

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

Daphna Oyserman

*Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1248, USA*

Available online 25 June 2009

## Abstract

Choices are often identity-based but the linkage to identity is not necessarily explicit or obvious for a number of reasons. First, identities feel stable but are highly sensitive to situational cues. Second, identities include not only content but also readiness to act and to use procedures congruent with the identity. Third, identities can be subtly cued without conscious awareness. Fourth, what an accessible identity means is dynamically constructed in the particular context in which it is cued. Because identities carry action- and procedural-readiness, the outcome of an identity-based motivation process may be similar to or different from the choices an individual would have made in another setting. Moreover, once an identity is formed, action and procedural-readiness can be cued without conscious awareness or systematic processing, resulting in beneficial or iatrogenic outcomes.

© 2009 Society for Consumer Psychology. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

David Boies, who represented Al Gore in the 2000 Supreme Court elections case, has long been a top earning Wall Street lawyer. But he does not appear in court elegantly attired in a designer label suit; rather, he wears Lands' End suits, even when arguing cases in front of the United States Supreme Court. Why does he choose Lands' End, a Midwestern mail order company famous for allowing returns or exchanges at any time and for any reason—a policy called “Guaranteed. Period.”? As he explains it, wearing Lands' End just feels right; it is the right brand for him because he “comes from non-fancy people.” In Lands' End suits he feels like himself, wearing them is congruent with some aspect of his identity even if it might not look that way to others. Like David Boies, people routinely symbolize who they are and may become, as well as who they are not and want to avoid becoming, through consumption choices that can be self-symbolizing (Belk, 1988; Shavitt, 1990; Shavitt & Nelson, 1999).

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

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

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

*E-mail address:* [daphna.oyserman@umich.edu](mailto:daphna.oyserman@umich.edu).

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

## Identity and motivation

### *What is meant by identity?*

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

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

Though all self-concepts are assumed to contain both social and personal identities, people differ in the likelihood that personal or social identities are central as well as the ways in which identities are conceptualized. Gender, culture, and minority status all might make particular social identities or

intersections between identities (e.g. Black professional male) salient and can increase or decrease the tendency to use social vs. personal identities to make sense of the self generally (Brewer, 1991; Cole, 2009; Cross & Madson, 1997; Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Markus & Oyserman, 1989). Within cultural psychology, the terms individual and collective or independent and interdependent are used to describe individuals who are more likely to use personal vs. social identities as well as to describe societies that are more likely to institutionalize or prioritize personal vs. social identities (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989).

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

### *Which identities matter?*

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

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات