

# IDENTITY FUSION AND REMEMBRANCE PROCESSES

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** From the assumption that identity fusion will influence the remembrance processes, this work proposes that individuals, classified as *fused*, will remember more in detail certain events of their countries, and the influence of these events will be greater in their identities, than in individuals classified as *not fused*.

**Method:** In a sample of 450 Spanish subjects, with representativeness close to gender parity, a correlational study is proposed through an online survey. The main objective is to test the possible influence of person-country fusion in his/her remembrance processes, of unpleasant experiences in that country, as well as in his /her identity construction.

**Findings:** The two hypotheses proposed have been refused. There is not a significant difference between means in both groups, *fused* and *not fused* with their country, in the *clarity* and *importance memories*, for the individual's identity construction, in the experimental condition *unpleasant event*.

**KEY WORDS:** identity fusion, social identity, remembrance processes, memories.

## **IDENTITY FUSION AND REMEMBRANCE PROCESSES**

Social psychology has been interested in defining the way people develop their self-concept, as an element that differences one person from another or, contrarily, identifies them with their reference groups.

To reach a complete knowledge about how people are, self-concept is complemented with the feelings for their reference groups, and how these groups influence their behavior, beliefs, and perceptions. In other words, their social identity.

Identity is a personal construction. It is developed integrating: (a) identifications and not-identifications with other people and reference groups, (b) a social construction generated through internal assimilation of roles, and (c) the reflection of the evaluations from others (Western & Heim, 2003). In this way, identity is understood as the knowledge that is built (Gaviria E, Cuadrado I, López M, 2009).

Different theories have addressed self-concept and identity, and some authors consider them synonyms. Nevertheless, others consider identity more restrictive than self-concept. Self-concept encompasses several identities, while identity would not include various self-concepts.

Self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) argues that people categorize themselves considering only their personal identity, they perceive themselves differently from the other humans. This need for self-categorization seems universal, but different studies have demonstrated that there are nuances whether an individual comes from collectivist or individualist culture (Markus y Kitayama, 1991; Páez et al., 2004; Singelis, 1994).

Identity, as a concept, has been divided into different categories. Thus, in the last quarter of the 20th century, two kinds of identities have been identified, which in turn gave rise to two kinds of self-concepts: personal identity, proposed for Tajfel y Turner (1979), and social identity, a concept that gave rise to the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1972; Turner & Brown, 1978). Both theories, although from different origins and core aspects since 1980 have been related in several works.

Since 90's starting from a double concept of social identity, there is a change toward a triple concept with Brewer and Gardner (1996), when proposed a more general vision about self-concept that contemplates individual self-concept, relational self-concept, and collective self-concept.

*Social identity theory* has been one of the most prolific theories in research in the last 40 years, addressing many aspects of intergroup relations. It has approached three basic concepts: social categorization, social identity, and social comparison. This approach considers that subjects build their social identity through categorization, by which subjects perceive themselves as belonging or not to different categories.

Regarding the social identity, it would be understood as the part of individual self-concept derived from the knowledge of belonging to a group or social groups, along with the emotional and evaluative meaning that this belonging entails (Tajfel, 1981). That knowledge of belonging and the evaluative meaning are reached through the third construct mentioned, that means, through processes of social comparison between the in-group and the out-group.

One more step in research about personal identity, social identity, and intergroup relationships, is the line of research that is centered in the identity fusion (Swann, Gómez, Seyle, Morales y Huici, 2009) in which, it is proposed a form of union between personal and social identity. That implies a functional equivalence among them and not just a high commitment of the individual with the group, but also to the maintenance of a potent self, that can offer unique contributions to the group, and even, reach to extreme behaviors in favor of the group. That is, from this perspective it is observed that, in certain contexts, the connection between individual and group is so great, that the border between the self and the others is diffuse. It could be considered the group as an externalization of the own individual.

When this identity fusion is observed, according to the concept introduced by Swann and his colleagues (2009), the individual can equate group well-being to the own well-being, perceiving that the goals and the priorities of the group are coincident with the own ones. This fusion entails a feeling of individual-group unity that distinguishes fused individuals of the individuals identified

merely with the group.

Gómez and his colleagues (2013) propose that there are four principles that serve for distinguishing fusion from identification with a group. In fusion, it is found: (a) strong feeling of personal agency, that can be observed in behaviors and control of own behavior in favor of the group, (b) identity synergy, personal and social identity are combined synergistically in order to motivate the behavior in favor of the group, (c) relationship loops, other members in the group are valued, not only for their belonging to the group, but for their personal features, and (d) irrevocability, that means, when the fusion with the group is produced, the member stays fused.

According to identity fusion, this study seeks to check whether the subjects classified as fused with the group (own country) consider that they remember better some unpleasant experience occurred in this country (selected by themselves) than those individuals classified as not fused.

The subjects that show a visceral feeling of unity with their country, identifying themselves totally with their country, are considered fused so that for them both individual and group identities are equivalents.

Equally, this work tries to check if that fusion feeling, and the importance that the individual conceded to some past experience, present some relation. It is proposed that the individuals considered fused would give more importance to the experience, declaring it shaper of their own identity, against not fused individuals who would rate less the importance of that experience for their identity.

In summary, the objective of this study is to check experimentally the possible influence of the group-fusion feeling (individual-country fusion) in the remembrance processes of unpleasant experiences lived in that country, as well as in the own identity conformation.

The independent variables are (1) fusion with the own country, which is operationalized as a percentage of fused and not fused people with their country, (2) unpleasant experience in their country determined by the subjects.

The dependent variables are related to the unpleasant experience condition, and they are (1) clarity: the number of details and frequency of certain unpleasant memories that occurred in his/her country, and (2) importance: influence of this experience in his/her personal identity, considered by the own individual.

The following working hypotheses are considered:

**H1:** related with the clarity variable. It is considered that people classified as fused will believe that remember better and with more details the unpleasant experience. Therefore, for the clarity variable, the average score obtained in the fused group should be higher than the average in the not fused group.

**H2:** for the importance variable, fused people will tend to think that experience identified as unpleasant has influenced more in their personal identity than those not fused with their country. Therefore, the average in the importance variable will be higher in the fused group than in the not fused group. The hypotheses are been tested through a parametric test for comparing two groups of two independent samples.

## **METHODS**

### ***Sample***

The sample has been conformed for 450 adult subjects (>18 years old), residents in Spain, 180 men (40%) and 270 women (60%), average age of 35.30 (SD = 11.83). The applied sampling technique was snowball.

### ***Procedure***

It was provided a link to an online survey to the participants. The survey had different items with questions related with the group identity (with their country), rituals in their country and unpleasant experiences lived in their country. All items were valued on a Likert scale (0 – 5), except the

individual-group identity that also incorporated a graphic scale (EGIO type), that has been used by Shamir y Kark (2004) in various organizational studies.

From the diverse options in the survey, the condition selected was *unpleasant experience*, in which the subject defines several unpleasant experiences and select one of them, evaluating it in importance for his/her identity and remembrance clarity, depending on how much and how he/she remembers it. The results have been analyzed through a parametric t-test.

## RESULTS

From the respondents (N=450), 95 are considered fused (21%), and 355 are classified as not fused (79%). The results are shown in Table1:

**Table 1:** means of punctuation in every group and variable measured.

		Dependent variable	
		Clarity	Importance
Independent variable	Fused	3.34	2.74
	Not fused	3.17	2.70

A t-test for two independent samples has been applied. The t-value and its probability for every hypothesis proposed are clarity ( $t=0.98$ ,  $p>0.5$ ) and importance ( $t=0.23$ ,  $p>0.5$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The literature indicates that identity fusion influences, in some manner, in the clarity with which individual remembers his/her experiences lived in the group since when those were unpleasant, and in the way affect the identity conformation in fused individuals. Data in this study show, however, results quite different to expected initially and the obtained in previous similar studies.

Results obtained force to refuse both hypotheses proposed. The difference between the two means is not significant, so any difference detected between the two groups is purely random. So, results do not support that fused individual remembers better the unpleasant experiences, nor considers that those have influenced notably his/her identity construction.

With these results, we can conclude that identity fusion does not seem to affect the memory of unpleasant experiences and does not seem to have a relation between those experiences and the later identity in fused individuals.

It is remarkable that the number of individuals totally identified with their country (21%) is much lower than the unidentified (79%). This data and the results obtained invite us to think about the possible influence of contextual variables. In this case, maybe the economic instability surrounds in which the country (Spain) was in the experiment moment, with high rates of unemployment, the great disaffection towards the politics that seemed to have the citizenship, according to surveys published in the mass media, as well as the political corruption cases that perhaps influenced in certain uprooting of the population, and therefore a distancing even of their own memories related to their nation.

On the other hand, and reflecting some respondents' comments, the survey was not well understood in some of its items. Some respondents indicated that country and nation concepts were used indistinctly when they should not be considered synonyms. This aspect could influence results, as well.

One of the study's limitations could be the use of the Internet for distributing the survey. This kind of format maybe is adequate for younger subjects, so that access to another age group, like the elderly, can be more complicated. In fact, the age average is quite low in this study, so few elderly people have participated.

Maybe this study could be continued by analyzing data obtained in other similar studies made in Spain, but before or after the crisis, or comparing the results with other studies in different countries, in order to detect possible mediating and moderating variables.

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