Multiple Identity and Coalition Building:
How Identity Differences Within Us
Enable Radical Alliances Among Us

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ABSTRACT

Conventional wisdom holds that differences among us prevent the formation of radical alliances that can work toward social justice. Implicit in this view is the assumption that each individual or group is the repository of only one set of perspectives, practices and beliefs. Attention to multiple identity in various fields, however, has shown this assumption to be false. Through a case study of Latino/a politics, I argue that multiple identity can play a decisive role in the formation of diverse coalitions working for social justice. I suggest that multiple identity


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can increase links between individual citizens and a range of politicized groups. It can underpin a synergistic process of identity and community (trans)formation that can become the basis for radical political alliances. Multiple identity also introduces a flexibility that enables citizens to make strategic political re-positioning and to temporarily set aside differences and contradictions that can thwart the coalition process.

**INTRODUCTION**

We typically think of identity as singular, stable and definitive. But in 1970s Chicago members of two different and divided ethnic groups created and adopted a new identity. With this new identity they understood themselves collectively as members of a single larger, internally diverse, and *politically* ethnic group. Together these two ethnic groups used their newly forced *Latino/a* identity to unify themselves and to mobilize together to combat discrimination and to seek social justice. In the process Latino/a identified peoples engaged both a new identity and retained the identities they already had—including national, sexual, gender, age, ideological, class, professional, and other identities.

What these historical events suggest is that we should emphasize identity as a set of qualities that define each person as a specific human being. These sets of qualities are large, diverse, and contain subsets of qualities that form different identities—*multiple identities*—that stand within an overarching identity. The idea of *multiple identity* has been gaining wider acceptance in a variety of academic fields. Yet, we know little about the political implications of multiple identity. I address this issue here by analyzing the politically strategic formation of Latino/a identity in 1970s Chicago through the concept of multiple identity. Bringing case and concept together, I describe three implications that multiple identity has for the creation and mobilization of diverse political coalitions, especially coalitions and radical alliances that seek social justice.

**MULTIPLE IDENTITY**

The idea of multiple identity has a variety of sources both ancient and modern. Versions of the concept can be found from Plato's *Republic* to psychoanalytic theory, from postmodernist thought, post-colonial theory and various feminisms (Lauretis 1990, Anzaldúa 1987; Lugones 1994) to sociology (Giddens 1991) to empirical psychology (Ryan 1995, Singer 1995, Greg 1995). Yet, while conceptions of multiple identity date to antiquity, it is modernity that has made multiple identity itself widespread. Modern conditions made multiple identity prevalent by segmenting everyday life into a variety of different milieux—each with its own social identity (Giddens 1991). To function well in these many settings all modern peoples have had to acquire different social identities appropriate to each context. In this way, modernity has made multiple identity a real and necessary aspect of life for everyone living in modern conditions.
The identity effects of social segmentation have also been compounded by the unprecedented interpenetration of cultures in modern history. Wars, colonization, de-colonization, natural disasters, economic transformations and other events have displaced millions of peoples around the globe (Bamm 1994). Cultural intermixiture generates multiple identity when displaced people (and their new neighbors) respond to changing life conditions by learning new identities (e.g. gender, ethnic, national, and subcultural identities) while maintaining their existing identities. Because of the cultural interpenetration of modernity, millions of people today are born of mixed heritage and socialized to two or more religious, subcultural, ethnic and/or conflicting gender identities (Spickard 1989). Not only households but also entire regions have become areas where contradictory social milieux are co-present. Inhabitants of these “borderlands” often learn and retain different identities in order to thrive in the diverse social contexts that comprise the borderlands where they reside (Anzaldúa 1987).

While the conditions creating multiple identity have received increasing attention there is, however, no single model of multiple identity that all theorists of multiplicity follow (Lugones 1994; Lauretis 1990; Basch, et al. 1994; Braidotti 1994; P. Smith 1988; A.M. Smith 1994; Rosaldo 1989). I define multiple identity as a concept in which the self is made up of a number of different but integrated identities. Each identity is a frame of reference that includes a scheme of values and a set of meanings and practices. These identity frames of reference (or identity frames) correlate to a nearly endless array of possible social identities, including: gendered and sexual identities, cultural, ethnic and racial, ideological and subcultural identities, identities based in nationality, physical ability, specific lifestyle, socio-economic status, language group, subnational region, generation, and so on. The identity frames of any individual person are potentially many, diverse, and possibly contradictory. Although distinct, these different identities are not entirely separate from each other, but are instead loosely integrated and mutually conditioning. As people move from one social context to the next, they foreground and inhabit (or perform) the identity that they consider (consciously or unconsciously) to best fit their immediate situation. People, therefore, inhabit their identity frames, a) situationally—in response to the contours of their immediate context, and b) relationally—in social relation to those with whom they share that context. On my definition, therefore, multiple identity has five characteristics: multiplicity, contradiction, mutual conditioning, situationality, and relationality.

**MULTIPLE IDENTITY AND COALITIONS IN 1970s CHICAGO**

Multiple identity played a key role in the political activities among Spanish-speaking and surnamed people in 1970s Chicago. The Spanish-speaking, and surnamed population of Chicago contained two disadvantaged groups: Mexicans (Mexican immigrants and native-born Mexican Americans) and Puerto Ricans. The former group—Mexicans and Mexican Americans—arrived in Chicano in several waves throughout the twentieth century. The earliest Mexican arrivals were lured to Chicago with the promise of permanent employment. Once arrived they were exploited as strikebreakers and paid the lowest wages of all unskilled laborers (Acuña 1988). Mexican-origin residents settled in four neighborhoods. Steel workers settled in South
Chicago, meat packers in Back of the Yards, rail workers in Near West Side—and later arrivals inhabited Pilsen (Acuña, 1988). Residents of these barrios felt little self-awareness as members of a Mexican-origin community before the 1940s. But between the 1940s and the 1960s, ethnic community consciousness and social and political organizing increased. Yet this organization was often centered in each of the barrios (Gómez-Quíñones 1989) and it was not until the mid-1960s that more citywide organizations sought to bring Mexican Americans together into a community of interest (Padilla 1985).

Puerto Rican immigration to Chicago, in contrast, began in the 1940s and peaked during the 1960s. U.S. changes reduced jobs on the island and drove many Puerto Ricans to seek work in the U.S. By the 1960s Puerto Ricans in Chicago were primarily living, in Westtown. Yet, unlike the circumstances faced by Mexican immigrants to Chicago (the economy had by 1960 begun to transform, reducing the number of unskilled industrial jobs), Puerto Ricans, therefore, often could only find low-paid, non-industrial, dead-end work.

The diverse histories of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago are a clue to the distinctions between the two ethnic groups. For most of this century neither ethnic group identified with the other, but rather by national origin—as Mexican or Puerto Rican. Mexican Americans, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans were (and still remain) divided—both among, and within each group—by different histories, cultural practices, Spanish dialects, regional origin, employment patterns, class, ideology, citizenship, and legal status in the U.S. In short, Puerto Ricans and people of Mexican origin lived and organized in different parts of Chicago and were separated not only by neighborhood but also by social, cultural, linguistic, and historical factors. Mexican Americans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans had little social or economic contact and no substantial political alliances in Chicago prior to the 1970s.

The deep differences between these groups were not well acknowledged in the broader social and political dynamics of post-war Chicago. Longstanding Euro-American stereotypes typically failed to distinguish the two ethnic groups—instead projecting onto them a single racialized, language-based identity that became part and parcel of the systems of ethnic subordination played out in twentieth century Chicago (Padilla 1985; Acuña 1988). Perceived as a single Spanish-speaking mass, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans were subject to the same discrimination in employment practices, housing, education, and city resource allocation. Police brutality, judicial system injustices, employment discrimination, and workplace harassment prevented Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans alike from achieving equitable wages, decent housing, adequate health care, and basic legal protections.

Mexican American and Puerto Rican groups had tried but largely failed to make gains in these areas using, traditional electoral means (Gómez-Quíñones 1989). But in the 1970s—as Felix Padilla’s sociological study of events shows—the political tactics of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans began to include a new political strategy. This new strategy involved the creation of a third ethnic identity—a Latino/a identity around which Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans could mobilize for social justice. In Padilla’s word Latino/a ethnic identity was an innovation conceived and adopted a “another form of group consciousness among, the Spanish-speaking populations” (Padilla 1985, 61). The innovation of Latino/a identity was intended to bring cohesion to disparate Puerto Rican and Mexican American groups. Those who at...
who advocated Latino/a identity held the conviction that Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans could make more political gains as a Latino/a collectivity than as separate ethnic groups.\(^4\)

The founding aspects of this new ethnic identity were shared social justice values and goals derived from common experiences of ethnic/racial discrimination, economic marginalization, and persistent social barrier to upward mobility (Padilla 1985, 64–83, 138–146). Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans drew clarity and conviction for the social justice values from the discriminatory treatment and impoverished living conditions inflicted on them by the privileged white majority. These values translated into a shared interest agenda that included the achievement of decent employment, housing, and health care. With these founding values, Latino/a identity was from its very conception a politicized identity.

In addition to social justice values and goals, shared linguistic heritage was also used to signify and demarcate Latino/a identity. Spanish language was central to the “approximating myth” or “narrative of common origin” that served to describe the diverse Spanish-surnamed group, as a single collectivity.\(^5\) But, as Padilla makes clear, language alone has long failed to unite these diverse groups. Where common Spanish language had failed, the integration of a social justice agenda into a new ethnic identification dramatically increased the possibility of mutual support, solidarity, and coordinated action toward shared goals within the multiethnic coalitions that subsequently formed.

Many activists worked to persuade Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans to view themselves also as Latinos/as. Hector Franco in particular played an important role in advocating Latino/a identity and in the multiethnic organizing which brought together Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans as Latinos/as. Franco, a Puerto Rican activist, was influenced by his own participation in multi-ethnic coalitions—such as the Allies for a Better Community—to which he was introduced by his friend and colleague Sally Johnson an activist who worked to mobilize poor blacks and Puerto Ricans in Westtown (Padilla 1985, 108–117).

Although Latino/a identity originated with organizers like Hector Franco, it became widely accepted in the course of community organizing through new interactions between members of the Mexican and Puerto Rican communities (1985, 155). Increased contact among Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans generated personal ties and shared practices among members of both groups. Just as we are socialized to any identity, Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans both created (i.e. performed) and internalized Latino/a identity through their ongoing, social interactions.

Because the aim of Latino/a identity was to unify and mobilize two separate ethnic groups, coalition activity became the preferred mode of political action for the Latinos/as in Padilla’s study. As his study shows, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans who also identified as Latino/a began to work collectively to resist discrimination, particularly in employment. The primary vehicle for this struggle was the Spanish Coalition for Jobs.\(^6\) This coalition was a collective of 23 Mexican American and Puerto Rican community organizations that originated from all of the principle Puerto Rican and Mexican American neighborhoods across the city—Pilsen, Westtown, South Chicago, and Lakeview. Nine of these organizations were job referral agencies frustrated by the refusal of major employers in Chicago to hire virtually any of the Latinos/as they regularly referred to them. The pattern of discrimination was clear and new federal
legislation on Affirmative Action convinced the coalition members they were right to attempt to reverse the patterns of economic marginalization from which they had long suffered.7

The Spanish Coalition for Jobs used a combination of formal negotiation, consumer power, and protest tactics to fight discriminatory hiring practices. The Coalition's first target was Illinois Bell, which with nearly 44,000 employees had only 300 Latinos/as on its payroll. At a public meeting in August 1971 Coalition spokespeople asked Illinois Bell to alter its current hiring policies to increase significantly the number of Latinos/as they employed. When Illinois Bell refused and offered to hire only 115 additional Latinos/as, the Coalition began a yearlong protest campaign against the company. Several subsequent negotiations also failed to bring results and were followed by additional protests. Ultimately, through continued pressure, the coalition succeeded in its primary objective when Illinois Bell agreed to hire over 1,300 Latinos/as over a four-year period.

IMPLICATIONS

By analyzing the development of Latino/a identity and politics in Chicago we can better understand the implications that multiple identity has for building coalitions with social justice goals. The first implication is that people can and do identify with more than one community. Since people with multiple identity alternate among different identities in everyday contexts, they can also relate to and participate in the politics of more than one community in different contexts. Padilla described this multiplicity of identifications as it took place in Chicago. There, in his words, "the Latino-conscious person sees himself as a Latino sometimes and as Puerto Rican, Mexican American, Cuban and the like at other times," (1985, 61–62). In political contexts, multiple identity allowed people to foreground Latino/a identity in contexts of general concern, and national ethnic identity when the political issues were narrower. A number of Padilla's respondents described how this dynamic worked in everyday political settings. One commented that in his individual practices, "I try to use [Latino] as much as I can. When I talk to people in my community, I use Mexican, but I use Latino when the situation calls for issues that have city-wide implications" (1985, 62). Another comment shows how Latino/a and other ethnic identifications varied in terms of the political issues at stake and the expected intra-coalition dynamics:

When we move out of South Chicago and South Chicago is to have a relationship with the Westtown Concerned Citizens Coalition, it will have to be around issues that affect them equally. We cannot get South Chicago to get mad at Westown if Westown doesn't support their immigration situation. That is a Mexican problem that cannot be resolved through a Latino effort. But we can get them to come and talk to Westown about jobs, about things that are hitting everybody. (1985, 62–63)

Here Latino/a ethnic identity was salient in those instances when the political context involved the Spanish-speaking and surnamed community as a whole. When the context involved either the Mexican American or Puerto Rican community specifically, these national identifiers were foregrounded and different mobilization tactics were adopted.

In general then, one contribution that multiple identity makes to coalition building is this: people with multiple identities can internalize and retain a number of different identities which
they have potential connections to a wide range of different social groups and communities. In the case of Latino/a political mobilization, for example, the internalization of Latino/a identity among resident showed that they could acquire a new Latino/a identity and also retain their existing identities as Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Catholics, and so on. Consequently these people could be simultaneously linked to a Latino/a community as well as a range of other disparate communities.

Where multiple identity increases the number of links between individual citizens and social groups, multiple identity also increases the opportunities for possible coalition building. Each link represents the possibility for recruiting an individual to a given social or political movement. It also represents the presence of a social link and an identity frame of reference that can be appealed to for judgment and action through public discourse. In this way multiple identity increases the avenues for political participation.

A second implication of multiple identity for coalition building is how it contributes to a synergistic development between identity formation and community building in which the development of one feeds the growth of the other. The open, fluid yet durable characteristic of multiple identity enables residents to acquire new identification throughout their lifetime. This capacity, in turn, enables community building and transformation where the internalization of a new identity frame feeds the organization of a new community—thereby opening the way to a synergistic process of identity formation and community building. In Chicago, for example, a few community organizers initiated Latino/a identity as part of a particular political strategy. Their articulation of Latino/a identity spread to others. This new Latino/a identification led to an increase in existing social networks through the formation of new Latino/a community organizations. Identification and engagement with these new Latino/a organizations led more Puerto Rican and Mexican American residents to internalize the practices, meanings, and values ascribed to Latino/a identity. Widening Latino/a identification fostered still more Latino/a community organization. More Latino/a community organization led to yet wider Latino/a identification and so on. This process proceeded synergistically—that is, once initiated the dual processes of identity and community formation fueled each other.

For individual citizens, therefore, the internalization of an additional identity into their existing identity scheme opened them to a process of community building. Latino/a identity enabled residents, including community organizers, to draw upon Latino/a individual and group identification to build a Latino/a community. As a multiethnic collectivity the Latino/a community in Chicago relied on newly established interethnic social connections. The making and accepting of these interethnic connections by Mexican American and Puerto Rican residents depended on multiple identity as an identity structure open and fluid enough to take on new identity and durable enough to retain existing identity frames in spite of change.

The synergistic development between identity formation and community building can forward efforts to achieve social justice. In Chicago this synergistic process led to the formation of a set of uniquely Latino/a community organizations and networks and a Latino/a-specific social, economic, and political agenda. It also enabled the production of a set of symbols around which otherwise separated groups (Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans) could come together to mobilize politically despite their cultural, historical and other differences. Because multiple
identity underpins this synergistic process of identity and community (trans)formation, multiple identity played a key role in political mobilization aimed at changing socio-political conditions and securing rights and opportunities that had been unjustly denied. In this way, multiple identity was a necessary but not sufficient condition of the identity and community innovations central to the coalition building strategy adopted by Puerto Rican and Mexican American activists in 1970s Chicago.

Third, multiple identity can play a role not only in the formation of diverse coalitions, but also in the relations within those coalitions once they are formed. A well-functioning coalition requires organizers and members to find (or create) shared issues that will form the common ground for intra-group communication, decision making, and action. The large number of different frames of reference that members will bring to a diverse coalition makes this task more difficult. Many of these perspectives will be at odds with one another or possibly at odds with the concerns that organizers and members have used to galvanize the coalition. The result can be intra-group contestation that can paralyze or destroy a coalition. Multiple identity can influence intra-coalition interactions by providing people with the capacity to foreground some identity frames of reference while de-emphasizing others by shifting among their various identity frames as different settings demand or allow. Consequently, multiple identity provides a flexibility of social positioning that can smooth intra-coalition interactions.

In Chicago, for example, Mexican American and Puerto Rican coalition members would—in particular political contexts—foreground their shared identification as Latinos/as and in the process de-emphasize their differences as separate ethnic groups. The multiplicity of identifications held by these coalition members meant that they could foreground their Latino/a identity—for political action when necessary, and in the process temporarily de-emphasize the differences among them in terms of their other identity axes of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age and so on. By foregrounding one axis of their identities for the purposes of political mobilization, they did not, however, eliminate these identities or the other differences they represent.

Within the coalition process therefore, multiple identity enables coalition members to temporarily de-emphasize task-irrelevant differences in a way that does not ultimately deny those differences or banish them completely from the person or the organizational matrix of the coalition. By enabling coalition members to bracket (i.e. set aside but not banish) their identity differences until they are relevant for coalition goals, multiple identity can help the internal functioning of coalitions where the members are diverse both within and among themselves. This is not to say that coalition building will no longer involve the difficult work of forging commitment to common concerns and goals among those who have many differences. Nor is this to say that the work of coalition building will not at times fail. My point instead, is that multiple identity is a flexible and open identity structure that makes it possible for people to foreground those identity frames of reference that they share with others in the context of specific political projects. Foregrounding shared perspective in this way enables (though does not guarantee) cooperation on specific political goals despite the continued presence of deep difference and diversity.

Multiple identity also provide citizens with a (relatively greater or lesser) number of identity frames of reference. The greater the number of frames of reference, the greater the likelihood...
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that a person’s repertoire of identities will contain some frame of reference that will allow them to identify similarly to other members of a coalition. Imagine, for example, Puerto Rican activist Hector Franco and his coalition involvement with Sally Johnson. Because Franco is not African American, he likely did not know—as Johnson likely did—exactly what contemporary discrimination against blacks feels like. He did, however, certainly know the general history of African American experience since colonial enslavement brought Africans to the Americas. His unique personal history gave him a first hand understanding of poverty. And although he may not have experienced segregation laws directly, he most likely knew that Jim Crow laws were applied to Mexican Americans as well as Blacks. (Montejano 1987). Franco had also experienced de facto discrimination against Spanish-speaking and surnamed people in Chicago.

Together, his knowledge and biographical experiences would have provided Hector Franco with two (overlapping) identity frames of reference (a class and ethnic identity) that include a detailed grasp of both poverty and ethnic and racial discrimination. African Americans such as Sally Johnson in coalition with Hector Franco would have also had identity frames that included understandings of both poverty and racial discrimination. As different marginalized groups in the U.S., these understandings would have been somewhat different, though also broadly similar. As coalition partners, then, Franco and Johnson and their coalition partners would have shared (albeit imperfectly) at least two identity frames of reference (e.g. as working class/poor and disadvantaged ethnic minority). As coalition members they may not know exactly what other members’ experiences have been. Yet, through their multiple identity frames they have some intersection of frames of reference. These frames will, in turn, equip them to understand approximately the experiences and concerns of others in the coalition who are different from themselves. In other words, the partial intersection of identity frames of reference can make it possible for coalition members to partly understand and identify with very different people with whom they are working. This partial intersection of identity frames of reference can be (though may not always prove to be) a sufficient common perspective from which coalition members can negotiate agreement on shared problems and goals, and plan for common action to pursue those goals.

 Critics of this contention will no doubt respond that the partial overlap of identity frames and perspectives within a coalition still leaves a wide field of differences and contradicting perspectives open. These differences, they will claim, will foment contestation within a diverse group and ultimately render it paralyzed by perpetual internal confrontation and irreconcilable differences. To this I have two replies. First, it is impossible to exile differences or contestation from political coalitions (or any diverse social organization). Human diversity is too extensive to eliminate. And granted, the presence of diversity can always contribute to disagreement and contestation that can become divisive and polarizing. But the disagreement and contestation that spring from difference can also be the source of political critique and the creative energy behind new political insights and solutions. Since intra-coalition contestation has both advantages and disadvantages, the problem that faces us is not how to eliminate contestation and disagreement from diverse coalitions. It is, instead, to understand how contestation and disagreement within coalitions can be harnessed and directed away from an unrelenting emphasis on division and separation, and steered toward the establishment and pursuit of shared
political, social, and economic objectives. Both possibilities are always open within the coalition process. Only the second, however, stands a good chance of helping people achieve the social and political changes they envision.

Various organizational possibilities can help harness difference and contestation in a productive manner. Among Latinos/as in Chicago, for example, disagreement existed about the political means that should be used to achieve shared goals. Some established community groups favored grassroots mobilization and protest politics (e.g. Centro Latino, Pilsen Neighbors, West-town Concerned Citizens Coalition) (Padilla 1985, 71). Others favored electoral politics and lobbying to achieve and/or influence traditional political powers (e.g. Mexican Civic Committee, League of United Latin American Citizens, Puerto Rican Congress) (1985, 71). Within the Spanish Coalition for Jobs these differences were reflected not only in the subgroups of the coalition, but also in the coalition’s political tactics. Rather than allow dissent to dissolve the coalition, differences were channeled productively by combining protest tactics with sophisticated, formal negotiations with Illinois Bell. Both tactics were directed at the same social justice goals. Here disagreeing members could negotiate their different perspectives based on a common commitment to shared goals grounded in their shared Latino/a identification.

Those who suggest that groups must fully resolve all differences within their communities before they engage in multiethnic or other diverse coalitions must reconsider their claims against examples such as these and organizational possibilities such as broad coalitions and fluid political positionings. In any case, multiple identity gives citizens the capacity to foreground the frames of reference that are appropriate to specific acts of coalition building, maintenance, and mobilization. In addition, multiple identity gives citizens a flexibility that is a necessary (though not sufficient) component of successful cooperation in the coalition process. The flexibility of multiple identity also enables citizens to enact subtle shifts in position in political contexts. These shifts in identity position can be used to leverage the internal diversity of a community in order to achieve political ends. In this way, the flexibility inherent in multiple identity better enables citizens to work together productively as members of a diverse political coalition.

CONCLUSIONS

Multiple identity has several implications for coalition building and the mobilization of radical alliances. First, multiple identity provides people with a range of actual or potential affiliations to social groups based on age, gender, class, race, ethnicity, ideology, physical ability, and so on. The potential for politicization and mobilization of these groups for social justice goals is always present. Citizens are therefore linked to not one, but a number of potentially politicized groups. Second, the openness and durability of multiple identity allows people to create, internalize, and inhabit new and/or transformed identifications while maintaining their existing identities. This, in turn, enables a synergistic process of identity (trans)formation and community building. In this process, new or transformed identifications and communities can become the basis for political coalitions aimed at social change. Third, multiple identity furnishes people with intellectual flexibility that can diffuse and/or draw advantage from intra-
The coalition contestation. This flexibility increases the likelihood that coalition members will be able to locate and work from shared perspective(s) within diverse coalitions and to make strategic repositionings during political action that can help them achieve their political goals.

My main point is that multiple identities can connect people to a number of social groups and communities that can, in turn, potentially become politicized and mobilized in order to achieve particular social justice goals. Identity-community formations, though durable, are open to constant revision and amendment. The fluidity and change that accompany the durability of multiple identity means that the relationship between multiple identity and politics transcends “identity politics” by denying that specific identity frames are a primordial or essential aspect of the self (i.e. unchanging touchstones already there for political mobilization). Rather—as witnessed in the Chicago case—multiple identity means that new identifications can be strategically generated to unify previously unconnected groups of people. Theoretically and empirically then it is possible for multiple identity to help us forge new identifications specific to particular social or political crises that can be used to bring cohesion, political direction, and motivation to disparate groups of people who share common concerns but also deep diversity.

While multiple identity can make key contributions to the formation and mobilization of diverse coalitions, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of these contributions. Multiple identity’s contributions to coalition building largely involve the creation of possibilities. That is, multiple identity enables certain types of events but cannot guarantee that those events will occur. For example, multiple identity gives coalition members the capacity to shift among frames of reference, and to temporarily set aside perspectives they do not share with other coalition members. Yet, multiple identity does not guarantee that coalition members will actually exercise this capacity in order to increase the cohesion of the coalition. Likewise, multiple identity provides citizens with an open, fluid, yet durable identity structure that opens the way for adopting new or transformed identity (and community) formations and to using these politically to achieve social justice goals. The existence of this possibility however, does not guarantee that such identity innovations will be made. Nor does it guarantee that the political mobilization arising from these identity-community formations will be able to achieve their intended aims.

Many factors determine whether or not diverse coalitions will be formed and how successful they will be in their pursuit of social justice. Institutional, material, and historical factors all have a significant effect on coalition building. Multiple identity is another psyche-social factor that can aid to the formation of diverse coalitions. Realization of the possibilities that multiple identity introduces will depend on the combined influence of these other contributing factors. Yet, multiple identity has important implications for coalition building and radical politics. Contrary to the conventional wisdom that difference is inherently divisive, the events analyzed here show that multiple identity—as difference within us—can play an integral role in coalition building, that brings together different people to work toward social justice. By focusing on multiple identity we can better see how differences within us can help us work together despite the differences among us.
1. Consequently, a few thinkers have begun to explore the implications multiple identity has for democratic politics. Among these are Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau (1985), Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Schiller and Cristina Stanton Blanc, (1994), Anna Marie Smith (1994) Yen Li Espiritu (1994) and Lisa Lowe (1991). Lowe and Espiritu, in particular, have suggested that multiple identity might play an important role in the formation of multi-ethnic coalitions.

2. A Cuban population also resided in Chicago at this time, however, since they did not constitute a disadvantaged group they are not a focus of Felix Padilla’s study from which the central case study of this essay is drawn.

3. By creating a common crisis, Euro-American stereotyping and subjugation of the Mexican American and Puerto Rican populations as a monolith aided the creation of a Latino identity.

4. A similar discussion continues today. Some Mexican Americans, for example, argue that as roughly 80% of the Latino population in the U.S. it dilutes Chicano/a influence to identity with other Latinos/as. Other activists insist that a coalition among Spanish-speaking and surname groups (along with other minority groups) is the best path for political and economic reform. For a discussion of contemporary Latino/a identity sec L. DeSipio (1996).

5. The formation of a "community" is always an approximation that cloaks internal diversity. For thorough accounts of the role of approximation in community formation see Cohen (1985) and Anderson (1991). In 1970s Chicago, as today, it is problematic to use Spanish language use to demarcate the Latino/a community since many native born Latinos/as are not fluent in Spanish and Latino/as who are Spanish-speaking speak a range of Spanish dialects so diverse as to be sometimes mutually unintelligible. The use of the Spanish language to signify Latino/as thus performs a gross (but often helpful) approximation.

6. Some readers may question the “Latino” character of an organization named the “Spanish” Coalition for Jobs. The naming of the “Spanish” Coalition for Jobs is interesting against the backdrop of widespread “Latino/a” self reference—less because it erases or undermines Latino/a self-identification (Padilla shows it to be widespread) and more because it performs a strategic repositioning that seeks to turn the misconceived Euro-American stereotype of the “Spanish masses” to good political effect. The socio-historical conditions of the 1970s differ from our own, in which the term Latino/a has much wider currency but still competes with imposed terms imposed by the dominant culture such as “Hispanic.”

7. Padilla stresses that Affirmative Action was an important influence on Latino/a coalition building because it authorized opposition to existing forms of discrimination.

8. The connection among these three—individual identity, group identity, and community—is a possible but not necessary one in any given case. A person may be socialized to an identity frame, but the inculcation of this personal identity frame does not necessarily lead to continued self-ascription to a group-identity or identity group-based community over a lifetime. For example, a woman may have grown up with her Jewish family and internalized a Jewish identity frame (e.g. internalized Jewish values practices and systems of meaning) but, as an adult, not identify herself as Jewish or understand herself as a member of the "Jewish Community." Yet, others may ascribe Jewish group identity and Jewish community membership to her, asserting that she is subject to the standards of the community. Since she does not self-ascribe as Jewish or as a Jewish community member, she may resist such a positioning or she may accept such a positioning, but perhaps only in certain contexts.

9. There is a sense in which some identities within a multiple identity can become more or less significant over time. This dimension of multiple identity is more complex than I have had space to describe here. For additional details see Baruca-Carter (1998).