

# Caught Between Worlds:

Existential Isolation and Dual Identity among 1st & 2nd Generation Immigrants

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## Background

Immigrants commonly experience conflicts of dual identity in which they feel “alone between worlds” of their native and host countries’ cultures. Existential isolation is the sense that one’s subjective experience is distinct from the subjective experiences of others (mind-mind gap; MMG) and the objective state of the outside world (mind-world gap; MWG). The current study explores the relationship between harmony of dual identity (DIH) and existential isolation in a sample of first- and second-generation immigrants.

## Method

Participants identifying as first- or second-generation immigrants completed an online survey (N = 274). Sixty-nine countries were represented in the sample.

India: 28	Peru: 11	Canada: 8
Cuba: 23	Brazil: 11	Philippines: 8
Mexico: 15	Vietnam: 10	China: 6
Haiti: 13	Egypt: 9	England: 6
Venezuela: 11	Jamaica: 9	Other: 106

## Key Findings

MMG predicted MWG indirectly through dual identity harmony (.07;LLCI = .02, ULCI = .12; Figure 1).

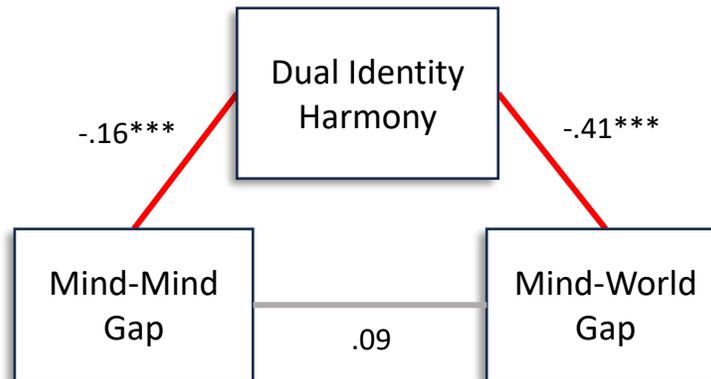
Qualitative content coding of participants’ self-generated descriptions of between worlds experiences revealed common themes, including language barriers (14%) and conflicts of values (20%; Figure 2).

Immigrants struggling with **dual identity** feel **existentially isolated** from others and the world.



“It makes you feel like a fish out of water or just out of place in general where you can tell you stand out.”

Figure 1: Indirect Effect of MMG on MWG Through DIH

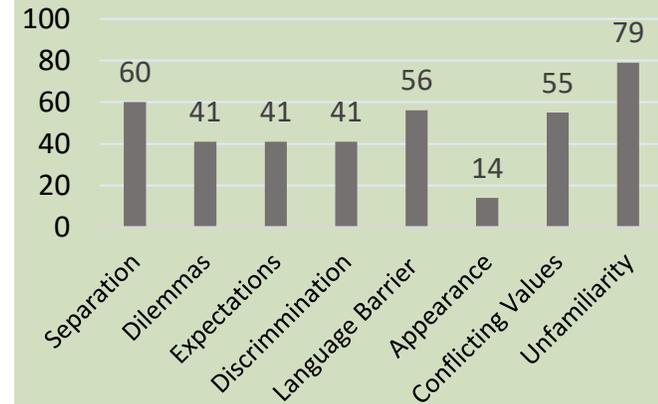


Note: Analysis completed in Hayes PROCESS macro for SPSS v.29. The indirect effect is significant. (.07;LLCI = .02, ULCI = .12)



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Figure 2: Qualitative Content Frequencies



Note: Values indicate total numbers of responses coded within each category. Responses could be coded to more than one category.

Table 1: Bivariate Correlations of Key Variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. DIH	3.16	.78				
2. MMG	3.79	.96	-.20**			
3. MWG	3.47	1.08	-.31**	.14*		
4. USA ID	3.35	.95	-.08	-.05	.07	
5. NAT ID	3.66	.95	-.100	-.04	.17	.86**

Note: \*denotes p < .05, \*\* denotes p < .001. DIH = dual identity harmony, MMG = mind-mind gap, MWG = mind-world gap, USA ID = strength of American identity, Nat ID = strength of native identity.

## Conclusion

First and second-generation immigrants who feel they cannot relate to the experiences of others experience disharmony between their cultural identities, which may leave them feeling disconnected from the world.