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Who Am I?

Race, Ethnicity, and Identity

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Race and ethnicity shape history, politics, schools, neighborhoods, the media, and science. They also shape who we are—our identities. Our identities, in turn, influence how we think, feel, and act. I define identity as a social process and then describe identities as complex, dynamic, unique, individual as well as collective, projects that depend on the context. As with all identities, racial and ethnic identities are a blend of self-regard and how one perceives the regard of others. In the United States people often say "I don't see color"; they assume that race and ethnicity are irrelevant to their behavior and strive to "get beyond them." Yet if race and ethnicity are organizing dimensions of a nation, society, community, neighborhood, workplace, or classroom, they will necessarily be important for the identities of everyone who participates in these settings. This will be the case whether or not people are aware of their race or ethnicity and whether or not they claim a racial or ethnic association as an aspect of identity. Race and ethnicity influence identity and behavior in a wide range of ways, and this influence depends on the majority or minority status of the group with which one is associated, with how others see this group, and with the particulars of the context. Race and ethnicity are often a source of prejudice, discrimination, and inequality, but they are also a source of meaning, motivation, and belongingness. Finally, I provide some examples from social psychological research to illustrate the variety of ways that race and ethnicity answer the "Who am I?" question and influence behavior.

WHO AM I? AFTER YOU READ THIS FIRST PARAGRAPH — BUT BEFORE YOU read the rest of the essay—jot down some answers to this deceptively simple question. You may have been asking yourself this question since

kindergarten and feel that you have a good idea of what the answers might be. Perhaps you have spent years making T-shirts and posters that display your answers to the world and now have no trouble filling in your profile information on social networking sites. Alternatively, you may find the question a relatively novel one and somewhat difficult to answer—at least without some more guidance about what kind of information is being requested. Yet, whether or not you have given much thought to this question, try to think about *what* you are thinking as you answer the question. Don't worry if your answers change as you read the chapter. This is not a test. There are no "right" answers—although some answers may make your life easier than others.

Every year, in a large introductory psychology class, I ask students to describe themselves. Stanford University has a very diverse undergraduate community; students come from throughout the United States and around the world. More than half of the students are non-white, and many Stanford students are not American. Consequently, when I do this exercise I get all sorts of answers to this question. Here is a sample of recent responses to the "Who am I?" question from some of the students who gave me permission to share them.

- *I am motivated, responsible, caring, serious, intelligent with many diverse interests, like to play Halo, tired from studying, Asian American.*
- *I am 21 years old, African American, a woman, a student, a teacher, a daughter, a sister, a granddaughter, a best friend and a girl friend. I am a poet, a dancer. I am an optimist/realist who seeks to find love. I am a child of God.*
- *I am unique, a student, a musician and a singer, a huge nut for pop-culture, a protector for my friends, a giving individual, can be brilliant when motivated, a son and brother, a person with "good toys," somewhat lazy, overly emotional, worried about exams.*
- *I am friendly, generally outgoing, talkative, a little lazy, determined, stubborn, self-righteous, a woman, agnostic Mexican American, proud of cultural roots, very sensitive, a little crazy, someone who likes to wear cute clothes.*
- *Tall, male, biracial, motivated when I need to be, but certainly not all the time, a leader when I want to be but it is fun to follow. I am nice, carefree, a huge slob, and most importantly rarely serious. I am going to apply to law school.*
- *I am a student, son, sociology major, Japanese.*

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As you can see from these examples, the "Who am I?" question asks people to consider their selves, or their *identities*. Like these students, most people can quickly generate at least eight or ten characteristics with which to describe themselves, and, if given a bit more time, they can come up with another ten or so. This deceptively simple question opens a window into how people think about themselves—the stories they tell about themselves, who they would like to be, and who they are afraid of becoming. These answers, when combined with those of hundreds of other students in this class over many years, reveal some clear patterns. These patterns provide a set of interwoven insights into what identity is and why we have the ones we do. This essay is about why we answer the "Who am I?" question in the way we do and how this matters for behavior.

DEVELOPING AN IDENTITY

In 1673, René Descartes, while attempting to establish a set of true principles that could not be doubted, made a declaration that has become a mainstay of Western philosophy. He famously wrote: "I think, therefore I am." Descartes was not wrong, but his statement captures only half of the truth. It is also the case that "*you* think, therefore I am." For a long time my own field, social psychology, has been preoccupied with and fascinated by the unavoidably social process that gives rise to the self or identity. In describing what he called the "looking glass self," psychologist Charles Cooley (1922) suggested that other people are the mirror in which we see ourselves. And according to G. H. Mead (1934), without other people to respond to our actions, we would not be aware that we "are" or that we exist. Taking all this together leads to two central insights about identity: A person's identity depends on *her own view* of herself, but it also depends on *others' view* of her. In the paragraphs that follow, I elaborate these and other key features of the concept of identity. A good understanding of identity is fundamental to an accurate conception of the social categories of race and ethnicity.

Identities Are Where the Self Meets Society

If you look back at the answers of the six students above, you can see that identities are complex, multifaceted, and dependent upon people's self-descriptions. Any one person's identity is a mix of personal characteristics (outgoing, optimistic, carefree, motivated); social roles (sister, friend,

teacher), activities (dancer, musician); preferences (likes to wear cute clothes); and descriptions of past and future states, particularly hopes (going to law school) and fears (worries about exams). Many people have considerable freedom to compose their identities as they like, choosing what to emphasize and what to downplay. Certainly, the way you describe yourself—as outgoing, an optimist, serious, giving, anxious, or with one of a hundred other attributes—is pretty much up to you. Even though many of the things you think about yourself come from the reflections of others, you can decide whether to think of yourself or to describe yourself in these ways. You are free to say "I like to dance," or "I am a dancer," or "moving my body to music makes me happy," or to make no mention of dancing whatsoever. Developing an identity requires selectivity and allows for considerable creativity, and to a large extent this depends on you. Clearly, then, your identity depends on how you identify yourself—that is, on how you think you are, or how you would like to be: motivated, nice, on your way to law school, and so on.

The second insight about identity is that our individual identities are, in part, given to us by *others*. A person's identity reflects her own list of who she is *but also* society's list of who she is, making it the meeting place between her and society. Many of the characteristics included in the students' responses above describe relationships and roles—I am a daughter, a brother, a student—and refer to many of the important categories that organize our communities and societies such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity. These aspects locate a person and give her a position in the world.

The realization that a person's identity necessarily involves others brings with it the realization that, with respect to her identity, she is not completely in control. Identities are only partly a matter of personal choice. The students in my examples can change their majors, their activities, and their preferences, but not all of their identity attributes are of this type. Unlike going to law school or being a dancer, most people have less freedom with respect to whether, when, and how to invoke or present identity characteristics involving our family relations or our ascribed race or ethnicity. To see what I mean, look back at the examples. Only one student gives her age. Five of the six say something that makes it evident that they are a male or a female. Five students mention either their ethnicity or race (Asian American, Mexican American, Japanese, African American, biracial), while one of the students mentions neither. In other words, some of the students mention their age, gender, race, or ethnicity and some do not—thus making it seem as though they have a

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choice regarding whether to identify themselves using these categories. Yet social psychological studies of identity reveal that whether people decide to emphasize age, gender, race or ethnicity in their own story of who they are, these characteristics will necessarily influence their identity and experiences in the world.

This is why identities are individual but also collective projects. A person cannot really answer the "Who am I?" question without thinking about what *other* people think of her. Her identity is not just her project alone; what her identity ends up being depends also on how other people identify her. Identities are, in fact, group projects, and as such, "you can't be a self by yourself." A person's identity depends on who she is in relation to others (a daughter, a girlfriend), as well as how others identify her (as a woman, as Mexican, as Japanese, or as African American).

Erik Erikson, one of the most important theorists of identity, described identity as what "the 'I' reflects on when contemplating the body, the personality, and the roles to which it is attached," and also as an implied constant conversation with the others with whom for better or for worse we are constantly comparing ourselves (1968, p. 217). Erikson's own life story demonstrates the power of others in determining one's identity. Erikson's parents, his Jewish mother and stepfather, had adopted him and raised him, giving him the last name of Homburger. Yet Erikson's biological father was Danish, and Erikson was tall, blond, and blue-eyed; he did not know the details of his birth until later in his life. What he did know was that during the weekend, at the Temple School where all the students were Jewish, he was teased for looking "Nordic." What he also knew was that during the week, at grammar school, where there were relatively few Jews, he was taunted for being Jewish. What identity is and how it is sensitive to the social context became a lifelong concern for Erikson.

Some of you may have had experiences that give you an insight into Erikson's identity predicament. Consider, for example, Sarah, an African American student in my class whose father identifies as black and whose mother identifies as white. In her junior year, Sarah enrolled in an overseas study program in South Africa. Arriving in Capetown, she identified herself as black just as she always had growing up in the Bay Area. The South African students, who have a very different set of historical and sociopolitical understandings of race, would have none of it. From their perspective, Sarah was obviously colored or maybe white, but certainly not black. Or consider Kenji, another student in the same class with Sarah. Growing up in Japan, Kenji never thought much about

his ethnicity except on trips with his parents to Taiwan and Hong Kong. He knew at Stanford that his ethnicity would matter, yet when he arrived, he was surprised to realize that he was regarded as "Asian"—not Japanese, not East Asian, just "Asian." As Sarah and Kenji discovered, the answer to a question that seems so personal and private—"Who am I?"—was not completely up to them. Other people are always involved. Sometimes others affirm a person's identity and see her the way she would like to be seen, sometimes they ignore or deny the ways she would like to be seen, and at other times they impose on her a set of categories or labels that she dislikes, resists, or finds irrelevant. The fact that a person's identity comes in part from her relationships to others leads to a third significant feature of identity: because identities depend on the contexts from which they emerge, they are dynamic and evolving.

Identities Are Dynamic

As the examples of Sarah and Kenji show, the answers to the "Who am I?" question partly depend on the context—the "where" in the web of social relations a person is located at any particular time. There are, in other words, spatial as well as temporal dimensions to identity. As is the case with buying real estate, the three rules of understanding identity are "location, location, location." Who you are at any given moment depends on where you happen to be and who else is there in that place with you. Looking across the six self-descriptions quoted earlier, most include some mention of being a student. This is not accidental. The "Who am I?" question was posed in the classroom during exam week. Two students refer to exams and studying. Had we asked this question later in the day when the students were in the dorm or in their family homes, some different aspects of the students' identities would have surfaced.

To illustrate the effects of location on identity, consider a study my colleagues and I (Kanagawa, Cross, and Markus 2001) did in which we asked students in the United States and Japan the "Who am I?" question in one of four different locations—alone in the psychological laboratory, with a friend in the cafeteria, in their professor's office, or in a classroom with many other students. We found that their answers varied by location at the local as well as the national level. The students in the United States were most likely to describe themselves in terms of attributes (creative, athletic, friendly), while the Japanese students were most likely to describe themselves in terms of activities (working part-time, preparing for exams). This pattern reflects cultural differences between the two groups of students in the way they construct their identities, an issue to

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which I will return in more detail later on in this essay. For both sets of students, what they said and how much they said about themselves depended on the immediate situation. For example, when thinking about who they were while in the professor's office, the Japanese students seemed to become very aware of the high standards others might have for them and were more likely to make critical statements about themselves than were the students who described themselves while sitting alone in the laboratory.

It is important to note that the "Who am I?" question captures only the part of identity that a person is conscious of at a given moment in a given context, like a snapshot or a stop-action film clip of the whole identity. People move around from place to place, and even when they stay in one place, the context around them changes. Consequently, identities are always in flux. They are continually formed, expressed, changed, affirmed, and threatened in the course of everyday life. As a person moves from home, to the classroom, to the store, to the bank, to a university office, to the gym, or to the home of a friend, the different social worlds she is part of can all work to shuffle the various aspects of her identity.

Identities Are Unique

Finally, we come to our last insight about identity: every identity is unique. Because a person's identity is a joint project between her and the others around her, and because it changes over time and according to her environment(s), it is her personal signature. Although we all share many contexts with others (families, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces) and may develop some aspects of our identities that are similar to theirs, in the end, our identities derive from our particular experiences in the world, which are unlikely to overlap completely with those others. So, for example, when two people attend the same school, how the school context influences their separate identities will depend on many other aspects of their lives—whether they are female or male, Hispanic or white, whether they get good grades, and whether they are attending college in 1990 or 2008. Even twins who have grown up in the same family, experienced many of the same events, and formed relations with many of the same people are unlikely to have completely overlapping identities.

In sum, identities are complex, dynamic, and unique. In addition, and most notably for a volume on "doing race," they are social and depend on the context. In other words, they are both private and public property—others have a say in who a person becomes. This is the case even if the

person says, for example, "I don't think of myself as black," or "I don't think of myself as white" or "I am Filipino but I don't think about it." If a social category matters in a given community, and if a person claims an association with this category, *or* if others associate her with this category, that category will have some impact on her behavior.

THE BEHAVIORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF IDENTITY

"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are" is a claim widely attributed to Anaïs Nin, a French-Cuban writer known for her diaries and journals. This statement summarizes one powerful role of identity: how a person sees the world depends on her identity, and her identity depends on her experiences in the world. For the sake of illustration, consider two students who attend the same university. As students at the same school, they will probably have some overlapping experiences. Yet a white female student from San Francisco majoring in biology is likely to have had a somewhat different social history and to have gained a different repertoire of experiences from those of a Latino student from Atlanta who is getting a degree in electrical engineering. As a result of having different histories and experiences, they are likely to develop different understandings about and perspectives on the world. Through our particular individual experiences we all begin to develop frameworks of meaning and of value—what psychologists call schemas—to help us make sense of the world and organize our experiences. These interpretive schemas guide us; they tell us what is real, what is true, and what should matter. Moreover, because they reflect who we are and how we are positioned in the world, these schemas are deeply interwoven with our identities. Since different identities indicate different locations in the various social networks and contexts of our lives, they will be associated with different perspectives and understandings. This is why paying attention to people's identities is an important part of understanding the social world.

In addition to telling us what to pay attention to and what to *see*, our identities also tell us how to think, feel, and act—what to do and what not to do (Markus and Sentis 1982; Oyserman and Markus 1993). They help us determine what is good, what is bad, what should count, and what should not. Identities, then, are both frames of reference and sets of blueprints for action. Given this foundational role of identity, any situation or event that is relevant to an aspect of identity can have a powerful impact on your actions.

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An easy way to see identities at work in organizing the world is to ask
a number of people for directions to the same location and then track
the reference points. The foodie/gourmet will tell you to go a block until
the Left Bank restaurant, then go halfway down that street until you
see Whole Foods Market, and slow down right before the driveway to
Peet's Coffee store. The contractor will tell you to go a block and a half
until Home Depot, turn right just past the big construction site, and look
for the driveway by the office building with all the new solar panels.
For the foodie/gourmet, food plays an important role for her identity, as
construction does for the contractor. These important aspects of identity
then become the point of orientation for the individual's behavior. In
other words, "we see things as we are."

Figure 13.1 illustrates some elements of the dynamic and rela-
tional process through which our social experiences in the world have
an influence on identity and behavior. Race and ethnicity, because
they are the focus of this essay, are shown in bold. However, depend-
ing on the context and the details of our particular lives, many other
social categories are also likely to be important in shaping our experi-
ences. Moreover, the influences of these different social categories will
intersect, depending on the particular social situation and which aspects
of identity are salient. As the earlier student self-descriptions suggest,
we see ourselves in terms of categories that blend race, gender, and
age—"21-year-old African American woman." Specifically, however, in

FIGURE 13.1 | **THE SOCIETY-IDENTITY-BEHAVIOR-SOCIETY CYCLE.**
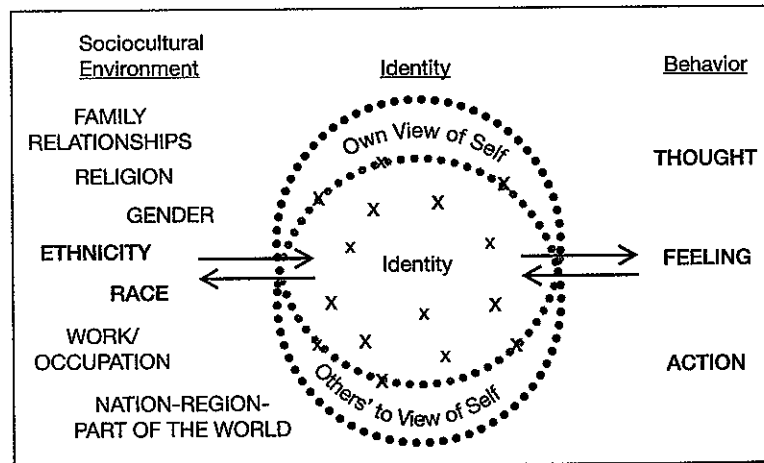
those spaces where race and ethnicity are salient, the social categories of race and ethnicity will influence identity. In Figure 13.1, identity is indicated as the meeting place described earlier—that is, as a combination of a our *own* view of *ourselves* with *others' views* of us. Sometimes, in some situations, these views converge; at other times or in other situations, they diverge. The Xs in the figure refer to those schemas about the self that derive from previous social experience and that provide the interpretive frameworks, the anchors, and the benchmarks for behavior. The role that race and ethnicity will play in identity depends on the details of our social experience both currently and as we were growing up. For some of us, the schemas related to race or ethnicity will be highly elaborated and chronically accessible for making sense of the world (indicated by the bold Xs); for others these schemas may be less dense and may become available only when something in a social situation makes them relevant. In general, however, our actions will reflect these schemas and will, in turn, reinforce them.

Nin's observation that "we see things as we are" suggests that identities can provide powerful clues for predicting behavior—our own and others. If we know something about a person's life experiences, we can make a reasonable guess about some features of her identity. From there, we can hypothesize about what her interpretive schemas are likely to be—that is, what she is likely to pay attention to, what she might care about, what might please her, what might make her sad, what might prepare her to fight, or even to die. Events that are consistent with a person's preferred identities (past, present, or future) or that affirm her in some way—put her in a good light, make her feel competent or proud— are likely to have consequences that she will regard as desirable. Events that are inconsistent with or that threaten a person's identity—make her feel anxious, incapable, humiliated, or ashamed—are likely to have undesirable consequences (see in this volume Steele, Chapter 14; Fryberg and Watts, Chapter 17). If the rule of thumb for understanding political events is to "follow the money," surely the rule for understanding behavior is to "follow the identity."

RACE AND ETHNICITY AS A SOURCE OF IDENTITY

Whenever someone participates in a group or community or society, the factors that are important in how the nation, states, cities, neighborhoods, families, and schools are organized will have some influence on who she

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is, whether she notices them, and whether she thinks a particular factor is important to her. If a category—whether it is race, gender, ethnicity, or religion—is associated with the distribution of power, resources, status, respect, knowledge, or other cultural capital in a particular context, that category will matter for identity. For example, in the United States, everyday life is powerfully shaped by the categories of race and ethnicity. A person's race and ethnicity influences where she is likely to live and who her friends are likely to be. They also predict her health and wealth as well as the quality of schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, medical care, and other life outcomes she is likely to have access to (Krysan and Lewis 2005; Massey and Denton 1992). Of course, there are many other factors that matter for these outcomes as well, but the extent to which race and ethnicity are important to a person's life chances often remains unseen or even deliberately ignored. After all, as Americans, we want to believe in the hope expressed by the American Dream—that all that matters for success is the willingness to work hard, and that who you are or where you have come from should not matter. Certainly, as the election of Barack Obama powerfully reveals, the American Dream can sometimes be realized. His election proves that an association with a non-mainstream racial and ethnic category does not, by itself, preclude inclusion and full success in our society.

Yet, in American society, the race or ethnicity you are associated with does still matter. It will continue to matter until the realities of American life—the policies, institutions, representations, and everyday social practices—reflect broadly the ideals of the American Dream. At present, race and ethnicity still afford some people a wide set of advantages and privileges that are systematically denied to others. However, not everyone is equally aware that this is the case; those in the minority ethnic or racial group are much more likely to understand this connection than those in the majority. Studies over several decades have documented the tendency of people in the majority not to be aware of their own race or ethnicity and so not to mention it as an answer to the "Who am I?" question (Tatum 2002; Oyserman 2008). This is the key to why some white people are perplexed about why people of color refer to or focus on their race or ethnicity. From the majority and/or dominant location, race and ethnicity are unremarkable and irrelevant. Like water to the fish, the racial or ethnic aspects of identity are invisible. In a now-classic piece on white privilege, Peggy McIntosh (1997) suggests that one of the hidden privileges of being white in the United States is that a white person can choose to ignore her racial identity and to imagine that she can be

"beyond race." She can claim not to see race and to regard herself only as a human being.

Defining Race and Ethnicity

One significant misconception about race and ethnicity is that they are products of the body or the blood—inherent qualities that are present and unchangeable inside a person from birth. Yet race and ethnicity are anything but natural. Rather than permanent, immutable characteristics of a person, specific races and ethnicities are organizational categories that have been created by humans over time as a way of orienting themselves in the world. As Paula Moya and I define the concepts in the introduction to this book, 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 use to distinguish groups of people from other groups and to organize their own communities. Throughout history, differences in the physical characteristics of people such as skin color, eye color, and hair texture have become associated—deliberately as well as inadvertently—with different meaningful behavioral outcomes, both positive and negative. Specific racial and ethnic categories (i.e., Asian, Black, Latina/o) are, in this way, human-made, as are the identities based on them.

The circumstance of dividing up the world according to visible physical and behavioral characteristics, while understandable, is not inevitable. It is not necessary for people to be divided by skin color, or according to the continent on which some of their ancestors might have lived several generations ago. The world could be arranged so that the physical characteristics now used to assign race and ethnicity do not matter for life outcomes. Of course, some people will argue that humans will always make some type of distinction to note who is "our kind" and who is not. Importantly, however, the basis of these distinctions can vary and, in fact, have varied throughout history. For example, in ancient Greece, distinctions were not made on skin color—this came with modernity and science—but in terms of language and belief. Most likely language and belief had as much of an impact on a person's identity and his life chances in ancient Greece as race and ethnicity do now in the United States of America.

Up to this point, I have been using the terms *race* and *ethnicity* simultaneously in a way that might give the impression that these two concepts

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are interchangeable. While they do overlap in meaning, and though they are similar in the way they are formed by others and have been reinforced throughout history to the present day, there is a very important difference between the two that must be addressed.

First, the term *race* specifically indexes a history in which group characteristics have been used to establish a hierarchy and to accord one group a higher status and the other group a lower status (Fredrickson, 2002). Therefore, categorizing people as a racial group draws attention to the difference in the power relationships among this group and other groups. Race is important for identity because if a person is associated with a racial group, her race is likely to have affected the way she has been viewed and treated by others. Many of the ideas and practices associated with particular races have been constructed and imposed on the group by those not associated with the group and are unlikely to be claimed by those associated with the group. When people do claim association with a particular racial group, they are often acknowledging, as a part of their identities, the history of unequal relations between their group and a dominant group. Categorizing people as an *ethnicity*, on the other hand, focuses attention on differences in meanings, values, and ways of living (social practices) that are often regarded as equally viable and need not establish a status ranking among the groups. People in groups called ethnicities are often relatively willing to claim or elaborate these differences between the groups they are associated with and other groups.

When a person identifies with an ethnic group, her focus is usually on how people in the in-group—those who identify with her group—think about their group. By contrast, when a person thinks about her group as a racial group, her focus is likely to be on how people in the out-group—those who do not identify with her group—think about her group. She is, moreover, likely to be highly aware of the nature of the power relations between her group and other groups.

Using the definitions of race and ethnicity presented above, most groups can be classified as ethnic, racial, or both. In practice in the United States, African Americans typically think of themselves as a racial group, Asian Americans more commonly identify themselves as an ethnic group, and Latino/as sometimes classify themselves as one or the other or both. Yet groups typically conceptualized as races can also be analyzed as ethnic groups, and ethnic groups can be analyzed as racial groups, a process that will certainly have consequences for identity. The case of Muslims with Middle Eastern heritage living in the United States is a good example.

Before the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, in most instances, Muslims with Middle Eastern heritage were considered ethnic groups, and members of that group identified themselves as Muslim and Middle Eastern, because that was the way they saw themselves. New meanings and representations are now associated with being Muslim and Middle Eastern, and those identified with this group must now deal with these imposed representations as they negotiate their identities. To the extent that being Muslim is being broadly devalued and Muslims are facing increasing prejudice and discrimination, we can say that this ethnic group is being racialized.

When and How Race and Ethnicity Matter

I have suggested here that if race and ethnicity are important in society, they will always have an impact on identity, and if they have an impact on identity, they will influence some aspect of behavior. Currently, in American society, one finds a great deal of anxiety around racial and ethnic identities. Many imagine that these social distinctions can be only the basis of division and conflict, and that our individual and societal goal should be to get beyond these group boundaries. Yet while racial and ethnic identities can certainly be the basis of prejudice, discrimination, and inequality (as many essays in this volume reveal), they can also—and sometimes simultaneously—be the source of pride, meaning, motivation, and belongingness.

Specifying the type of influence race and ethnicity will have for identity and action and whether it will be personally or collectively beneficial or detrimental for behavior is currently the focus of a great deal of exciting research and scholarship in the social sciences and humanities (see Alcoff 2006; Alcoff, Hames-García, Mohanty, and Moya 2006; Alcoff and Mendieta 2003; Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, and Nisbett 1998; Heine 2008; Moya 2002; Moya and Hames-García 2000; Prentice and Miller 1999; Steele, Spencer, and Aronson 2002). The evidence is now compelling. Race and ethnicity influence identity (1) whether or not people are aware of their race or ethnicity, and (2) whether or not they claim a racial or ethnic association (develop an elaborated self-schema) as an aspect of identity. When and how racial and ethnic associations and categorizations influence identity and behavior depends on a wide array of personal and social factors, including how others in a given context (e.g., nation, neighborhood, workplace, classroom) regard the ethnic or racial

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This research reveals that racial and ethnic associations can pattern behavior in ways that are surprising and not always immediately apparent. Very significantly, however, to say that race or ethnicity "influence" or "constitute" identity is not to say they *determine* identity. Race and ethnicity are among many influences that can shape identity. People are indeed intentional agents who, as I have noted, can be highly selective in what aspects of their experience they attend to and elaborate. Once a person becomes aware of her race and ethnicity and its potential role in shaping behavior, she can (1) *claim* this influence and emphasize its role in identity or (2) actively *resist* any influence of race and ethnicity. That said, given a society organized according to race and ethnicity, it would be impossible for her to escape *all* influence. Even if she actively tries to separate herself from these categories, the very fact of separating herself from them will affect her behavior and remind her that she has to contend with their effects.

Psychological Research on Race and Ethnicity

Because race and ethnicity are only an aspect of a person's overall identity, a person typically cannot parse her experience into its racial or ethnic components. Consequently, the question of how race and ethnicity influence identity and behavior requires a variety of approaches and some considerable research ingenuity. The "Who am I?" question that gave rise to the descriptions of identity at the beginning of the chapter is a quick and relatively easy way for a researcher to elicit some aspects of identity, but, of course, it advantages the preferred aspects of one's identities and those aspects of identity that are active at the moment. The "Who am I?" question does not tap those parts of our identities that we are not aware of or that are not under our personal control, and it does not reveal the ways in which our identities influence our behavior. For this reason, social psychologists employ a variety of other measures, including surveys and the observation of behavior in carefully controlled laboratory situations. In the next section, I describe a series of experiments done by researchers in social psychology that together illustrate three broad and surprising ways in which race and ethnicity shape behavior. These examples demonstrate how race and ethnicity can (1) provide frameworks of meaning, (2) provide motivation for behavior, and (3) be a source of belongingness.

HOW RACE AND ETHNICITY SHAPE
IDENTITY: A SAMPLER

Race and Ethnicity as Frameworks of Meaning

People do not make their lives from scratch. In the United States, for example, we receive many messages, sometimes explicit, sometimes tacit, about what Americans believe is valuable, moral, real, and true. These messages tell us who is good and who is bad, what is the right way to behave and what is not, what it means to be a mother, a father, a child, or even just a person. Typically, these answers are not verbalized or written out, and most often we are completely unaware that these questions have been asked and answered for us. Instead, we just go about our lives, unaware that we are living according to a particular set of norms and behaving in ways that seem to us to be the "natural" or "normal" or "human" way. These "natural," "normal," or "human" ways of interacting and being in the world are oftentimes shaped by race and ethnicity. It is in this way that race and ethnicity are powerful sources of designs for living and of schemas for making sense of the world.

The ethnic patterning of our thoughts, feelings, and actions typically comes into high relief only when we change contexts or meet someone who has been steeped in the idea and practices of another ethnic context and discover that the normal or obvious thing to think or feel or say now seems peculiar or inappropriate. To illustrate this point I start by describing some patterns of behavior in the United States.

In the United States it is important to be an *independent* person—an autonomous individual who knows what she thinks and believes and is in control of her actions (Fiske et al. 1998; Triandis 1991). This 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. To encourage independence and the development of personal preferences, goals, and perspectives, American lives are arranged to foster this independence. If they can afford it, 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. The importance of independence, of standing up for convictions, and of going your own way and doing your own thing is manifest in practices of language, caretaking, schooling, work, and the media. Americans did not just dream up this model; it is written into the Declaration of Independence (the founding document of our country) and

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is the result of thousands of years of Western philosophical and religious thinking. Under this view, "goodness" or morality involves maintaining independence and protecting the "natural rights" of each individual. These ideas and practices are representative of one way of being that is typical of people in America, particularly European Americans. For example, if your ethnicity is European American, then this way of understanding yourself as an independent individual is probably thoroughly embedded in your identity—not just in *what* you say about yourself (e.g., independent, go-getter, stand up for what you believe in) but also in the *way* you talk about yourself.

Consider this: the American students who described themselves in the opening examples might be surprised to find that their answers to the "Who am I?" question reveal a style of describing themselves that is very common among people who have lived in middle-class North American contexts where the independent model of self is common. It is, moreover, quite different from the style of people who have inhabited other contexts where different models of how to be a self are common. Specifically, the American self-descriptions contain many extremely positive trait adjectives—caring, intelligent, brilliant, friendly, outgoing, motivated, and only a few negative descriptors. This style of description suggests an awareness of the self as a separate entity made up of various specific attributes. These students seem confident and certain in their descriptions; they do not qualify their statements.

The independent model of the self is so thoroughly inscribed in American society (particularly in mainstream or middle-class European American contexts) that often we do not realize that other models of the self exist and that our behavior has been shaped according to one particular model of how to be a self. For example, in many ethnic contexts outside North America and Northern Europe (as well as some within these contexts), being a good or appropriate person requires being, not an independent person, but an *interdependent* person. When a model of the self as interdependent organizes social life, people understand and experience themselves less as separate autonomous individuals and more as interconnected parts of a larger social whole. From this perspective, actions necessarily involve an explicit awareness of others and adjusting behavior to that of others. Rather than separation from others, it is fitting in, being part of, and contributing to one's family or one's work or other social group that explains behavior. The identities that result from participation in worlds structured according to these ideas and practices will resonate with and reflect these ideas.

Take, for example, the student who identifies as Japanese but does not include a list of adjectives, as do all the other students who are American. Consider also the following two descriptions given by Japanese students at Kyoto University. These descriptions are from a study that made a careful comparison of patterns of self-description of students from one ethnic group, European Americans, with students from another ethnic group, Japanese (Markus and Kitayama 1998).

- *I do what I want to do as much as possible, but I never do something which would bother other people. Although sometimes I make a decision all by myself, if it is related to a group or it involves a very important decision, I always talk to somebody in order to make a final decision.*
- *I am rather gentle and respect harmony with people. I express my own interests to a certain degree, but I avoid conflicts almost all the time. I behave in order for people to feel peaceful.*

Both of these Japanese students start by describing themselves, but within the first sentence they mention other people—specifically, adjusting to, harmonizing with, and not bothering other people. An analysis of hundreds of Japanese descriptions reveals that an awareness of interdependence, a sense of the self as in a network with others and in relationship with others, is a common characteristic (Cousins 1989; Kanagawa et al. 2001). Further, these students, like many Japanese students, describe themselves with actions rather than with trait adjectives. Moreover, although both students describe themselves positively, they emphasize being cooperative, gentle, and peaceful rather than as happy, motivated, or brilliant.

This sense of the self as an interdependent part of the family is common among East Asian ethnic groups, like the Chinese and other many East Asian–origin immigrants who have settled throughout the United States. This interdependence has its roots in a Confucian tradition, which includes cultivating the social order, knowing one's own place in the social order, meeting the expectations of others, and being sensitive to the demands of the social situation (Hwang 1999; Tsai 2005). Just as the United States began with ideas and practices promoting independence that were present and central to the very conception of the United States, so too are the ideas and practices promoting East Asian ethnicities present from its earliest history. This fact demonstrates the power of

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These differences in ways of understanding the self—as independent or as interdependent—have many implications for identity and behavior. For example, when researchers asked Chinese American and European Americans mothers in Los Angeles what was important for raising children (Chao 1993), they gave somewhat different answers. European American mothers stressed nurturing and building the child's self-esteem and individuality, dealing with emotions, developing confidence and independence, and creating an environment that the child would experience as fun or enjoyable. The Chinese American mothers, by contrast, stressed the cultivation of a good relationship with the child, education, respect for and getting along with others, self-reliance and the maintenance of Chinese culture. These mothers had been brought up in an environment that encouraged and valued interdependent ways of interacting with others, and their own child-rearing practices reflected that. Just as the foodie/gourmet in the earlier example used messages related to food to guide her behavior, Chinese American mothers will use their schemas of interdependence to guide the way they raise their children. Both sets of mothers build on their own ethnic-specific understandings of the right way to be to. Chinese American mothers are more likely to create and promote opportunities for their children that will foster within them an appreciation for interdependence and working with others, while European American mothers will do the same for their children with an emphasis on promoting independence.

This process does not just occur at home; it also takes place in the world outside the home. For example, beginning at the preschool level, European American teachers arrange their classrooms and their lessons to allow students to have a great deal of choice in their activities. Through their choices, students can manifest their individuality, express themselves, and become active agents in control of their own behavior. When interdependence is given greater weight, as in East Asian homes and schools, the focus is on activities that teach children their proper roles and on how to adjust to and cooperate with each other. In Japanese classrooms, children are encouraged to work in groups of five or six to create a group poster or storyboard. They are given only a few sets of scissors and crayons so that they have to share and coordinate their efforts (Tobin, Wu, and Davidson 1989). The emphasis is on how to fit

in with others and on appreciating and understanding group life. The patterns of independence and interdependence characteristic of these different ethnicities are institutionalized in the lives that the children lead, and most often parents, children, and others are not aware that things could be otherwise. This speaks to the power of ethnicity as a set of ideas and practices that can shape identity, thoughts, feelings, and actions in multiple ways, many of them unseen.

Sociocultural psychologists are now examining models of the self in many ethnic contexts in the United States and around the world, revealing a variety of models for identity and how these differences shape thoughts, feelings, and actions. For example, they find that interdependence and the importance of relations is more central to behavior in many other ethnic contexts than it is in European American ones. In Mexican contexts, for example, knowing one's place in the social hierarchy is often emphasized; respect, deference, and obedience to elders are expected (Valdez 1996). Among peers, cooperation, solidarity, and similarity are more likely to be emphasized than difference or uniqueness. The family and not the individual is a foundational reality such that loyalty to and helping the family and extended family is often expected and required.

The European American notion that growing up means becoming independent and separating from expectations and constraints of family can be a peculiar idea for many Mexican and Mexican American students. Whenever I ask for a show of hands of those students who call home frequently, students with Latino backgrounds are decidedly more likely to raise their hands than are the European Americans students for whom independence and some separation from family is a desirable sign of maturity. A study comparing Mexican college students with European American college students asked students before solving a set of anagrams either to think of a good time they had had with their *family* or a time they felt good about *themselves* and then to write a paragraph about it. The European American students solved the most anagrams after they wrote about feeling good about themselves—in fact, most students wrote about a successful achievement. In contrast, the Mexican students solved the most anagrams after recalling a good time with their families (Savani, Alvarez, and Markus 2008). Affirming their identity as independent motivated the Americans, while affirming their identity as an interdependent family member motivated the Mexicans.

People who identify as Mexican American often take on aspects of both ways of being—the independence emphasized in European American

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contexts and the interdependence emphasized in Mexican contexts. For Mexican Americans, one recent study showed they were just as likely as European American students to describe themselves as independent, but they were decidedly more likely to also describe themselves as interdependent and connected to family. They were also more likely than European Americans to report that it would be difficult to be happy if someone in their family were sad (Mesquita, Savani, Albert, Fernandez de Ortega, and Karasawa 2006). For Mexicans and Mexican Americans, the emphasis on family and respect, as well as being independent, forms the foundation for their identities.

Interdependence in conjunction with independence seems to be a defining element of many African American ethnic identities as well. Although there are still very few comparative studies that examine the specific behavioral consequences of these identities, a growing literature reveals a moral imperative to help others (Burlew, Banks, McAdoo, and Azibo 1992; Hudley, Haight, and Miller 2003) and an emphasis on unity and equalitarianism, but also a strong focus on independence and self-expression (Jones 1999; Nobles 1991; Oyserman, Gant, and Ager 1995). For example, among the six self-descriptions at the beginning of the essay, the student who identified herself as African American was in fact the most explicitly interdependent in her self-description, characterizing herself in terms of her relationships as a "student, a teacher, a daughter, a sister, a granddaughter, a best friend and a girl friend." Notably, however, another student who identified as biracial did not use any relational or role terms in answer to the "Who am I?" question. Considering these two examples together underscores that ethnicity is a dynamic set of ideas and practices. How people engage with them and respond to them depends on how much exposure they have had to them, what other ideas and practices they have been exposed to, and very importantly, on other important social distinctions such as gender and social class.

These examples illustrate the ways in which race and ethnicity create frameworks for identity. A person's racial and ethnic contexts are the sources for something that is typically invisible to her; they do not provide the exact answer to the "Who am I?" question, but they specify for her what it means to be a person, and set up some general tasks that will guide her actions. Additionally, a person's ethnic and racial contexts can be the source of models of emotion, (i.e., how, when, and what to feel), and models of morality (i.e., what is good, what is bad, what is fair, what is just, what is well-being, satisfaction, or the good

life, etc.). Research that reveals these various models and their behavioral consequences is important because it reveals that *everyone is ethnic*. Thus, everyone's way is a *particular* way, and no one person is truly just "standard issue." Thinking, feeling, and acting are not neutral acts, nor are they simply products of the brain and body. Instead, our actions have a deep structure that derives from who we are and how we are located in the world, and one important feature of how we are located is our race or ethnicity.

Race and Ethnicity as Motivators for Behavior

The studies discussed in the previous section explored the consequences of ethnicity by grouping people based on their ethnic background and examining differences in thought and formation of identity. Other social psychological studies have examined how ethnicity and race shape behavior by asking people directly about the racial and ethnic aspects of their identities or by observing actual behavior when race and ethnicity are made salient.

As discussed in the previous section, European American ethnicity is defined by ideas and practices that promote identities that value independence and separation from others, while East Asian ethnicity fosters identities that value interdependence and being in connection with others. To examine how identities form around independence or how interdependence influences behavior, one team of researchers examined the ways these two ethnic groups differed in their motivation as a function of their identity. They did this by giving eight-year-old Asian Americans and European Americans a choice of which category of five-letter anagram puzzles they wanted to solve (Iyengar and Lepper 1999). The goal was to unscramble the letters and make a word; then the researchers counted how many puzzles the children solved correctly. The puzzles were equally difficult in all categories and differed only in their labels. The performance of the eight-year-olds who chose for *themselves* which puzzle to solve was compared to the performance of a group of eight-years-olds who believed their *mothers* chose which category of puzzle they were to solve. As American educators would predict, the European American eight-year-olds solved the most puzzles correctly when they chose the puzzle category *themselves*. In contrast, the Asian American children solved the most anagrams correctly when they solved the anagrams their *mothers chose for them*.

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For European American students—who are socialized with the ideas of individuality and independence—it is an imposition to have another person, particularly one's mother, pick the type of puzzle to solve. Even at the tender age of eight, these students experience their mother's choice as an act that threatens their individuality and freedom. They identify with being able to make their own choices; they want to be under no one else's power but their own. When the students in the study worked under this threat to their independence, they performed less well, solving few word puzzles. In contrast, the Asian American students are likely to have identities that value the ideas of fulfilling parental expectations and honoring their families. They are likely to have understood this same activity—their mother's choice of the puzzle—not as an imposition on their freedom but instead as an attempt to guide them or support them. What was important was to perform well. This study is a powerful example of how the ideas and practices associated with one's ethnicity can shape meaning, motivation, and behavior, even when there is no mention of race and ethnicity.

Yet, not everyone who is associated with a racial or ethnic group is going to be influenced by the ideas and practices of the group in the same way. In fact, maybe it is an important part of your identity to *not* be a part of your racial or ethnic group. This, too, will have consequences for behavior. For example, Oyserman and her colleagues (Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, and Hart-Johnson 2003) wondered whether the way students think about their own racial or ethnic group would make a difference for their motivation and performance. To study this question they surveyed an integrated middle school where students were African American, Hispanic, or American Indian and asked the following question: "What does it mean to you to be a member of your race or ethnic group?" They found three types of answers to this question. Some students answered with what the researchers called in-group responses, or responses indicating the students embraced being a part of their race or ethnic group as part of their identity. For example, one student responded, "It means the world to me, I'm glad of my ethnicity. I wouldn't want to be anything else." Another student said it means "eating the foods, talking to my friends, and color of my complexion in the mirror." These two students clearly identified with their racial or ethnic group. They had a *racial* or *ethnic self-schema*.

Other students in the middle school ignored or resisted their racial or ethnic label; they attempted to reject, as significant for their identity,

being a part of their racial or ethnic group. One said, "Really my race does not matter to me." One responded, "Nothing," and another said, "It means nothing to me. I think it does not matter how you feel about your ethnic group." These students were *aschematic* (or *without a schema*) for their race or ethnicity. A third group of students showed a concern for their in-group *and also* a concern for their connection to the larger or mainstream society. In other words, these students had a *dual schema*— they claimed for themselves their racial or ethnic identity *as well as* their membership or engagement with larger or majority society. For example, in response to what it means to be a member of your race or ethnicity, one student said, "Every time that I step out of my house I feel as though someone is waiting for me to screw up. So I feel that as a black male I have a responsibility to set a good example for me in the world and for the people of my race." Another said, "Being a member of this race helps me strive to be a successful person in the world [where] we African Americans are minorities but also members." A third student answered, "I am good at most things most people are good at and proud of what African Americans did for the world." When these three groups were compared for their end of quarter grades, the students who received highest last quarter grades were those who had a dual schema—an identity that included an awareness of their in-group and also an awareness of the role of their in-group in the larger mainstream society.

In a second study, the three groups of students—those with a racial self-schema, those without a racial schema, and those with a dual schema—were given a novel mathematical task and asked to solve the problem in as many ways as possible. Specifically they were asked to use the numbers 2, 3, or 7 to obtain the number 36 by adding, subtracting, multiplying, and using the number as many times as they wanted. Again in this study, those students who ignored their racial or ethnic identity or who claimed it did not matter to them performed less well, whereas those students with a dual schema had the most motivation and persisted the longest on the task, both in the laboratory and at school. In other words, an identity defined in terms of both the in-group and the mainstream group was linked to better performance, and this dual schema seems to have served as a buffer against the negative representations that are prevalent in the world. When an event in the environment makes one's race or ethnicity salient, identifying with both the in-group and the mainstream can be helpful. Because you see the world as you are, you are likely to think about positive representations of yourself as an in-group member *and* positive representations of yourself as a member

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of the larger society. When these positive representations come to mind, they can both be used to confront and contest the prevalent negative stereotypes.

Other researchers have examined the behavioral consequences of race and ethnicity not by observing the behavior of those associated with the group or by asking them about what their group means to them but by making the views *other* people hold about their group more salient. In a series of studies, Steele and his colleagues (Steele 1997; Steele et al. 2002; see Steele, Chapter 14 of this volume, for a full discussion) made the views that *other* people hold about one's group more or less relevant and examined how these views can threaten identity and have a detrimental effect on academic performance. In particular, they showed that those in the minority in society, like African Americans in the United States, can experience a threat to their identity because of the fear of being seen in a negative light from their racial group association. If there is some cue in a situation—as in a classroom—that students might be judged in terms of this pervasive stereotype or if there is a worry that they could do something that inadvertently confirms it, their academic performance can suffer.

To explore this idea, researchers set up an experiment in which a group of black college students and a group of white college students were matched for their ability level so that even before the study began the experimenters knew that these students' ability level was the same. Then the experimenters mentioned to half the students before taking the test (a difficult section of the GRE) that the test was a measure of verbal ability. This instruction made the common stereotype that black students do not perform well academically directly relevant to the student's performance on the test. For the other half of the students, nothing was said about the test being diagnostic of ability and instead they were told that the experimenters were trying to determine how problems are solved.

While there was no difference between black and white students in the "nondiagnostic" or problem-solving condition, when the black students thought that the test was diagnostic of their ability, they performed significantly less well than whites. Most important, these students did not need to *believe* the pervasive stereotype about their group and low ability or performance. When the identity threat was present, *simply being aware* of the stereotype was enough to depress these students' performance. When, on the other hand, the threat was lifted from the situation—that is, when they were told that the test was not diagnostic and so they did not have to worry about how their performance would

reflect on their group—their performance improved. These studies suggest that a person does not have to personally identify with her racial group to be affected by the group. Simple knowing how others see the racial group she could be associated with is enough to have an effect on a person's performance.

Race and Ethnicity as a Source of Belongingness

Finally, our identities locate us in social spaces and tell us where we belong. Often people are unaware of this very important consequence of their race or ethnicity in defining who they are until something or someone questions their belongingness. Cheryan and Monin (2005) examined what happens when a person is not recognized as a member of an important group that they claim as self-defining, that is, when their belongingness is denied, again highlighting the importance of others in defining identity. Even when you claim race or ethnicity as part of your identity, other people can contest this claim. The focus of this study is the predicament of Asian Americans who report that others often ask them "Where are you *really* from" as if they are not fully American or do not belong in America to the same extent as other Americans.

In this study white Americans and Asian Americans were approached on campus and asked, "Do you speak English?" These students were compared with those in a control condition who were not asked this question. The researchers predicted that while this question would not bother white Americans, it would be subtly but powerfully threatening for Asian Americans because it would bring to mind a discrepancy between their own view of themselves as Americans and others' view of them as foreigners. The researchers also predicted that they would want to assert their American identity in some way, to show that they belonged to this country. Following the question, the participants were given a questionnaire that asked them to list as many American TV shows from the 1980s as they could remember. These students had grown up in the '80s and so knowledge of these shows would indicate a familiarity with American popular culture. In the control condition in which no question was asked, white Americans spent more time recalling shows than Asian Americans. Yet in the "Do you speak English" condition, it was the Asian Americans who spent more time remembering shows from the 1980s. So for the Asian Americans who claimed being American as part of their identity, this threat to their belongingness set up by the question

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about their language served as a motivation to expend more effort to recall the shows and prove and validate their identity as Americans.

This study is a striking reminder that people are very sensitive to whether they belong in a situation and will often seek out ways to show that they do belong. Cohen and his colleagues (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, and Master 2006) reasoned that if the group with which you are associated is in the minority and regarded negatively by many in your community or society—an experience that is common for many who are Latino American or African American in the United States—you are very likely to feel unwelcome and as if you don't belong unless someone does something to explicitly suggest that you do. They reasoned that many racial or ethnic minority students may lack feelings of belongingness in society in general, particularly in schools, and so have more difficulty identifying as a student or as a learner. To test this idea they carried out a series of studies in which black and white middle school students were randomly assigned to an intervention group or a control group. Students in the intervention group were asked at the beginning of the school year to identify what mattered to them most—family, art, religion, athletics, and so on—and then to write a paragraph explaining why. The invitation to write about themselves was a simple indication that someone in the school was interested in them. Those in the control group were asked to select something that didn't matter to them and explain in a paragraph why it might matter to someone else. At the end of each semester Cohen and colleagues collected the students' grades.

The results point to the importance of identity. In each year of the two years of the experiment, the black students who wrote about what was important to them scored better (about one-third of a letter grade) than those in the control group. No such effect was observed for the majority white students who presumably felt relatively more at home at school and as if they belonged from the very beginning of the year. This very simple, one-time writing task seems to have had a positive effect on the performance of those students who might question whether they are welcome in the school. Writing gave them an opportunity in the school setting to present who they were and to foster a sense of identity with the school.

CONCLUSION

This brief survey of some recent empirical studies in psychology reveals that race and ethnicity can influence behavior in a wide variety of ways.

The studies sketched here are among hundreds that further reveal the powerful and diverse behavioral effects of racial and ethnic identities. They show that we can be aware of the influence of race and ethnicity on our behavior or that these effects can be completely outside our awareness. Sometimes these influences can be intentional as in the direct teaching of ethnic or racially specific ways of being, and sometimes their influence is indirect and unintentional and comes about as people absorb normative patterns of association (e.g., black = crime; American = white). The effects of race and ethnicity can be detrimental to individual behavior, impairing motivation, performance, or engagement; but they can also be beneficial, providing meaning and enhancing motivation, performance, and belongingness. The effects of race and ethnicity on identity and behavior are highly variable; they depend on the particular social context and the cues these contexts contain about the meaning of race and ethnicity. Moreover, many of the effects depend on other people—sometimes the actions of specific others and sometimes others in general. What is clear, however, is that race and ethnicity matter for identity and for answering the "Who am I?" question.

Although it is a popular and comforting idea that we might ignore or go beyond race and ethnicity and be color-blind or post-race, the psychological study of the consequences of race and ethnicity reveals that given the current patterning of the world, this is probably an impossibility. If race and ethnicity matter for the ways that communities, societies, and nations are organized and how life is lived in these spaces, they will necessarily matter for identities because identities are the meeting place of individuals and societies. Race and ethnicity then become sources of identity—sources of our selves and of who we are. And as we have shown here, we see (and react to) the world not as it is, but as we are. This is not a weakness or a moral failing or an expression of racism or ethnocentrism. In every context, significant social distinctions shape identity, which, in turn, shapes behavior and society. The operation of this cycle is a social psychological fact. While it is not possible to live outside the society-identity-behavior-society cycle, the cycle itself is a result of human activity over time. Ultimately the consequences of the cycle will depend on how people individually and collectively make sense of race and ethnicity and on whether and how they build it into their worlds. As I noted at the beginning of the essay, there are no right answers to the "Who am I?" question. The answers can and do change frequently, yet for better and for worse, the answers will always shape behavior, reflecting one's own—but also others'—thoughts, feelings and actions.

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