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Multicultural Identities

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Abstract and Keywords

Rapid globalization has heightened intercultural exposure and diversity of societies. As an adaptation to globalization, many individuals are acquiring identities that pertain to more than one regional and/or national culture. To understand the formation, maintenance, and impact of multicultural identity, researchers study it at multiple levels of analysis. To this end, this chapter will review the literature on multicultural identities at the levels of intrapersonal processes, interpersonal processes, and organizational and societal influences. The review shows that the concept of multicultural identity has evolved over time, from being seen as maladaptive to an embodiment of creativity and open-mindedness. This chapter demonstrates how the study of multicultural identities has gained prominence in recent decades and will be even more urgent as the mobility of individuals and social groups becomes the “new normal.” That is, with the exponential rate of intercultural contacts and mixing, being or becoming multicultural seems more normative than being monocultural. Monoculturalism may soon be a rare case and, as such, described as a thing of the past. It is ever more pressing to understand how people navigate among cultures, form bi- or multicultural identities, and adapt to new cultural environments cognitively and biologically and the challenges and barriers they face in the era of globalized world.

Keywords: globalization, multiculturalism, identity, identity threat, acculturation, bicultural identity integration, multicultural personality, cultural frame switching, lay theories of race, cultural priming, essentialism, interculturalism, intergroup processes

Since 1990, the worldwide count of immigrants and expatriates by birth or citizenship has grown by 75% (United Nation, 2013), reaching 250 million in 2015; in 2016, the annual increase in refugee numbers surpassed that of any year since World War II. On top of migration, international tourism has increased from 25 million to 1,133 million in 2014 (United Nations World Tourism Organization [NWTO], 2015). Global Internet usage has grown from 14 million to 2.93 billion between 1993 and 2014 (Internet Users by Year, 2014). Taken as a whole, these aspects of globalization have heightened intercultural exposure and the diversity of societies.

As an adaptation to globalization, many individuals (e.g., a Hong Kong woman working in London who has received her college education in New York) are acquiring identities that pertain to more than one regional (e.g., Hong Konger, Londoner, and New Yorker) and/or national culture (e.g., Chinese, British, American). To understand the formation, maintenance, and impact of multicultural identity, researchers study it at multiple levels of analysis. To this end, this chapter will review the literature on multicultural identities at the levels of intrapersonal processes, interpersonal processes, and organizational and societal influences.

The concept of multicultural identity has evolved over time—we have moved a long way from early contentions that individuals should ideally have a single cultural identity and that involvement with more than one culture is psychologically undesirable because it leads to identity confusion and a divided self (Park, 1928). Research in the past few decades has proved that these early contentions are oversimplified. In the first section of this chapter, we will review research advancement on intrapersonal processes, with a focus on how individuals develop psychological well-being and competences through their experiences with multiple cultures. We will review major theories and findings **(p.616)** pertaining to acculturation, bicultural identity, and multicultural personality. This literature shows that individuals' beliefs regarding the compatibility of their multiple identities and the underpinnings of identities (e.g., racial categorization is fixed or malleable) shape their multicultural identification processes (see also Chapter 20 by Colleen Ward and Ágnes Szabó on acculturation).

In the second section of this chapter, we focus on interpersonal processes. Humans are social animals, and we develop our “self” through the judgments of others (aka, Cooley's [1922] and Goffman's [1959] idea of the looking-glass self). Therefore, we discuss how actual and/or expected reactions of others affect individuals' identity processes. Even though an individual may identify with a certain group and thus claim an identity with the group, other ingroup members may not necessarily accept this person as a member (identity denial). An example of this is the principle of *hypodescent*—a person with one drop of African American “blood” will be classified as black (instead of white or

multiracial) throughout most of the twentieth century in America. The person's self-identification would not alter this classification. We will explain how multicultural individuals, especially those with minority status, can take a wide range of strategies to battle identity denial and discrimination.

In the third section of this chapter, we review organizational and social ideologies pertaining to diversity. Specifically, we argue that the diversity policies that organizations and societies adopt affect individuals' multicultural identity formation and negotiation. We will discuss the ramifications of policies driven by multicultural, color-blind, and interculturalism ideologies.

Taken as a whole, these three levels are like layers of an onion—with the intrapersonal processes as the inmost layer, the interpersonal processes in the middle, and organizational and societal influences as the outer layer. The three layers are intimately related because they mutually influence each other.

Intrapersonal Processes

Berry's Acculturation Taxonomy

Defined as the process through which cross-cultural contact would lead to changes in a person psychologically and culturally, *acculturation* is an important concept for understanding individual adaptation in new cultural environments. One of the key psychological changes that takes place during acculturation is individuals' cultural identities or the degree to which they view themselves as members of the cultural or ethnic groups they are associated with. Berry and colleagues noted that acculturating immigrants and ethnic minorities undergo two separate processes of acculturation: retaining their original culture versus adapting to the mainstream dominant culture (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). For example, in the case of a minority ethnic member, their acculturation experience would entail maintaining contact with co-ethnic members, practicing their (p.617) ethnic rituals, and upholding the beliefs and values endorsed by their ethnic group, and so forth, while trying to make friends with members of the majority culture and adopt the behaviors and values of the majority culture. Based on these two parallel acculturation processes, four acculturation profiles have been identified by cluster analysis in his taxonomy: integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization. *Integration* is a profile when both native (minority) cultural maintenance and involvement with the larger (host) society take place simultaneously. *Separation* is a profile in which individuals only maintain their minority cultural identity but refuse or fail to adapt to the larger (host) society. The opposite of the separation profile is *assimilation*—a profile in which individuals adapt to the larger society at the cost of neglecting or losing their own (minority) cultural identity. Finally, the *marginalization* profile entails a process in which individuals identify with neither their own cultural group nor the larger (host) society.

Berry's acculturation taxonomy makes a key theoretical advancement because it recognizes that high identification with one culture does not entail low identification with all other cultures (Zou, Morris, & Benet-Martínez, 2008), thus contrasting from the earlier unidirectional models of acculturation (e.g., Flannery, Reise, & Yu, 2001; Gans, 1979; Gordon, 1964) that assume that high identification with one culture (e.g., host culture) implied low identification with other cultures (e.g., ethnic or native culture).

The different acculturation profiles are associated with different cultural adaptation outcomes. Earlier perspectives tend to view strong identification with one's ethnic group as having a protective effect on individual well-being. For instance, meta-analytic evidence across 184 studies, across all age range, gender, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status, indicates that ethnic identity is positively associated with psychosocial well-being, although the relationship is a modest one (omnibus effect size of $r = .17$; Smith & Silva, 2011). More recent perspectives tend to suggest that an integration profile is associated with the best psychological and sociocultural adaption outcomes (e.g., Berry et al., 2006; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). In other words, individuals who tend to prefer social engagement with both their native and host cultural groups, identify with both cultural identities, and establish language proficiency in both languages also tend to adapt better both culturally and psychologically (Berry et al., 2006). That being said, these findings were criticized by Rudmin (2003) who argued that the acculturation measurement used was faulty and thus the conclusion that integration resulted in the best psychological outcomes is not warranted (see also Chapter 20 by Ward and Szabo for more discussion about acculturation and the Berry model).

Other studies, however, support Berry's view that multiple strong identifications are not only possible but also beneficial (e.g., Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2010; cf. Ward & Geeraerts, 2016). For instance, a meta-analysis of 83 studies shows that biculturalism (i.e., attachment to and competency in two cultures) is associated with both positive psychological (e.g., self-esteem, lack of depression) and sociocultural (e.g., career success, lack of delinquency) adjustment, but not with health (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012). Two factors may explain the integration advantage: cognitive flexibility and social **(p.618)** network. First, bicultural people are likely to develop stronger cognitive flexibility during the process of learning and situating in different cultures, thus leading to competence in dealing with conflicts and challenges. Supporting this contention, indeed, it has been shown that individuals with greater identity integration also exhibited greater interpersonal tolerance toward other people who hold dissimilar values and preferences (Huff, Lee, & Hong, 2017). Second, bicultural individuals are also more likely to acquire social support networks in both host and heritage cultures, which could buffer psychological or social maladjustments such as anxiety or intercultural miscommunication. Belonging to both cultural groups could reduce adjustment costs because, when an individual finds herself

in a situation in which one of her identities is threatened, she could turn to her alternative identity or social network for reassurance or comfort.

Bicultural Identity Integration

Bicultural individuals differ in the extent to which they integrate their two cultural identities. The construct of *bicultural identity integration* (BII) was introduced to capture such an individual difference. Drawing from an extensive review of acculturation and biculturalism literature, the BII is constructed to capture perceptions of managing dual cultural identities through subjective overlap and compatibility (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2010). Particularly, BII captures two relatively independent psychological aspects of dual cultural identity: distance (vs. blendedness, the degree to which two cultures are perceived as dissociated) and conflict (vs. harmony, amount of perceived tension between two cultures). In simple terms, a person high in BII sees two cultures as “compatible” and thus able to be integrated, consistent with the notation of a “hyphenated culture” or a combined, “third” culture (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2010, p. 15). In contrast, a person low in BII focuses on conflicts and separation among the two cultures he or she identifies with, thus seeing the mainstream and ethnic cultures as mutually exclusive or opposing (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2010).

Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, and Morris (2002) demonstrated that bicultural Chinese Americans with high BII scores responded in culturally congruent manners to cultural cues. For example, they made more external attributions (a characteristically Asian behavior) after being exposed to Chinese cultural cues and more internal attributions (a characteristically Western behavior) after being exposed to American cultural cues. On the contrary, bicultural Chinese Americans with low BII scores behaved in contrast to the culturally normative pattern in response to cultural cues.

High BII has been thought to be associated with multiple positive characteristics, from richer social networks to higher psychological adjustment. It has also been suggested that ethnic minority people with such skills would have better physical and psychological well-being (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2012). Recent research, on the contrary, indicates that a *low* level of BII-distance could be beneficial as well. For instance, immigrants with lower BII-distance enjoy better well-being (e.g., less anxiety, Hirsh & Kang, 2015). Latino biculturals with low BII-distance perceived themselves as having more similar **(p.619)** personality traits to a typical Latino and also to a typical Anglo-American than their high BII-distance counterparts (Miramontez, Benet-Martínez, & Nguyen, 2008). Moreover, Saad, Damian, Benet-Martínez, Moons, and Robins (2013) found that low BII-distance Chinese Americans had better creative performance in a bicultural but not monocultural context. Tadmor, Galinsky, and Maddux (2012) found that low BII-distance individuals exhibited higher cognitive complexity and, ultimately, creativity. In contrast, identity

conflict, or more specifically, an inability to resolve it, could negatively impact on mental and physical health. For example, studies have shown that identity conflict could provoke anxiety and increase the chance of mood disorder (Hirsh & Kang, 2015).

Despite that, surprisingly, a *high* level of BII-conflict could also associate with some positive cognitive outcomes. For example, Tadmor, Tetlok, and Peng (2009) and Benet-Martínez, Lee, and Leu (2006) have shown that biculturals who experience identity conflict exhibit greater cognitive complexity—the capacity to construe people, objects, and ideas in a multidimensional way. Relatedly, Tadmor et al. (2009) proposes that bicultural individuals face greater conflict between their two identities and their associated norms and values. In the process of resolving the conflicts, they develop a higher level of integrative complexity¹ than those who assimilate or separate their identities (and thus reduce the identity conflicts). By the same token, Thomas, Brannen, and Garcia (2010) found that biculturals perceiving greater identity conflict have higher cultural metacognition.² Overall, these studies provide an important insight in that it is how an individual internally represents his or her dual cultural identities that creates such difference in cognitive capabilities. Benet-Martinez et al. (2006) attribute bicultural individuals' enhanced cognitive complexity to their accumulative experience of detecting and receiving cultural cues that are complex and ambiguous. In comparison, monoculturals are less likely to recognize dominant cultural perceptions as compared to their bicultural peers (Gutierrez & Sameroff, 1990) and thus lack the necessary experience for developing cognitive complexity.

Recently, Huynh, Benet-Martínez, and Nguyen (2018) have developed a new measure of BII by adding new items into the measure based on qualitative interviews. To test its reliability and validity, the new measure (BIIS-2) was administrated to an ethnically diverse sample of bicultural individuals from different generational groups. Findings revealed some interesting and important patterns of relations with theoretically relevant constructs: personality, acculturation, and psychological well-being across different generations of ethnic minorities (mainly Latinos/as and Asian Americans in the sample). In particular, path analyses confirmed that, in general, personality and acculturation **(p.620)** variables influence individuals' experiences with their dual identities, which in turn influence adjustment, but there were interesting and important generational differences on how these variables were related.

Cultural Marginals

Recently, new insights have been gained about “marginals” (Berry, 1980), or multicultural individuals who have low identification with all their cultures (Fitzsimmons, Lee, & Brannen, 2013). Traditional views suggest that these individuals are maladjusted. Marginals are often described as poor in adapting to their environment, overwhelmed, and socially weak (Berry et al., 2006)

because these individuals have more than one cultural affiliation but do not identify with either or any strongly. Recent evidence contradicts the traditional view that these individuals are maladjusted. Instead, some recent empirical evidence has portrayed the culturally “marginal” individuals to be well-adapted and highly successful (Gillespie, McBride, & Riddle, 2010; Moore & Barker, 2012). For instance, in a study involving multiple samples of individuals with substantial multicultural experiences, Tadmor et al. (2012) found an unexpected superiority among “marginal” individuals compared to their assimilated or separated counterparts. Specifically, the researchers found that, similar to their integrated counterparts, the marginals were more likely than the assimilated and the separated multicultural individuals to turn their multicultural experience into a creative advantage and a higher likelihood of career success. In a qualitative study with “third-culture” individuals (people who have lived or studied in more than two cultures), Moore and Baker (2012) observed that although many third-culture individuals need not strongly identify with or feel a sense of belongingness to any culture at all, they tend to develop a high level of competence in intercultural communication and behavioral adaptation. Additional support for this view can be seen in Gillespie et al.’s (2010) work involving Mexican managers working in international business settings; the authors found that both biculturally integrated and marginal individuals were more likely to be in upper management positions in Mexico, indicating that marginals enjoy a career advantage similar to their integrated counterparts.

Based on these new insights, Arasaratnam (2013) proposed an alternative definition of multicultural identity as “the condition of persons who have formed an identity that is not affiliated with one particular culture but instead a blend of multiple cultures and contexts” (akin to the notion of polyculturalism developed by Morris, Chiu, & Liu, 2015) (see also related discussion on polyculturalism by Michael Harris Bond in Chapter 2). Arasartnam suggests that those with extensive exposure to multicultural environments are more likely to develop blended identities and attitudes in favor of diversity. That said, the same identity structure that may signal independence in business executives may signal alienation in the underclass. In other words, although some recent studies have found that some marginal individuals tend to enjoy a positive outcome in terms of creativity, intercultural communication, and career progression, such a finding could be an artifact of the socioeconomic status of the participants. While **(p.621)** independence from cultural groups can be beneficial for more privileged individuals who can form meaningful social connections on a basis other than cultural or ethnic ingroups, losing this important source of social connection can lead to detrimental outcomes for individuals with fewer community-building alternatives. It would be worthwhile to include a broader strata of economic groups to more accurately assess the impact of marginalization in future research.

Multicultural Personality

As the world continues to witness growing cultural diversity, individuals' competency or effectiveness in multicultural settings becomes ever more valuable. Being multiculturally competent or effective means that a person could not only operate and incorporate successfully in a new and fast-changing cultural environment but also feel at ease and of a positive psychological state. In other words, after experiencing a cultural shock, the person could feel contented and satisfied in being situated in the new environment. A "multiculturally effective" person would, for instance, feel positive and motivated to learn a new language when migrating into a foreign country, instead of feeling intimidated and keeping at a distance from the host culture. A widely used instrument is the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ). The MPQ measures individuals' multicultural effectiveness from five dimensions: cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, flexibility, and social initiative (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000).

These dimensions describe concrete and indicative behaviors. Individuals high on such indexes are likely to be more multiculturally effective. That is to say, they could empathize with feelings and thoughts of people from another cultural background, are open-minded enough to hold an unprejudiced attitude toward variances in cultural norms and values, are emotionally stable such that they could remain calm and stress-free under conflicts, and hold a tendency to initiate actions. All of these characteristics are crucial to one in the face of clashes of cultural values in the environment and oneself. These dimensions are predictive of multicultural activities, such as traveling experience and interaction with foreigners, or aspirations, such as for an international career.

Cultural Frame Switching

Bicultural or multicultural competence is developed as result of living in two cultures under an alternation model (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993), which leads to abilities and behaviors such as shifting across cognitive and perceptual processes or learning a new language. Evidence has been found to support that individuals can hold two or more cultural orientations simultaneously via *cultural frame switching* (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000). That is, in face of a changing environment, the individual switches between interpretive frames in response to the varying cultural situation.

Research using cultural priming methods has also revealed both positive and negative consequences of priming international students with their home versus host (p.622) culture. On the one hand, Zhang, Morris, Cheng, and Yap (2013) found that immigrants from mainland China speak English less fluently when exposed to Asian rather than Caucasian faces or when exposed to icons of Chinese culture rather than of American culture. Priming can trigger the first language, and this interferes with second language processing or cross-language

interference. On the other hand, priming recently arrived expatriates with their home culture can boost their relational security and help them adjust to the new culture. Fu, Morris, and Hong (2015) have shown that home-culture primes introduced by asking participants to write about their home culture (vs. host culture) symbols during their overseas trip improved adjustment among international students who felt highly insecure about interacting and building relationships with host culture individuals, but not among those lacking these insecurities. Similarly, Hong, Fang, Yang, and Phua (2013) found that subliminally exposing international students to their home cultural cues can buffer threat and predict lower perceived discrimination and acculturation stress. Yap, Hong, and Christopoulos (2017) further showed that this process can be generalized to individuals in their own country when facing threat; they found that subliminally exposing Singaporean students to their home cultural cues (e.g., the Merlion icon) after threat (e.g., a picture of a gun pointing toward them) buffered their skin conductance increase. These studies have broadened the range of consequences explored in cultural priming research (see review by Hong, 2017).

Identity conflict can also explain why frame switching (Mok & Morris, 2013) in response to cultural primes operates in a divergent direction (contrastive) rather than convergent direction (assimilative) for some bicultural individuals. Mok and Morris (2009, 2010, 2012) found that primes evoked contrarian frame switches among conflicted biculturals in studies of attentional foci, need for uniqueness, and information-seeking and choice. One explanation is that conflicted biculturals feel disidentified with one of their cultures and distance themselves from cues of it.

An alternative explanation is the motivation to protect the non-cued identity (Mok & Morris, 2009, 2010, 2012). Recent evidence using subliminal priming indicates that this motivation is implicit rather than conscious impression management (Mok & Morris, 2013). Biculturals with low BII could experience such threat of neglecting a cultural identity unconsciously when being exposed to cultural cues of only one cultural identity. This could be explained by a need to resist assimilating into the cultural norm since conformity may threaten their other cultural identity. By comparison, persons with high BII have more integrated cultural identities and thus experience less of such risk. These findings may first appear to suggest that conflicted bicultural are neurotic and ineffective. However, they may succeed well in some roles. Their contrarian impulses leave them much less vulnerable to groupthink than their peers (Mok & Morris, 2010). In other words, bicultural individuals with conflicted identities can be especially instrumental in curbing groupthink.

Although BII can moderate the cultural frame switching process, it is important not to conflate BII and cultural frame switching; they are independent concepts. That is, **(p.623)** biculturals' chosen identity configurations (i.e., describing

oneself as culturally blended vs. compartmentalized) and their ability or willingness to alternate between behavioral and cognitive repertoires in response to cultural cues (i.e., cultural frame switching) do not have to map onto each other necessarily (Boski, 2008). A bicultural individual might report both having a blended identity *and* also alternating between different cultural frames and repertoires depending on the demands of the situation (especially for those with high BII). For instance, as Veronica Benet-Martinez once used herself as an example (Benet-Martinez, personal communication, 2017): “I had a bicultural upbringing in Barcelona which included paternal Catalan and maternal Spanish cultural influences. When asked about my cultural identity during these early years, I reported having an overall blended or fused Catalan-Spanish identity, an amalgamate which comprises elements from both cultures. At the same time, I also experienced ‘alternating’ cultural frames, as I found myself regularly switching between Catalan and Spanish languages, behavioral scripts (and sometimes even feelings of cultural attachment) depending on the sociocultural demands of the situation.” Therefore, in their new scale (BIIS-2), Huynh, Benet-Martínez, and Nguyen (2018) have dropped items pertaining to feelings of switching between cultures.

Lay Theories of Race (Racial Essentialism)

Because culture and race/ethnicity are often conflated, how bicultural individuals conceptualize the nature of race and ethnicity should also affect how they manage their identities (and possibly vice versa as well). In particular, two lay theories of race have been identified—*racial essentialism* refers to a belief in race as a fixed biological essence that determines a person’s traits and ability, whereas *social constructivism* refers to a belief in racial categories as malleable social construction. Asian Americans (ethnic minorities) who believed in racial essentialism identified less with American (host) culture than did those who believed in social constructivism (No et al., 2008). Furthermore, holding racial essentialism also resulted in less flexibility in shifting between cultures (Chao, Chen, Roisman, & Hong, 2007), more rigid racial categorization (Chao, Hong, & Chiu, 2013), and dampened creativity (Tadmor, Chao, Hong, & Polzer, 2013). Conversely, holding less racial essentialism was associated with better psychological well-being for multiculturals because it reduces the racial barrier in interracial contexts (D. T. Sanchez & Garcia, 2009). The lay theories of race have their theoretical roots in psychological essentialism (Gelman & Hirschfeld, 1999; Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2000; Rothbart & Taylor, 1992) and have generated a rich literature; a detailed review can be found in Hong (2015; Hong & Khei, 2014).

To summarize, research in the past few decades has significantly enriched our understanding of how individuals could embrace multicultural identities. We have moved a long way from early contentions that individuals should ideally have a single cultural identity and that involvement with more than one culture is psychologically undesirable because it leads to identity confusion (Park, 1928).

With the unprecedented rate **(p.624)** of globalization, it is crucial to study how individuals find meanings in their contacts with multiple cultures and transform such experiences into useful tools and resources for creativity. However, individuals are embedded in interpersonal and societal contexts, and thus interpersonal processes and normative ideologies in the society are important factors that shape individuals' identity processes. We will discuss these factors next.

Interpersonal Influences

An individual's identity does not develop in a social vacuum; instead it is always negotiated and performed within specific social contexts (Wiley & Deaux, 2010). One highly relevant social aspect of identity is individual identity expression, or the exhibition (or suppression) of behaviors relevant to those norms conventionally associated with a salient social identity. The way an individual expresses her collective identities not only depends on her view of her own group, but also reflects actual and/or expected reactions of others (Klein, Spears, & Reicher, 2007; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995), and this situated nature of multicultural identities varies within individuals and across situations.

Identity Distinctiveness

Individuals are motivated to express distinctiveness (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002) when they do not encounter exclusion from their identified groups or experience identity threat. In other words, when individuals feel safe to express themselves genuinely, they may attempt to distinguish and differentiate their identified groups from other identity groups to create or express a distinctive identity. For example, in a series of survey studies, Mlicki and Ellemers (1996) found that, in the absence of immediate identity threat, Polish students displayed a more negative national identity stereotype compared to Dutch students. Despite holding more negative national identity stereotype, Polish students identified more strongly with their national identity and emphasized their negative identity traits more than did Dutch subjects. The authors suggested that this was a reaction toward the threat to Polish distinctiveness posed by Poland's historical status; at the time of the study, Poland was yet to have acquired membership in the European Union, while the Netherlands was an original member of the Union. Poland was also comparatively insecure in its political and economic status. The country's independence and sovereignty have been threatened by powers across the past centuries, including Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in the world wars and the post-war era. As such, a distinct Polish national identity is weighed highly significantly despite its association with negative stereotypes. In other words, Polish participants opted for being different, albeit using negative identity stereotypes, instead of being identified with positive characteristics that may be shared by fellow Europeans, demonstrating the desire for individuals to express distinct identities as long as the identities are not under threat.

(p.625) Identity Denial

In contrast, past research also showed that problems could arise when self-definition and others' definition of multicultural individuals' identities fail to align (Jasinskaja-Lahti, Mähönen, & Liebkind, 2012; Sanchez, Shih, & Wilton, 2014). One form of self-other misalignment is *identity denial*—when others do not recognize one or more of the multicultural individual's identities. Individuals may experience such encounters as identity threat and feel confronted by a lack of acceptance from one or more groups they identified with. Individuals who identify strongly with their group will assimilate to group values and norms to maintain the impression that they are members of the group to gain acceptance (Ellemers et al., 2002; Klein et al., 2007). Cheryan and Monin (2005) demonstrated how identity denial can change individuals' identity expression in a creatively designed study. In the study, American-born Asian American participants filled out an identity questionnaire 1 week before participating in the experiment. In the experiment, the participants were assigned to either an identity denial condition or a control condition. In the identity denial condition, a white American experimenter said to each participant upon arrival, "Actually, you have to be an American to be in this study." Every participant in this condition told the experimenter that he or she was American. In the control condition, participants were not subjected to such a statement. All participants then filled out the same questionnaire as 1 week ago. Comparing the experimental and control groups, the researchers found that the Asian American participants exposed to identity denial in the experimental condition reported greater participation in American practices such as listening to American music, having American friends, and playing American sports. In other words, when Asian American's American identity is threatened, they reacted by portraying themselves as more "American" in an effort to reaffirm the identity under threat.

As Cheryan and Monin (2005)'s study suggests, multiculturals with a minority ancestry may experience stronger identity denial because society believes that racial and ethnic categories have little overlap, and thus they can only belong to one racial/ethnic category. For instance, individuals with a minority descent often encounter situations in which they are expected or even forced to define themselves in singular identities, usually those of the minority or lower-status group (Daniel, 1996). Although an Asian American can strongly embrace both her Asian and American identities, others might forcefully categorize her only as Asian (e.g., by white Americans) or American (e.g., by her co-ethnics). In comparison, individuals who enjoy a great deal of overlap among their identities, such as Irish Americans, may contend less with identity denial from others because Irish is currently considered "white" in America (Ignatiev, 2008) and there is an implicit belief that American and white are cognitively overlapping categories (Devos & Banaji, 2005).

When identity denial occurs, individuals may also feel that their autonomy to exercise identity choice is thwarted. *Identity autonomy* refers to the extent to which **(p.626)** multiracials or multiculturals feel they can identify with the race(s) or culture(s) they desire (Sanchez, 2010). Research has shown that identity autonomy is critical to identity development, and restricted identity autonomy is associated with greater depressive symptoms. For example, Sanchez (2010) assessed identity denial using a forced choice dilemma, which asked questions such as “People have often told me that I should identify with one racial identity over another.” Sanchez found that multiracial individuals (aged 18–62 years) who faced more forced choice dilemma also experienced more depressive symptoms, and this relationship is mediated by a decrease in individual identity autonomy and perceiving the public as having unfavorable regard toward a person’s multiracial background. Similarly, perceived identity denial from an identified group may be detrimental for adolescents with multiracial ancestries. Data from the 2001 California Health Interview Survey show that multiracial adolescents and adults have greater rates of substance use (defined by alcohol consumption in the past month, binge drinking in the past month, and consumption of 100 cigarettes in one’s lifetime) than monoracial minority individuals (Chavez & Sanchez, 2010). While this study does not directly assess identity denial or identity autonomy, it controlled for established predictors of negative outcomes among multicultural/multiracial individuals, such as discrimination and poverty, and compared the multiracial individuals with other monoracial minority members rather than the majority ethnic members; thus the results provide strong evidence that coping with multiple cultural or racial identities can be a difficult challenge.

Apart from identity denial, another key challenge for multicultural individuals is that they are often ethnic minorities who face discrimination from majority groups (Adida, Laitin, & Valfort, 2010; Schwartz, Vignoles, Brown, & Zagefka, 2014). These problems contribute to a range of negative outcomes such as dampened self-esteem, decreased sense of belonging, and motivation (Townsend, Markus, & Bergsieker, 2009), increased substance abuse and depression (Chavez & Sanchez, 2010), and impaired academic performance (Mistry, Contreras, & Pufall-Jones, 2014), among others.

While ethnic minority members or multicultural/multiracial individuals tend to face more challenging or even hurtful social encounters, their reactions and subsequent well-being also depend on the lay beliefs they hold. One such belief is racial essentialism, or the tendency to see race, ethnicity, and nationality as distinct and fixed categories (as noted above, Haslam & Whelan, 2008; Hong & Khei, 2014). Multicultural individuals with high racially essentialist beliefs or holding a fixed view of race tend to perceive more identity denial, which undermines their mental well-beings (Sanchez, Shih, & Wilton, 2014). For example, in a study involving biracial participants, Sanchez and Garcia (2009) measured participants’ belief in race as a biological construction (thus high

belief in racial essentialism) via an initial questionnaire and collected week-long diary data. Their results indicated that, relative to multiracials with low racial essentialism, those who are high in racial essentialism have lower daily psychological well-being, as demonstrated by lower self-esteem, lower autonomy, and reduced feeling of belongingness and connectedness with others.

(p.627) *Status-justifying belief* may be another example. This could be particularly difficult for individuals who generally believe that status in society is fair and individuals deserve their current status (Major & Eliezer, 2011). When faced with discrimination, people who endorse status-justifying beliefs may blame themselves or their own group for the discrimination, thus leading to lower self-esteem. In two studies conducted on Latino Americans, researchers found that the relationship between perceived discrimination and self-esteem varies according to status-justifying beliefs (Major, Kaiser, O'Brien, & McCoy, 2007). The participants' status-justifying beliefs were measured via two beliefs: the belief that success is linked to hard work and the belief in individual mobility. Self-esteem was assessed with the abbreviated 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) and the 7-item Performance Self-Esteem subscale of State Self-Esteem Scale (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). According to the questionnaire data acquired from 191 Latino Americans in their first study, those who endorsed status-justifying beliefs reported more perceived discrimination and lower self-esteem compared to those who rejected status-justifying beliefs. In the next study of the same series, the researchers randomly assigned 50 participants to read a news article on a survey describing pervasive discrimination against either their own identity group (experimental condition) or a irrelevant group (control condition). Again, Latino Americans who endorsed status-justifying beliefs in the experimental condition reported lower self-esteem than did those in the control condition. The negative impact of minority status on well-being, such as reduced self-efficacy, may be accentuated for male members. One explanation is that although society expects men to support a family, it is difficult for males of low status to become employed or find decent job to fulfill their expected gender roles (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007). In addition, social groups of low status are often rejected and derogated in the society, thus leading to a lower sense of belonging among the ethnic minorities (Phalet & Kosic, 2006).

Multicultural individuals, especially those with minority status, can use a wide range of strategies to battle identity denial and discrimination. An automatic response to identity denial is to overemphasize the denied identity in a compensatory defense manner (e.g., by behaving in more stereotypically American ways if one perceives denial to her American identity; Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Somewhat differently, Sanchez et al. (2010) proposed that identity denial might cause multicultural/multiracial individuals to display cultural behaviors that are consistent with their own self-identifications to reassert autonomy. Using the example of Asian Americans, if they are denied an

American identity, they may only reassert this identity if they strongly identify with it.

Identity Strategies

Common strategies for combatting discrimination are identity switching and identity redefinition. *Identity switching* changes the emphasis among an individual's multiple social identities while keeping the stereotypes associated with those identities constant. *Identity redefinition* keeps the identity constant but attempts to change the stereotypes. Identity switching is typically deployed by de-emphasizing the vulnerable target identity **(p.628)** and self-recategorizing into a more positively valued identity, thus allowing an individual to maintain self-esteem by avoiding negative evaluations associated with a disadvantaged identity (Shih, Young, & Bucher, 2013). For instance, when a Russian American finds herself in a conversation that puts Russia in a negative light, she could choose to hide her Russian ethnic identity and instead emphasize her white American identity by using more American slang. Identity switching thus alleviates negative consequences of the discrimination a person experiences in the short term. The mechanism allows the particular individual to both emphasize advantageous identities as well as create more positive associations with an identity. This may thus protect her self-esteem and avoid performance decrements in a short-term perspective (e.g., Mussweiler, Gabriel, & Bodenhausen, 2000). However, identity switching has its negative consequences as well. De-emphasizing an identity requires cognitive resources because one needs to pay attention to cover up the identity traits one wants to hide (Smart & Wegner, 1999). Moreover, long-term use of identity switching predicts lower self-esteem in both adults (Downie, Mageau, Koestner, & Liodden, 2006) and adolescents (Hitlin, Scott Brown, & Elder, 2006). Long-standing identity switching individuals also reported a higher frequency of depressive symptoms as measured by the 20-item Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale (Radloff, 1977), and they reported more negative attitudes toward being multiracial (Sanchez, Shih, & Garcia, 2009).

Identity redefinition highlights positive associations with the target identity to protect self-esteem associated with that identity (see Shih et al., 2013, for a review on the mechanisms, moderators, and limitations of each strategy). Identity redefinition can be achieved via stereotype reassociation. For example, women may disassociate their identities from negative stereotypes, such as being bad at math (Schmader, 2002; Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999), while strengthening their association with positive stereotypes like being good at verbal tasks (Pittinsky, Shih, & Ambady, 1999; Shih et al., 1999) and social tasks (Eagly, 1987). Identity redefinition helps to protect individuals' self-esteem and can lead to better performance (Shih, Ambady, Richeson, Fujita, & Gray, 2002; Shih et al., 1999). For instance, when their ethnic identity was activated, Asian American females performed better on a mathematics test than did Asian American women who had no identity activation. Yet identity redefinition may

lead to backlash. In a series of experiments, Phelan and Rudman (2010) found that, compared to a black rapper, a white rapper experienced more prejudice and discrimination. In response to possible backlash from being counter-stereotypical, individuals employ defensive strategies that preserve racial stereotypes. For instance, black people who excelled in a leadership and reasoning aptitude task but feared backlash were reluctant to publicize their excellent performance on a national website. In the long term, identity redefinition can result in disidentification with one's identity group.

In addition to these reactive strategies, preventive approaches can be taken to protect multiculturals against potential threat. For instance, parents who have successfully adjusted to a multicultural environment can engage in *racial socialization* (i.e., raising (p.629) awareness of racism and discrimination and possible coping strategies) with their children to improve their adjustment and adaptation experiences (Mistry et al., 2014).

Multiculturals also cope with cultural identity threat using the technique of individual mobility (i.e., disassociating themselves from their groups and pursuing individual goals; Haslam, 2004). In this way, an individual tries to be accepted as a member of the higher status ethnic/cultural group, although probably at the a cost of being deprived of potentially valuable sources of ingroup support from the lower status ethnic/cultural group (Major & O'Brien, 2005). However, this coping strategy is more available to individuals who themselves share many visible commonalities with the mainstream group. For example, Caucasians migrated from Europe can be easily classified as white in America, whereas visible-minority individuals, like Asian Americans in the United States, are less likely to successfully assimilate in this way (Huynh, Devos, & Smalarz, 2011).

When individual mobility is not available for ethnic minorities, they may choose group-based strategies to strengthen their ethnic minority identity, either by engaging in social competition with the majority group or changing the frame of social comparisons. By doing so, they attempt to establish a positive distinctness in their ethnic identification. Studies have shown that this heightened identification can lead to greater psychosocial well-being and serve as a protective buffer against negative impacts of perceived identity threats and discrimination (Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, & Spears, 2001; Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003).

In addition, to cope with identity denial and discrimination, individuals with multicultural identities tend to establish their own ingroup membership and exclusively consider similar multiculturals as ingroup members (Sanchez et al., 2014); this is especially likely for multiculturals who feel rejected by more than one identity (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). For example, in a study involving 99 international students from 32 non-European and non-English-speaking

countries at the University of Kansas, Schmitt, Spears, and Branscombe (2003) measured participants' perceived prejudice and discrimination at the university using the two items "I feel like students at the University of Kansas look down on me because of my nationality" and "Students at the University of Kansas have discriminated against me because I am not from the United States." To measure the student participants' identity, the researchers asked students to indicate how much they identify with "international students at the University of Kansas" and "your country of origin," respectively. Their analysis found that, in general, perceived discrimination lowered the self-esteem of international students. However, perceived prejudice made participants identify more with "international students," and this increased identification predicted higher self-esteem.

To conclude, this section has reviewed research that examines how individuals actively cope with other people's expectations and reactions in forging their multicultural identities. Identity denial and discrimination can impede individuals' entry into a new identity, which can then create internal conflicts within these individuals and undermine multicultural identity processes. The expectations of and reactions toward new and **(p.630)** minority members could be shared within an organization or nation and legitimized by normative ideologies. We will discuss this process next.

Organizational and Societal Ideologies

The diversity policies that organizations and societies adopt can affect individuals' multicultural identity formation and negotiation. For instance, Berry's acculturation taxonomy can be mapped onto different societal policies, such that multicultural individuals could feel more pressured to endorse assimilation (embracing the host/mainstream culture and giving up the native culture) in countries that value a "melting pot" rather than those that value a "salad bowl" ideology. In this section, we review the impact of two alternative policies—multiculturalism and interculturalism—on outcomes for multicultural individuals and societies.

Multiculturalism

"Multiculturalism" is a term that was invented in Quebec in the 1970s to name the "policy of honoring differences with the goal of preserving different cultural communities within a society or organization, valuing purity of traditions" (Morris et al., 2015, p. 636). The essence is that groups have rights and that a society should welcome people from a number of cultural groups, with none being treated as more central than another, so that individuals can be recognized in their cultural identities. In two experimental studies, Verkuyten (2009) found that an experimentally created multicultural context provides a favorable condition for personal self-esteem of high ethnic-minority identifiers but not for low identifiers. Also, individuals endorsing multiculturalism show less social dominance orientation, more interest in and appreciation of diversity, and

greater comfort with differences (Rosenthal & Levy, 2012). However, some findings reveal the costs of multiculturalism. One cost is a reduction in national unity and increased divisiveness within the plural society. That is, there is a question of whether multiculturalism challenges the possibility of attaining social cohesion among the various cultural groups (Reitz, Breton, Dion, & Dion, 2009). Furthermore, multicultural approaches that focus only on the superficial characteristics of cultural groups may unintentionally reinforce group stereotypes (Crisp & Meleady, 2012; Gutiérrez & Unzueta, 2010).

For instance, when primed with a short essay advocating a multicultural approach, white American college students displayed stronger stereotypes toward blacks, greater stereotype accuracy, and greater use of stereotypical information to judge individuals, relative to students who were primed with color-blind perspective (Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000). Contrary to the multicultural approach's appreciation of group differences, color-blind or individuating strategies treat individuals as members of a common humanity. However, some recent research has doubted the effectiveness of the color-blind policy because it ignores the fundamental difficulties (e.g., institutionalized (p. 631) racism) that certain racial groups have encountered historically (e.g., poverty) and that placed them in a disadvantaged condition to begin with. Therefore, ignoring the "color" (membership) of those racial groups would reinforce the injustice and discrimination against them.

Interculturalism

Dissatisfaction with multiculturalism and color-blind policies has partly contributed to the increasing attention paid to interculturalist policies that "stimulate intercultural contact and dialogue" based on "a network conception of culture in which cultural influence on individuals is partial and plural and cultural traditions interact and change each other" (Morris, et al., 2015, p. 634). Interculturalism, as a policy, can be viewed as a combination of multiculturalism's support for ethnic preservation while also fostering active interaction and integration among ethnic and cultural traditions to fuse new creations. Interculturalism has recently gained theoretical and empirical support, particularly for its superior ability to predict positive intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes in multicultural environments. Specifically, compared to multiculturalism, the polyculturalist assumption underlying interculturalism is more strongly associated with a willingness to criticize one's own cultural tradition (Rosenthal, Levy, & Moss, 2011), eagerness for intergroup contact (Rosenthal & Levy, 2012), and positive attitudes toward people from different cultures (Bernardo, Rosenthal, & Levy, 2013). People who dramatically accommodated to the cultural norms of a society they are visiting are appreciated by polyculturalists and derided by multiculturalists (Cho, Morris, & Dow, 2014).

To conclude, different diversity policies can trickle down to the individual psychological level. The knowledge accumulated on this topic is still developing while the world is globalizing fast. Most previous research was conducted in the domains of sociology, economics, governance, and social policy. There is still room for development on this topic in psychology.

Conclusion

The study of multicultural identities has gained prominence in recent decades and will be even more urgent as the mobility of individuals and social groups becomes the “new normal.” As reviewed, this topic cuts across the interpersonal, interpersonal, and organizational and societal levels. Although we presented the three levels in separate sections, we do not mean to view the three levels as unrelated. Instead, they are intimately linked. Take two examples. First, interpersonal processes can affect intrapersonal processes. For instance, Cheng and Lee (2013) have shown that asking Asian Americans to recall positive (negative) interactions with the mainstream American group increases (decreases) participants’ level of bicultural identity integration, suggesting that the interpersonal level affects the intrapersonal level. Conversely, the intrapersonal level can **(p.632)** also affect interpersonal experiences as well. For instance, No et al. (2008) found that Asian American participants who held a social constructivist view of race increased their American identification significantly after recalling a large (vs. small) number of positive encounters with American culture, but those who held a racial essentialism view did not. Finally, both the intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences are affected by national policies (Berry & Sam, 2014).

Second, societal influences can impact intrapersonal processes. For instance, France and Canada uphold different governmental policies regarding cultural diversity. France seeks to minimize cultural diversity and emphasize cultural assimilation (Sabatier, Phalet, & Titzmann, 2016) whereas Canada practices a policy of multiculturalism, promoting cultural diversity (Noels & Berry, 2016). Berry and Sabatier (2010) examined 718 second-generation adolescents in Montreal and in Paris, using a questionnaire and one-to-one interviews. They found that national public policy and public attitudes predicted immigrant youths’ acculturation strategies. In France, since there was less orientation to their heritage culture, second-generation young immigrants showed lower self-esteem as assessed by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) relative to their Canadian counterparts. Moreover, the French-born immigrant youths also presented more behavioral problems, ranging from minor deviances like school tardiness to serious problems, such as drug use and criminal behavior.

Future research can further substantiate the processes at each level while elucidating the interplay among the three levels of multicultural identity processes. For example, it would be useful to understand how native and/or host

culture serve different psychological functions. It is possible that people attach to their native cultures in similar ways as they attach to their childhood caretakers. As such, the native culture can serve as a secure base that confers security to individuals in the face of stress and uncertainty. Therefore, the quality of attachment (secure vs. insecure) to the native culture can predict important outcomes of multicultural contacts and, consequently, general psychological and physical well-being. The recent proposal of cultural attachment theory and its related empirical studies have provided some initial support for these ideas (Hong et al., 2013; Hong, Roisman, & Chen, 2006; Phua, Meaney, Khor, Lau, & Hong, 2017; Yap et al., 2017; see review Hong, 2017). This direction of research can benefit from cross-fertilization with cultural psychology and developmental psychology and has the potential to bring new discoveries to light.

At the societal level, diversity and intercultural issues have disturbed many countries recently. Localism (a “local people first” mentality) is rising in many countries and likely plays a role in the current course of “black swans,” including Brexit in the UK and the election of Donald Trump in the United States. The upheaval of localism in developed countries can be understood as a reaction to globalization, a process in part characterized by companies’ outsourcing of their manufacturing to developing countries and the resulting influx of opportunity-seeking foreign workers to developed countries. Another issue is the influx of refugees and immigrants in many countries. Local people **(p.633)** in developed countries have perceived the resultant demographic and cultural changes as threatening and have thus increased their desire to guard their borders and protect local interests. This will provide a backdrop for a new surge of research in how diversity policies can impact on the well-being of multicultural individuals, especially that of immigrants and ethnic minorities. This literature is relatively limited currently, and thus resulted in a rather terse review in the third section of this chapter.

In conclusion, given high global mobility and connectedness (through the Internet and social media), intercultural contacts are inevitable. Against this backdrop, in this chapter, we have reviewed how intrapersonal, interpersonal, and collective (organizational and societal) factors impacted on multicultural identities. In general, the processes reflect the adaptation of individuals to the demand of the multicultural environment. These processes are analogous to animal species’ adaptation in response to environmental changes. Therefore, it is intriguing to ask if the exponential prevalence of multicultural contacts and mixing could possibly change human biology as well. A recent study found that adult Spanish-English bilinguals have larger gray matter volume in frontal and parietal brain regions (that are typically implicated in executive control) when compared with English-speaking monolinguals (Olulade et al., 2015). The researchers explain that managing two languages (i.e., the experience with two languages and the increased need for cognitive control to use them

appropriately) changes brain structure (in the frontal and parietal brain regions). To the extent that adapting to multiple cultures also requires navigating between cultural contexts and managing multicultural identities, multicultural experiences may change the human brain as well (see elaboration in Hong & Khei, 2014). Indeed, recent research (see review by Hong & Cheon, 2017) has shown that multicultural exposure can bring about positive outcomes (e.g., increased creativity and decreased prejudice) and negative outcomes (e.g., feeling disgust toward other cultural groups; Cheon, Christopoulos, & Hong, 2016). Taken as a whole, globalization has provided a new context for understanding intercultural processes. With the exponential rate of intercultural contacts and mixing via mass media and the World Wide Web, among other means, being or becoming multicultural seems more normative than being monocultural. Monoculturalism may soon be a rare case and, as such, described as a thing of the past. It is ever more pressing to understand how people navigate among cultures, form bi- or multicultural identities, and adapt to new cultural environments cognitively and biologically, and the challenges and barriers they face.

The pandit spoke first. “Mr. Patel, Piscine’s piety is admirable. In these troubled times it’s good to see a boy so keen on God. We all agree on that.” The imam and the priest nodded. “But he can’t be a Hindu, a Christian and a Muslim. It’s impossible. He must choose.”

“I don’t think it’s a crime, but I suppose you’re right,” Father replied.

The three murmured in agreement and looked heavenward, as did Father, whence they felt the decision must come. Mother looked at me. **(p.634)**

A silence fell heavily on my shoulders.

“Hmmm, Piscine?” Mother nudged me. “How do you feel about the question?”

“Bapu Gandhi said, ‘All religions are true.’ I just want to love God,” I [Piscine] blurted out, and looked down, red in the face.

—*Life of Pi*, Yann Martel (2001)

Although Piscine’s encounter here takes place in Yann Martel’s work of fiction, *Life of Pi*, his experience is likely to strike a chord and evoke feelings of anguish among many of us who constantly need to navigate between multiple cultural systems. Precisely because of this, it is even more important to study multicultural identities in this era. As such, research on multicultural identities has emerged as a vibrant new field.

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Notes:

(1.) *Integrative complexity* refers to the capacity and willingness to acknowledge the legitimacy of competing perspectives on the same issue (differentiation) and to forge conceptual links among these perspectives (integration) (Suedfeld, Tetlock, & Streufert, 1992).

(2.) *Cultural metacognition* is defined as the ability to consciously and deliberately monitor one's knowledge processes and cognitive and affective states, and the ability to regulate these processes and states in the domain of cross-cultural experiences and strategies with the goal to achieve intercultural effectiveness (Thomas et al., 2010).