Identity-based motivation: Implications for action-readiness, procedural-readiness, and consumer behavior

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Available online 25 June 2009

Abstract

Choices are often identity-based but the linkage to identity is not necessarily explicit or obvious for a number of reasons. First, identities feel stable but are highly sensitive to situational cues. Second, identities include not only content but also readiness to act and to use procedures congruent with the identity. Third, identities can be subtly cued without conscious awareness. Fourth, what an accessible identity means is dynamically constructed in the particular context in which it is cued. Because identities carry action- and procedural-readiness, the outcome of an identity-based motivation process may be similar to or different from the choices an individual would have made in another setting. Moreover, once an identity is formed, action and procedural-readiness can be cued without conscious awareness or systematic processing, resulting in beneficial or iatrogenic outcomes.
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David Boies, who represented Al Gore in the 2000 Supreme Court elections case, has long been a top earning Wall Street lawyer. But he does not appear in court elegantly attired in a designer label suit; rather, he wears Lands' End suits, even when arguing cases in front of the United States Supreme Court. Why does he choose Lands' End, a Midwestern mail order company famous for allowing returns or exchanges at any time and for any reason—a policy called "Guaranteed. Period."? As he explains it, wearing Lands' End just feels right; it is the right brand for him because he "comes from non-fancy people." In Lands' End suits he feels like himself, wearing them is congruent with some aspect of his identity even if it might not look that way to others. Like David Boies, people routinely symbolize who they are and may become, as well as who they are not and want to avoid becoming, through consumption choices that can be self-symbolizing (Belk, 1988; Shavitt, 1990; Shavit & Nelson, 1999).

In this paper I focus on a perhaps less obvious aspect of these choices, which is that they are rooted in *identity-based motivation*. Identity-based motivation is the readiness to engage in identity-congruent action (Oyserman, 2007; Oyserman, Brickman, Bybee, & Celious, 2006; Oyserman, Fryberg, & Yoder, 2007) and to use identity-congruent mindsets in making

sense of the world (Oyserman, Sorensen, Reber, Chen, & Sannum, in press). Although often experienced as stable, identity is highly malleable and situation-sensitive so that which aspect of identity comes to mind is a dynamic product of that which is chronically accessible and that which is situationally cued. Moreover, because what is cued is a general mindset rather than a specific content list, identity's impact on action- and procedural-readiness is likely to occur outside of conscious awareness and without systematic processing. I provide evidence that this is indeed the case; like David Boies whose frugal Midwestern self felt uncomfortable in a more expensive suit, people's choices are identity-based, resulting in choices that may not benefit them and may even undermine their well-being if these choices do not feel congruent with the press to act in identity-congruent ways.

To preview, in the next sections I outline what is meant by identity and identity-based motivation using a situated cognition framework. I then give examples of how identity-based motivation influences action and cognitive procedures. Specifically, I show how action-readiness influences consumers' choices in the domains of health and consumption and students' choices in the domain of academic performance. Turning to how identity-based motivation influences cognitive procedures, I review studies that show that temporary contextual influences can mirror chronic cultural differences in cognitive processing. Finally, I return to consumer research and address how an

identity-based motivation perspective can illuminate issues in consumer choice.

Identity and motivation

What is meant by identity?

Identity and self-concept are often used as interchangeable terms, though the self-concept may be better described as a theory about who one was, is, and may become articulated via an array of personal and social identities (Howard, 2000; Oyserman, 2001). Prior models assumed that identities form a clearly organized, stable or integrated hierarchical system, but evidence for this stability is scanty. Current conceptualizations are rooted in social cognition research and emerging knowledge about biological systems and assume a not-well-integrated array of personal and social identities. Personal identities (e.g., being a rugged individual, being smart) focus on traits, characteristics and goals that are not formulated as connected to membership in a social group or relationship. In that sense they are decontextualized descriptions of personal traits, characteristics and goals. In contrast, social identities (e.g., being a Midwesterner, being a member of Gen Y) are contextualized; they include the traits, characteristics and goals linked to a social role or social group that the person was, is, or may become a member of. Social identities range from broad, temporally expansive core identities (e.g., gender, cultural, racial-ethnic or religious heritage) to narrow, temporally specific identities (e.g., 'a 4th grader'). Social identities may function integratively (e.g., a Midwestern woman, a Black male) or separately (e.g., a woman, a Midwesterner), depending on what is relevant in a particular context. As part of the self-concept, identities organize experience and present a basis for making predictions about oneself and about others' response to the self. When nothing looks right for the shopper trying on clothes in the store, a salient 'out of shape' identity makes for a different understanding than a salient 'academic' identity. The out-of-shape shopper may buy exercise gear and vow to return with a new trim figure; the academic shopper may decide that the whole shopping thing is not worthwhile, get back into his clothes and return to the office to write a paper.

While often described in the present tense, identities are temporal, describing the person one was, is, and may become (Neisser, 1988; Oyserman & James, 2008; Ross & Wilson, 2002). While often assessed as semantic content, identities are experienced across sensory modes, including embodied experience of the self as a physical entity; they further include procedural knowledge and goals (Csordas, 1994; Markus & Oyserman, 1989; Oyserman, 2001). Though anything seen as identity-relevant is more likely to be positively than negatively valenced, identities include negative as well as positive possibilities, undesired as well as desired futures.

Though all self-concepts are assumed to contain both social and personal identities, people differ in the likelihood that personal or social identities are central as well as the ways in which identities are conceptualized. Gender, culture, and minority status all might make particular social identities or intersections between identities (e.g. Black professional male) salient and can increase or decrease the tendency to use social vs. personal identities to make sense of the self generally (Brewer, 1991; Cole, 2009; Cross & Madson, 1997; Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Markus & Oyserman, 1989). Within cultural psychology, the terms individual and collective or independent and interdependent are used to describe individuals who are more likely to use personal vs. social identities as well as to describe societies that are more likely to institutionalize or prioritize personal vs. social identities (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989).

Cultural psychological formulations propose stable between-group and between-society differences in the propensity to define the self (and the social world) in terms of groups and embeddedness within groups as well as stable differences in the kinds of groups that are self-defining (e.g., friendship, family, religious, tribal) (Fiske et al., 1998; Oyserman, 1993; Triandis, 1995). These differences are assumed to be based in history, socialization and social institutions so data are typically collected by comparing groups. However, evidence from such between-group or between-society comparisons suffer from causal ambiguity—groups and societies differ on many characteristics and it remains unclear whether observed differences are due to the posited cause or one of its numerous natural confounds. Hence, any observed difference could be due to differences in history or institutions as well as to more proximate factors that differ in the immediate context. While many of the theoretically posited between-society differences assumed based in individualism and collectivism can be found, between-society comparisons cannot illuminate the underlying process (for meta-analytic reviews and a discussion of the methodological issues, see Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). However, experimental approaches can provide insight into the underlying causal processes. Using priming techniques, recent experimental research indicates that cross-cultural differences can be reproduced within a given society through priming procedures. These results suggest that the differences observed between societies may be better conceptualized as differences in the relative salience of social and personal identities, not as differences in the existence of these identities (Oyserman & Lee, 2008). Both personal and social identities are easily cued, suggesting that societies may differ in two ways. First, as posited by theories of individualism and collectivism (e.g., Triandis, 1989), societies are likely to differ in the propensity for any particular situation to cue a social identity, as compared to a personal identity. Second, as outlined in the section on situated cognition, societies may also differ in which particular personal or social identities are cued, and what these identities mean in context.

Which identities matter?

Some identities are more likely to be situationally cued than others. Broader identities (e.g., female) are more likely to be cued than narrower ones (e.g., professor). Gender and race-ethnicity are both broad and also often psychologically salient (for a developmental argument as to why that is the case, see Bigler & Liben, 2006). In addition to gender and race-ethnicity,

other identities are cued when they are meaningfully distinctive in context (McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujiota, 1979). McGuire et al. demonstrated that ethnicity was more likely to be salient when it was distinctive. Distinctiveness is of course highly situational. For example, in the context of jury duty, being a social sciences professor may be highly meaningful distinction, hair color not. Being a graduate student may be salient to identity in some contexts (e.g., meetings with one's advisor) but not others (e.g., carpooling children to school). However, numerous other variables—from situational characteristics to experimental primes—can render an identity salient and increase its temporary relevance and influence.

Identity-based motivation

Identity-based motivation is a theoretical model that focuses attention on the motivational pull toward identity-congruent action and identity-congruent cognitive procedures. It builds on prior theories about self-concept and identity (for a review, see Oyserman, 2007) and links them to modern motivation theories, utilizing a situated social cognition perspective (e.g., Schwarz, 2007, 2009; Smith & Semin, 2004, 2007). A situated perspective proposes that cognition and action are not separate from contexts but rather are dynamically shaped by them. Identity-based motivation moves beyond purely cognitive models by integrating the perspective with modern goal theories which propose that once instantiated, goals can be situationally cued outside of conscious awareness and without systematic processing (for a review, Fischbach & Fergeson, 2007).

From an identity-based motivation perspective, both personal and social identities matter. While identity and social identity-based theories often focus on the social groups that people claim membership in and their valenced feelings about membership (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995), the identity-based motivation model argues that social identities include more than simple knowledge of group membership or positive sense of in-group connection. Specifically, the identity-based motivation model expands operationalization of identities from two components to three, from operationalization based in memberships and beliefs, to an expanded operationalization that includes readiness articulated as action-readiness and procedural-readiness.

First, consider social identities. The membership component of a social identity is about membership—the knowledge that one is or may become a member of a particular group. The beliefs component of a social identity focuses on beliefs about the group's place in the world and how the group engages the world. This includes beliefs about how permeable group boundaries are, how much being a member of that group carries with it permanent (essentialized) or impermanent characteristics, 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. The readiness component of a social identity includes action- and procedural-readiness, readiness to act in ways that are congruent with beliefs about group membership and to make sense of the

world using relevant cognitive procedures. Action-readiness involves self-controlling, self-regulating behaviors and embodied stances—how one stands, moves, dresses, and talks. Procedural-readiness involves sense-making about the social and non-social world, with social and personal identities differing in whether an individual or collective mindset is cued and so whether separating or connecting procedures are activated.

Next, consider personal identities. Like social identities, personal identities include three basic components (membership, beliefs, and readiness). Personal identity memberships focus on being or becoming the type of person who has the desired identity, or avoiding becoming the type of person who has the undesired identity. Personal identity beliefs focus on the norms, values, goals and strategies believed to exemplify desired and undesired identities. Action-readiness involves readiness to take action congruent with attaining desired identity goals and avoiding undesired identities. Procedural-readiness involves readiness to make sense of the world using an identity-congruent mindset.

Identity-based motivation is socially situated cognition

The premise of an identity-based motivation perspective is that people use identities to prepare for action and to make sense of the world around them. That is, that thinking (about identity) is for doing, an insight that can be dated back at least to James William (1890/1983). More recent key formulations of this theme come from Smith and Semin's situated social cognition model (2004, 2007), Fiske's (1992) thinking-is-for-doing formulation of the situatedness of social cognition, and Schwarz's (2007, in press) situational sensitivity formulation of social judgment. While varied, each of these formulations highlights the constructive nature of cognition and underscores that individuals are sensitive to meaningful features of the environment and adjust thinking and doing to what is contextually relevant (Fiske, 1992).

In this way, the identity-based motivation model builds on the recurrent social psychological theme that cognition is situated and pragmatic. Situated and social perspectives call attention to the fact that contexts in which one thinks influence both what comes to mind and how one makes sense of what comes to mind. Thinking is contextualized by social and non-social features of contexts, including the pragmatics of the task at hand and one's physical experiences in the context (Smith & Semin, 2004).

Taken together, situated cognition approaches suggest a few basic premises: 1) people think in order to engage in adaptive action; 2) thinking is situated; and 3) the impact of contexts on thinking does not depend on conscious awareness of its impact. Thinking is influenced by the context in which it occurs, including physical and social features of the external context as well as the experience of thinking itself. This means that thinking is not invariant and context-free; people think flexibly and are responsive to the immediate environment. The context sensitivity highlighted by situated approaches does not depend on conscious awareness of the impact of psychologically meaningful features of situations on cognition. Not only do

situational effects not require explicit justification, drawing attention to the potential influence of context can change the response (e.g., Fiske, 1992; Schwarz, in press).

To be sure, situated and social cognition approaches do not propose that all context effects on cognitive processes are necessarily mediated by self-concept or identity (e.g., Smith & Semin, 2004). However, a situated framework is critical to understanding identity-based motivation. The identity-based motivation model proposes that people are motivated to act in ways and make sense of the world using procedures congruent with their identities. But identities are situated. Which identities come to mind and what they mean in context is a function of both chronic and situational cues, with some situations more likely to cue particular identities or constellations of identities than others. People's interpretation of cued identities (or identity constellations) depends on the pragmatic meaning of these identities in the particular context; action- and procedural-readiness will be cued but also shaped by the affordances of the context.

When situations cue an identity (e.g., female) what the cued identity carries with it is not a fixed list of traits (e.g., warm, energetic). Rather, the cued identity carries with it a general readiness to act and make sense of the world in identity-congruent terms, including the norms, values, strategies and goals associated with that identity as well as the cognitive procedures relevant to it. What exactly this readiness looks like is dependent on what the cued identity comes to mean in the particular context in which it is cued. Being female is likely to mean something different in a sexually harassing job interview when a "female job seeker" identity is salient than on a date or at the hairdresser, when other aspects of being female are salient. This does not imply that identities do not predict behaviors over time but rather that the predictive power of an identity depends on the stability of the contexts in which it is cued because differing contexts cue different aspects of an identity and differing intersections with other identities. The effect of an identity will be stable over time to the extent that individuals repeatedly encounter psychologically isomorphic situations because in each instance the situation will engender readiness to take the same actions (for a related discussion of the stability of attitudes see Schwarz, 2007).

The impact of context on action-readiness is demonstrated in a study of responses to a sexually harassing job interview comparing in vivo contextualized behavior to predicted (decontextualized) behavior (Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2002). In the contextualized version, adult women were recruited for a job interview. They were interviewed by a male interviewer who asked sexually harassing inappropriate questions such as 'Do you think it is important for women to wear bras to work?' and 'Do you have a boyfriend?'. In the decontextualized version, a separate sample of adult women read about an interview which included the same set of sexually harassing inappropriate questions, but did not participate in an actual interview.

Thus, both sets of women had their identity as female cued, but for one set of women, identity was decontextualized from the immediate context while for the other set of women, identity

was contextualized. The decontextualized identity group all said that they would not stand for being treated that way as women, that they would be angry, confront the harasser and terminate such an interview. This was not the case for the contextualized identity group. None of these women terminated the interview or confronted the harasser; they smiled appeasingly and responded to all the questions. After the interview, almost none of these women reported anger, some reported fear.

Thus, while outside of context, female identity implied readiness to take assertive action including leaving the interview; in the job-seeking context, the aspects of female identity that were salient cued a different action set. These women did not leave the interview; they smiled and answered even inappropriate questions. What the interview situation cued was their socially appropriate job-seeking female identity and they acted to appease authority, to not appear rude and to get the job. Features of contexts influence which identities are likely to be salient, what these identities mean, and how action-readiness is directed, all without being explicitly articulated. When contexts are not psychologically equivalent (e.g., reading about an interview vs. being in an interview) they are unlikely to cue the same identity content, procedures and goals.

Just as in the above example, in everyday life, identity-based motivation is common. It is cued when an identity is cued by psychologically meaningful features of everyday situations, the features which tell the participant what the situation is about. Because thinking is for doing and is a dynamic product of the constraints and affordances of the immediate context, the particular identity cued in a particular context is a function of what is psychologically meaningful in context, what is chronically salient or central to the individual, and what the situational action-potentials are. While identities feel stable, they are better conceptualized as dynamically created and recreated in each situation in which they are evoked. Because thinking is for doing and thinking is the emergent outcome of a dynamic process, contextual cues determine, at least in part, not only whether a particular identity will be cued but also how a cued identity will be interpreted and therefore which procedures, behaviors, choices and motivations are primed. Even though they emerge in a dynamic interaction with context, cued identities are consequential for subsequent meaning making, including which cognitive procedures are brought to bear and which actions are taken.

Consequences of identity-based motivation

In this section, I present evidence that identity-based motivation results in readiness to take action even when the action is not beneficial to the participant or is unlikely to have been chosen outside of the specific context. Thinking about identity-based motivation and action-readiness focuses attention on choices made because of feelings of identity-fit, things people do or avoid doing because of fit or mis-fit with important identities. Once a choice becomes identity-linked, it is automatized. If it feels identity-syntonic, it feels right and does not require further reflection. On the other hand, if it feels non-syntonic to identity, it feels wrong and this feeling also does not

invite further reflection. This parallels the observation that behaviors that fit other motivational states feel right and are therefore, potentiated (Higgins, 2000, 2007; Higgins & Scholer, 2009).

As the following studies illustrate, one important variable triggering identity-based motivation is whether the situation brings identity to mind. Situations can bring identities to mind in different ways, ranging from explicit priming to the identity's distinctiveness in situ and concerns that the identity may not be validated in the context.

Identity-based motivation and action-readiness: consumption, health behaviors and academic performance

Consumption choices

Participants prefer brands associated with their self-schemas, but only if they are reminded of them in the context of the study (Aaker, 1999). Because identity-based motivation triggers action-readiness, there is no need for the target product to have a prior content-based link to the identity. For example, Latinos have been found to prefer detergents associated with a same ethnicity spokesperson—but only if they are minorities in their town, not otherwise (Deshpande and Stayman, 1994; Forehand & Deshpande, 2001). Presumably, their minority status in the local environment made racial-ethnic identity chronically salient, advantaging communications from a same ethnicity spokesperson. Because it is unlikely that racial-ethnic identity has an a priori connection with laundry detergent, such effects can best be understood in terms of situational affordances. When racial-ethnic identity is chronically on the participants' minds and linked to the current product through a same race-ethnicity spokesperson, it imbues the product with identity relevance and facilitates consumption.

Health behaviors

Identity-based motivation matters for consequential health-related choices. In a series of studies we (Oyserman et al., 2007, Studies 1 and 2) demonstrated that minority and majority groups held the same baseline beliefs about the efficacy of a healthy lifestyle in reducing health risks. Nevertheless, minority group members were more likely to identify unhealthy behaviors like eating fried foods, drinking soda and adding salt as in-group behaviors and less likely to identify healthy behaviors like flossing teeth or exercising as an adult as in-group defining. These differences were striking because participants were college students at an elite private university. More important, their perceptions of what is or is not an in-group thing to do made their correct baseline beliefs about the efficacy of a healthy lifestyle vulnerable to identity-based motivational concerns.

When we primed minority (e.g., Latino, African American, or American Indian) and low-income identities, participants' access to information about health and belief in the preventive capacity of health behaviors was undermined. In this case, low income, Latino and African American children reported higher fatalism about their future health as adults (Oyserman et al., 2007, Study 3). Effects were robust across samples and ages. In

a related study, we primed middle school children to think of their racial-ethnicity and social class and then asked questions about health behaviors. They were less successful in accessing their health knowledge, making more mistakes on a health knowledge quiz than when these identities were not primed (Oyserman et al., 2007, Study 4). Moreover, when race-ethnicity was made salient, African American and Native American college students and adult participants rated smoking, weight gain, and high sugar consumption as less likely to negatively influence health than when race-ethnicity was not salient (Oyserman et al., 2007, Studies 5–7).

However salient identity does not always undermine healthy responses. We found that the negative effect of accessible racial-ethnic identity on health beliefs is dependent on content of racial-ethnic identity. Identity priming does not undermine health beliefs among participants who do not see unhealthy lifestyle behaviors as social identity-congruent.

In sum, healthy behaviors that are not seen as the kind of thing "we" do are unlikely to be chosen, even if the overall goal of maintaining health is endorsed. Like David Boise who felt uncomfortable in a more expensive designer label suit, participants in these studies would be unlikely to floss, not because they do not believe it would work for others, but because using floss is not congruent with important social identities (Oyserman et al., 2007).

A number of other studies focusing on health behaviors found similar outcomes. To successfully engage individuals who do not see themselves as middle class whites in exercise, it is important to frame activities in ways that highlight the in-group congruence of action. It helps, for example, to use everyday clothing and dance as the medium and to avoid asking people to don spandex and jog (Choudhry, 1992; Cooper, Hill, & Powe, 2002). Similarly, when being or becoming physically attractive is identity-congruent and feels attainable, exercise appeals are more effective in producing behavior change (Martin & Leary, 2001; Werch, 2007). When low or no alcohol use is coupled with valued possible selves and social identities, alcohol use among at risk youth declines at three-month follow-up (Werch, Moore, DiClemente, Owen, Jobli, & Bledsoe 2003), as does alcohol and marijuana use among college students (Werch et al., 2008). The reverse pathway has also been shown. In a study explicitly manipulating the identity-congruence of alcohol consumption, undergraduate students reported less alcohol consumption when they learned that graduate students, a dis-valued out-group, drank a lot (Berger & Rand, 2008).

Academic performance

Identity matters for academic outcomes (Steele, 1997). When a social identity is made salient, performance declines if the social group associated with the identity is stereotyped as not performing well academically and improves if the social group associated with the identity is stereotyped as doing well (Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999; for a review, Wheeler & Petty, 2001). An identity-based motivation perspective focuses attention on the processes underlying these effects. For example, in some situations, identities feel safely supported and accepted by others. In other situations, the legitimacy of

one's claim to an identity may be questioned. Situations in which an identity is questioned cue identity-based motivation to demonstrate identity-fit.

For example, we observed among minority youth that acting like an in-group member is particularly important when concerns about fitting in are salient. Specifically, we compared feelings of social acceptance, classroom behavior, and grades of racial-ethnic minority students who did or did not look prototypically like members of their racial-ethnic group (Oyserman et al., 2006, Studies 1, 2). Because the classroom context does not afford many ways to engage in identity-relevant action, we predicted and found that students whose identities were challenged by not looking prototypical would feel less accepted and would be more likely to engage in academic stereotype-confirming behaviors, like disengaging from classroom participation and attaining worse grades.

In one set of studies, we examined the effect of non-prototypical physical appearance on engagement in academic stereotype-confirming behaviors in a sample of African American and Latino low income inner city youths (Oyserman et al., 2006, Studies 1 and 2). We obtained school records of grades for a community sample of African American youths who were asked to rate how much they fit in socially and how engaged they were with school. They also provided a physical description that included their hair, eye and skin tone on color continuums. We asked a separate group of African American respondents from the same community to use this same continuum to mark boundaries for light, medium and dark skin tone. Poorer grades, low felt social acceptance and low engagement with school were predicted by being non-proto-typical, that is having light skin tone in a context in which this was uncommon.

Effects were then conceptually replicated for Latino youth. Teacher-rated behavior problems and school-recorded grade point average were predicted by whether youth reported looking like a prototypical group member. This main effect was mediated by friendship choices. Students who believed that they did not look Latino were more likely to choose friends who were not engaged with school, and this friendship choice influenced student in-class behavior and grades.

In sum, youth who did not look like in-group members were more likely to enact an in-group identity by engaging in stereotype-consistent academic behavior; they under-performed academically, misbehaved in class and chose non-school focused friendships. These results suggest that identity-based motivation can have negative effects when the options for identify-confirming action are limited to dysfunctional behaviors. When belongingness to an important group is threatened, people use the situationally available means to mark their identities even when this means poor performance and adverse personal outcomes.

However, an identity-based perspective does not suggest simply that people are prone to self-stereotype. Rather, it holds that identities influence behavior by providing information about group norms and expectations and by shaping a person's interpretation of social and contextual feedback (Oyserman, 2007). Hence, identity-based motivation can have

both positive (stereotype-disconfirming) and negative (stereotype-confirming) impacts on behavior.

For example, in one study, we had students complete a math task before or after being reminded of their racial or ethnic group membership (Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, & Hart-Johnson, 2003, Studies 1 and 2). Being reminded of group membership improved or undermined math performance depending on content of racial-ethnic identity. Performance improved for students with 'dual' identities who saw themselves as members of both their racial-ethnic in-group and broader society. In contrast, performance declined for students with 'in-group only' identities who saw themselves only as members of their racial-ethnic in-group and not of broader society. We found the same pattern of effects in a separate sample of youths who were followed over the course of the school year. Here, identity beliefs predicted grade point average over time. Controlling for prior school performance, 'dual' racial-ethnic identities pre-dicted improved performance compared to 'in-group only' identities (Oyserman et al., 2003, Study 3).

The same pattern of effects was found in a sample of youth followed for 4 years from ninth to twelfth grade. 'Dual' identities predicted improved performance compared to 'in-group only' identities, presumably because doing well in school was seen as an identity-relevant goal for the former but not the latter students (Oyserman, 2008). To directly test this effect, we reminded students of their racial-ethnic identity either before or after taking a math test. When reminded of their racial-ethnic identity, African American students persisted more at math tasks if they believed that doing well in school was part of racial-ethnic identity (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995, Study 2).

Summary

Taken together these studies underscore a few basic points. First, people are motivated to act in identity-congruent ways. Second, what an identity means in context is a dynamic function of the pragmatic options for action in a particular situation and how these options are imbued with identity-based meaning. Third, the action-readiness aspect of identity-based motivation does not necessarily serve individuals' own goal attainment. Unlike rational choice formulations, the identity-based motiva-tion model does not imply that values are different or that actions necessarily are congruent with a set of underlying values. Note that if given a decontextualized choice, individuals are unlikely to choose to attain poor grades or to be unhealthy. However, in context, choices differed because actions leading to these outcomes were imbued with identity-based meaning. These observations have important implications for consumer behavior, which I address in a later section. Next, I turn to the effects of identity-based motivation on cognitive mindsets—how meaning is made.

Identity-based motivation and procedural-readiness: Basic cognitive performance and problem solving

In this section, the following proposition is considered: when a specific personal or social identity is cued in context, what is cued is not simply content but also a way of thinking, a

procedure. Having a relational or embedded sense of self cues relational and connected information-processing generally—a focus on patterns, connections and relationships. Conversely, having an autonomous and separated sense of self cues a different information-processing style, in this case separating and pulling procedures are cued and the focus is on figure, main point and central aspects.

Thus, two basic procedures are considered, which we term 'pulling apart and separating' procedures and 'connecting and relating' procedures. The idea is that what comes to mind when an identity is cued is not simply content but also a general way of making sense of the world. Because personal identities focus attention on traits and characteristics separate from relationships, the procedure cued would be to ignore background and details and focus only on a main point. Because social identities focus attention on relationships, with traits and characteristics having meaning only within the context of relationships, the procedure cued would be to pay attention to background and details and focus on connection.

This proposition builds on earlier formulations of gender, race-ethnicity, and cultural differences in the propensity to define the self as a set of personal identities separated from contexts, relationships, and group memberships or as a set of social identities, embedded in contexts, relationships and group memberships (Markus & Oyserman, 1989; Triandis, 1989; Woike, 1994). These formulations held in common the assumption that how one thinks about the self should influence how one thinks generally. For example, Markus and Oyserman (1989) carefully reviewed the extant literature on gender differences in mathematical and spatial abilities, arguing that while many differences were due to differences in training and exposure, a smaller subset seemed due to something else.

They found that on average men and women reported navigating three-dimensional spaces differently, with men more likely to report mental imagery separated from their own perspective—seeing the world 'as the crow flies' rather than as they traversed it. Tasks that involved rotation of objects in three-dimensional space also showed this gender difference. Markus and Oyserman (1989) proposed that basic differences in how the self is organized could predict these differences. Even though both men and women may have social identities based in gender, men and women may differ in the propensity to use social and relational information. Men are more likely to define the self as separated from, and women more likely to define the self as embedded in, contexts and relationships. These differences in content should also have implications for which cognitive procedures are accessible when the self was salient.

Whereas Markus and Oyserman's (1989) argument was based on a review of the gender literature on cognitive style, subsequent focus shifted to cross-national differences arguing for cultural differences in personal vs. social focus of self-concept (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). At the same time, cross-national differences in judgment and decision making were also emerging that seemed to parallel these differences in self-concept focus (for a review, see Oyserman et al., 2002). Just as personal identities focus on the self as separate, Americans seem to focus on the figure and ignore background in processing

visual information generally, while Chinese (Nisbett, 2003) and Japanese (Kitayama, Duffy, Kawamura, & Larsen, 2003) seem to focus on the relationship between figure and background, congruent with a social identity focus on the self as connected and related.

While intriguing, simply showing between-country differences in average cognitive style does not yet clarify the process underlying these differences. Effects may be due to the postulated cultural differences, to other culture-related factors, or to other differences entirely (see Oyserman & Lee, 2008, for a discussion). Thus, between-country comparisons cannot provide causal evidence that cognitive style is cued by salient personal and social identities. A first step in this process is to demonstrate that subtle situational cues do shift self-concept focus; a second step is to link these to the kinds of differences in procedures found in East–West comparisons.

An initial demonstration that average between-society differences in self-concept focus could be the result of situational cues was provided by Triandis and his colleagues (Triandis, 1989; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). They demonstrated that they could reliably predict whether people would use more personal or social identities to describe themselves by shifting their in-the-moment focus on themselves as similar to or different from friends and family. They also showed that once a personal or social identity focus was cued in one situation, it was likely to be used again in another situation. They proposed that cross-national differences in self-concept focus were due to situational cues. In the past 20 years, this basic finding has been replicated using a variety of situational cues, showing that people in East and West describe themselves using more or fewer social identities, depending on which is cued in situation (for a review, Oyserman & Lee, 2008). Taken together, the evidence is clear that situational cues influence whether a social or personal identity is cued.

In a series of experiments, we demonstrated that the same kinds of situational cues that make salient social vs. personal identities also trigger the cognitive procedures that parallel cross-national differences in whether a focal target or integrated whole is first perceived. We showed that the performance of participants from a variety of racial-ethnic and national groups (including African Americans, Asian Americans, European Americans, Koreans, Hong Kong Chinese, and Norwegians) was systematically influenced by whether an individual or a collective mindset was cued (Oyserman et al., in press). To prime mindset, participants were asked to read a paragraph and to mark the pronouns. To prime an individual mindset, the pronouns were first person singular (I, me, my); to prime a collective mindset, the pronouns were first person plural (we, our, us). Participants then completed a dichotic listening task that required them to repeat nonsense syllables presented to one ear and to ignore nonsense syllables presented to the other ear (Studies 6 and 7). Other participants completed a Stroop task that required them to name the color of the ink (e.g., blue) in which a color word (e.g., 'red') was printed, ignoring the semantic meaning of the word (Studies 4 and 5). When primed with an individual mindset, participants were better at these types of tasks, presumably because the mindset was congruent with the

optimal procedure for performing the tasks, which entailed focusing on some information while ignoring other information. Conversely, when primed with a collective mindset, participants were better at incidental recall of details including those that they had been explicitly told to ignore (Studies 1–3). Taken together, these studies indicate that individual and collective mindsets are associated with different cognitive procedures and facilitate their application. Specifically, an individual mindset is associated with procedures that facilitate focus on an isolated stimulus and its unique attributes, pulling the stimulus apart from the field. In contrast, a collective mindset is associated with procedures that facilitate the identification of relationships, emphasizing the embeddedness of a stimulus in its field. Each of these procedures facilitates performance on some tasks, and impairs performance on others.

Importantly, we observed that subtle situational influences can cue collective and individual mindsets in both East Asian societies described as collective and in Western societies described as individualistic. Our results are therefore not compatible with an argument that differences in cognitive procedures are based in extensive socialization in the intellectual traditions of a culture (Nisbett, 2003). Rather, our results suggest that differences in the spontaneous application of cognitive procedures are better portrayed as efficient responses to culturally dominant tasks, consistent with theories of situated cognition (see Oyserman & Lee, 2007, Oyserman & Sorensen, 2009 for more detailed discussion). While these effects are not necessarily mediated by a shift in focus from social to personal identity, an identity-based motivation model implies that when a social or personal identity is cued, it carries with it procedural-readiness, readiness to make sense of the world using an individual or collective mindset.

Implications of identity-based motivation for consumer behavior

The identity-based motivation model suggests two things relevant for consumer psychology. First, identity-congruent choices are more likely than identity-incongruent choices, no matter if these choices are perceived as beneficial or not. Second, identity-congruence and identity-incongruence can be construed as focused on the similarity between the choice and in-group 'me' identities or between the choice and out-group 'not me' identities.

The idea that products and brands are identity-linked has a long history in consumer psychology. Beyond price, quality and functionality, people use products as ways to identify who they are, especially if the product can be associated with a prototypical user, can be linked to one's own identity, and has attributes or a 'personality' that is congruent with valued current or future identities (Belk, 1988; Sirgy, 1982). Consumption choices are also used by others to make identity inferences (e.g., Belk, 1988; Ferraro, Kirmani, & Matherly, 2009; Kleine, Kleine, & Kernan, 1993). People prefer choices that signal connection to important in-groups and avoid connection with important out-groups (Akers, 1968; Berger & Health, 2007). These features of products are especially important for products

perceived as having expressive rather than only utilitarian qualities (Shavitt, 1990; Shavit & Nelson, 1999).

The identity-based motivation model clarifies that this is a bi-directional relationship. Products that allow for identity expression should be valued for two reasons. First, they cue identity-based motivation, meaning that choice will be imbued with more meaning; it will feel expressive rather than only utilitarian. Second, if a consumption choice is perceived to be identity-congruent, the choice should feel more important. This means that products associated with identity-based concerns are more likely to have a loyal consumer base.

Association can be framed through product qualities as well as the terminology used to position the brand. For example, in their print catalogue and on-line portal, Lands' End explicitly uses the term modesty to highlight features of its women's wear and swimwear, such as swim skirts and extra cloth to cover and mask cleavage. Though the target audience may be all women, the salient use of modesty as a descriptor suggests that the prototypical user is modest. Modesty is an identity-syntonic goal for women with particular socio-cultural and religious identities. If Lands' End is known as the modest choice, then choosing Lands' End is a way to reinforce relevant social identities. Note it is both that the clothing choices are modest and that they are marketed as such that matters—facilitating the spread of the idea that the choice is identity-syntonic within an in-group. Thus, the identity-based motivation approach clarifies that consumers actively search among consumption choices for choices that fit important identities, and simultaneously do not fit out-group identities. Brands and products seeking to capitalize on this tendency must accept the likelihood that the features that attract one group may also be the features that reduce attraction for another group.

These associations with products and specific brands have been termed the equity (Aaker, 1991) or personality of the brand (Aaker, 1997). Brand equity focuses on a broad array of characteristics relevant to a brand, which may include fit with one's own current or possible future identity. However, the identity-based motivation model clarifies that when brands or products are identity-congruent they are preferred. This preference is independent of any evaluative judgment about the brand or product—once a product is identity-congruent, it becomes what 'we' use, separate from utilitarian concerns. Just as one's in-group may have negative attributes or make poor choices, but these choices and attributes are still in-group defining, products and brands can be identity-congruent even if the product or brand is also negatively evaluated.

Take, for example, cigarette smoking. Although smoking has become less common in the U.S. generally (25% smoke), some groups, such as those with low incomes (Bergen & Caporaso, 1999) and African Americans living in inner city neighborhoods, smoke at almost double the general rate (45% smoke), with rates higher for women (Ahluwalia, Harris, Catley, Okuyemi, & Mayo, 2002). Moreover, among urban African Americans, a particular type and pattern of smoking is prevalent —these smokers are more likely to choose menthol cigarettes and to smoke within 10 min of waking up (Ahluwalia et al., 2002; Royce, Hymowitz, Corbett, Hartwel1, & Orlandi, 1993).

This high smoking rate and convergence in choice is reflected in beliefs about the identity-congruence of smoking. African Americans describe smoking cigarettes as in-group congruent behavior (Oyserman et al., 2007). This does not mean that smoking is viewed positively, rather that it is recognized as an in-group thing to do. Independent samples suggest that African Americans do rate smoking as a community problem and also that they report trouble quitting, even though attempts at quitting are common (Ahluwalia et al., 2002; Royce et al., 1993). Eye-tracking research suggests that once smoking is identity-based, warnings are not perused (Fox et al., 1998).

Negative consequences of identity-based consumption choices are not confined to low income or minority groups. More privileged groups are also likely to make consumption choices that are identity-based, sometimes with unintended negative consequences. For example, for many undergraduates, being a college student includes engaging in a set of behaviors (e.g., late nights, junk food, excessive alcohol, tobacco or marijuana use) that together result in unintended poor health outcomes such as weight gain, depression and accident risk (Werch, Moore, Bian, DiClemente, Ames, Weiler, Thombs, Pokorny, & Huang 2008). Weight gain in the first year of college is so common that it has a name, "the freshman fifteen." Gaining weight is not viewed positively, but it is identity-syntonic among individuals for whom being a college student is an important social identity.

Using an identity-based motivation perspective suggests that identity-based motivation influences a variety of consumption choices which express identity—from mundane meal choices, to bigger purchases (whether the to buy the house in the suburbs or keep on renting in town), as well as lifestyle choices that may improve or undermine health and well-being. While seemingly innocuous, over time, these behaviors may be well-being enhancing or impairing.

Lack of attention to identity-based motivation may explain why traditional exercise and abstinence regimes are unattractive even though health risk behaviors are common and people are aware that lifestyle choices matter (Fine, Philogene, Gramling, Coups, & Sinha 2004). Indeed, health researchers argue that linking identities to health behaviors is important in the development and maintenance of health behaviors (Amos et al., 1997, 1998; Gray, Amos, and Currie, 1997). Choosing healthy behaviors is more likely if it feels congruent with important current or possible future self images. People consciously or nonconsciously compare their current and future self with their image of the prototypical person who engages in targeted healthy or risky health behaviors, engaging in behaviors that fit their identity and not in those that do not (Gibbons & Gerrard, 1995, 1997; Gibbons, Gerrard, Blanton, & Russell, 1998).

Final comments

In this paper, I outlined a perspective that assigns a central role to identity as it is dynamically constructed in context. Briefly, while identity feels stable and important, it is also highly malleable and context sensitive, even though people are unlikely to be aware of the impact of situations on behaviors that they attribute to identity, or of the influence of identity on other cognitions and behaviors. Identity matters because it influences what actions people take (action-readiness) and how they make sense of the world (procedural-readiness). Identity-based motivation can be beneficial or detrimental, depending on how the identity is constructed in the specific context and the behavioral and procedural options available in that context. It is not possible to understand the influence of identity on cognition and behavior without taking situations into account. Identity-based readiness should influence consumer behavior depending on features of the situation in which choices are made. These include advertisements, who is identified with a brand or product, and whether information is best understood using identity-congruent or -incongruent procedures.

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