directly to influence educational outcomes for all children. But that’s for another time.

Conclusion

After thirteen years at University of California, Santa Cruz, I have seen two generations of college students graduate. Several of these students have even finished graduate school, law school, and have married and are raising children. I believe the cultural and social adaptations of these students illustrate what we as academics and hopefully as socially involved individuals will have to deal with in our work and communities. Tizoc, a fourth generation Californian, married a first generation immigrant Mexicana, Lizbeth. They have a child whom they named Anastacia in honor of Lizbeth’s great-great-grandmother who was a soldadera in the Mexican Revolution. Saguache married a Salvadoran immigrant, Yvette, and they have a child named Sandino, in honor of the Nicaraguan revolutionary. They travel often to El Salvador because they want their child to grow up with knowledge of their mother’s native country. Xochitl has married an Irish American, and they only speak Spanish in their home because they want their little boy to be bilingual. They named him Carlos Murphy. Obviously, there is much work to be done to fully understand future cultural transformations.

[Figure 1 and 9 ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

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