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# Cultural Identity and Diversity in Organizations

*Bridging the Gap Between Group Differences and Individual Uniqueness*

## BERNARDO M. FERDMAN

The concept of *diversity* as it has been employed by organizational researchers, theorists, and practitioners can encompass a broad range of differences. Most agree, however, on the group-based nature of human heterogeneity. At an individual level, no two persons are alike in every respect, and thus they can be regarded as diverse relative to each other. But it is those features that make us like some specified group of people and different than other groups that constitute the principal thrust of much current work on diversity in organizations. Thus diversity in organizations is typically seen to be composed of variations in race, gender, ethniqity, nationality, sexual orientation, physical abilities, social class, age, and other such socially meaningful categorizations, together with the additional differences caused by or signified by these markers.

Yet at the same time, particularly in an individualist society such as the United States, many people view their individuality and uniqueness as a significant part of themselves that they would not like to be overlooked. When they are described primarily in group terms, many Americans experience this as a threat to their individuality. Given a societal and a social scientific preference to view the self as an "independent, bounded, autonomous entit[y]" (Markus & Kitayama, 1994, p. 568) that "(a) comprises a unique, bounded configuration of internal attributes . . . and (b) behaves primarily as a consequence of these internal attributes" (p. 569), many people choose to see themselves and others as distinct from particular collectives. As Markus and Kitayama (1994) describe it, this "individualist ideal . . . occasions a desire not to be defined by others and a deep-seated wariness, in some instances even a fear, of the influence of the generalized other, of the social, and of the collective" (p. 568). In this construction, individual uniqueness is typically construed as the ways in which a person is separate from and different than other individuals and independent of the collective. While not all societies view the self in this individualist manner (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994; Triandis, 1989), this is a tendency that must be addressed in working with diversity in the United States.

Whether or not persons are constructed essentially as members of collectives, there is a great deal of within-group variation that must be considered if we are to have a complete picture of the dynamics of diversity in organizations (Ferdman, 1992; Ferdman & Cortes, 1992). Part of this variation is due to the processes accompanying the intergroup contact inherent in a diverse society. It must be remembered, for example, that individuals are at once members of many cross-cutting categories. Thus, from a social psychological perspective, group-level accounts of diversity are insufficient if they do not provide a means to consider the linkages between collectives and their individual members.

In this chapter, I seek to bridge the gap between a focus on group differences and a focus on individual uniqueness by elaborating the concept of *cultural identity*, which may be defined as the person's individual image of the cultural features that characterize his or her group(s) (Ferdman, 1990) and of the reflection (or lack of reflection) of these features in his or her self-representation. This construct provides a vehicle by which researchers, theorists, and practitioners can pay attention to within-group variations while also taking seriously the very real ways in which groups differ. It also permits exploring systematic variations in how people see themselves as connected to their group(s), including those differences based on multiple group memberships. Thus the concept of cultural identity can serve as a psychological lens to examine the experience and impact of diversity at the level of the individual while maintaining in focus the reality of group-level differences.

## Two Current Approaches to Understanding the Dynamics of Diversity

Many explorations of the dynamics of diversity typically seem to follow one of two approaches (Ferdman, 1992). A categorization or labeling approach —a predominant one in social psychology—focuses on the impact of the boundaries between groups. The intercultural approach—a more interdisciplinary perspective—highlights the implications of actual between-group differences in culture.

The traditional approach within social psychology to understanding intergroup relations has focused on the negative dynamics associated with the highlighting of group memberships. These correlates include prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination (for reviews, see Alderfer, 1986; Brewer & Kramer, 1985; Cox, 1993; Ferdman, 1992; S. Fiske, 1993; Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Messick & Mackie, 1989; Tajfel, 1981; Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987; Worchel & Austin, 1986). A great deal of work in the social psychology of intergroup relations shows that the dynamics of interaction between the members of different groups often can be understood in terms of the significance to individuals of the intergroup boundaries themselves, rather than in terms of any specific differences between the groups.

Indeed, much work on ameliorating negative intergroup relations in organizations has focused on helping people work better across group boundaries. From this perspective, this is accomplished most effectively by emphasizing the common ground individuals may have as members of the same social system (e.g., Brewer, 1994; Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993; Gaertner, Mann, Murrell, & Dovidio, 1989). In many cases, these approaches are based on moving people "beyond" perceiving and treating each other as members of different groups and toward working together as individuals (e.g., Brewer & Miller, 1984, 1988; Miller & Brewer, 1986).

This strategy is largely premised on a notion of the person as "self-contained" (Sampson, 1988), one whose essence is distinguishable and separate from his or her ascribed characteristics (see also Appiah, 1990). In this

construction, the core of "who I am" is based on characteristics that are strictly unique to me and that distinguish me from those around me, rather than on those features that make me similar and connect me to others. Because this notion views the boundary between self and other as quite firm and control of action and outcome as located in the person, those subscribing to this idea do not consider it problematic to suggest that individuals can in some way "let go" of their group memberships. Even when it is not presumed that it is possible (or desirable) for the person to be symbolically detached from the group, a strict categorization or labeling viewpoint emphasizes the goal of living with intergroup demarcations such that their negative consequences are avoided.

In line with the focus on diversity as group-based difference, however, a central theme in much of the current work on diversity in organizations is the cultural nature of heterogeneity. In the intercultural approach, the emphasis is on the *content* of the differences that are denoted by, but not the same as, the group boundaries. For example, Cox (1993) defines cultural diversity as "the representation, in one social system, of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance" (p. 6). The major tenet in this approach is that because social groups vary in their preferred patterns of values, beliefs, norms, styles, and behaviors—in short, in their cultural features— our memberships in these social groups distinguish us not only in name but also in our views of the world, in our construction of meaning, and in our behavioral and attitudinal preferences. The intercultural view emphasizes that all of us are in an essential sense cultural beings, shaped by and oriented in the world by the cultures of the groups to which we belong. Thus a significant component of the diversity in an organization is constituted by cultural differences among its members.

This focus on the cultural aspects of diversity has led to increasing attention paid by organizational scholars and practitioners to the many cultural differences among various types of groups. This newer line of work looks at the implications of cultural differences for interpersonal and organizational processes and outcomes when members of these various groups work together or otherwise come in contact. As evidenced by trends in teaching (Ferdman, 1994; Ferdman & Thompson, 1994), in research and theory (see, e.g., Adler, 1991; Arvey, Bhagat, & Salas, 1991; Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991; Cox, 1993; Ferdman, 1992; Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, Dunnette, & Hough, 1994), and in organizational practice (see, e.g., Cross, Katz, Miller, & Seashore, 1994; Jackson et al., 1992), today many authors view a complete understanding of

organizational behavior as necessarily incorporating consideration of the role of cultural differences. At the same time, psychology in general is grappling with the implications of a cultural view of human behavior (e.g., Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1992; Betancourt & Lopez, 1993; Jones, 1991; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Schweder & Sullivan, 1993; Smith & Bond, 1993; Sue, 1991).

From this work, we have learned that ignoring or attempting to suppress cultural differences can result in many negative outcomes for organizations, groups, and individuals. These perspectives have led to an increasing emphasis on organizational interventions aimed at helping people to understand, accept, and value the cultural differences between groups, with the ultimate goal of reaping the benefits of cultural diversity. Such views and approaches have also typically meant looking at individuals in the context of their particular groups, and thus being cognizant of and sensitive to their (and our) cultural group memberships.

## Separating (and Reconnecting) the Group and the Individual

While the use of culture as a focal concept has been very important in framing the positive aspects of diversity, considerations and descriptions of culture have tended to focus primarily on the group level. Culture is by definition a concept used to describe a social collective. For example, Betancourt and Lopez (1993) cite Rohner's (1984) view of culture:

> [He] proposed a conceptualization of culture in terms of "highly variable systems of meanings," which are "learned" and "shared by a people or an identifiable segment of a population." ... Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of Rohner's formulation is the explicit statement of aspects such as the learned, socially shared, and variable nature of culture. (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993, p. 630)

Betancourt and Lopez go on to advocate the utility of focusing on subjective culture "defined in terms of psychologically relevant elements, such as roles and values" (p. 630).

Specific accounts of cultural elements (e.g., Berry et al., 1992; A. Fiske, 1992; Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, Kurowski, & Gelfand, 1994) usually describe

a particular group or set of groups, without providing much guidance regarding the degree to which such accounts might apply to given individuals (Ferdman & Cortes, 1992). In using these cultural descriptions to focus on diversity in organizations, we need to avoid the ecological fallacy (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Smith & Bond, 1993) of assuming that something that is true at the group level is true for every individual member of that group. For example, "this fallacy would be the mistaken belief that, because two cultures differ, then any two members of those cultures must necessarily also differ in the same manner" (Smith & Bond, 1993, p. 41).

## Where Is the Group's Culture?

Nevertheless, while descriptions of cultures are focused on the group level, they typically include values, norms, and behaviors expressed by individuals. Although culture is meaningful only with reference to the group, it is enacted by individuals. To understand the individual manifestations of culture while avoiding the ecological fallacy, we are faced with the problem of locating culture: Is the group's culture in the mind of each member, or is it an abstract notion at the collective level (Ridgeway, 1983)? Keesing (1974), in considering cultures in a broad sense, and Ridgeway (1983), in her analysis of small group culture, resolved this by saying that the group culture exists in the mind of each individual member as that person's theory of the code that the other members are following. Each member's theory may be unconscious, but it is used to interpret events and also affects decisions about how to behave (Ridgeway, 1983). So the culture of the group as a whole is located in the interaction of the members with each other:

> When members meet, each with their own theory of the group culture, they enact together their shared symbols, meanings, ideas of themselves and their situation. Even though the members' conceptions of their culture are not identical, these shared meanings emerge from their mutual adjustments to one another and the substantial overlap among their views. (Ridgeway, 1983; p. 247)

In any specific interaction, one finds only part of the group culture, and any individual carries basically a personal theory of the group culture, not necessarily a complete or a static picture.

This perspective—that individuals within a group vary in their image of the group's culture—constitutes the root for the concept of cultural identity developed in this chapter. Before going on to describe cultural identity in more detail, I discuss additional arguments for the need to link group-level notions of culture with individual variation, and then review some current models of identity that focus on the role of culture and group membership in the self-concept.

*Individuals often resist overgeneralizations about them, making it difficult to frame cultural differences positively, but the differences are no less real.* In my work with Hispanic managers in a largely Anglo organization (Ferdman, 1988; Ferdman & Cortes, 1992), I found a good deal of resistance to being typecast. Many of the managers I interviewed were very clear that they did not want to be seen simply as Hispanics. They very much resisted categorical statements. For example, one Puerto Rican man whom I'll call Eddie told me:

> Even though you consider yourself one of the guys, American, and a professional, a manager, you have a lot of different statuses outside your Hispanicity, people have subtle ways of letting you know that when they look at you they see a Señor first or a Hispanic first. Maybe not first, but at least, . . . one of the first things, they look at you, and they say, "Well he's a manager, but he's also a Hispanic." . . . I've been called Jose, and I've been called San Juan.

Another manager, a woman, said to me:

> I've been told very nicely, "Gee, you're Puerto Rican? You don't look Puerto Rican." And my answer to that is, "What do Puerto Ricans look like?"

For these two managers and their colleagues, one consequence of feeling that they had to fight stereotypes was that they had difficulty in articulating positive and differentiated visions of what it meant to be Hispanic. In their construction, being seen primarily as a Hispanic diminished their sense of being respected as individuals.

But Eddie also told me in an interview: "Sometimes [it's] a different you when at the job and away from the job." Eddie and many of his Hispanic coworkers were quite clear about their sense of being different than the other managers. They believed that, in various ways, they were not the same, even though they did not appreciate being typecast as "the Hispanic." For example,

in the same organization, another manager said that her "family wouldn't recognize me here." A third interviewee, explaining why he found little in common with the usual networks in the company, said that "the things which other people [at the company] think are important are not the same things I think are important."

Clearly, in each of these cases, they were not simply describing individual uniqueness. They were not just talking about the ways in which they were different than others along some individual dimensions. They were referring in large part to some of the implications of group differences and some of the ways that they experienced those. However, the experience of difference was not restricted to or focused solely on their identity as Hispanics. As Eddie pointed out, he saw himself as being constituted by a variety of group memberships.

*Diversity goes beyond group differences to include within-group differences.* The differences within groups are an important part of the multifaceted and complex nature of diversity. In a diverse society with a multitude of cultural groups in constant contact with each other, there will naturally be a great deal of within-group variation (see, e.g., Boekestijn, 1988; Ferdman & Cortes, 1992; Ferdman & Hakuta, 1985; Gurin, Hurtado, & Peng, 1994). Individuals can relate in a variety of ways not only to other groups but also to their own. For example, in some cases the extent to which an individual manifests the group's typical cultural features may reflect processes of acculturation (Berry, 1993). Also, related to this, individuals may change over time in the degree to which they exhibit cultural patterns characteristic of the group.

*Every individual belongs to multiple groups.* Individuals are part of many types of groups at once. This means that even when we take seriously the cultural perspective on diversity, the meaning that each of us gives to any particular group membership may very well be related to the constellation of our other identifications. Gurin et al. (1994), for example, showed how Chicanos (persons of Mexican descent born in the United States) and Mexicanos (immigrants to the United States born in Mexico) constructed their social identities quite differently, such that each had different associations among family, class, gender, nationality, and ethnic identities. Among Chicanos, but not among Mexicanos, these identities were correlated with the reported amount of contact with a variety of other groups. As Hurtado, Rodríguez, Gurin, and Beals (1993)—building on Tajfel and Turner's (1986; Tajfel, 1981) social identity theory—pointed out:

Different social experiences, even among people who share an objective categorical membership, can encourage the perception and establishment of subtle and detailed group distinctions. Mexican descendants recognize that some members of this category are farmworkers, others working-class; some are Catholic, others Protestant; some are recent immigrants, others third-generation. They go on to use these distinctions to construct different social identities. (p. 133)

In discussing the "multidimensional nature of social identity," these authors also cited research by Rodriguez-Scheel (1980), who presented Chicanos in Detroit with a set of labels and asked each respondent to select one label to define him- or herself. Nonethnic categories, for example, occupational, family-related, racial, religious, and/or linguistic, were picked at least as often as ethnic labels. Hurtado and her colleagues (1993) concluded: "To isolate one criterion as capturing the essence of ethnicity is to artificially limit and simplify its nature and to represent the Mexican-descent population as a homogeneous aggregate" (p. 133).

The issue for the present discussion is that, while group-level descriptions may be accurate, much more information is necessary before they can be used to understand a specific individual. This point was made in my conclusion to a study of Hispanic managers:

The findings . . . highlight some of the ways in which the individual expression of group-level cultural features is modified by and interacts with other variables. Some of these include organizational demands, minority roles, specific situations, and both organizational and individual perceptions of ethnicity. For both the Hispanic managers at XYZ, as well as for organizational researchers, it is difficult to "see" culture at the individual level. Nevertheless, as the patterns we found indicate, group-level patterns are present in individual behavior. That we can abstract such group-level features, however, does not mean that we can then directly apply them back to individuals. The Hispanic managers at XYZ varied widely in their specific behavior and outlook, as well as in how they thought about culture. (Ferdman & Cortes, 1992, p. 273)

## Individual Uniqueness as the Constellation of Social Identities

When we focus at the individual level and take seriously the multiplicity of group memberships of any particular person, it then becomes unnecessary to separate the person from the group to view others (and ourselves) as unique.

While I may share a particular identity with others, for example, Latino, the specific expression of that group membership is defined by its coexistence with the variety of my other identities, for example: Jewish, parent, professor, and diversity consultant.

In this view, even when I think about myself in terms of my social identities (i.e., my group memberships), I can experience these as contributing to and forming an essential part of my individual uniqueness. This contrasts with the position taken in self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994), which distinguishes personal and social identity such that

> as shared social identity becomes salient, individual self-perception tends to become *depersonalized*. That is, individuals tend to define and see themselves less as differing individual persons and more as the interchangeable representatives of some shared social category membership. (Turner et al., 1994, p. 455, italics in original)

Instead of the depersonalization of self-perception, the focus here in considering the links between group differences and individual uniqueness is on the *personalization of group perception*. Rather than distinguishing personal and social identity as "two different levels of self-categorization" (Turner et al., 1994, p. 454), the view posited here is that my social identities can be an important part of my personal identity, that is, who I am as an individual. It is quite possible that, given a distinctive set of group memberships, I can experience these as making me quite unique.

## New Directions

These considerations lead us to pose questions of a sort not typically addressed in connection with current psychological approaches to diversity in organizations. Such questions include the following:

- How can we understand the individual experience and impact of diversity?
- How can we honor individual uniqueness and at the same time better accept, explore, and value group differences?
- How do individuals develop and maintain differentiated and positive images of the group(s) to which they belong?

People identify with or accentuate different aspects of themselves and their relationships to groups. We often experience certain aspects of ourselves as quite personal, but they may not be. I might believe that certain characteristics of myself are simply something about me as an individual, and yet according to the way others perceive me, there may well be some kind of cultural connection. Or I may grow, over time, to see a cultural connection.

In context, it can be difficult to see things or to experience one's behaviors, values, and beliefs as culturally rooted, in part because the whole group culture does not exist in any one individual and in part because each of us belongs to a variety of groups at once. Another reason this association is difficult is that in the United States, in particular, it is often seen as negative to connect an individual's features to the group. As alluded to earlier, the United States has been described as a society that subscribes to an individualist notion that strongly rejects the interdependence of the self and the collective and displays a "fear of the collective" (Markus & Kitayama, 1994).

Because of the history of oppression of some cultural groups (see, e.g., Cross et al., 1994) and the way group differences have been used to devalue some people as less worthy than others, a frequent response is attempts to discount group memberships. This is captured by the oft-heard phrase, "Treat me for who I am, not what I am." Indiscriminate interpretation of individual characteristics as expressions of group-level features is what we call *stereotyping*, and this must be avoided if we are to manage diversity positively. In particular, people from marginalized groups have often felt that they had to separate themselves from the group to be seen positively (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994; Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Taylor & McKirnan, 1984).

When we try to shift from this perspective so that we view ourselves through a cultural lens, it can become very difficult, because we cannot readily separate the personal from the collective. Who is to say definitively which aspects of my individual uniqueness are cultural and which are idiosyncratic? And can they ever be truly disentangled?

My position is that, from the individual level, we have to ask the question differently. The issue is not so much what is "true," that is, what are the actual cultural differences (though as discussed earlier that can be a very important question from the group level). From the individual level, the question should become, not what is happening "objectively" but, instead: How does the person construct her- or himself as a cultural being? How do I see myself as a cultural being? What do I believe is the reflection of the collective in me?

## Models of Cultural
## Diversity at the Individual Level

Various theorists and researchers have addressed the links between the group and individual levels in the context of diversity. Their work describes the individual construction of the self as a cultural being in terms of the person's relationship to the groups in the environment. Two such approaches are briefly discussed here: models of biculturalism and acculturation, and Cox's (1993) model of "culture identity structure."

### Biculturalism and
### Acculturation Models

Approaches that deal with acculturation (e.g., Berry, 1980, 1993; Marín, 1993) focus on the ways in which individuals incorporate the influence of two or more "autonomous cultural systems" (Social Science Research Council, 1954, p. 974, cited in Marín, 1993)—one belonging to their culture of origin and the other(s) to cultures with which they come in contact. Similarly, work on biculturalism seeks to describe the implications for individuals of having more than one culture as a reference group. For example, in a review of theory and research on the psychological impact of biculturalism, LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) list five types of models that have been used "to describe the psychological processes, social experiences and individual challenges and obstacles of being bicultural" (p. 395). These include (a) assimilation models, which describe how individuals give up one culture to be absorbed into another, more dominant one; (b) acculturation models, which describe the development of competence in a dominant culture by members of minorities; (c) alternation models, which address the two-way nature of intercultural contact and describe how individuals can move between two cultures without giving up either; (d) multicultural models, which describe how individuals can maintain their cultures of origin while interacting with members of other cultural groups; and (e) fusion models, which describe the melting pot notion in which two or more cultures are blended on an equal basis into a new combination.
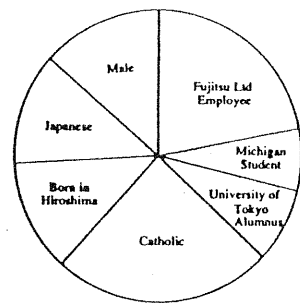
The concepts of acculturation and of biculturalism are quite rich and very useful for understanding aspects of the dynamics of diversity. In terms of the issues that are the focus of this chapter, however, these models can be problematic when they are based on an either/or view of cultures at the group level. The cultures are viewed as being separate from their members and as somewhat static. Individuals then decide, or are influenced by a variety of factors, to move back and forth between cultures, to move permanently from one to the other, or to develop a blend (e.g., Rotheram-Borus, 1993). Such models presume the primacy of the group-level cultures as the stimuli driving individuals' adaptation strategies.
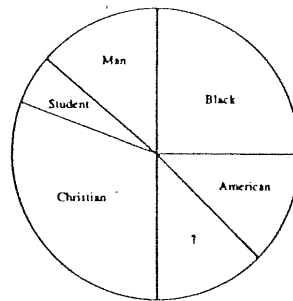
Most problematic, however, is that these approaches tend not to specify the nature of the group-level cultures, usually either implicitly or explicitly viewing these in a unitary and relatively objective fashion. Thus, for example, Berry (1993) writes about cultural transmission in the context of "two cultures in contact (A and B)." From the perspective of the present analysis, it is possible that each of these cultures may appear quite different to different individuals, whether or not they are original members of the groups. If there is a great deal of individual variation not only in the way that cultural contact is handled but also in the way in which individuals subjectively construct the cultures (i.e., what the cultures are understood to be), then acculturation and biculturalism models could benefit by incorporating concepts to represent this dynamic.

### Cox's Model of
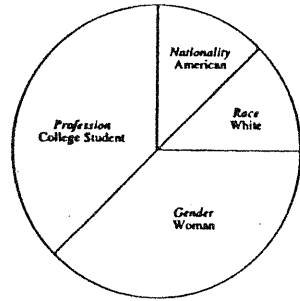### Culture Identity Structure

Taylor Cox, Jr. (1993) uses the concept of *culture identity structure* to refer to an individual's particular configuration of membership in cultural groups. In this view, individuals may view themselves in terms of their membership in many different groups at once, and also may vary in the weight that they perceive each group as having in their self-concept. Figure 2.1 shows examples of culture identity structures generated by four of Cox's students. In these pie charts, the presence of a slice indicates that the group affiliation is important in that person's self-concept, and the size of the slice represents the relative importance of that affiliation in the overall identity. Comparing Examples 2 and 4, *Male* or *Man* is given a similar weight, suggesting that each student sees his gender as constituting the same proportion of the self-concept. In contrast, in Example 2, Black constitutes approximately one quarter of the self-concept based on group affiliations, while in Example 4, *White* is
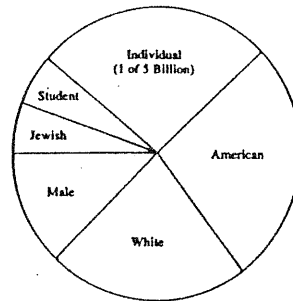
them. The preferable perspective is one that permits considering the ways in which various group memberships interrelate and influence each other.

**Toward Connected Identities**

A useful way to conceptualize identities from the individual perspective would be to incorporate the connections and interrelations among the various components. For example, we can expect that the meaning of a given ethnicity for the individual will in part be shaped by other identities, such as gender, class, religion, and immigration status. Wealthy members of the English nobility will not have the same conception of what it means to be English as will poor laborers in Liverpool, in spite of a shared ethnic identification. A recent immigrant from Mexico living in a poor neighborhood of Los Angeles will probably have a different conception of Hispanic culture than a sixth-generation landowner in New Mexico, and both of these will differ from a Jewish woman recently arrived from Buenos Aires, although all may well identify as Latinas. The construct of cultural identity is intended as a way of capturing such individual-level variations.



**Figure 2.1.** Examples of Culture Identity Structure

smaller than one quarter, implying that this student perceives race as less important to his self-concept.

This approach represents an advance in that it allows for multiple group identities that vary from person to person in their configuration. From the individual perspective that I am proposing, however, this is insufficient, because it continues to treat each group as unitary or separate. In the individual's culture identity structure, each piece has its own little box; the objective is to figure out how much of each one there is. Within this model, it is not clear what impact, if any, the various identities have on each other.

Related to this, there is an implicit equivalence of the same group across individuals. The students in Examples 2 and 4 both emphasized being male, and there is an assumption that this might mean the same thing for both of

## Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is proposed as a concept that represents the individual-level reflection of culture as it is constructed by each of us. Cultural identity addresses our sense of ourselves as cultural beings. It can be seen as the individual's road map of how the group guides her or his behavior, together with her or his reactions to that. Before formally defining it, I want to put it in the context of social identity.

Social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is an individual-level construct that deals primarily with the boundary around the group, and the individual's image of that boundary. *Social identity* typically refers to the symbolic aspects of social categories—the demarcation between in-group and out-group, between "we" and "they"—and the associated affect. In contrast, cultural identity focuses on what's "inside" the boundary, on what the person perceives to be the behavioral and attitudinal bases or consequences of the categories.

Cultural identity can be defined as one's individual image of the behaviors, beliefs, values, and norms—that is, the cultural features—that characterize one's group(s), together with one's feelings about those features and one's understanding of how they are (or are not) reflected in oneself. Thus cultural identity includes three types of perceptions on the part of the individual:

- What constitutes the group-level culture?
- How (what) do I feel about it?
- Where is it in me? (Where/how/to what degree are the group's cultural features reflected in me and my values/beliefs/style?)

Thus cultural identity is my picture of the relationship between my group's culture and myself. Like social identity, it includes both descriptive and evaluative components.

Via her or his cultural identity, an individual answers the question: What is the culturally appropriate way for someone such as me, for someone having my group memberships, to behave in and to interpret the world? Individual members of a particular group will vary in the extent to which they perceive specific attributes as central to their cultural identity and in the value they give to these attributes. In addition, they will vary in the degree to which they see themselves as having these attributes.

The first aspect of cultural identity is the individual's construction of the group, which can vary across persons. Two individuals may define membership in a group in basically the same way. However, each describes the group's cultural features quite differently. For example, Person 1 may be just as strongly Jewish as Person 2, but their constructions of Judaism and what it means for them, and even their picture of the Jews as a group, can be very different. Similarly, two people who perceive their identification as Hispanics as central to their social identity may define its meaning very differently. For example, a Puerto Rican living in New York and one living in Puerto Rico may share an ethnic identification but have dissimilar experiences and ways of looking at the world, with resulting differences in their cultural identities. For one, minority status and ethnic distinctiveness in an urban environment play a relatively focal role; for the other, the Spanish language and living on the island will be relatively more important (e.g., Flores, 1985; Ginorio, 1987; Safa, 1988). Similarly, some Hispanics more than others may perceive certain values or behaviors, such as balancing work and family life or maintaining close relations with extended family, to be culturally linked.

The second aspect of cultural identity is the individual's feelings about the cultural features ascribed to the group. Two individuals may agree in their depiction of a reference group that they share, but these images may carry quite divergent valences. For example, two Americans may view the U.S. culture as characterized by conservative values about sexuality. One may feel positively about this, however, while the other would prefer that the group were different.

The third aspect of cultural identity is the individual's view of where, how, and to what degree the group culture is reflected in the self. Thus, in the previous example, the individual who has positive feelings about U.S. culture sees himself as having conservative values and believes that this reflects his enculturation as an American. The person with negative feelings about these values may not see these reflected in her own preferences. A third person may perceive similar features in U.S. culture and have somewhat negative feelings about them, but still see these characteristics reflected in himself.

Figure 2.2 depicts schematically the conjunction of these various elements in three different individuals. Each person addresses the questions: What is the group like? How do I feel about it? And where am I in relation to that—what relationship is there between me and the group? In these examples, Persons 1 and 2 describe their reference group's cultural features in relatively similar ways (perhaps they are two siblings in the same family), and they have the same boundaries around those, in terms of who's in and who's out. But Person 1 puts herself close to the group, seeing herself as reflecting the group's culture to a large degree, whereas Person 2 sees very little of the group's culture reflected in herself. So there is some overlap, but not very much. Note that for Person 1, however, it is hard to distinguish in herself between the cultural features attributable to one group versus those features based on membership in another group. Indeed, it is the conjunction of these two groups that she sees reflected in her own styles and values. Person 2 in contrast sees no overlap between the cultural features of her various reference groups. Finally, Person 3 interprets the reference group culture quite differently than Persons 1 and 2, and also sees himself as somewhat but not completely detached from that culture.
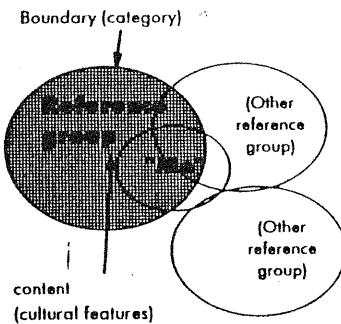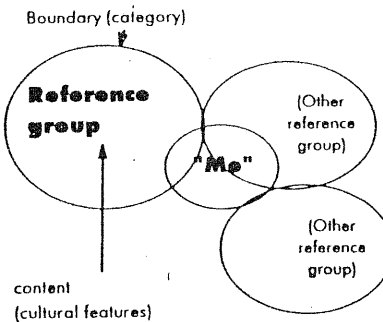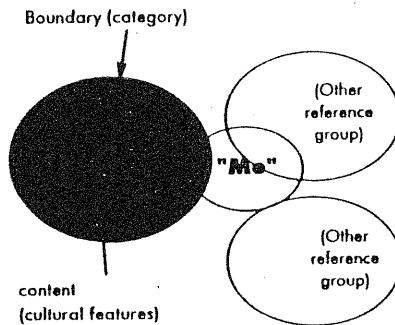
**Cultural Identity - Person 1**

Boundary (category)

(Other reference group)

(Other reference group)

content
(cultural features)

**Cultural Identity - Person 3**

Boundary (category)

Reference group

(Other reference group)

"Me"

(Other reference group)

content
(cultural features)

**Cultural Identity - Person 2**

Boundary (category)

(Other reference group)

"Me"

(Other reference group)

content
(cultural features)

**Figure 2.2.** Cultural Identity in Three Individuals

## *Implications for Diversity in Organizations*

The concept of cultural identity as discussed here has a number of implications for research and practice regarding diversity in organizations. Some of these can be introduced by considering an experience related to me during a focus group interview with a Hispanic manager whom I'll call Maria:

I went to Puerto Rico with a peer of mine. . . . She didn't want to read, so she would sit there for hours watching television and not knowing what they're saying. And at one point she looks at me and she goes, "Maria, I finally figured out why you are so outgoing and you talk with the hands and all. All of you are like that." I said "I beg your pardon." She goes, "Yeah, you know, I always thought you were kind of friendly and everything . . . you and [another Puerto Rican coworker], when you talk you're always with the hands and everything, you're very expressive and emotional." I started laughing, but I said, "Wow, that's interesting." She goes, "All of you are like that," from watching TV. It wasn't a negative statement to her. She was just saying that she realized that it was all of us. . . . I started watching Puerto Rican television, and sure enough, the hands are going crazy.

There are at least two dynamics occurring here relevant to the current discussion. First is the traditional notion of intercultural training. Maria's coworker is beginning to see behavior that she previously interpreted as idiosyncratic or individual as connected to the group. Second, Maria is also changing in terms of seeing aspects of herself as connected to the group. So she is beginning to develop an idea about how some of her own style that she previously experienced as individual may actually be related to her membership in a group. A graduate student, in a recent discussion on this topic, reported a similar experience. She said to me:

I was reading some of your work about cultural identity, and I was thinking, wow, this is amazing. People have always said to me in graduate school, "You don't seem so professional," or "there is a certain thing about you that we really need to understand," or "there's just something that doesn't match."

She had initially tended to think of herself simply as being different at an individual level and having characteristics that she had to change. And as she read my descriptions of cultural features of Hispanic managers and some of their discoveries of that, she said, "Wow, maybe that's culturally related." So she started changing her theory about what was cultural and what was not. I do not presume here to decide what is "true" and what is not. The point is that each of us has a different construction of how our individuality reflects our group culture(s), and we need to pay more attention to that in our work on diversity.

## Organization Socialization

Cultural identity has implications for how people are socialized and incorporated into organizations. The concept of cultural identity suggests that simply having some representatives of a particular group may not adequately reflect the full range of diversity. The process of "joining up" may vary depending on individuals' cultural identities. In developing and instituting mechanisms to help people become more socialized—people whose groups have previously not been represented in an organization, for example—it may be hard to justify having programs of the "one size fits all" type. We need to pay more attention to the process of how socialization works in relation to where the individuals are, and not just our collective constructions of their groups as a whole.

## Intergroup Understanding

Cultural identity adds another layer of complexity to descriptions of what we might mean by developing intergroup understanding. Triandis (e.g., Triandis, Kurowski, & Gelfand, 1994) proposes the importance of moving toward making isomorphic attributions, such that members of Group A observing the behavior of a member of Group B learn to explain that behavior in the same way other members of Group B would explain it. The cultural identity concept suggests that intergroup understanding may go far beyond having people make isomorphic attributions. Given individual variations in the construction of the group, it becomes more difficult to know what is an isomorphic attribution. It becomes important to specify the level that we are talking about—group or individual. At the individual level, it would seem quite difficult ever to achieve fully isomorphic attributions, because they are usually based primarily on generalized knowledge of the group, not the individual.

I believe that we have to develop more dynamic and fine-tuned notions of intergroup understanding that include the relationship of the interpersonal to the intergroup aspect. We also need to incorporate means of guiding individuals in accepting their own identities and in understanding where they are now, before they can start working with other groups. This is consistent with approaches to intercultural training that focus on starting with understanding one's own culture and its influence before moving to consider others (see Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983).

Cultural identity suggests that in intergroup understanding there is also a dimension of within-group as well as between-group processes. To the extent that there are variations within a group, an out-group may develop understanding with some of its subgroups and not with others. Related to this, assessment of when intergroup understanding has been reached may vary depending on who is asked. Some group members may be quite satisfied with their interactions with the members of another group, while others perceive these to be problematic.

## Diversity Training

Another implication of cultural identity relates to the practical aspects of diversity training. How can we most effectively do what some people call diversity training, which is to help people get the skills they need to work better in more inclusive organizations? Consideration of cultural identity suggests adding another objective to this type of training: learning that individual uniqueness is not compromised by group memberships. In fact, individual uniqueness may be enhanced by group memberships.

In terms of methods for diversity training, the notion of cultural identity suggests that the self—the individual self-constructions—may be a very valuable vehicle in doing this kind of training, and that we certainly need to go beyond presenting lists of cultural features of other groups.

## Research Questions and Methods

Thinking about cultural diversity in the manner suggested by this chapter has implications for the type of research questions we might ask and the methods we might use to investigate them. In the acculturation and biculturalism approaches discussed earlier, ethnic and social identities, and perhaps even some aspects of what I call cultural identity, are typically seen as the independent variable. Identities are considered as the precursor or antecedent, and then research examines what effects they may have on other variables. If one looks at cultural identity in the way described here, one needs to think about it as a dependent variable or at least a moderator. What dynamics, what processes, what kinds of contextual factors or experiences will result in different patterns of cultural identity? Then one can begin to

ask questions about systematic variations in cultural identity across different kinds of subgroups.

There is some exciting work in education that can be interpreted in this light. Fordham (1988, 1992), for example, showed how Black high school students who wanted to succeed in school felt pressed to construct identities that were "raceless":

> Achieving academic success in a context where a Eurocentric ethos dominates necessitates divorcing one's commitment to a changing yet familiar African American identity and embracing instead an unpredictable, unfolding meaning of both Self and Other. (Fordham, 1991, p. 471)

The texture of these reconstructed identities, however, varied across individuals and subgroups.

In terms of research methods, a consideration of cultural identity suggests that some of our quantitative, structured approaches should be complemented by more qualitative methods that allow people to tell their own stories. Before we can systematize some of the questionnaires we use and some of the assumptions about the differences between groups, we need to first include approaches that allow us to really hear what people think and believe about their own individual uniqueness as it relates to their group memberships. I hope then we will be able to find a better bridge between group differences and individual uniqueness.

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