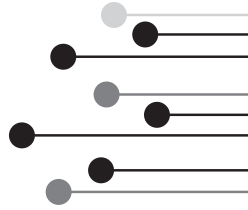


Introduction to the Psychology of Diversity



Each of us lives in a diverse social world. Although we are frequently unaware of it, our lives unfold within social contexts that are populated by people who are different—both from us and each other. The people who populate the situations in our day-to-day lives may differ in many ways, such as their ethnic identity, sex, cultural background, economic status, political affiliation, or religious belief. The specific dimensions of difference do not matter nearly as much as the fact that we think, feel, and behave within diverse social contexts. Two important ideas follow from the fact that we, as individuals, are perpetually embedded in diversity.

First, because individuals are literally part of the social contexts in which they behave, those *situations cannot be understood independently of the people in them*. Have you ever been amazed that you perceived a situation, such as a job interview, much differently than a friend? Perhaps you approached the interview with optimism and confidence, regarding it a potentially positive step in your career goals. Your friend, however, may have viewed the same scenario as threatening, bemoaning how it would never work out. This illustrates how social situations are, in vital part, constructed and maintained by people. We project our own attitudes, feelings, expectations, and fears onto the situations we encounter. Applied to our social contexts, this principle says that the differentness we perceive between ourselves and other people or among other people may be inaccurate. As we will learn in subsequent chapters in this book, there are times when we project too much social difference onto our contexts and the people in them. At other times, however, we underestimate the diversity around us. So the diversity of our lives is partly a function of us—our individual ways of thinking and emotional needs.

Second, because people live and behave in diverse social contexts, then *individuals cannot be understood independently of the situations in which they act and interact*. Are you sometimes a different person, or do you show a different side of yourself, as

Topics Covered In This Chapter

- The guiding concepts in a psychological study of diversity
- Dimensions of diversity studied by psychologists
- A statistical snapshot of American diversity
- The meanings and usages of the term *diversity*
- Diversity as a social construction and social influence

your social setting changes? For example, do you display different table manners when eating with your friends at the café than during a holiday meal with the family? Do you think of yourself differently in those situations? If so, then you realize how we are, in vital part, social beings. Our behavior and identity are constructed and maintained by the situations in which we act and live. Likewise, our thoughts and actions flex with the situational norms we encounter. If we are interested in explaining who we are and why we behave the way we do, we must look to the social context for insight. The diversity of our social contexts is laden with informative clues to help us demystify our own behavior and confront our attitudes and beliefs.

In sum, if we are to fully understand the diversity of our classroom, community, or nation, we must appreciate that it is more than statistics about race and gender. Diversity and the individual are inextricably linked; therefore, the study of one must include the other. This book examines how we can better understand diversity by studying how the individual constructs it and how we can better understand the individual by learning how she or he is defined and influenced by social diversity. These two principles of the psychology of diversity will be revisited and elaborated at the end of this chapter. First, we must consider what diversity is and examine some of the common ways the term is used.

Diversity Is Social Difference

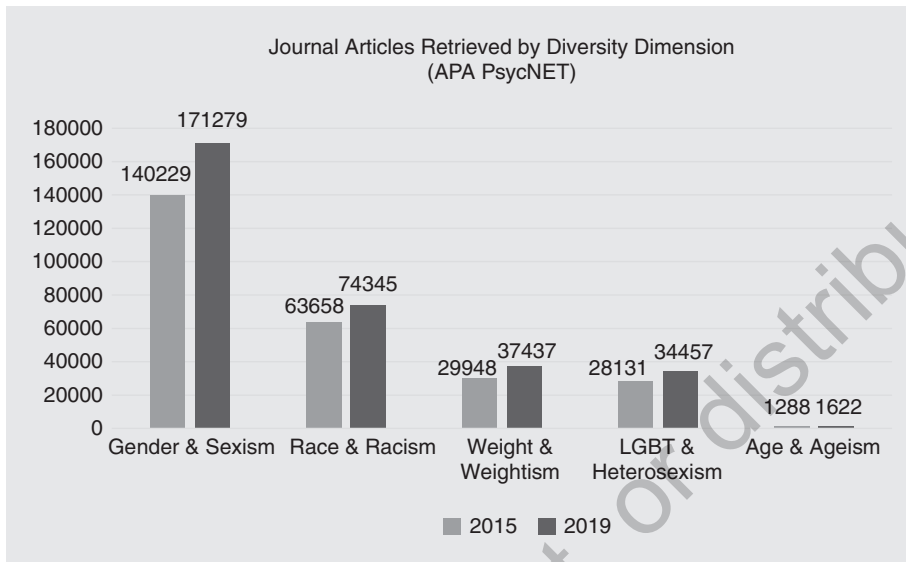
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What is diversity? According to the dictionary, **diversity** is the presence of difference. However, the most common usages of diversity refer to *social* difference, or differences among people. People can differ in so many ways; to appreciate the range and types of diversity in the United States, and to introduce the dimensions of diversity that are addressed in this book, let's develop a statistical snapshot of the social differences of Americans from the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau statistics and other recent national surveys. Figure 1.1 displays the research activity in the psychological research literature on the five dimensions of diversity that we address in this book, and how that activity has changed since the previous edition of this book was published.

Gender

The study of gender, including related topics like sex roles and sex differences, is by far the most researched aspect of diversity. Gender is a good case study for understanding that majority-group status is conferred by status and control over resources and not mere statistical majority. Figures from the *2018 American Community Survey*, which provides annual updates to the U.S. Census, show that females and males make up 51% and 49% of the U.S. population, respectively. Put another way, there are about 97 males in America for every 100 females and, because women tend to live longer than men, women become more of a statistical majority as they age. Although, statistically speaking, women are a majority group, women have historically endured second-class status relative to men in many life domains. For example, even with legal protections against discrimination of

Figure 1.1 Research Activity on Dimensions of Diversity From 1887 to 2015 and to the Present



women in the workplace, a gender wage gap still exists such that women earn about 81 cents for every dollar earned by men (Hegewisch & Hartmann, 2019). We will take up gender diversity, including gender stereotypes and sexism, and further discussion of the gender wage gap, in Chapter 6.

Race

The second most researched aspect of diversity involves race and other related topics, such as racial identity and racism. Racial distinctions are based on physical and facial characteristics, skin color, and hair type and color that developed in response to particular geographic and climatic forces. The most common race labels are limited in that they combine color-based racial notions (e.g., White, Black) with ethnic and linguistic (e.g., Asian, Hispanic) elements. Moreover, about 3% of the population identify themselves on government surveys as biracial or multiethnic (e.g., having parents from different racial or ethnic groups). To deal with this complexity, the U.S. Census Bureau treats ethnic background and race as different concepts so that, for example, Hispanic people can identify themselves as White only, Black only, some other race, or even biracial. Measures of race and ethnic background (appropriately) defy simple snapshots of racial and ethnic diversity of Americans. Still, a general picture of who we are as Americans in racial-ethnic terms would be helpful.

In 2018, again based on *American Community Survey* census updates, Whites constituted about 70% of the American population, with Black (12.7%), Asian (5.4%), and Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander (.2%) completing the other prominent racial categories. Those figures don't add up to 100%, but they omit three categories of people—those who identify as Hispanic/Latino of any race (17.6%), those who identify with two or more races (3.1%), and those who identify their race as “other” (4.8%). These figures indicate that Hispanic/Latino individuals are the largest minority group in the United States, with the large majority of that group being of Mexican ethnicity or heritage. Indeed, the total U.S. population grew by 27 million people in the last decade (2010 to 2020), and growth in the Hispanic population accounted for over half of that growth. In terms of race, Hispanic/Latino people can identify as White, Black, more than one race, or other race. Indeed, White non-Hispanic/Latino (or White alone) people make up 61.5% of the population, whereas Black or African American alone people comprise 12.3% of the U.S. population. This shows that in terms of racial identity, most Hispanic/Latino people identify as White. The U.S. Census allowed respondents to choose more than one racial category to describe themselves in 2000. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of White and Black biracial Americans more than doubled, and the number of White and Asian biracial Americans nearly doubled (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Although the absolute numbers of biracial Americans is small, this is a rapidly growing racial category, with estimates that biracial Americans could comprise 20% of the population by 2050 (Farley, 2001). We will learn more about issues surrounding multiracial identity in Chapters 2 and 4 (see also Diversity Issue 1.1 in this chapter).

About 22% of Americans speaks a language at home other than English (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Spanish is by far the most common language spoken in homes where English is not or is rarely spoken. About 13% of the population speaks Spanish in the home, with over half of that group also reporting speaking English very well. Chinese (1% of the population) is the second most common non-English language spoken in the home, followed by Tagalog (Filipino), Vietnamese, Arabic, and Korean (each less than 1%). Look around your class: The changing nature of the American population is reflected in the makeup of your college or university student body. In 2000, about 29% of college students were non-White (12% Black, 10% Hispanic, 7% Asian). In 2017, just 17 years later, minority college students (14% Black, 19% Hispanic, 7% Asian) constituted 44% of the college population (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). Biracial college students, who were not even counted in 2000, were about 4% of the college student population in 2017. These statistics reflect three changes in the larger population: Minority or non-White students are a greater proportion of the student population, Hispanic/Latino students have become the largest minority student group, and biracial students are a small but growing student group. We will take up racial diversity, including racial and multiracial identity, racial stereotypes, and the implications of racial minority status for college achievement, in Chapter 6.

Weight

Body shape and size is a visible aspect of diversity. Research on the consequences of overweight and obesity for health, social opportunity, and well-being has exploded in the past several years. In the first edition of this book (published in 2007), the number

of journal articles retrieved from APA PsycNET on some aspect of obesity or weight-based stereotyping or discrimination was about 11,000. By 2019, just 12 years later, the research literature on weight and weightism had more than tripled in size. Currently, about 2 out of every 3 American adults are overweight, defined as having a body mass index, or BMI, over 25 (World Health Organization, 2018). As of 2017, 39.8% of Americans were obese, which is defined as having a BMI of 30 or more (Hales, Carroll, Fryar, & Ogden, 2017). Although obesity rates are about the same among women and men, obesity increases with age in both groups. Obesity rates vary across racial groups, with Hispanic/Latino (47%) and non-Hispanic Black (47%) having higher rates than non-Hispanic Whites (38%) or Asians (13%). Obesity is an important issue in a study of diversity for several reasons. First, body size informs self-image and self-esteem. Second, prejudice and discrimination against people because of their weight is widespread and, unlike most other forms of discrimination, legal. Third, overweight and obesity are associated with tremendous loss of social status and opportunity. In Chapter 8, we will discuss stereotypes associated with being overweight and the widespread weight-based discrimination that exists in many areas of society.

Sexual Orientation

Estimates vary of the percentage of LGBT (a term including lesbian, gay male, bisexual, and transgendered) individuals in the population due to two factors: the reluctance of some people to disclose their sexual orientation on a survey and the error inherent in small sample surveys. The best estimates of the percentages of LGBT Americans may come from the *National Health Interview Survey* (NHIS), an annual survey of about 35,000 randomly-chosen American households containing about 87,000 individuals (Centers for Disease Control, 2019). Statistics from the 2015 NHIS found that 1.4% of women and 1.8% of men are lesbian and gay, respectively, and 1.1% of women and .5% of men describe themselves as bisexual. Other estimates of the prevalence of sexual orientation come from the National Survey of Family Growth, an interview survey of about 10,000 American adults, aged 15 to 49, focusing on family life, reproductive health, and related topics (Centers for Disease Control, 2019). Statistics from the 2016 survey showed that 1.3% of women and 1.9% of men said they were homosexual, gay, or lesbian, 5.5% of women and 2.0% of men said they were bisexual, and 0.9% of women and 1.0% of men said either they didn't know or refused to answer (Copen, Chandra, & Febo-Vazquez, 2016). Sexual diversity is noteworthy because, relative to gender and race, it is an invisible status and this greatly affects whether one is a target of gay-related prejudice and how one copes with prejudice. We take up concepts of sexual orientation and identity and the stereotyping and discrimination of LGBT individuals in Chapter 7.

Age

Compared with other dimensions of diversity, age diversity receives relatively little research attention (see Figure 1.1). That may change in response to the large Baby Boomer generation reaching retirement and old age thresholds. According to *American Community Survey* census updates for 2017 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018), the median (or 50th percentile) age for the U.S. population is 37.8 years, which is over a year older than

the median age in 2010. The average life expectancy at birth for the U.S. population is 78.6 years (Xu, Murphy, Kochanek, Bastian, & Arias, 2018). Substantial race differences exist in life expectancy, ranging from non-Hispanic Black males (71.5 years) to Hispanic females (82.4 years). On average, women live about 5 years longer than men, which means that women increasingly outnumber men as they age: Women are 56% of the 65-and-older population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, people who are age 65 and older now represent 15% of the population, and the percentage is predicted to reach 20% by 2040 when the last wave of Baby Boomers reaches retirement age (Ortman, Velkoff, & Hog, 2014). The growth of the senior citizen population has implications for eldercare, health care, and other issues. We will consider age-related stereotypes and ageism in Chapter 9.

Making Sense of Diversity

These statistics offer a glimpse of the extent of social differences around us. But how do we make sense of this diversity? When we talk about diversity, *how* do we talk about it? Do we regard diversity as a good thing or a bad thing, as something to be preserved and celebrated, or something to be overcome? Is diversity more of a political or a social word? Diversity can be approached from several intellectual perspectives, each imparting a different meaning to the concept. Before introducing a psychological perspective on diversity, let's clarify what is meant by diversity from demographic, political, ideological, and social justice perspectives.

Diversity as a Demographic Concern

A common use of diversity involves the range or proportion of social differences that are represented in a group of people, an organization, or a situation. When used in this way—often in concert with social statistics—the term reflects demographic concerns. To understand the nature of social differences and how they differ from individual differences, try this exercise. The next time you attend the class for which you are reading this, look around and consider the many ways that the people in that class differ. Physically, they have different dimensions, such as weight and height, and characteristics, such as hair color and style. Psychologically, they have varying levels of self-confidence and anxiety. Intellectually, they differ in their verbal ability and intelligence. Finally, the students in your class probably differ in the social categories or groupings of which they represent, such as sex, ethnicity, cultural background, and religion. Notice how the first three (physical, psychological, and intellectual) are examples of *individual* differences—each student probably differs from every other student on that dimension. Social differences, however, refer to groupings or categories of individuals such as male and female; Catholic, Jewish, or Protestant; or single, divorced, or married. People are *socially* different when they associate with or are members of different social categories. Demographers, as scientists of vital and social statistics, study diversity using social categories.

Social categories are also useful and informative tools for a psychological study of diversity. They help us organize and remember other information about people,

operating something like computer files in which social information is arranged and stored. As a result, when an individual's social category is brought to mind, that related information—such as our attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about people in that category—becomes very accessible. Try this free association task. What images or thoughts come to mind when you think of the social category *poor*? If you imagine a person who was lacking in the intelligence or motivation to make something of himself, dressed in shabby clothes, and living in the bad section of town, you begin to see how social categories are rich with information about a person's characteristics and behavior and how the concept of diversity is influenced by the kind of information we associate with dimensions of social difference.

Social categories are also useful for describing people: We commonly identify others by their social characteristics. In describing a person to a friend you might say, "You know, she's Hispanic, an engineering major, and a Sigma Tau." How many social categories are employed in that description? Compared to descriptions of others that cite individual differences, such as their height, optimism, and grade point average, descriptions that involve *social* differences are more available and informative. Social identification is not limited to our thinking about other people; we also identify ourselves in social terms. If asked to describe yourself, you would likely use many social terms, such as Asian American, female, Catholic, or Republican. Because we identify ourselves in social terms, we are conscious of the beliefs and assumptions that other people typically associate with those categories.

Psychologists and demographers, therefore, share a common interest in social categories. But whereas demographers analyze social statistics, psychologists are interested in how social differences relate to individual behavior. Clearly, dimensions of social difference are important to our thinking about ourselves and other people. The significance of social differences, however, goes beyond the mere fact that we think of people in terms of their social groups. Social categories are laden with a great deal of information that influences how we perceive and experience our social world.

Diversity as a Political Concern

Sometimes the term diversity refers to specific dimensions of social difference that typically include sex, race, ethnicity, and to a lesser extent, physical disability. This meaning may stem from the 1978 Supreme Court *Bakke* decision in which diversity was viewed as a goal that could justify admitting students to a university based on their race. If so, diversity in a political perspective refers to particular social groups who have experienced disadvantage and discrimination (i.e., women, Blacks, Hispanics, and other ethnic minority groups). To have a diverse corporation or university, for example, is to include (or not exclude) members of historically disadvantaged social groups. This definition, however, fails to acknowledge that many social groups other than women and racial minorities have experienced injustice in our society, including gays and lesbians, the poor, released convicts, Muslims and Jews, and obese people.

This conceptualization—that diversity is the presence of people from historically disadvantaged social groups or categories—has political overtones and is limiting to a psychological study of diversity in two ways. First, recall that one of the principles of this book is that we construct diversity through our perceptions, beliefs, expectations, and

behavior toward people based on social dimensions. But if diversity is linked predominantly to women and ethnic minorities, then the range of social difference (or *important* social difference) is preset for us by a particular legal definition of diversity. Although the motives for including members of historically disadvantaged groups in our schools and businesses are noble, this political meaning of diversity restricts the actual diversity of our social environment.

Second, the political usage of diversity focuses too much attention on social differences that are visible. Although some social differences are visible, others are not so obvious. For example, can you tell which of your classmates is learning disabled, Jewish, or gay? Perhaps you *think* you can based on their behavior or appearance, but in fact, those judgments are probably not very accurate. From a psychological standpoint, diversity need not be limited to visible dimensions of social difference. Indeed, whether our social differences are visible or hidden from others is an important factor in understanding their influence on our psychological and social adjustment.

In sum, a psychological approach to diversity includes obvious dimensions of social difference as well as those which are less apparent or even unobservable. Psychological and political approaches to diversity, however, share an important feature—the recognition that there is a greater psychological burden associated with being a member of some social categories than others and some of this burden is attributable to past oppression and injustice.

Diversity as an Ideological Concern

Thus far we have considered that the concept of diversity is both a demographic and political concern. If social difference is a fact of life in our schools, communities, and nation, why is the concept of diversity such a controversial and divisive topic? The controversy that surrounds the term diversity is due to a third meaning that incorporates qualities that *should* be present in a diverse society. The qualities that should accompany social diversity are subjective and, as a result, open to debate and controversy. Not surprisingly, people take different positions on why diversity is valuable or desirable. Ideological perspectives on diversity tend to be one of three types: the melting pot, multiculturalism, and color-blindness.

The Melting Pot

For decades, the United States has taken great pride in the America-as-melting-pot idea and its prominent symbol, the Statue of Liberty. The section of Emma Lazarus's poem, "The New Colossus," that is mounted on the base of Lady Liberty, illustrates the melting pot:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

Source: From "The New Colossus," Emma Lazarus, 1883

People who use the term diversity in this way tend to believe that a diverse society should be one where all people are welcome, where social differences are accepted and understood, and where people with social differences relate harmoniously. In the film *Manhattan Murder Mystery*, when a gentlemanly neighbor is suspected of murdering his wife, Larry (Woody Allen) retorts: “So? New York is a melting pot.” This parody is nevertheless instructive: The **melting pot** ideal involves the acceptance of others’ difference if they are (or perceived to be) otherwise devoted to the majority-group values and goals, such as working hard and being a responsible citizen. This melting pot view of diversity is reflected in an essay by Edgar Beckham, who coordinates Wesleyan University’s Campus Diversity Initiative: “How unfortunate, especially in a democracy, that we fail to note how insistently diversity also points to unity.” Beckham (1997) argues that diversity requires a unifying context in which social differences among people can work together for the benefit of everyone. So the melting pot embodies a vision of a school, community, or nation in which differences among people—especially those that relate to ethnicity and cultural heritage—are blended into a single social and cultural product. Critics of the idea that diversity evolves toward a blending of difference argue that the melting pot conveys assimilationist values and thus is little more than an offer of acceptance from the majority group on the majority group’s terms. Alternative metaphors that convey more egalitarian and inclusive attitudes toward nonmajority groups include the mosaic, kaleidoscope, or tossed salad. These metaphors offer a vision in which diverse social traditions and values are preserved, forming elements of a larger product whose identity is multiplex and changing rather than unitary and static. These metaphors reflect a multicultural approach to social difference.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is the name given to beliefs or ideals that promote the recognition, appreciation, celebration, and preservation of social difference. People who espouse multiculturalism value the preservation of the separate voices, cultures, and traditions that comprise our communities and nation. A patchwork quilt rather than a melting pot provides a helpful metaphor for appreciating multiculturalism. In fact, quilts and quilting projects are used by educators to teach diversity concepts in elementary school-age children. A song written by Lauren Mayer and part of the *Second Grade Rocks!* educational curriculum, expresses this idea:

We are pieces of a quilt of many colors
See, how we blend together in harmony
And each piece is not complete without the others
Stitching a quilt made of you and me.

Source: Music & lyrics by Lauren Mayer © 2004

In multicultural approaches to diversity, patches of people, each with a distinct cultural or national heritage, become sewn into a large social quilt. The patches are connected to each other, perhaps by a common commitment to some overarching value such as democracy or freedom. In the spirit of the metaphor and the values surrounding

multiculturalism, the quilt preserves the uniqueness of social and cultural groups while at the same time uniting them for a superordinate purpose. Critics argue that multiculturalism too easily becomes laden with identity politics, in which preserving the rights and privileges of minority groups takes priority in the “quilt-making” enterprise. Multiculturalism in this critique can include a priority of making reparations to minority groups for past discrimination or exclusion. So although the quilt metaphor is pleasant to imagine, it may be difficult to work out in policy. Limited resources and the democratic process often require that we prioritize and make distinctions among minority social groups’ rights and interests.

Color-Blindness

As an ideology, **color-blindness** attempts to consider people strictly as individuals, ignoring or deemphasizing racial or ethnic group membership. To adopt color-blindness is to try to remove race from one’s thinking and as a factor in understanding the way people are treated. Color-blindness is generally an ideology held by the racial majority about or toward racial minority persons. Also inherent in color-blindness is an assimilationist hope: that people from racial minority groups will downplay their racial and ethnic differences and adapt to mainstream norms (Wolsko, Park, & Judd, 2006). Proponents of color-blindness believe that racial diversity in communities, businesses, and schools is a valuable goal but that greater diversity should be achieved by making decisions based on factors other than race. Critics of color-blindness argue that erasing or attempting to erase race from one’s thinking about individuals blinds perceivers to the ways racial bias and discrimination is generated and maintained by institutions, policies, and traditions (Wingfield, 2015). Moreover, being color-blind also implies being blind to one’s own race. For European American people, this means avoiding the realities of White privilege in many aspects of society.

Melting pot, multiculturalist, and color-blindness notions of diversity have different implications for individuals from minority groups. In melting pot and color-blind ideologies, racial and ethnic minorities gain acceptance to the extent that they assimilate and adopt majority-group customs. In a multicultural society, minority groups’ culture and customs are accepted and preserved by the majority group. Which ideology is better for minorities? The research is mixed: Some work shows that multiculturalism is threatening to Whites and contributes to prejudice against minorities (Morrison, Plaut, & Ybarra, 2010; Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011). Other research finds that multiculturalism decreases and color-blindness increases minorities’ perception of bias against their group (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009; Gutierrez & Unzueta, 2010). A recent review of the literature concludes that whereas both color-blindness and multiculturalism have some negative implications for people of color, multiculturalism generally offers more to reduce inequality and improve opportunities for minority group individuals than does color-blindness (Plaut, Thomas, Hurd & Romano, 2018).

Regardless of whether you believe that melting pot, multicultural, or color-blindness ideals are desirable or even possible, we must acknowledge that diversity is often used in a manner that conflates description and ideology—what is and what should be. With regard to diversity, the three ideologies described above are statements of what

some people feel *should* be in a socially diverse environment. We will approach our study of diversity regarding it neither as inherently desirable nor undesirable but simply as an important characteristic of our social world.

Diversity and Concern for Social Justice

Diversity is not something that is inherently good or bad, but many dimensions of social difference are associated with inequality and disadvantage. Therefore, diversity is also a concern of individuals who value and strive for social justice. Social justice exists when all the groups of people in a society are afforded the same rights and opportunities and when their life outcomes are not unfairly constrained by prejudice and discrimination. As the diversity of a community increases, so does the potential for some groups of people to be disadvantaged relative to other groups. In a socially just community, the accomplishments and well-being of some people are not won at the expense of others.

The United States is a diverse society, but how socially just are we? Much data suggest that although all Americans enjoy similar rights and opportunities, not all realize comparable outcomes. All U.S. citizens are entitled to free public education through Grade 12, but not all of them get it. According to the U.S. Census *Current Population Report* for 2015, 93% of Whites, 89% of Asians, 87% of Blacks, and 67% of Hispanic/Latino (of any race) had earned a high school diploma (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). In principle, all people should have access to health care, if not from their employer then from a government health care program such as Medicare or Medicaid. In 2017, according to U.S. Census figures, the uninsured rate (the percentage of people with no health insurance) was 6% for White non-Hispanics, 7% for Asians, 11% for Blacks, and 16% for Hispanics of any race. And children living in poverty, who are disproportionately Black and Hispanic/Latino, were two times as likely to have no health insurance as children whose families had incomes above the poverty level (Berchick, Hood, & Barnett, 2018).

In a socially just society, people will not be victimized because of their group membership. However, according to data from the Department of Justice's *National Crime Victimization Survey*, more than 80% of violent hate crimes are motivated by race or ethnicity (Tessler, Langton, Rivara, Vavilala, & Rowhani-Rahbar, 2018). The risk of race/ethnicity-motivated victimization was substantially greater for Blacks and Hispanic/Latinos (of any race) than for Whites. Although Blacks are about 13% of the U.S. population, U.S. Bureau of Justice statistics show that they make up 33% of the sentenced (state and federal) prison population. Hispanic/Latinos represented 16% of the adult population but accounted for 23% of inmates whereas Whites are 64% of adult population but make up 30% of prisoners (Gramlich, 2019). Another way to look at racial disparities in incarceration is the incarceration rate, or the number per 100,000 people that are imprisoned. Blacks (1,549/100,000) are incarcerated at over 5 times the rate of Whites (272/100,000) and almost two times the rate of Hispanic/Latinos (823/100,000). These statistics suggest that in a nation devoted to equal opportunity for its citizens, racial and ethnic minorities and poor people experience more unequal outcomes than White and wealthy people do.

Psychologists have long approached the study of diversity with an underlying concern for identifying, explaining, and correcting social injustice. For example, Kenneth

and Mamie Clark's (1940) work showing that Black children preferred to play with White rather than with Black dolls was instrumental in the Supreme Court's 1954 decision declaring that racially segregated schools were unconstitutional. Psychologists' concern for social justice is also evident in the way research on stereotyping and prejudice has been conducted. The great majority of research articles on stereotypes and stereotyping (numbering in the tens of thousands) have examined Whites' beliefs and preconceptions about Blacks while only a relative handful of articles have examined Blacks' stereotypes of Whites. When stereotyping processes should be the same in both directions and thus equally understandable from either group's perspective, why does this research bias exist? Stereotypes held by empowered, majority group members—like Whites and males—are much more problematic because stereotypes can cause, support, and justify discrimination of minority group individuals. Because leadership positions in business and government have traditionally been and continue to be disproportionately held by White people, their stereotypic beliefs about Blacks have the potential to become institutionalized and contribute to institutional forms of discrimination. So psychologists have combined their basic research questions (e.g., What are the processes that lead to stereotyping?) with concerns for understanding and potentially addressing social injustice. As a final bit of evidence for the social justice agenda of psychologists, consider the mission statements of the two national psychological societies in the United States. The stated purpose of the American Psychology Association is to “advance psychology as a science and profession and as a means of promoting health, education, *and human welfare*” (italics added). Likewise, the mission of the Association for Psychological Science is to “promote, protect, and advance the interests of scientifically oriented psychology in research, application, teaching, and *the improvement of human welfare*” (italics added).

Diversity Is Accused of Buzzword or PC Status, According to Many

What is meant by that characterization? What meaning of the term diversity is being dismissed with these labels?

Let's pause and sum up. A psychological study of diversity shares with demographers and policy makers an interest in social categories and historically disadvantaged groups. However, the most prominent theme in a psychological study of diversity is the concern with social justice. So as we proceed through the chapters of this book, we will strive to gain a psychological understanding of diversity *and* acknowledge the social injustices faced by people from various social groups. At the end of the book (Chapter 12), we will focus directly on interventions and strategies for reducing prejudice and promoting social equality and harmony. This book must also address two shortcomings in the psychological research on social difference. First, research attention to

Figure 1.2 The Goals of a Psychological Study of Diversity

A psychological study of diversity must

- Examine how diversity shapes our own identities and behavior
- Examine how we shape the diversity of our social worlds
- Confront a wide range of diversity dimensions, not just those that are associated with historical disadvantage
- Recognize the social injustice that attends many dimensions of diversity and use our scientific knowledge to respond to injustice
- Recognize not just social differences but also the diversity within and similarities between groups of people

diversity has been dominated by a small number of dimensions: gender and, to a lesser extent, race and disability (see Figure 1.1). Race and gender affect our thinking about others more than other social categories do; this may explain the greater research activity on those dimensions of diversity. The research priorities displayed in Figure 1.1 may also reflect broader societal efforts and the psychological research involved in those efforts to extend equal rights all based on gender and race. Still, there are many other dimensions of diversity and social injustices that affect the members of those groups that students of the psychology of diversity must confront. Second, psychological research favors finding differences between groups of people over similarities between and differences within groups of people (J. M. Jones, 1994). For example, tens of thousands of studies document the (relatively few) psychological differences between men and women. This same research obscures, however, both the many ways that men and women are alike as well as the diversity within the populations of men and women. A psychology of diversity must therefore accentuate shared qualities between and diversity within groups of people. The goals of a psychological study of diversity are listed in Figure 1.2.

The Psychology of Diversity: A Conceptual Framework

A psychology of diversity considers how individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behavior are intertwined with their diverse social environments. At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced two principles that form a framework for a psychological study of diversity. First, social difference is constructed and maintained by individuals, and second, social difference exerts influence on individuals. Let us consider further the interdependence of the individual and his or her social context.

Diversity Is Socially Constructed

The Individual Is a Social Perceiver

As individuals living in a social world, we confront and process volumes of social information each day. From others' skin color to facial characteristics, from their clothing preferences to political attitudes, we sift through, organize, and make sense of countless pieces of social information. Although we can be very fast and efficient in the way we process these data, psychological researchers have demonstrated that we commonly make mistakes and exhibit inaccuracies in our thinking about other people and our social world. These tendencies and errors have consequences for our conclusions and judgments about our social world and the people who comprise it. We tend to rely on information that is most available in our memory banks to help us make judgments about other people, and this information leads us to make mistakes in judging the diversity of our social environments. Consider this: What proportion of your college or university student population is made of physically disabled individuals? Do you have to guess? On what information will you base your guess? Most of us have rather infrequent interactions with disabled individuals and tend not to notice them around campus. Based on our own interactions with and memory for disabled students, we would probably underestimate their numbers in the student population. In sum, the extent of diversity that we perceive in our schools, organizations, and communities is influenced by our natural limitations and biases in dealing with an overwhelming amount of social information.

Our attention and memory for social information tends to be organized by social categories, which, in turn, can distort differences and obscure similarities between members of different categories. Information about the characteristics of, for example, women and men are organized and stored in different memory structures. Although there are advantages to storing social information in this way, separating male and female information in memory leads to an overemphasis of the differences between men and women as well as an underappreciation of the ways that men and women are the same. The popular *Men Are From Venus, Women Are From Mars* books and videos suggest that the differences between men and women are vast and inexplicable (Gray, 1992). Psychological theory and research helps us see, however, that gender diversity—the extent to which men and women are different—is distorted by our use of social categories.

The Individual Is a Social Actor

Not only are we social perceivers, we also act within our social contexts in ways that have implications for diversity. We typically bring into our interactions with other people a set of beliefs and expectations about them. These expectations can function in two ways: guiding the way we act toward other people and influencing the way others react to us. Here's an example. Psychological studies have demonstrated that most of us feel tension and uncertainty in interactions with physically disabled people. These feelings may stem from the belief that handicapped individuals have special needs with which we are uncomfortable or unfamiliar. Our beliefs about disabled people may lead us to

avoid them or keep our interactions with them brief and superficial, thereby contributing to their differentness from us. Moreover, our suspicious and avoidant actions actually contribute to rather than ameliorate their marginalization and dependence on others. In other words, our behavior often sends signals to other people about their differentness and how they are expected to act, leading them to live up to (or, more commonly, down to) those expectations. In this way, our behavior toward others actually alters the extent of difference in our social environment.

Finally, our actions toward socially different others are also driven by our feelings about ourselves. We have discussed how we think of ourselves in terms of our social categories and affiliations. These social identities are value laden; we are proud of being, for example, Jewish, Latino, or female. Because we are emotionally invested in our social categories and memberships, we want them to compare favorably with other social groups. The desire to have our social group look good compared to others invariably guides us to behave in ways that create or enhance differences between us. In short, the diversity we perceive in our schools or communities may result in part from our needs to feel good about our own social groups.

Diversity Is a Social Influence

To study how the individual and the social context are interdependent, we must recognize that our behavior is influenced by a variety of social forces, one of which is our differentness from others. Therefore, we not only perceive social difference in our environments, many of us *experience* diversity, too. We are aware that we are different from other people in many ways, such as in our skin color, family background, and religious beliefs. This experience is psychologically important because being different from others influences the way we think and feel about ourselves and interact with other people.

Influence on Identity

Psychologists have learned that our identities—whom we regard ourselves as—incorporate the impressions and beliefs others hold regarding us. The experience of diversity acknowledges that we live among people who, themselves, are constructors of their social world. In other words, other people categorize *you* based on dimensions of social difference (just as you tend to do to them). Other people may not know you personally, but as a member of some (often visibly apparent) social group about which they have prior knowledge, you are known to them to some degree. The *you* that is known to other people and based largely on your social group affiliation may differ sharply from how you view yourself. The discrepancy between our identities and the way other people identify us has profound implications for our psychological well-being and social adjustment. Imagine a disabled individual who views herself in the following terms: intelligent, Italian American, athletic, Republican, and outgoing, but is viewed by others primarily in terms of her disability. How frustrating it must be to realize that other people think of you as disabled (and the negative qualities associated with being disabled) when you do not think of yourself in that way or when

disabled is just one (and perhaps a relatively unimportant) part of who you are. One's social identities and the beliefs and assumptions that other people associate with those identities have important implications for one's psychological identity and well-being. In sum, a psychological appreciation of diversity must include an understanding of the experience of being different from others.

Influence on Behavior

The experience of diversity extends beyond how we identify ourselves and includes how we behave. Just as our actions toward others that are guided by category-based expectations have implications for the perception of diversity, others' behavior toward us follows *their* beliefs and expectations about us and influences how we experience a diverse world. Others' beliefs and expectations about the traits and behaviors of the members of a social group comprise a role—a script for conducting oneself in the ongoing drama of life. However, social roles are a double-edged sword. On one hand, they are comfortable contexts in which to live because playing the expected role brings the approval of others. On the other hand, social roles are limiting; they constrain what a member of a social group should be or do. For example, there is still a strong collective belief in this society that women are best suited for roles that involve nurturant, supportive, and helpful behavior. Not surprisingly, women greatly outnumber men in such occupations as elementary school teacher, nurse, and secretary. Adopting this female role in one's behavior is associated with opportunities in those vocational areas as well as a cultural stamp of approval at playing the woman role appropriately but also place women at an economic disadvantage. You can see, then, how our behavior is not ours alone but is shaped by cultural forces that stem directly from social differences.

Summary

- Diversity is difference based on one's sex, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, national background, income and education level, first language, religion, and appearance—and these are just the major categories of social difference!
- A psychological study of diversity must consider how social categories are tools for viewing and evaluating other people; that diversity is not limited to historically disadvantaged or visible groups; that diversity is an escapable and value neutral aspect of our daily living; and that a concern for social justice must accompany the study of social difference.
- The psychology of diversity is based on two principles. One, through our thoughts, judgments, and actions, we shape and distort the raw material of objective social differences. Two, the diverse social contexts in which we live shape our identities and actions.

Diversity Issue 1.1: Hypodescent

Meghan Markle, Duchess of Sussex and wife of Prince Harry, has a Black mother and a White father. Ms. Markle proudly identifies herself as biracial or, in her terms, “half Black and half White” (Markle, 2015). She has been the target of criticism and attacks, both on social media and from the journalistic community, revealing subtle—and sometimes explicit—racism. The negative assumptions and treatment of the Duchess suggest that critics assume Ms. Markle is Black. U.S. law has historically declared people from mixed (Black and White) racial backgrounds to be Black, expressing the principle of hypodescent. **Hypodescent** is the automatic assignment of mixed-race individuals to their inferior or lower-status racial group (M. Harris, 1964). Hypodescent operates in miscegenation laws, which are still in place in many states to deny freedoms or opportunities to mixed-race individuals. But hypodescent also seems to guide our everyday social perceptions. Many experiments have shown that when presented with pictures of Black/White mixed-race people, study participants are much more likely to categorize them as Black than as White (see Cooley, Brown-Iannuzzi, Brown, & Polikoff, 2017; Freeman, Pauker, & Sanchez, 2016). However, response options in those studies were limited to Black and White. To address this limitation, Jacqueline Chen and her colleagues had White participants categorize White, Black, and mixed-race (White and Black) faces while providing a multiracial response option. Their results showed that participants categorized mixed-race faces as multiracial rather than Black and distinguished between mixed-race and Black faces in their responses (J. Chen, Pauker, Gaither, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2018). This pattern was replicated in a follow-up experiment with a different

sorting task, but participants again categorized mixed-race faces as multiracial much more than Black. A third study found that participants categorized mixed-race faces as “non-White” more than any other category.

Do Black perceivers categorize multiracial people using the hypodescent principle? Arnold Ho and his colleagues found that both Black and White participants categorized a mixed (Black–White) race person as more Black than White (Ho, Kteily, & Chen, 2017). However, follow up research revealed that the motivations for those categorizations differed. White participants used the hypodescent principle for anti-egalitarian purposes, as an exclusionary rule to maintain social hierarchies and racial group boundaries. Black participants, by contrast, used hypodescent for egalitarian purposes. Believing that mixed-race individuals face discrimination, categorizing them as Black expresses stigma-based solidarity and a sense of kinship with that person (Craig & Richeson, 2016).

These findings suggest that the hypodescent principle oversimplifies our perceptions of multiracial individuals. Absent ancestry information about people, we tend to categorize multiracial people as non-White but resist automatic assignment to a particular minority group while preserving group status for multiracial people. Among members of racial minority groups, hypodescent-based judgments can express egalitarian and inclusive social values. And finally, exposure to biracial individuals reduces color-blindness—the ideology discussed earlier whose point is to avoid categorizing people in racial terms. In a series of experiments, Sarah Gaither and her colleagues (2019) showed that White participants’ exposure to real-life biracial individuals reduced their commitment to

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color-blindness. The participants perceived less color-blindness in biracial people, which in turn led to their being more aware of racial identities and differences.

Consider your own racial and ethnic background. Who were your parents and grandparents, in terms of their country of origin, language, race, and religion? Does your identity reflect that multicultural background?

If you have a multiracial or multiethnic identity, does your identity reflect a melting pot, multicultural, or color-blind model of diversity? In other words, are your racial identities mixed together to form a unique cultural product (you); are there elements of each heritage preserved and existing side-by-side in you; or do you not think of yourself in terms of racial or ethnic categories at all?

Diversity Issue 1.2: Income Inequality

Income inequality refers to the distribution of wealth and income in the population and is often captured in the income gap between the rich (defined here as the wealthiest 1% of families) and everyone else. The Great Depression and World War II eras saw a marked change in income distribution from the previous Gilded Age, with the top 1% of families receiving 11% and the bottom 90% receiving nearly 68% of the income. However, the gap between the top 1% and the lowest 90% of families has steadily increased over the past 30 years. According to recent data, the top 1% of families now receive 22.5% in all income, and the bottom 90% of families receive only 50% (Saez, 2013). What is an acceptable or fair gap between the ultra rich and the large majority of middle- and low-income families is open to debate, but a 2014 Pew Research Center survey show that most American adults view the rich/poor gap as either a “very big” (47%) or “moderately big” (27%) problem (Pew Research Center Report, 2014).

Income inequality is correlated with health outcomes such that countries with higher inequality have higher death and infant mortality rates, shorter life expectancies, and higher rates of depression and obesity (Lochner, Pamuk, Makuc, Kennedy, & Kawachi, 2001). We would expect poverty and poor health outcomes to be highly correlated, and they are, but income inequality alone predicts poor health outcomes even among the wealthy. Correlations do not prove that inequality causes health declines in a population, so how can we understand the relationship? Some scholars argue that income inequality erodes social cohesion and contributes to anxiety and stress for all members of the population, and these factors help explain the poor health outcomes of high-income inequality countries (Inequality.org, n.d.).

How does being aware that the super rich are getting richer and average working people are not affect you psychologically? Emotionally? Does that inequality change your behavior? Discuss.

KEY TERMS

diversity 2
melting pot 9

multiculturalism 9
color-blindness 10

Hypodescent 17

FOR FURTHER READING

Boatright-Horowitz, S. L., & Soeung, S. (2009). Teaching White privilege to White students can mean saying good-bye to positive student evaluations. *American Psychologist*, 64(6), 574–575. doi: 10.1037/a0016593

This article discusses the consequences of trying to confront racism, particularly White students' racial attitudes, in the classroom for students' evaluations of their course and teacher.

Fassinger, R. E. (2008). Workplace diversity and public policy: Challenges and opportunities for psychology. *American Psychologist*, 63(4), 252–268. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.63.4.252

This article discusses barriers to greater diversity in the American workplace.

Wingfield, A. (2015, September). Colorblindness is counterproductive. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/color-blindness-is-counterproductive/405037/>

This essay offers a critique of colorblind ideology from sociological research.