

## Pride, Prejudice, and Ambivalence: Toward a Unified Theory of Race and Ethnicity

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*For more than a century, hundreds of psychologists have studied race and ethnicity. Yet this scholarship, like American culture at large, has been ambivalent, viewing race and ethnicity both as sources of pride, meaning, and motivation as well as sources of prejudice, discrimination, and inequality. Underlying this ambivalence is widespread confusion about what race and ethnicity are and why they matter. To address this ambivalence and confusion, as well as to deepen the American conversation about race and ethnicity, the article first examines the field's unclear definitions and faulty assumptions. It then offers an integrated definition of race and ethnicity—dynamic sets of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices—while noting that race, although often used interchangeably with ethnicity, indexes an asymmetry of power and privilege between groups. Further, it shows how psychology's model of people as fundamentally independent, self-determining entities impedes the field's—and the nation's—understanding of how race and ethnicity influence experience and how the still-prevalent belief that race and ethnicity are biological categories hinders a more complete understanding of these phenomena. Five first propositions of a unified theory of race and ethnicity are offered.*

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Americans now talk daily about race and ethnicity. What is it like to be Black in America? Does Obama's candidacy mean that America can finally confront race? Is it a sign that America is postrace? Do Black churches influence the Black vote? Do White churches influence the White vote?

### Editor's Note

Hazel Rose Markus received the Award for Distinguished Scientific Contributions. Award winners are invited to deliver an award address at the APA's annual convention. A version of this award address was delivered at the 116th annual meeting, held August 14–17, 2008, in Boston, Massachusetts. Articles based on award addresses are reviewed, but they differ from unsolicited articles in that they are expressions of the winners' reflections on their work and their views of the field.

Are Latino and Black interests at odds in the South? Will Asians form a coalition with Whites in California? These conversations, while animated, are tinged with ambivalence and confusion. Many Americans feel that paying attention to ethnic and racial differences is at odds with our ideals of individual equality and our belief that, at the end of the day, people are people. Doesn't highlighting racial and ethnic differences come close to stereotyping? And isn't even talking about race and ethnicity sort of, well, racist and ethnocentric—not to mention possibly illegal? What are race and ethnicity, anyway?

For many psychologists, ambivalence and confusion about race and ethnicity are not new. I know they have been with me at least since I was an undergraduate, when I began my research career coding *New York Times* articles about political conflict (Feierabend, Feierabend, & Nesvold, 1971). For each article, my first task was to determine whether racial groups or ethnic groups were involved in the conflict. To explain the difference between race and ethnicity, my graduate student supervisor gave the example of ethnic and racial ghettos: People choose to live in ethnic ghettos, but not in racial ghettos. This example did not help me much, and at the time, I could not really understand the difference between *race* and *ethnicity*.

My confusion about race and ethnicity only grew in graduate school. I remember proposing a study on gender and the self-concept and another on race and the self-concept. It was Ann Arbor in the 1970s, and nobody said no. Yet my advisors suggested that I would be better off studying just *the* self-concept. Their advice drew on a widely held, implicit distinction between what is basic and what is peripheral, what is process and what is content: The self is basic; being a self is process. Gender, race, and ethnicity are peripheral; they are content.

At about this time, James Jackson proposed the first nationally representative survey of Black Americans. Many at the Institute for Social Research insisted that he include a White comparison group. Otherwise, they said, his research would not be sound—never mind that 30 years of surveys without Black or Latino comparison groups were presumably robust. The debates raged. I walked away from these two graduate school incidents with two new types of confusion: Why isn't studying gender, race, and ethnicity "basic" science? And if race and ethnicity are so peripheral, why does everyone get so tense when they talk about these topics?

Then in 1992, as a University of Michigan faculty member, I designed my first cultural psychology course, with sections on selves in European American, Japanese, Chinese, Indian, African American, Latino American, and Asian American contexts. Many colleagues and students were enthusiastic, but one colleague was inconsolable. His family had survived the Holocaust, and he demanded to know how a social psychologist could teach a course that

he called *Stereotyping 101*. My head hurt: As a social psychologist, I shared my field's passion for drawing attention to the evils of prejudice and discrimination. But also as a social psychologist, I shared my field's passion for identifying patterns in social behavior. Where did science end and stereotyping begin?

Grappling with race and ethnicity caused me problems again in 1995. My research lab was discussing the power of popular media to create and maintain stereotypes. I was arguing that *Pocahontas* (Pentecost, Gabriel, & Goldberg, 1995), unlike earlier Disney movies, included some positive representations of underrepresented minorities. An American Indian student retorted, "White people *would* think that." I was used to push-back in this lab, but I was surprised to hear myself called a White person. After all these years studying race and ethnicity, I had somehow failed to realize that I "have" race, too. Moreover my observation that things were getting better for American Indians was experienced as reflecting this White perspective.

More recently, I discovered that the struggle over what to think, say, and do about race and ethnicity is poured into the very concrete of my office. The Stanford Psychology Department resides in a building named after David Starr Jordan, the first president of Stanford and, like many educational leaders of his time, a noted eugenicist. Over the building's entryway is a statue of Louis Agassiz, a Swiss American naturalist, champion of the scientific method, highly accomplished Harvard professor, and proponent of the belief that some races are just biologically better than others. How is it that Jordan Hall, home to generations of scientists trying to counter prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination, features the name and image of two people whom some might now call racists? What do we do about the Jordan name, the Agassiz statue?

My confusion and ambivalence about race and ethnicity do not stem from a lack of interest, effort, or goodwill. They are also not mine alone. Instead, they reflect the assumptions and anxieties of the field of psychology, which in turn embodies the assumptions and anxieties of Americans as a whole.

With race and ethnicity moving to the fore of our nation's consciousness, the time has come for psychologists to examine our own ambivalence and confusion so that we may spell out, clearly and compellingly, what race and ethnicity are and why they matter for behavior. Here I offer a first step toward that end: the beginnings of a unified theory of race and ethnicity. I first argue that psychology's ambivalence and confusion stem from four sources: (a) disagreements over the definitions of race and ethnicity, (b) a view of the person that inhibits our ability to understand how race and ethnicity might shape experience, (c) the stubborn persistence of the idea that race and ethnicity are biological categories, and (d) psychology's inattention to its own role in fostering this ambivalence. I then offer new

definitions of race and ethnicity and describe a view of the person that readily accounts for how race and ethnicity influence behavior.

Finally, I sketch five initial propositions of a unified theory of race and ethnicity. A complete theory will require multiethnic, multiracial networks of psychologists with expertise in psychology, in race and ethnicity, and in the social histories of these phenomena both in America and in a global context. In the meantime, closely examining and integrating the psychological research on race and ethnicity will be extremely valuable for psychological science and practice.

### Separate but Relevant Literatures

My sense that the time is right for an integration of research on race and ethnicity within psychology developed when I was director of the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity at Stanford University. In my work with colleagues from many fields, I have noticed that psychologists are more likely to accept race and ethnicity as facts of the world than are many other scholars. As a field, we have done a good job discovering the universal causes and consequences of prejudice but not such a great job uncovering the history and specifics of the American case. We are less likely to ask what race and ethnicity are, where they came from, and what psychology has done to create and perpetuate particular understandings of these phenomena (for a significant recent exception, see Helms, Jernigan, & Mascher, 2005). With respect to ethnicity, we have shown increasing interest in comparing Americans with Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans or with Asian American or Latino American participants, and in characterizing differences among these groups in various psychological tendencies. At the same time, we have been much less astute in recognizing that "everyone is ethnic" and in examining how mainstream European American behavior is also ethnically and racially grounded.

Within psychology, researchers across subfields study race and ethnicity, generating a variety of distinct literatures that could be well integrated. One robust, empirical literature now demonstrates that race shapes psychological experience (for reviews see, e.g., Adams, Biernat, Branscombe, Crandall, & Wrightsman, 2008b; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Eberhardt & Goff, 2005; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Jackson, Chatters, & Taylor, 2004; J. M. Jones, 1997; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Richeson & Shelton, 2007; C. M. Steele, 1997). We now know from this research that racial identity can be an important predictor of attitudes, beliefs, motivation, and performance. In contrast to conventional wisdom, racial identity need not pose a barrier to finding commonalities with other groups (e.g., Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1991; Gurin, Gurin, Matlock, & Wade-Golden, 2008; Helms, 1990; Oyserman, Kimmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, &

Hart-Johnson, 2003; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). We also know that racial stereotypes are often automatically activated and have powerful behavioral consequences both for those who hold the stereotypes and for those who are the target of them. One groundbreaking theory and finding is that racial prejudice and discrimination do not require individual negative attitudes or hostile intent. Instead, what Claude Steele and his colleagues describe as a “threat in the air”—a stereotype about one’s group that is active in the sociocultural context—is enough to impair performance in domains relevant to the stereotype (e.g., C. M. Steele, in press; C. M. Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002).

Another robust but separate literature demonstrates that ethnicity (often called culture) shapes individual experience (for reviews see, e.g., Brewer & Yuki, 2007; Bruner, 1990; Chiu & Hong, 2006; Fiske & Fiske, 2007; Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Heine, 2008; Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008; Kitayama & Cohen, 2007; Markus & Hamedani, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 2003b; Matsumoto, 2001; Mesquita & Leu, 2007; Miller, 1999; Nisbett, 2003; Shweder, 1991, 2003; Tsai, 2007). Labeled *cultural psychology*, this literature has so far primarily documented diversity in the psychological functioning of European Americans and East Asians, even though culture is a more general term and refers to patterns of ideas and practices associated with any significant social grouping, including gender, religion, social class, nation of origin, region of origin, birth cohort, or occupation. Studies in cultural psychology reveal that much of what has been taken for granted in the field of psychology as “basic human psychological experience”—for example, ways of attending, thinking, feeling, being a self, relating to others, coping—is actually specific to middle-class European American psychological experience. Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Asian American contexts are often characterized by different understandings of what is good, real, moral, and healthy, as well as by different social and material resources. As a consequence, the psychological processes of those engaged in these contexts can take very different forms. The goal of this research is to extend the scope of psychological theories so that they are useful and relevant to the predictions, descriptions, and explanations of all human behaviors, not just middle-class, Western ones (Markus & Kitayama, 2003a).

A third thriving literature examines both race and ethnicity and how they influence mental health and psychotherapy (for reviews see Draguns & Tanaka-Matsumi, 2003; Marsella & Yamada, 2007; Phinney, 1996). These analyses focus on the multiple ways minority and/or immigrant status influence emotional and mental health, and the challenges of counseling across racial and ethnic divides (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993; Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Leong et al., 2007; Ponterotto, Casas, Alexander, & Suzuki, 2001; Sue & Sue, 2002). Prior to these comparative studies, racial and ethnic differences in self, emotion,

health, and well-being were like water to the fish—invisible. These studies are also important in highlighting different conditions of societal treatment and integration and their consequences for health-related outcomes.

A fourth literature that attends to both race and ethnicity comes from the pioneering work of W. E. B. Dubois and other Black scholars from the early 20th century and from the Black psychology movement (Gaines & Reed, 1995). This literature reflects Guthrie’s (1976) observation and book title that in psychology, *Even the Rat Was White*. One explicit goal of this research has been to blend perspectives from mainstream research on race, discrimination, and prejudice with research that focuses on the unique historical and cultural experience of African Americans (e.g., Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). These studies examine how African philosophies shape the African American experience. They also analyze concepts that are meaningful in Black life but that are not represented in mainstream or majority experience (for reviews see Boykin, 1986; J. M. Jones, 2003; R. L. Jones, 1972; Nobles, 1972; Taylor & Manning, 1975; White & Parham, 1990). Finally, and more recently, scholars in all of these literatures are seeking ways to integrate perspectives that emphasize the universal aspects of race and ethnicity with perspectives that highlight the ways that psychological functioning is contingent on history, culture, and context (e.g., Adams, Biernat, Branscombe, Crandall, & Wrightsman, 2008a; Fryberg & Townsend, 2008; J. M. Jones, 2003; Kitayama, Markus, Adams, Keller, & Shelton, 2008; Oyserman, in press; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Dittmann, & Crosby, 2008; C. M. Steele, in press; D. M. Steele et al., 2008).

### Race and Ethnicity Defined

Despite these literatures’ powerful findings and compelling insights, they have not reached a consensus on what race and ethnicity are, how they overlap, or how they differ. Instead, race researchers publish their findings in different journals and textbooks than do ethnicity or cultural researchers, and the two groups speak at different symposia and conferences. A quick review of their findings suggests that this ambivalence is not surprising. In some instances, racial and ethnic differences are viewed positively: They unite people and are a source of pride, identity, and motivation. In other instances, however, the same differences are viewed negatively: They divide people and are a source of prejudice and devaluation. Moreover, research on race is about countering assumptions of group difference and dispelling stereotypes, whereas research on ethnicity and culture is about identifying and explaining difference and has been accused of generating stereotypes. In addition, African Americans and, more recently, Latino Americans and Hispanic Americans are the groups who have “race”; whereas Asians, Asian Americans, and sometimes other

groups such as the Irish, the Italians, the Mexicans, or American Indians are the groups who have “ethnicity and culture.” Until quite recently, mainstream Whites have had neither.

In fact, most racial or ethnic identifications reflect an ongoing confluence of the social structural factors and cultural meanings, and a person’s psychological experience cannot be parsed easily into its racial or ethnic components. Groups typically conceptualized as races can for some purposes be “ethnicized” and analyzed as ethnic groups, and ethnic groups can be “racialized” (as is currently the case for people with Middle Eastern heritage in the United States, who face increasing discrimination following 9/11) and analyzed as racial groups.

Meanwhile, in everyday conversation and in a great deal of social science, medical, and biological research, people use the terms *race* and *ethnicity* interchangeably or combine them in constructions such as *racial-ethnic* or *ethnoracial*. Both lay people and professionals discuss race and ethnicity as if they were something people “have”—some set of attributes, traits, properties, or essences. They then use these presumed attributes to sort people into different groups.

In contrast, scholars in sociology and history have paid more attention to the difference between race and ethnicity (e.g., Fredrickson, 2002; Omi & Winant, 1986, 1994). According to these views, *race* implicates power and indexes the history or ongoing imposition of one group’s authority over another. Usually, a racial designation signals that differences between groups may be the result of one group maintaining another group as different (and usually inferior). Categorizing a group as a racial group draws attention to the difference in the power relationships among this group and other groups. Thus, people in groups called races may dispute that they are different from the dominant group. In contrast, *ethnicity* focuses attention on differences in meanings, values, and ways of living (practices). People in groups called ethnicities are likely to claim these differences and are more likely to agree with generalizations about the behavior of the group.

Race and ethnicity are, however, alike in many respects, and for this reason, they can be productively considered together. Contrary to the popular belief that race and ethnicity are biological entities, both race and ethnicity are dynamic sets of ideas (e.g., meanings, values, goals, images, associations) and practices (e.g., meaningful actions, both formal and routine) that people create to distinguish groups and organize their own communities (for related definitions, see Helms, Jernigan, & Mascher, 2005; Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952; Phinney, 1996; Shweder, 2003). The social distinctions of race and ethnicity are inventions—the result of human activity or meaning making, and these as well as other categorical distinctions, such as gender, religion, social class, nation, and occupation, are not neces-

sary, natural, or inevitable. Other distinctions can be made and will be made as historical, political, and economic conditions change.

The existence and influence of race and ethnicity reflect humans’ unique evolved capacity to make communities and then to be shaped by them (Markus & Hamedani, 2007). As people ask “Who am I?” they simultaneously ask “Who are we?” (e.g., Brewer, 2007; Hogg, 2003; Turner & Haslam, 2001). Both ethnicity and race are the result of the basic psychological process of creating and maintaining social distinctions. They are both important answers to the universal “Who are we?” question, guiding behavior and sketching blueprints for our worlds. Whether it is possible to create and observe difference among groups of people without establishing a hierarchy, such that X’s ways of “being” or “doing” are better than Y’s, remains a contested question (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

The ideas and practices associated with race and ethnicity are not separate from behavior or overlaid on a set of basic or fixed psychological processes. Instead, these social constructions are active in the very formation and operation of psychological processes. Whether people are aware of their race or ethnicity, or whether they claim them as self-defining, both can influence thoughts, feelings, and actions (Markus, 2008).

To capture the important similarities and differences between the terms *race* and *ethnicity*, Paula Moya and I in a forthcoming volume (Markus & Moya, in press) offer the following definitions (Moya & Markus, in press):

*Race* is a dynamic set of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices that (1) sorts people into ethnic groups according to perceived physical and behavioral human characteristics; (2) associates differential value, power, and privilege with these characteristics and establishes a social status ranking among the different groups; and (3) emerges (a) when groups are perceived to pose a threat (political, economic, or cultural) to each other’s world view or way of life; and/or (b) to justify the denigration and exploitation (past, current, or future) of, and prejudice toward, other groups.

*Ethnicity* is a dynamic set of historically derived and institutionalized ideas and practices that (1) allows people to identify or to be identified with groupings of people on the basis of presumed (and usually claimed) commonalities including language, history, nation or region of origin, customs, ways of being, religion, names, physical appearance, and/or genealogy or ancestry; (2) can be a source of meaning, action, and identity; and (3) confers a sense of belonging, pride, and motivation.

These definitions highlight that making and maintaining difference is a social process that involves both ingroup and intergroup relations, and they dispel some of the confusion I have felt in my own career. As an undergraduate

research assistant whose job was to distinguish between racial and ethnic conflicts, I didn't understand how the difference between ethnic and racial ghettos could be my guide. To my 18-year-old eyes, ethnic ghettos and racial ghettos were the same—people with similar languages, customs, and regions of origin living together. Yet history matters. Ethnic ghettos arise because people choose to be with others who share their ways of living. But racial ghettos arise when people have no choice in the matter—as was the case for Jews in Europe during World War II or for African Americans in the 1960s who were denied mortgages when trying to buy houses in certain neighborhoods. In the latter cases, more powerful groups justified and maintained the racial ghetto, privileging themselves while claiming and fostering the inferiority of the subordinate group.

Highlighting the distinction between race and ethnicity also clarifies some of my struggles as a graduate student and faculty researcher. Envision a study comparing Black and White participants' political attitudes, coping responses, communication styles, or emotional patterns, as the Institute for Social Research scholars wanted Jackson to conduct. Now envision a similar comparison between Japanese and European Americans—two ethnic groups that are relatively similar in power and prestige. In the former case, one group helped cast the other group as different and lesser, and so people tend to see the behavior of the dominant group as normative or good and the behavior of the subordinate group as nonnormative or deficient. They may also fail to link group differences to disparities in resources and opportunities. I see now that Jackson may have been worried about comparing Blacks and Whites because he knew that people were unlikely to recognize how the majority group creates and maintains the Black/White divide. When explaining, say, why Whites vote more often than Blacks, or why White students score higher on standardized tests than Black students, some audiences would fail to account for vast differences in these two groups' histories, resources, and opportunities. Instead, they would fall back on the common just-so story that Blacks are inferior to Whites—and thereby further justify the social rankings of Blacks and Whites.

When researchers study groups that are similar in power and prestige, they can more confidently interpret their findings as ethnic differences—that is, differences in ideas, values, and patterns of social life. For example, cultural psychologists, who have found that middle-class European Americans tend to view themselves as influencing others whereas middle-class Japanese tend to view themselves as adjusting to others, explain their findings in terms of the different ideas about the self, philosophies, religions, child-rearing practices, educational systems, and even languages of these two groups. These types of ethnic comparisons can be misleading, however, when the contrast involves

two groups that have experienced different levels of power and privilege—especially when one has enjoyed its power and privilege at the expense of the other. In this case, although ethnic comparisons are useful and needed, they should be made in tandem with racial comparisons that explicitly recognize differences in conceptual and material resources across time.

### **The Problem With the Independent Self**

Defining race and ethnicity highlights two critical features of both phenomena—other people create them, and they are not biologically based “things” that people “have.” Instead, they are socially constructed “doings” or “historically situated projects,” as Omi and Winant (1994, p. 55) call them. Yet the idea of race and ethnicity as social transactions is at odds with two powerful cultural assumptions: (a) that the individual is the source of all thought, feeling, and action and (b) that race and ethnicity are biological or otherwise essential attributes (Moya & Markus, in press). These assumptions have considerable historical precedent but little empirical support. Nevertheless, they invisibly scaffold most conversations on race and ethnicity, driving much of psychology's—and Americans'—confusion and ambivalence about these phenomena (Gaines & Reed, 1995; Johnson, 2006; Sampson, 1988; Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Tajfel & Turner, 1985).

For its part, the independent model of the person has led researchers and lay people alike to look deep inside individual minds for sources of thought and action as well as to ignore or even deny the influences of the social world. According to the independent model, the person is the primary source and center of all thought, feeling, and action. Agency resides within the person; it comes from internal states, capacities, motivations, and dispositions. From the perspective of this “it's what's inside that counts” model, people are self-determining, self-motivating, and morally responsible for their own actions (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2003b; Plaut & Markus, 2005; Triandis, 1991). Normatively good actions originate in an independent, bounded, autonomous self and are separate or distinct from the thoughts and feelings of others.

The independent model of the self is so thoroughly inscribed in American society that we often do not realize that other models of the self exist. It is the basis of the self-interested rational actor in economic theory, the reasonable man in the law, and the authentic self in clinical and counseling psychology. Fostering this model of self are foundational texts such as the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, a legal system that identifies and protects individual rights, and a host of social and political institutions that encourage the development and expression of these rights. This powerful model is not just a set of

values. It is also a to-do list that organizes the flow of everyday life in many American contexts.

For example, to encourage independence and the development of personal preferences, goals, and perspectives, American parents give infants their own bedrooms. Children choose their own breakfasts and their school activities from a wide array of options. Regardless of the circumstances, Americans explain their own actions and those of others as expressions of individual preferences and choices. Americans know that they should resist influence by others and have the courage of their own convictions. Animated by the independent model, they think they can and they do. They take charge, are in control, and realize their dreams. When things go right, individuals get the credit; if not, they get the blame.

The independent model of the self does acknowledge other people and relationships. After all, Americans make friends, love one another, cooperate, volunteer, give to charity, and pull together to solve problems. Yet attention to and concern for others is cast as intentional and voluntary; it is not necessary or obligatory (Adams, Anderson, & Adonu, 2004; Markus & Kitayama, 1994). From the perspective of the independent model of the person, people can and should choose their own fates and determine their own destinies. This model implies that people can and should choose what, when, and who will influence them, and this includes choosing if and how race and ethnicity will affect them.

Americans did not just dream up this particular model of the person. Rather, thousands of years of Western philosophical and religious thinking led to it. Plato's notion that to know something is to discover its underlying essence is tied to the Western idea that agency resides within the person (Popper, 1957). Likewise, Descartes' idea that moral strength comes from inside people, not from outside sources, presages our modern belief that moral action often requires keeping one's own counsel and resisting the crowd (Taylor, 1989). Philosophers during the late 17th century's Age of Reason further bolstered the idea of the self-determining individual, as did the Enlightenment's rejection of tradition and authority in favor of reason and science (Weizmann, 2004). Jefferson distilled many of these ideas when he wrote in the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

In the modern paradigm that took root during this time, the autonomous individual is the sole source of meaning and truth. Through systematic observation and the use of reason and doubt, individuals can develop rational faculties that allow them to stand strong against the demands of culture, custom, and other people. The concepts of the individual, independence, freedom, liberty, knowledge, reason,

rights, justice, science, choice, control, and self-determination are a powerful knot of positive associations that recruit and support one another. In contrast, the concepts of the collective, the social, others, custom, culture, convention, superstition, sensitivity to social influence, adjustment to others, compliance, and conformity are a countervailing knot of negative associations.

Because the ideas of race and ethnicity highlight ties to others and social influence, Americans would often prefer just to ignore these phenomena. Doing so is consistent with the task of resisting the collective and maintaining independence. Moreover, because the independent model is a description not only of how people are, but also of how they should be, claiming that race and ethnicity matter can seem immoral, leaving one vulnerable to multiple charges—a lapse of self-determination, an expression of weakness, a failure of reason.

Meanwhile, because the true story of human nature is the "inside story," according to the independent model of self, psychologists have usually believed that the primary route to understanding behavior is to analyze those universal internal attributes and processes that the human mind comprises. This is why my graduate school advisers thought I would be wiser to study *the* self-concept, abstracted from the messiness of particular social worlds.

But who gets to be *the* universal, generic person with *the* self-concept? The fact that a study or a survey with all Japanese participants or all Black participants seems incomplete and requires a White comparison group, whereas the same study with all White participants does not, reveals the extent to which those in the majority can take their own behavior as standard, neutral, or basic. Why wouldn't a study of only Black participants reveal basic processes? It also reveals why I was surprised to have my observations about Disney's *Pocahontas* tied to my race. In the movie, Pocahontas sings, "For whether we are white or copper skinned, We need to sing with all the voices of the mountains, We need to paint with all the colors of the wind" (from the song "Colors of the Wind," lyrics by Stephen Schwartz). Although admittedly saccharine, these lyrics to me sounded like a perfectly reasonable call to multicultural cooperation. Yet like many majority-group people with an independent model of self, I failed to see how my own social positioning shaped my experience of these lyrics. To one identified as American Indian, a recognition that one's group had been devalued and denied the power and privilege the majority group gave itself should accompany the need to paint with all the colors of the wind. As the adage goes, people with power want peace, but people without power want justice.

### **Another Bad Idea: Race and Ethnicity Are Biological**

Bound up with the idea of the individual defined by natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is the

powerful idea of equality among individuals. Yet the Enlightenment ideal of universal emancipation was deeply at odds with everyday reality, in which groups of people who differed by race and ethnicity lived in unequal circumstances and received unequal treatment. Indeed, the United States' founders explicitly excluded some groups—African Americans and Native Americans—from their notion of the “men” who were created equal. So Jefferson's appeal to the equality of men fomented much questioning about his meaning. Was every human as equal as every other? Were they equal in capacity, or before God? How could you know? What would be the test of equality? And even if people believed that all humans were equal in capacity and worth, then how could they explain the existing inequality? Questions like these preoccupied the country's founders, and the answers they provided have had profound consequences for the history of race and ethnicity as well as for research on race and ethnicity (Moya & Markus, in press; Stoskopf, 2002).

One convenient answer to the vexing equality question was that people have different biological attributes. Tied to the assumption that the person is an independent entity made up of defining attributes is the idea that race and ethnicity are a result of some qualities or attributes inside the body or blood of people associated with a particular race and that these physical traits reliably indicate how good, smart, or civilized people are capable of being (Markus & Moya, in press; Smedley, 1999). Thinking of race as a fact of nature appears to have emerged in the 15th century as part of the Western scientific project of categorizing and ordering the world. Classifying people according to their race was not, however, a natural or an obvious way to think. In fact, many historians of ancient civilizations now concur that, although people from the Egyptian, Middle Eastern, Greek, and Roman worlds often interacted, they rarely used race or color as a basis of difference. The Greeks, for example, distinguished among people on the basis of their language (Fredrickson, 2002; Snowden, 1983).

Racial and ethnic classifications became common, however, with the development of science and with the rise of the nation-state. Europeans viewed the political conflicts between their states as reflections of different national characters (Weizmann, 2004). As these Europeans began colonizing Africa, Asia, and the Americas, they developed a wide array of racial classification systems. According to one of Linnaeus's systems, for example, Native Americans were reddish, stubborn, and easily angered; Africans were black, relaxed, and negligent; Asians were sallow, avaricious, and easily distracted; while Europeans were white, gentle, and inventive (Linnaeus, 1767, p. 29). Agassiz's notions of the biological differences among races built on and extended these earlier notions (Gould, 1981).

Notably, the European scientists doing the classifying found their own race to have superior qualities. The notion that some races were inferior to the European race was useful for justifying European dominance. In the face of Enlightenment claims that people were equally free and moral, a racial hierarchy could explain the growing inequality. The idea of biological differences among people also fit the independent model's claim that behavior arises from internal attributes. This simple idea served a wide variety of ideological and social purposes throughout Europe and America, and so it stuck.

During World War II, biological thinking inspired Nazi ideology and its horrific outcomes, leading to an aversion to the idea of race as biology. Yet Americans never fully embraced another way of thinking about race and ethnicity. Instead, people just avoided the topics altogether. The progressive norm became to claim color blindness—that is, the stance that race and ethnicity did not matter, and everyone should be treated equally. Yet color blindness did not solve the problem of what type of phenomena race and ethnicity were. Nor did it grapple with the fact that even though race and ethnicity should not matter, they still stratified almost every aspect of society. Although research studies repeatedly show that race and ethnicity are not biologically based, they do not suggest better ways to talk about the apparently racial and ethnic differences that are everywhere in plain sight.

This assumption that differences must be biological is what drove my colleague to label my cultural psychology class *Stereotyping 101*. He was implicitly using a biological definition of race and ethnicity, wherein race and ethnicity are fixed, internal entities. He had not yet entertained an alternate conceptualization in which race and ethnicity are sets of ideas and practices that change with time and circumstance. To underscore the view of race and ethnicity as patterns of ideas and practices in the environment and not as entities inside people, I find it useful to say, for example, “people who have participated in Mexican contexts” rather than “Mexicans,” and “people who are designated or who claim themselves as African American or Latino American” rather than “African Americans” or “Latino Americans.” Although clearly more convenient, the practice of labeling groups with a noun encourages essentialism and assumptions of entitativity.

### **Social Construction of the Self, Race, and Ethnicity**

Despite the powerful philosophical argument for the self as independent, people are not just autonomous, separate, biological entities; they are also relational, interdependent beings (Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1997). The liberal individualism that abstracts and separates the individual is an engine of a democratic and capitalist society (Augoustinos, 1998; Plaut & Markus, 2005), but it can also obscure the ways in which individuality is a product of history and

social connections. Being a person requires others and their context-specific ideas and practices. In fact, there is no such thing as a neutral, ahistorical, asocial person. People deprived of regular social contact fail to develop into competent, appropriately functioning adults. And so despite the appeal of the independent model, it should not be confused with an empirically derived model. Empirically, the picture could not be clearer. Virtually all behavior is dependent on and requires others.

A view of the person as necessarily interdependent can seem at odds with the highly prized notions of individual autonomy and control. Yet saying that other people constitute the self is not saying that other people determine the self. People are indeed individuals; they are intentional agents who can, if they wish, resist and contest the views of others—parents, priests, and politicians. At the same time, people everywhere live in social networks, groups, and communities, and so their thoughts, feelings, and actions are interdependent with the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others. A significant evolutionary advantage of humans is that they enter a world replete with the ideas and products of those who have gone before them; they do not have to build the world anew (Tomasello, 2001). People form bonds with others, help others, depend on others, compare themselves to others, learn from others, teach others, and experience themselves and the world through the images, ideas, representations, and language of others (e.g., Asch, 1952; Bruner, 1990; Shweder, 2003). Such social influence is both a product and producer of human nature; it is not a failure of independence.

People also know themselves and each other through social categories. As a result, they will necessarily be influenced by how others regard their social groups. Individuals *are* African Americans, Europeans, Chinese, Mexicans, and so forth. They *are* also women, Muslims, Republicans, Southerners, blue-state dwellers, doctors, joggers, and dog owners. Such social identities are highly mutable and shuffled by context and circumstance, but they have powerful consequences for behavior. People respond to and are responded to according to social categories that are significant in a given situation.

Like the idea that a person is a bounded, self-determining entity, the notion that race and ethnicity are primarily a matter of biological essences or entities is a resilient one that, once established, has proven difficult to dislodge from both the popular and scientific imagination. A shift in paradigm requires recognizing that although people differ in the inherited characteristics of skin color, eye color, or hair texture, which are often used to assign race and ethnicity, these characteristics are not the source of observed differences in character, intelligence, and other patterns of behavior. Instead, race and ethnicity are social categories that involve the historically derived and institutionalized ideas of those associated with the group and also those outside

the group (J. M. Jones, 1997; Omi & Winant, 1994; Richards, 2004).

The move away from thinking of race and ethnicity as biological entities began early in the 20th century, but there have been frequent roadblocks and detours. While America was caught in its first panic over too many immigrants and how to justify mounting inequalities, some social scientists took issue with the idea that the cultural, linguistic, and behavioral differences among people were the result of a set of inherent and fixed physical characteristics. For example, in 1911, when Franz Boas published *The Mind of Primitive Man*, which included studies on Native Americans along the northwest coast of the United States, he demonstrated that many of the most significant features of people's behavior (their language, values, ways of cooking, kinship ties, child rearing) cannot be tied to inherited bodily differences (Moya & Markus, in press). He argued that all these features overlap and vary independently of each other. For example, two populations that looked very similar could speak different languages and behave very differently from each other. Conversely, they could speak the same language and have similar cultural practices but, in terms of physical features, look very different. Boas's research thus allowed social scientists to understand the differences they noted among humans in new ways. Boas was a forceful opponent of the existence of a racial or ethnic hierarchy in which some groups are more evolved than others. Rather, he championed cultural pluralism, arguing that there are a number of equally evolved and viable human cultures. Boas and his students, including Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, found that differences in ideas and practices among people could account for the differences that had previously been ascribed to race. Horace Kallen (1924), Robert E. Park (1950), and Gunnar Myrdal (1944/1962) also challenged biologism and made the case that ethnicity was a social category.

As Omi and Winant (1994) explained, the concept of ethnicity was an extremely significant one because it moved thinking away from the biological thinking associated with race. Yet theories of ethnicity created their own set of problems, and one legacy of these problems is a veil of suspicion between those who focus on race and those who concentrate on ethnicity and culture. As the study of "ethnicity" took the place of the study of "race" in the middle of the 20th century, the assumption was that White European immigrant groups and racial minority groups could be understood similarly. Yet differences in historical circumstance, in structural barriers, in access to resources, and most important, in the terms of their acceptance by the White majority undermined any clear analogy between White ethnic groups and racial minority groups such as Blacks, Latinos, and American Indians. Underscoring this point, many groups rejected the ethnic identity ascribed to them and claimed instead a racial identity.



Even though the terms *race* and *ethnicity* are seldom defined in psychology, a view of race and ethnicity as dynamic sets of ideas and practices is the framework that implicitly underlies much of the recent research on race and ethnicity cited in the beginning of this essay. The conceptual location of race and ethnicity is finally shifting. Race and ethnicity are not inside people, nor are they entities that people have. They are instead a result of understandings distributed and institutionalized in the social context and used by people to guide their own behavior and make sense of the behavior of others. For example, in cultural psychology, ethnicity is defined in terms of cultural patterns, which are “explicit and implicit patterns of historically derived ideas and their embodiment in institutions, practices, and artifacts” (adapted from Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952, cited in Adams & Markus, 2004, p. 341; see also Atran, Medin, & Ross, 2005; Shweder, 2003). As Shweder (2003) noted, when ethnic groups are characterized in terms of patterns of ideas and practices, there is no assumption of an absence of dispute among those identified with the group or any claim of within-group homogeneity in knowledge, belief, or practice.

Highlighting the notion that there are alternate ways to think about race and ethnicity are recent studies examining differences in the theories people hold about the sources of racial difference and the consequences of these differences (Chao, Chen, Roisman, Chiu, & Hong, 2007; Williams & Eberhardt, 2008). Williams and Eberhardt (2008) found, for example, that those who held a biological conception of race as opposed to a social conception of race were more likely to endorse stereotypes, were more pessimistic about overcoming race-related inequities, had a less diverse group of friends, and explained inequality in terms of inherent racial differences.

Yet even as a more accurate and social perspective on race and ethnicity becomes established, simple and popular glosses of many new findings in genetics keep the biological hypothesis alive. Population geneticists are now able to analyze genetic material from humans sampled around the world, from different populations on different continents, and to ask how and why these individuals and populations are related (Feldman, Lewontin, & King, 2003; Lee et al., 2008). Notably, the populations used in these studies have very little correspondence with our everyday historically and politically derived constructs of race and ethnicity. Yet until people understand that race and ethnicity are social constructions, this work will doubtless continue to fuel the assumption that race is a biological thing (Feldman, in press).

### **Psychology's Role in Fostering Ambivalence**

Along with psychology's independent model of self and a biological model of race, a few unsavory aspects of our field's history contribute to the ambivalence about race and

ethnicity. Psychology is known for its fight against prejudice, and some of its most impressive contributions are associated with revealing the everyday mechanisms of discrimination. Yet psychology has also played a powerful role in confirming racial hierarchies and in creating and maintaining the idea of race as a natural or biological fact (Winston, 2004). As we consider this history and its consequences for our science, I believe the field's wariness toward race and ethnicity's influence will begin to dissipate.

Most discussions of race in psychology begin with the work of Francis Galton, who gave psychology the phrase “nature versus nurture.” Scholars disagree about the level of Galton's intentional racism and whether or not he fell within the continuum of Victorian thinking on the topic (see Fancher, 2004; Winston, 2004). Galton, however, did advocate eugenic breeding practices that he hoped would help elevate the inferior races to approach the level of civilized Europeans. Americans initially gravitated to Galton's ideas because of worries over the influx of Europeans from Southern and Eastern Europe.

Psychology's most specific and powerful role in the study of race and ethnicity centers around the idea of tests of intelligence. As American policymakers faced the task of classifying groups of people so they could determine who was fit for service, schooling, or citizenship, they readily adopted the idea of “mental tests.” James Catell, who worked with Galton and is known for his efforts to strengthen psychology's scientific credentials, was one of the first American psychologists to attempt to isolate and measure intelligence through a variety of psychophysical techniques, including measuring head size (Catell, 1890). His work was highly influential in the popularization of mental testing. The implementation of mass testing quickly fueled the already widespread assumption that intelligence was a fixed attribute of a person and that some persons, by virtue of their racial group association, were less intelligent than others.

For example, Stanford psychology professor Lewis Terman assessed the then-common belief that non-Northern European people were less intelligent than people of Northern European origin. Adapting a test that had been developed in France to measure students' performance on specific academic tasks and to assess their need for tutoring, he followed Goddard's (1914) lead and suggested that the test instead measured people's innate intelligence. After administering the test to non-Northern European immigrant children, Terman concluded: “The tests have told the truth. These boys are ineducable beyond the merest rudiments of training. No amount of school instruction will ever make them intelligent voters or capable citizens” (Terman, 1916, pp. 91–92).

In retrospect, these tests, which were touted as efficient ways of measuring the mental abilities of large groups of people, are more accurately described as tests of culture-

specific knowledge. Yet the hypothesis that good performance on an IQ test reflects familiarity with ideas, objects, activities, and approaches that are common in middle-class contexts never gained popular traction. Instead, differences among groups in test scores were left unexplained, and these IQ scores became facts that were used to explain differences in educational achievement (Winston, 2004). For example, at the end of Reconstruction, Black schools were seriously underfunded and in very bad condition. The vast differences in educational opportunities between Blacks and Whites might have been an obvious and ready explanation for differences in achievement, but then as now, the focus was on the individual and on what is inside the individual, and differences in test scores and school achievement were explained in terms of innate differences among racial groups. In spite of the research by Klineberg (1935), who found that lower scoring Southern Blacks who moved North and were integrated into better-quality Northern schools had scores equal to those of Northern-born Blacks, the prevailing argument took the by-now-familiar form that the races have fundamentally different psychological characters and destinies (Richards, 2004). The availability of an intelligence test came together with what was called the “Negro education debate” and set up a decades-long, on-again, off-again discussion on racial differences in intelligence.

Most psychologists are well aware of Jensen’s (1969) argument about the inherited deficiencies of Black children, of Eysenck’s (1971) defense of him, and of Herrnstein and Murray’s (1994) revival of these ideas. Yet as a field, we have yet to grapple with the powerful causes and consequences, both intended and unintended, of this persistent debate. Richards (2004) found the concern with the biological basis of race and with the possibility of inherent biological differences to be a “peculiarly American obsession” (p. 157). We use it as a convenient response to a host of unresolved social, political, and economic tensions around race. He did not claim that other nations are more enlightened with respect to race, only that they do not explain racial differences in terms of genetically definable natural categories.

Following World War II and the racist ideology of the Nazis, many psychologists just moved away from any discussion of race differences (Duckitt, 1994). Instead, they shifted their attention to the consequences of race—that is, prejudice and discrimination. Allport (1954) outlined the role of fear as a source of prejudice and defined prejudice as faulty or inflexible generalizations that arise from the need to categorize the world. His work gave rise to the idea of reducing prejudice through contact among groups (Clark & Clark, 1939; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Many additional psychologists led the charge for desegregation and promoting civil rights, with some even illuminating

psychology’s role in promoting racism and a racial hierarchy (e.g., Billig, 1988; Tucker, 1994; Winston, 2004).

Unpacking psychology’s role in fostering ambivalence about race and ethnicity will require a comprehensive understanding of American history and politics. For example, many psychologists turned away from the study of race and ethnicity following the controversy surrounding the infamous 1965 Moynihan report. This report, titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, located a “tangle of pathologies” squarely and rather intractably inside African American cultural practices. The report, published a year after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, argued that without fathers in the house, Black families fell into a cycle beginning with poverty, disorganization, and isolation and ending with delinquency and crime. At the same time, the report failed to highlight how the lack of educational and employment opportunities for African Americans set up the conditions for fathers to leave their families in the first place. In effect, the Moynihan report identified allegedly endemic flaws in African American families and then blamed African American families alone for them.

Because it failed to do the obvious—tie the culture of poverty to the many sociocultural contexts beyond the family that created and fostered it—the report succeeded in giving “culture” and “ethnicity” a clearly negative connotation among those interested in the lives of African Americans. It also set up a divide between culture and structure and used it to erroneously distinguish ethnicity and race. Cultural (and ethnic) explanations were seen as emphasizing what was unchanging about individuals and families, while structural (and racial) explanations were those that emphasized opportunity and changing social conditions. This divide persists despite the fact that new definitions of culture now locate culture and ethnicity not in attributes or values inside individuals but instead in both their material and conceptual resources—the ideas, practices, and institutions of various environments. Blacks and Whites can be productively analyzed both as ethnic groups and as racial groups, yet since the Moynihan (1965) report, researchers have been wary of characterizing the psychological tendencies of people in African American contexts, or other racialized contexts, for that matter. For example, only a handful of studies compare people in these types of contexts with people in European American contexts on their attributional tendencies, on their self-serving biases, or on ingroup/outgroup behavior. In contrast, there are hundreds of studies making ethnic comparisons of these tendencies among North Americans and East Asians. Examining the ways in which race and ethnicity shape experience is important in a diverse society. It is also critical to establishing how universal human capacities are shaped by and also shape their specific cultural contexts. Yet given the history of how racial differences have been explained and used,

wariness is warranted. A different way of responding can easily become not just another viable way but a deficient or inferior way.

The point of thinking through psychology's role is not to assign blame but to encourage the development of a different paradigm for analyzing race and ethnicity. A contextual and historical analysis of race and ethnicity reveals that they are not distinct, naturally occurring entities but are instead ideas (and practices and artifacts) about race and ethnicity, which have been socially produced and incorporated in our worlds. Psychologists could have had and can have other ideas that will ground our research and our worlds. Further, we can, for example, consider the assumptions underlying mental tests and the associations that accompany a statue of Agassiz and other such material representations. What other artifacts might take their place and what other messages might they communicate about race and ethnicity?

### Understanding the Ambivalence

The more one probes the philosophical, historical, and political background of the ideas of race and ethnicity and their study in psychology, the easier it is to understand the ambivalence around these topics as well as the reasons that the study of race, which is now largely the study of prejudice, and the study of ethnicity are now pursued largely separately in distinct literatures.

The mythical ideal of the self-determining individual who is equal to all individuals and free from the constraints of the social world is a powerful and pleasing one. It underpins the belief that the proper focus for psychology as the study of the individual is what is going on inside the head or brain of the person. Moreover, race and ethnicity have been so demonstrably problematic, it is easy to sympathize with a desire to "get beyond all that" and be "color-blind" or posttrace and postethnic (Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2002; Plaut, 2002). Such a stance, when animated by ideals of individual fairness and equality, can be very appealing, but it is directly at odds with a world still highly stratified by color and race, and it is also completely opposed by the voluminous data that reveal the multiple routes through which race and ethnicity structure psychological experience—both content and process.

In addition, the independent model of the self directly supports the idea that race and ethnicity are attributes of people, and thus that race-related issues and problems are the problems of the people who have race and ethnicity, obscuring the reality that making and maintaining difference is a relational process. The problem with being Black is primarily that of not being White in a society where power and privilege are positively associated with being White (Johnson, 2006). Yet most Whites still do not see themselves as White; it is others who have race. Race and ethnicity (and also racism and ethnocentrism) are not the

problems of individuals; they are features of social systems that people create and maintain through their participation in them. Race in psychology has been primarily about prejudice created and perpetuated through assumptions of difference and inferiority imposed by dominant groups on nondominant groups. The process of looking for difference has been persistently associated with shoring up the prevailing racial hierarchy and the idea that race was a biological entity. The differences in intelligence, character, and potential that have been identified throughout history have been identified by those who are not associated with the group. Those associated with the group have been left the task of disputing these claims of differences and trying to claim full personhood.

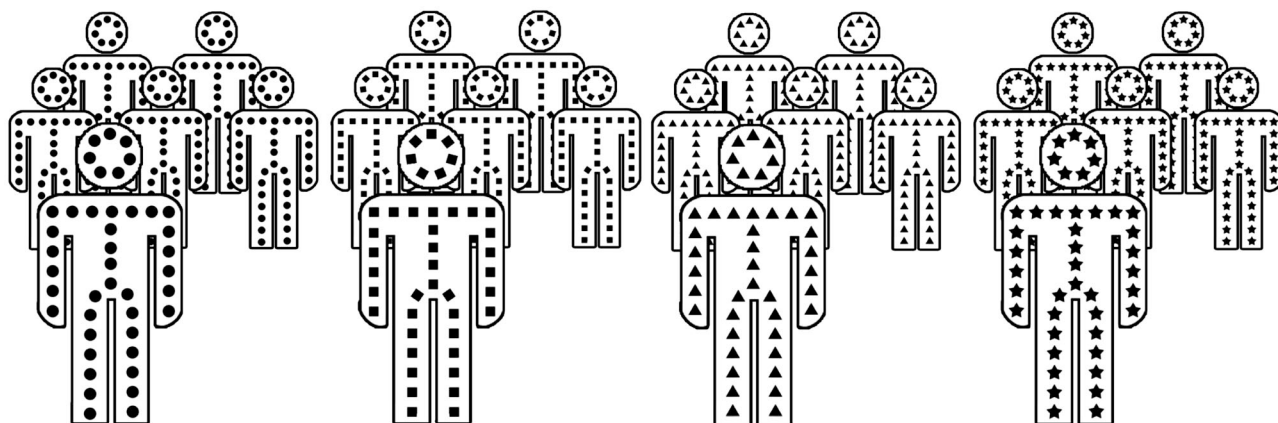
### Five First Propositions

The proposed integration of research on race and ethnicity from a variety of literatures and subfields within psychology could allow psychologists to devise a unified theory of why and how race and ethnicity will influence psychological functioning. Such a theory has the potential to develop a framework for the growing volume of empirical work, provide an extremely useful guide for practitioners in many domains of society, and reduce both the ambivalence and the polemic about race and ethnicity. As an example, a unified theory of race and ethnicity could include the following distinctions and propositions:

1. Race and ethnicity are not, as shown in Figure 1, inherent or essential properties that people or groups *have*. Instead, as shown in Figure 2, they are something people *do*. They are historically derived ideas and practices transmitted and held in place by people (both ingroup and outgroup) and by institutions. A key difference between race and ethnicity is in the primary source of the social distinction or difference. Both race and ethnicity are social distinctions that derive from the ideas and practices of those associated with the group as well as of those outside the group. In the case of race, the views of *others* predominate in defining the group, and the categorization often has little to do with how those associated with the group would describe their values, norms, or behaviors (see Figure 3). In the case of ethnicity, the views of those associated with the group are relatively more prominent in defining the group (see Figure 4). A given group can be analyzed as an ethnic group, as a racial group, or as both, but in all cases, differences and similarities in behavior should be linked with ideas and practices that are associated with these designations.

2. Ethnic differences refer to differences in frameworks of meaning, value, and ways of living (practices) that derive through association with a particular ethnic group and are noted, claimed, or appreciated by those associated with the group. Thus Japanese students may be relatively more motivated by failure feedback than by success

**Figure 1**  
*Race and Ethnicity as Essential Characteristics*



*Note.* Race and ethnicity are shown as essential and inherent characteristics within people that distinguish them from others who have different and other essential or inherent characteristics. The individual people shown in the figure are “circles,” “squares,” “triangles,” or “stars” because they have “circle,” “square,” “triangle,” or “star” qualities inside of them.

feedback, whereas American students are energized by success feedback (Heine et al., 2001). Or Asian Americans may prefer more calm or low-arousal emotional states, whereas European Americans may prefer more excited or high-arousal states (Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006). In these cases, the ethnic groups are likely to recognize and claim the hypothesized differences. These differences are qualitative differences that reflect equally viable ways of being. They do not establish a rank order among groups.

3. Racial differences, by contrast, refer to differences in societal worth that people outside the group impose and that people associated with the group do not claim and, in fact, often resist. These status differences determine a hierarchy among groups. For example, African Americans and American Indians are not only ethnic groups but also racial groups because dominant outgroups initially created and have assiduously maintained their boundaries and status. As a result, many of the patterns of behavior associated with these groups are responses to the dominant outgroup's treatment. Moreover, people associated with the group will not claim the characteristics attributed to their group (e.g., the academic underperformance associated with African Americans or American Indians) because these characteristics have usually been defined, identified, and maintained by those outside the group.

4. If race or ethnicity is salient in a social context (nation, neighborhood, classroom, family), it will influence psychological experience—thoughts, feelings, and actions—even if people are not aware of or do not desire or claim this influence. For example, a person who can be identified by others as Black or Chinese may say “race and ethnicity are irrelevant to me” or “I do not

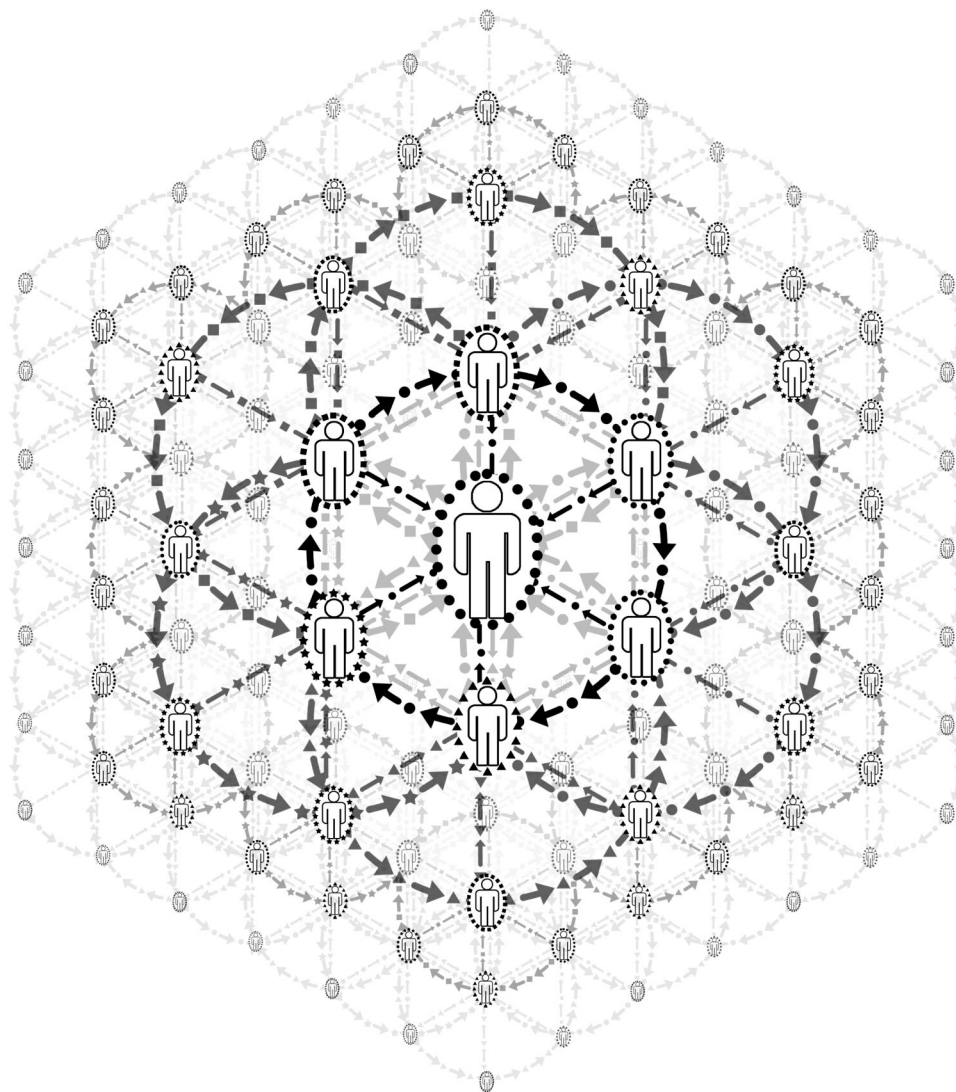
identify as Black or Chinese,” but this person will nonetheless be influenced by the ideas and practices associated with this classification.

5. The influence of race and ethnicity can be direct, explicit, and intentional, involving for example, the direct teaching of values. But it can also be indirect, implicit, and automatic, occurring outside of conscious intention, as, for example, when people incorporate normative patterns of thought, feeling, and action that are prevalent in a given cultural context or when people pick up patterns of association (Black = crime, American = White). This influence occurs as people engage with the ideas, practices, products, and institutions of particular contexts. The way that race and ethnicity will influence behavior depends on how others in a given context regard and represent the racial or ethnic group with which a person is associated. As people change contexts or encounter new ones, their experience and behavior will change.

### Concluding Remarks

I began this essay with the observation that Americans are struggling with race and ethnicity. Living effectively in a diverse nation and world requires understanding how ethnicity and race shape collective and individual experience. As a field, we have a great deal of knowledge about how race and ethnicity shape psychological experience, but this work is not well integrated. As a result, we have yet to succeed in giving this knowledge away to the many practitioners in education, business, counseling, and politics, who could use it as they negotiate ethnicity and race in every domain of life. With the goal of developing an integrated and applicable paradigm for how race and ethnicity shape psychological experience, I have tried to unpack

**Figure 2**  
*Race and Ethnicity as a Social Matrix*

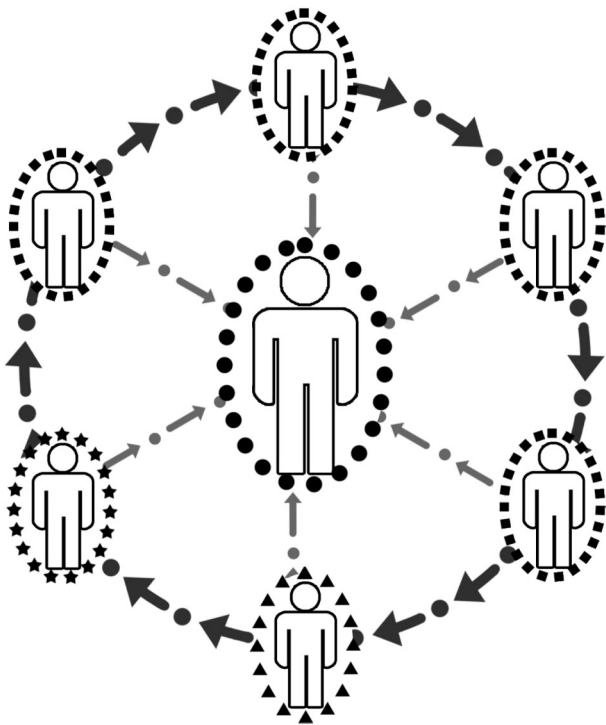


*Note.* Race and ethnicity are shown as social and mutually constituted processes—the result of active meaning making by self and others (note the bidirectional arrows connecting persons that create the matrix). As an example, the person in the very center of the figure is outlined by small circles, depicting that this person is not inherently a “circle” but becomes one in relationship with others. These others are represented by the six persons surrounding the middle person. They are connected by a ring of arrows and small circles, which portrays societally shared representations (e.g., laws, institutions, media, historically derived ideas) of what it means to be a “circle.” The smaller arrows directed toward the person in the center represent everyday actions (e.g., parenting, teaching practices, language) that personalize these ideas. Through the processes depicted by the arrows, note that each person in this figure is made (and makes others) into “circles,” “squares,” “triangles,” or “stars.” The people and rings of arrows in the lighter gray periphery denote that the mutual constitution of race and ethnicity has occurred throughout history. While current ideas and practices about race and ethnicity are probably not identical to those of previous times, they are nonetheless likely to reflect and be shaped by these earlier ideas and practices.

some of the most philosophical and historical antecedents of the nervousness and ambivalence associated with race and ethnicity in American society. We come by this ambivalence honestly. First, we (psychologists and people in general) are still stuck with a model of the person (see Figure 1) that is a barrier to our understanding of how and why race and ethnicity make a difference. People are not bounded, stable, autonomous entities but are instead social entities, made up of and constituted by relations with other

people and by the ideas and practices that are prevalent in their social environments. From the perspective of this more interdependent model of the self, people will necessarily be influenced by their ethnic and racial associations. It follows, then, that there should be multiple viable ways to think, feel, and act depending on the meanings and practices associated with various ethnic and racial contexts. This influence should not be seen as a weakness, a lapse of independence, or a moral failing.

**Figure 3**  
Race as a Social Process



Note. Race is shown as a relational process whereby the dominant members of society have the greatest influence on constructing what it means to be a "circle." In the figure, the dominant members are represented by the more numerous "squares" (though in some cases the dominant members are not the numerical majority). These others can impose what it means to be a "circle" on the person in the middle. Many of these imposed ideas and practices may serve to justify the status difference that the "squares" assume exist between themselves and the "circles." Often, the person in the middle has little say or control on how it is being made into a "circle."

Second, we in psychology and American society more generally have yet to fully grasp that race and ethnicity are not properties of the body or blood but are instead human inventions—historically derived and institutionalized ways of thinking about ourselves and other groups. Race and ethnicity are not, as some may worry, inherent or essential differences among people; instead, they are sets of ideas and practices with powerful life-altering consequences for individuals and for societies, but they are not inevitable.

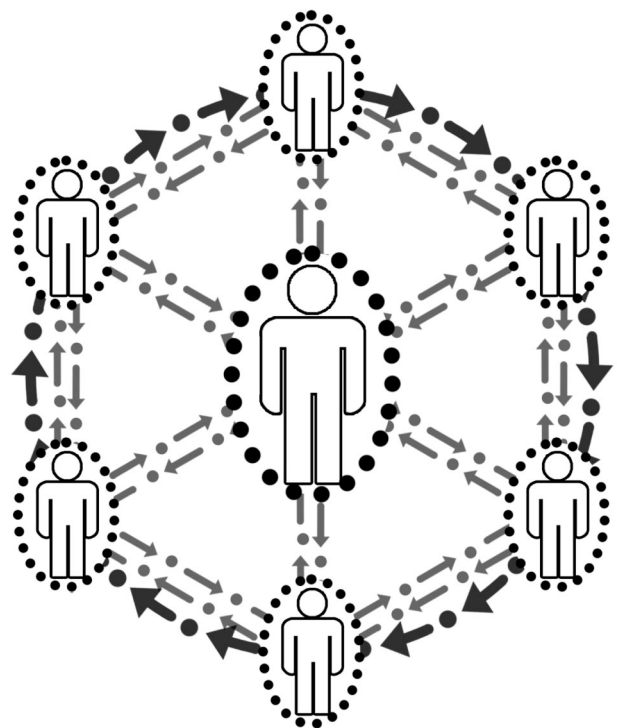
Very significantly, though the patterns of ideas and practices associated with race and ethnicity can powerfully influence or constitute our thoughts, feelings, and actions, this does not mean they *determine* our thoughts, feelings, and actions. As intentional meaning-making agents, we can actively reflect on, incorporate, resist, and/or selectively and inventively synthesize the ideas and practices of race and ethnicity.

Finally, a larger issue that underpins the widespread anxiety and ambivalence is the realization that race and ethnicity are central to the American story (Omi & Winant,

1994). The nation began with a claim of equality while living and maintaining a reality of inequality. Yet because Americans institutionalized the idea that race and ethnicity should not matter, we now find it easy to believe they really do not matter. Nevertheless, as indicated throughout this essay, this is not the case, and race and ethnicity are also central to psychology's story.

My hope is that through an integration of research from the various literatures on race and ethnicity, we might become less ambivalent about difference and develop a more historically and empirically informed understanding of how and why race and ethnicity matter. The proposed theoretical and empirical integration would allow us to contribute more forcefully to the American conversation on race. In the process, we may also see what is still relatively invisible—the basic and universal capacity of individuals to be shaped in their thoughts, feelings, and actions by the social distinctions (such as race and ethnicity) of the communities in which they participate and, in turn, their capacity to shape their worlds so that they reflect, perpetuate, or change these distinctions. In sum, ethnic and racial differences should not make us anxious but should serve as a springboard for theory and research. We need to recognize

**Figure 4**  
Ethnicity as a Social Process



Note. Ethnicity is shown as a relational process whereby those associated with the group have relatively greater influence on what it means to be a "circle" than those outside the group. The process is bidirectional, and all people associated with this group can negotiate what it means to be a "circle" with each other.

that any constructed differences, in this case race and ethnicity, can be a source of pride, meaning, and motivation and/or they can be a source of prejudice, discrimination, and inequality. It is how we understand the origins of these differences and how we decide to respond to them as individuals and societies that matter.

#### Author's Note

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