EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS AND TRENDS

SEE Volume 2: *Employment, Adulthood; Flexible Work Arrangements; Gender in the Workplace; Job Change.*

EMPTY NEST

SEE Volume 2: *Midlife Crises and Transitions.*

ETHNIC AND RACIAL IDENTITY

What does the term *racial and ethnic identity* mean? Briefly, when something is an identity, it is a part of self-concept. When something is part of self-concept, it influences how people make sense of themselves, what their goals are and how they try to achieve them, as well as the interpretations they give to others' responses to them. Racial and ethnic identity includes three basic components: (a) membership—knowledge that one is a member of particular racial and ethnic groups; (b) beliefs—beliefs about how the groups one is a member of fit into broader society and how members of these groups act, what they believe in, what their goals and values are, and the strategies they use to attain these goals; (c) action readiness—readiness to act in ways that are congruent with beliefs about group membership.

Race and ethnicity can be distinguished in theory: Racial categorization is often associated with beliefs about common physical characteristics that are thought to distinguish groups; these beliefs are often associated with power structures within a society. In contrast, ethnic categorization is often associated with assumed immigration histories and beliefs about shared nationality, history, language, and traditions. However, for a number of reasons, it may not be useful in practice to distinguish them. First, race and ethnicity are both social constructs, that is, their meaning is based on socially agreed-on categorizations, rather than on biologically meaningful categorizations. Second, both involve "imagined communities," groups with which one feels a sense of common fate or allegiance and a sense of common ancestry or kinship, whether or not one personally knows many group members. Third, in modern societies race and ethnicity intermingle. Therefore, this entry discusses racial-ethnic identities rather than attempting to separate the two concepts artificially.

Race and ethnicity are not always part of self-concept, but they often are because race and ethnicity carry social meaning and therefore are useful in making sense of oneself and one's experiences with others. As noted in the three-part operationalization of racial-ethnic identity, racial-ethnic identity includes more than simple knowledge of group membership, it includes both beliefs about one's group and readiness to take action congruent with these beliefs (see three-part operationalization, above). In this way, people's life courses will in part reflect their racial-ethnic identities.

SELF-CONCEPT AND IDENTITY

The self is a basic cognitive structure; distinguishing self from non-self is an early developmental milestone. Self-concept is a theory about oneself, what one thinks about when one thinks about oneself; the self is experienced as content (who one was, is, and may become, how one fits in); and process (what one's goals are, what one is trying to do). The three basic self-processes are self-protection, self-improvement, and self-maintenance. Self-protection is involved when one's goal is to feel as good about oneself as possible given circumstances. Self-improvement is involved when one's goal is to critically focus on one's limitations in order to make changes for the better. Self-maintenance is involved when one's goal is to provide a stable anchor of self-knowledge from which to make predictions about self and others. A person's self-concept is involved in both intrapersonal processes (e.g., memory, motivation, and self-regulation) and interpersonal processes (e.g., interpretation of social contextual cues, reactions to feedback, relational style).

The idea of self-concept originates in the early theorizing of psychologist William James (1890). Within sociology, the term *identity* is more commonly used. However, modern usage of both terms overlaps in that individuals are assumed to define themselves with a multiplicity of self-descriptions. Thus, self-concept and identity are now seen as multidimensional, multifaceted, and dynamic structures, rooted in and sensitive to social contexts. For clarity, in this entry we operationalize the self-concept as containing diverse, potentially conflicting personal and social identities and self-schemas (cognitive generalizations about the self derived from past experience). Identities can encompass personal traits, feelings, images, and knowledge about the self as well as social memberships, social roles, and social statuses. Some of these identities are more central or "salient" to one's self-concept, while others are less central.

Irish Step Dancers. *Irish step dancers performing in a St. Patrick's Day parade.* © BLAINE HARRINGTON III/CORBIS.

RESEARCH ON RACIAL-ETHNIC IDENTITY

Theoretical development and empirical assessment of racial-ethnic identity draws on social identity theory. According to this perspective, social identities are the parts of self-concept derived from group memberships and adherence to group values (Tajfel, 1981). Social identities include at least three parts: information about group membership (that one is a member of one group and not of another), information about the nature of group boundaries (how permeable is membership, can one quit the group, how do others view one's group), and information about what it means to be a group member (including the norms, values, goals, and attitudes of one's group). From this perspective, racial-ethnic identities may influence behavior by providing information about group norms and expectations and by shaping a person's interpretation of social and contextual feedback (Oyserman, 2007). Perceived group norms can be positive. For example, Oyserman, Gant, and Ager (1995) found that when reminded of their racial-ethnic identity, African American students persisted more at math tasks if they believed that doing well in school was an in-group expectation. Perceived group norms are not always positive though. For example, Oyserman, Fryberg, and Yoder (2007) found that middle school, college-aged, and adult participants were less likely to believe that engaging in a healthy lifestyle is beneficial to one's health if they were reminded of their racial-ethnic identity and believed that people in their in-group did not engage in these behaviors.

Follow-up research suggests that among adult currently smoking African American women, smoking is more likely to be perceived as racial-ethnic identity congruent than it is among non-smokers. That is, smokers are more likely to believe that smoking was in-group normative, something that African Americans commonly do.

Social interactions are central in shaping both personal and social identities, including racial and ethnic identities (e.g., Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Most generally, who one is in the moment is defined in part by how one's interaction partner makes sense of oneself. In some sense, people have as many versions of themselves as they have interaction partners because different partners facilitate, encourage, and provide role models for different ways of being a self. Although active exploration of one's identity is considered

a primary developmental task during adolescence and young adulthood, self-concept and identity are not simply formed at this time and stable thereafter. Rather racial, ethnic, gender, and social class identities begin to develop in early childhood, and changes in social contexts influence identities throughout the lifespan (Demo, 1992). Whether race and ethnicity are part of identity and what this entails is likely to shift as well.

Early research on racial-ethnic identity focused on its content and possible implications for self-esteem (Clark & Clark, 1947; Proshansky & Newton, 1968). In the United States and elsewhere, this line of research focused on historically stigmatized groups (in the United States, African Americans and Jewish Americans). Researchers assumed that the experience of racism, hatred, or disdain from others toward one's racial-ethnic group would be internalized and result in self-hatred and self-disdain (Grambs, 1965; Nobles, 1973). However, the data did not support this idea, so conceptual and empirical models were refined to distinguish a sense of in-group (that is, persons sharing one's social group) worth and knowledge about out-group (that is, persons belonging to other social groups) responses (Cross, 1991). These newer models emphasized the importance of feedback from close, supportive in-group others (e.g., family, kin networks) for feelings of worth, as separate from racial-awareness, which focused on the negative attitudes and beliefs of out-group members (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; Phinney, 1996). As would be predicted by social identity theories, researchers demonstrated that a positive sense of self-worth was associated with feelings of in-group connection or pride. After the resolution of this conceptual debate, researchers developed new lines of inquiry, focused on identifying consequences of the content and structure of racial-ethnic identity for action, mood, and cognitive processes more generally.

Some evidence suggests that content of racial-ethnic identity matters in that how one describes one's racial-ethnic identity predicts behavior over time. In particular, how the connection between in-group membership and membership in broader society is described seems to influence how much individuals engage in the institutions of broader society. In terms of academic outcomes, teens who describe themselves only in terms of in-group memberships (e.g., American Indian, Black, Latino) were less likely to persist in academic tasks than teens who both described themselves in terms of in-group memberships and saw in-group members as integral members of broader American society, not as separate from broader American society (Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, & Hart-Johnson, 2003). Similarly, in terms of health outcomes, women who described themselves as African American were more likely to obtain a mammography than women who described themselves as Black

(Bowen, Christensen, Powers, Graves, & Anderson, 1998). In each case, it seems to be that identity terms convey beliefs about how much the in-group fits into broader society.

Research examining the content of racial-ethnic identities has shown that not all persons incorporate race-ethnicity into their identity (Oyserman et al., 2003). For some individuals, membership in a racial-ethnic group is simply a social fact about oneself, something that may be true but is not self-defining. However, in societies in which race-ethnicity is used by others to make predictions about what one is like and one's skills and abilities, not including race-ethnicity in identity is likely to leave one open to the negative psychological consequences of negative stereotypes. Race-ethnicity is likely to be incorporated into one's self-concept when it feels meaningful—when race-ethnicity has an impact on how in- and out-group others respond to oneself. Like other social identities, racial-ethnic identities are multidimensional; that is, one knows many things about oneself as a group member, not all of which are salient at any moment in time. Moreover, like other aspects of self-concept, racial-ethnic identities can contain competing or conflicting information. Which aspects of racial-ethnic identity are salient and influential at any moment in time will depend on social contextual cues. For example, in academic contexts, content and identity-relevant questions focused on academics (do "we" do well in school?) are likely to come to mind.

Research on racial-ethnic identities explores the ways that such identities affect well-being, motivation, goal pursuit, and behavior. Of particular interest are dimensions of identity including sense of connection to in-group, beliefs about the relationship between in-group and broader society, and beliefs about the goals, activities, and strategies effectively used by in-group members (Oyserman, 2007, in press). Sense of connectedness to the group focuses on the extent to which individuals perceive in-group membership to be central to their self-concept. Identities that are not central are less likely to be activated so are less likely to have an impact on behavior. Beliefs about the relationship between in-group and broader society are sometimes described in terms of the perceived boundaries between in-group and other groups and awareness of the attitudes of others toward one's racial or ethnic group. Knowing how others view one's in-group can provide important information about likely responses of others to oneself. More broadly, this dimension involves perceptions about the connections (or lack thereof) between in-group and broader society. The third dimension of racial-ethnic identity focuses on beliefs about in-group goals, attitudes, norms, values, and strategies. These beliefs are not necessarily accurate, but because they provide standards that are assumed to be accurate and self-relevant, they are likely to

influence one's own goals, attitudes, norms, values, and strategies. These beliefs can have powerful effects. For example, if one believes that people from one's own racial-ethnic group gain weight in middle age, one's own heavy future will feel inevitable, and, because effort to lose weight is assumed to be futile, individuals are less likely to expend effort to do so.

Once the in-group is a salient part of identity, then the other two dimensions of identity—being able to gauge how others may respond to the in-group and what in-group members are like—are more likely to shape individual behavior, perception, and motivation. Researchers differ in which of these dimensions they focus on, and individuals are likely to differ in the extent that each of these dimensions is a focus of identity (Cross, 1991; Jenkins, 1982; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998). When in-group membership is made situationally salient (e.g., being the only African American at a work conference), both similarity to the in-group (e.g., other African Americans) and the related meanings associated with that group identity will become prominent (Haslam, O'Brien, & Jetten, 2005; Sidanius, Van Laar, & Levin, 2004). Effects are also likely to be linked to salience of one's group in a location, profession, or social institution.

Because most research on racial-ethnic identity has focused on stigmatized groups, an important question is the extent that racial-ethnic identity predicts success across important life domains. Thus, researchers have asked about the relationship between content and structure of racial-ethnic identity and academic success in the adolescent and college years. Oyserman (in press) finds that effect of racial-ethnic identity depends on content. Simply feeling connected to in-group or being aware of racism are not sufficient to improve academic effort and outcomes; rather it is necessary to also believe that in-group members value and engage in effort to do well in school. With regard to engagement healthy lifestyle behaviors in the college years and beyond, Oyserman and colleagues (2007) find that when comparison between in-group and broader society is made salient, minority group members are less likely to believe in the efficacy of preventive health measures such as exercising as an adult if they believe that members of their group do not engage in them (or think that members of their in-group engage in risky health behaviors such as smoking cigarettes). Although research often focuses on a particular group, making sense of commonalities in impact of racial-ethnic identities across groups is beginning to be the focus of more research attention.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND GAPS IN THE CURRENT LITERATURE

Literature on racial-ethnic identity has focused primarily on childhood, adolescence, and the early years of adult-

hood. Thus a major limitation of the research literature is the lack of attention to when and how racial-ethnic identity should matter beyond the college years. Although the previously described research gives some sense that racial-ethnic identity is likely to matter for engagement in health and health care, more needs to be done to conceptualize how racial-ethnic identity should matter to health and other aspects of adult life and to document effects over time and in real-world situations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Research on racial-ethnic identity provides several implications for program development and public policy. First, this research suggests that programs and policies should highlight belongingness and connections between broader society and members of diverse racial-ethnic groups. That is, important social goals and values—including healthy lifestyle and civic engagement, education and career advancement, and effective strategies for obtaining these goals—should feel relevant to all racial-ethnic groups within a society. Second, to the extent that identities continue to be shaped over the lifespan, resources for engagement should be tailored across developmental phases. Globalization and international migration mean that societies across the world, including the United States, are becoming more diverse. Americans now reaching retirement face both the challenges of aging and the challenge of remaining engaged in an increasingly racially and ethnically diverse world.

SEE ALSO Volume 1: *Biracial Youth/Mixed Race Youth; Identity Development; Immigration, Childhood and Adolescence;* Volume 2: *Racism/Race Discrimination.*

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