1

Introduction to the Psychology of Diversity

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

First, because individuals are literally part of the social contexts in which they behave, those *situations cannot be understood independently of the people in them*. Have you ever been amazed that you perceived a situation, such as a job interview, much differently than a friend? Perhaps you approached the interview with optimism and confidence, regarding it a potentially positive step in your career goals. Your friend,

however, may have viewed the same scenario as threatening and bemoaning how it would never work out. This illustrates how social situations are, in vital part, constructed and maintained by people. We project our own attitudes, feelings, expectations, and fears onto the situations we encounter. Applied to our social contexts, this principle says that the differentness we perceive between ourselves and other people, or among other people, may be inaccurate. As we will learn in subsequent chapters in this book, there are times when we project too much social difference onto our contexts and the people in them. At other times, however, we underestimate the diversity around us. So, the diversity of our lives is partly a function of us—our individual ways of thinking and emotional needs.

Second, because people live and behave in diverse social contexts, then *individuals cannot be understood independently of the situations in which they act and interact.* Are you sometimes a different person, or do you show a different side of yourself, as your social setting changes? For example, do you display different table manners when eating with your friends at the café than during a holiday meal with the family? Do you think of yourself differently in those situations? If so, then you realize how we are, in vital part, social beings. Our behavior and identity are constructed and maintained by the situations in which we act and live. Likewise, our thoughts and actions flex with the situational norms we encounter. If we are interested in explaining who we are and why we behave the way we do, we must look to the social context for insight. The diversity of our social contexts is laden with informative clues to help us demystify our own behavior and confront our attitudes and beliefs.

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

Diversity Is Social Difference

What is diversity? According to the dictionary, **diversity** is the presence of difference. However, the most common usages of diversity refer to *social* difference, or differences among people. People can differ in so many ways; to appreciate the range and types of diversity in the United States, and to introduce the dimensions of diversity that are addressed in this book, let's develop a statistical snapshot of the social differences of Americans from the 2010 U. S. Census Bureau statistics and other recent national surveys. So that we can simultaneously appreciate how much (or little) research attention has been given various aspects of diversity in the social scientific research literature, we review these in order from the most-researched to the least-researched (See Figure 1.1 for a display of the research activity in each area).

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

Number of Articles Retrieved by Diversity Dimension (APA psychNET)
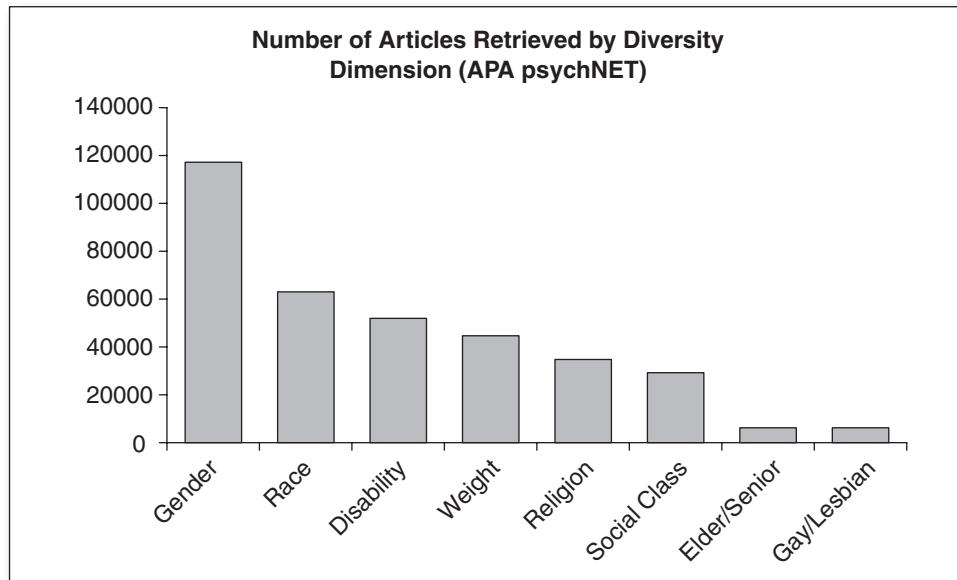
Gender

The study of gender, including related topics like sex roles and sex differences, is by far the most-researched aspect of diversity. Gender is a good case study for understanding that majority-group status is conferred by status and control over resources and not mere statistical majority. Figures from the 2010 U.S. Census show that females and males make up 51% and 49% of the U.S. population, respectively (Howden & Meyer, 2011). Put another way, there are about 97 males in America for every 100 females and, because women tend to live longer than men, they become more of a statistical majority as they age. Although, statistically speaking, women are a majority group, women have historically endured second-class status relative to men in many life domains. For example, even with legal protections against discrimination of women in the workplace, in 2011, a gender wage gap still existed such that women earn about 80 cents for every dollar earned by men (Hegewisch, Williams, & Henderson, 2011). We will take up gender diversity in Chapter 6.

Race

The second most-researched aspect of diversity involves race and other related topics such as racial identity and racism. Racial distinctions are based on physical and facial characteristics, skin color, and hair type and color that developed in response to particular geographic and climatic forces. The most common race

labels are limited in that they combine color-based racial notions (e.g., White, Black) with ethnic and linguistic (e.g., Asian, Hispanic) elements. Moreover, many people now identify themselves on government surveys as biracial or multiethnic (e.g., having parents from different racial or ethnic groups). To deal with this complexity, the U.S. Census Bureau treats ethnic background and race as different concepts so that, for example, Hispanic people can identify themselves as White only, Black only, some other race, or even biracial. Measures of race and ethnic background (appropriately) defy simple snapshots of racial and ethnic diversity of Americans. Still, a general picture of who we are as Americans in racial-ethnic terms would be helpful.

In 2000, Whites constituted about 69% of the American population, with Black (about 12%) and Hispanic/Latino (about 12%) people comprising minority populations of about the same size. In 2010, 64% of Americans were White, 13% were Black, and 16% were Hispanic, with people from other racial categories (e.g., Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander) making up the remaining 7% of the population (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). These figures indicate that Hispanics are now the largest minority group in the United States. Indeed, the total U.S. population grew by 27 million people in the last decade, and growth in the Hispanic population accounted for over half of that growth. In terms of racial identity, most Hispanic people consider themselves from one race, with about half of the Hispanics on the 2010 census listing their race as White. Most of the other half identified themselves as Black or "some other race," which was a catch-all category to include a variety of nationality-based responses (e.g., Mexican). In 2010, 3% of Americans identified themselves as biracial or multiracial, increasing from 2.5% in 2000. Although the absolute numbers of biracial Americans is small, this is a rapidly growing racial category. We will learn more about issues surrounding biracial identity in Chapters 2 and 4 (see also Diversity Issue 1.1 in this chapter).

About one in five Americans speaks a language at home other than English, and about one half of those people speak little or no English. Spanish is the most common language spoken in those homes where English is not, or rarely, spoken. Indeed, there are about 35 million first-language Spanish-speaking Americans (roughly the population of California), making Spanish literacy an increasingly important concern in government, business, and education. Look around your class: The changing nature of the American population is reflected in the make-up of your college or university student body. In 1990, about 20% of college students were non-White (9% Black, 6% Hispanic, 4% Asian). In 2008, just 18 years later, minority college students (14% Black, 12% Hispanic, 7% Asian) constituted 33% of the college population (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008).

Disability

Disability takes many forms and includes any condition that affects individuals' vision, hearing, mobility, learning and memory, or communication ability. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 22% of American

adults have some kind of disability, with roughly half of those people having a severe disability. Disability increases with age: About 38% of people over the age of 65 have some disability compared with 14% of adults between 18 and 44 (CDC, 2008). Disability rates tend to be slightly higher in women than in men, and higher in White and Black Americans compared with other minority groups. People with disabilities also have lower incomes and higher rates of living in poverty than do able-bodied people.
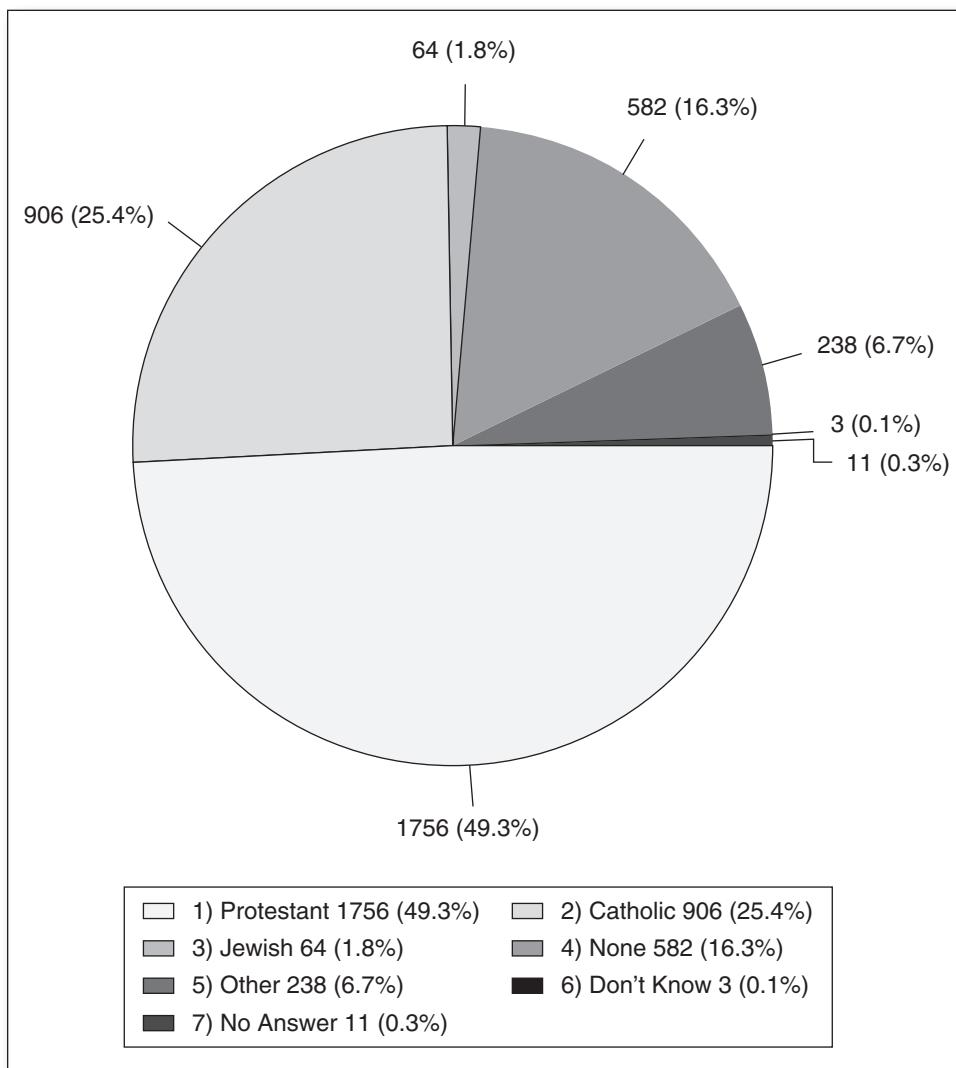
Weight

Body shape and size is a visible aspect of diversity. Research on the consequences of overweight and obesity for health, social opportunity, and well-being has exploded in the past several years. For evidence of that, look at Figure 1.1: In the first edition of this book (published in 2007), the number of articles retrieved from PsychNET on some aspect of weight was about 10,000, making weight the least-researched of the diversity dimensions pictured in Figure 1.1. Not even 10 years later, over 40,000 articles are available on some aspect of weight. Currently, about two out of every three American adults are overweight (having a body mass index, or BMI, over 25), and one in three is obese, having a BMI of 30 or more (Flegel, Carroll, Ogden, & Curtin, 2010). Obesity rates are higher among women than among men, among racial and ethnic minority groups than among Whites, and among lower income compared with middle- and high-income persons. Overweight/obesity is an important issue in a study of diversity for several reasons. First, body size informs self-image and self-esteem. Second, prejudice and discrimination against people because of their (heavy) weight is widespread and, unlike most other forms of discrimination, legal. Third, overweight and obesity are associated with tremendous loss of social status and opportunity. We will cover these topics and more in Chapter 7.

Religion

Americans are overwhelmingly Christian in religious affiliation or belief. Looking at Figure 1.2, if you combine Catholic and Protestant traditions, about 75% of Americans identify themselves as Christian. Jews constitute about 2%, and all other religions together about 7% of the American population. People who identify with no religious tradition are a sizable minority, constituting about 16% of the population. Although Christianity dominates the religious landscape, some religious minorities are growing at astounding rates. For example, in 1990, there were 1.5 million Muslims in the United States; by 2010 the number had increased to 2.6 million, and by 2030 over 6 million Muslims are expected to populate the American religious scene (Pew Forum, 2011). Religion occupies a more prominent role in the lives of Black compared with White Americans: About 80% of Blacks say religion is very important in their lives, compared with about 56% of White Americans. Black Americans also engage in more public (e.g., church attendance) and private (e.g., prayer) religious behavior than Whites do (Pew Forum, 2009). We will further consider religious diversity in Chapter 8.

Figure 1.2 Religious Preferences of Americans by Tradition (in Millions of Respondents and Percentage of Population)

64 (1.8%)

582 (16.3%)

906 (25.4%)

238 (6.7%)

3 (0.1%)

11 (0.3%)

1756 (49.3%)

1) Protestant 1756 (49.3%)   2) Catholic 906 (25.4%)
3) Jewish 64 (1.8%)   4) None 582 (16.3%)
5) Other 238 (6.7%)   6) Don't Know 3 (0.1%)
7) No Answer 11 (0.3%)

SOURCE: Data from General Social Survey. Graph from Association of Religion Data Archives, http://thearda.com/. Used with permission.

Social Class

Social class, or socioeconomic status, refers to a marker that combines educational attainment and income. The median annual household income (the income level that divides the upper and lower halves of the population) for Americans in 2009 was

$49,777 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2010). Household income, however, varied greatly by race: On average, White and Black households earned $51,861 and $32,584, respectively. As of 2009, poverty is defined as having an annual household income at or below $21,954 for a family of four, and 14% of all American families live in poverty. As with income, poverty status depends on one's race: 12% of White families live in poverty, compared with 26% of Black and 25% of Hispanic families. Most Americans (85%) have a high school education, and about one half (54%) of the population has some college education or a college degree (Crissey, 2009). Education, especially higher education, also varies sharply by race. Among White and Asian Americans, 31% and 50% respectively, earn a college degree or greater. Black (17%) and Hispanic (13%) Americans achieve a college degree or higher at much lower rates.

Age

Age diversity receives relatively little research attention, but that should change with the expected growth of the senior citizen population in the next 20 years. The median (or 50th percentile) age for the U.S. population is 36.5 years. The typical female is older than the typical male due to the longer life expectancy for women. For people born in the early 1990s, which includes many readers of this book, average life expectancy is 72 years for males and 79 years for females (Arias, 2011). The aging of the Baby Boom generation (those born between 1946 and 1964) means that in 2011, the first wave of Baby Boomers will turned 65. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2010, 13% of the population was age 65 and older. In 2030, when the last wave of Baby Boomers reaches retirement age, 19% of all Americans will be 65 or older. The rapid growth of the senior citizen population has implications for eldercare, health care, and other issues. We will consider age-related stereotypes and agism in Chapter 9.

Sexual Orientation

Estimates vary of the percentage of LGBT (a term including lesbian, gay male, bisexual, and transgendered) individuals in the population due to two factors: the reluctance of some people to disclose their sexual orientation on a survey, and the error inherent in small sample surveys. The most recent and best data on the percentages of LGBT Americans come from the National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior, a survey of 5,965 randomly selected Americans from age 14 to 94. Regarding homosexual identity, about 3% of male and 9% of female adolescents identify themselves as gay or bisexual. Among adults, 7% of men and 5% of women identify as either gay or bisexual (Herbenick, Reese, Schick, Sanders, Dodge, & Fortenberry, 2010). Same-sex sexual behavior is somewhat more common than homosexual identity: Among adults ages 40 to 49, 10% to 15% of men and 10% to 12% of women report having participated in same-sex oral sex in their lifetimes (Herbenick et al., 2010). Sexual diversity is noteworthy because, relative to gender and race, it is an invisible status and this greatly affects whether one is a target of gay-related prejudice and how one copes with prejudice.

?

Do visible differences matter more to us than invisible differences? Why?

Electoral politics are color-coded: talk about what you think a red-state versus a blue-state voter is like.

Making Sense of Diversity

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

Diversity as a Demographic Concern

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

Social categories are also useful and informative tools for a psychological study of diversity. They help us organize and remember other information about people, operating something like computer files in which social information is arranged and stored. As a result, when an individual's social category is brought to mind, that related information—such as our attitudes, beliefs, and expectations about people in that category—becomes very accessible. Try this free association task. What images or

thoughts come to mind when you think of the social category *poor*? If you imagine a person who was lacking in intelligence or motivation to make something of himself, dressed in shabby clothes, and living in the bad section of town, you begin to see how social categories are rich with information about a person's characteristics and behavior, and how the concept of diversity is influenced by the kind of information we associate with dimensions of social difference.

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

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

Diversity as a Political Concern

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

This conceptualization—that diversity is the presence of people from historically disadvantaged social groups or categories—has political overtones and is limiting to a psychological study of diversity in two ways. First, recall that one of the principles of this book is that we construct diversity through our perceptions, beliefs, expectations, and behavior toward people based on social dimensions. But if diversity is linked predominantly to women and ethnic minorities, then the range of social difference

(or *important* social difference) is preset for us by a particular legal definition of diversity. Although the motives for including members of historically disadvantaged groups in our schools and businesses are noble, this political meaning of diversity restricts the actual diversity of our social environment.

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

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

Diversity as an Ideological Concern

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

The Melting Pot

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

. . . Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,

I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

Emma Lazarus, 1883

People who use the term diversity in this way tend to believe that a diverse society should be one where all people are welcome, where social differences are accepted and understood, and where people with social differences relate harmoniously. In the film *Manhattan Murder Mystery*, when a gentlemanly neighbor is suspected of murdering his wife, Larry (Woody Allen) retorts: "So? New York is a melting pot." This parody is nevertheless instructive: The **melting pot** ideal involves the acceptance of others' difference if they are (or perceived to be) otherwise devoted to the majority group values and goals, such as working hard and being a responsible citizen. This melting pot view of diversity is reflected in an essay by Edgar Beckham, who coordinates Wesleyan University's Campus Diversity Initiative: "How unfortunate, especially in a democracy, that we fail to note how insistently diversity also points to unity." Beckham (1997) argues that diversity requires a unifying context in which social differences among people can work together for the benefit of everyone. So the melting pot embodies a vision of a school, community, or nation in which differences among people—especially those that relate to ethnicity and cultural heritage—are blended into a single social and cultural product.

Multiculturalism

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

> We are pieces of a quilt of many colors
>
> See, how we blend together in harmony
>
> And each piece is not complete without the others
>
> Stitching a quilt made of you and me**.**
>
> Music & lyrics by Lauren Mayer, © 2004

In multicultural approaches to diversity, patches of people, each with a distinct cultural or national heritage, become sewn into a large social quilt. The patches are connected to each other, perhaps by a common commitment to some overarching value such as democracy or freedom. In the spirit of the metaphor and the values surrounding multiculturalism, the quilt preserves the uniqueness of social and cultural groups while at the same time uniting them for a superordinate purpose. In short, melting pot ideals hold that social differences can, and should, be blended in a harmonious way. Multiculturalism also values unity, but in a way that preserves and even capitalizes on our social differences.

Color-Blindness

As an ideology, **color-blindness** attempts to consider people strictly as individuals, ignoring or de-emphasizing racial or ethnic group membership. In short, race should not matter in the way people are treated. This aspect of color-blindness reveals that it is an ideology held by the racial majority about, or toward, racial minority persons. Also inherent in color-blindness is an assimilationist hope: that people from racial minority groups will downplay their racial and ethnic differences and adapt to mainstream norms (Wolsko, Park, & Judd, 2006). Color-blindness need not be antithetical to diversity: Indeed, proponents of color-blindness believe that racial diversity in communities, businesses, and schools is a valuable goal, but it should be achieved by making decisions based on factors other than race. Although true color-blindness is an ideal where race is irrelevant to life outcomes (e.g., income, housing, health), critics of color-blindness argue that race *is* relevant because of the persistence of racial discrimination in society.

Melting pot, multiculturalist, and color-blindness notions of diversity have different implications for individuals from minority groups. In melting pot and color-blind ideologies, racial and ethnic minorities gain acceptance to the extent that they assimilate and adopt majority group customs. In a multicultural society, minority groups' culture and customs are accepted and preserved by the majority group. Which ideology is better for minorities? The research is mixed: Some work shows that multiculturalism is threatening to Whites and contributes to prejudice against minorities (Morrison, Plaut, & Ybarra, 2010; Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011). Other research finds that multiculturalism decreases, and color-blindness increases, minorities' perception of bias against their group (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009; Gutierrez & Unzueta, 2010).

Regardless of whether you believe that melting pot, multicultural, or color-blindness ideals are possible or even desirable, we must acknowledge that diversity is often used in a manner that conflates description and ideology—what is and what should be. With regard to diversity, the three ideologies described above are statements of what some people feel *should* be in a socially diverse environment. We will approach our study of diversity regarding it neither as inherently desirable nor undesirable, but simply as an important characteristic of our social world.

Diversity and Concern for Social Justice

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

We know that America is a diverse society, but how socially just are we? Much data suggest that although all Americans enjoy similar rights and opportunities, not all realize comparable outcomes. Here are a few examples that highlight the divergent life outcomes of Whites compared with racial and ethnic minority individuals and the wealthy compared with the poor (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). All U.S. citizens are entitled to free public education through grade 12, but not all of them get it. In 2009, 92% of Whites had earned a high school diploma, but only 84% and 62% of Blacks and Hispanics, respectively. In principle, all people should have access to health care, if not from their employer, then from a government health care program such as Medicaid. In 2009, however, 16% of White, 21% of Black, and 32% of Hispanic individuals had no health insurance. Even for people with insurance, racial disparities in health outcomes are common. For example, Blacks with diabetes were less likely to be screened for, or receive, hemoglobin testing than Whites with the illness, and five times more likely than Whites to have a leg amputated due to the complications of diabetes (Sack, 2008). We will consider racial discrimination in health care in Chapter 5.

In a socially just society, people will not be victimized because of their group membership. However, according to Bureau of Justice data from 2009, Blacks are about 50% more likely to be a crime victim, and about three times more likely to be a victim of a robbery, than Whites are (Truman & Rand, 2010). Although Blacks are about 12% of the U.S. population, they are about 50% of those arrested for crimes, and even though twice as many Whites as Blacks are arrested for crimes, White and Black individuals are imprisoned in equal numbers. These statistics paint an unsettling image. In a nation devoted to its citizens' life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, racial and ethnic minorities and poor people have less of these than White and wealthy people do.

Psychologists have long approached the study of diversity with an underlying concern for identifying, explaining, and correcting social injustice. For example, Kenneth and Mamie Clark's (1940) work showing that Black children preferred to play with White than with Black dolls was instrumental in the Supreme Court's 1954 decision declaring that racially segregated schools were unconstitutional. Psychologists' concern for social justice is also evident in the way research on stereotyping and prejudice has been conducted. The great majority of research articles on stereotypes and stereotyping (numbering in the tens of thousands) have examined Whites' beliefs and preconceptions about Blacks, while only a relative handful of articles have examined Blacks' stereotypes of Whites. When stereotyping processes should be the same in both directions, and thus equally understandable from either group's perspective—why does this research bias exist? Stereotypes held by empowered, majority group members—like Whites and males—are much more problematic because stereotypes can cause, support, and justify discrimination of minority group individuals. Because leadership positions in business and government have traditionally been, and continue to be, disproportionately held by White people, their stereotypic beliefs about Blacks have the potential to become institutionalized and contribute to institutional forms of discrimination. So psychologists have combined their basic research questions

(e.g., What are the processes that lead to stereotyping?) with concerns for understanding and potentially addressing social injustice. As a final bit of evidence for the social justice agenda of psychologists, consider the mission statements of the two national psychological societies in the United States. The stated purpose of the American Psychology Association is to "advance psychology as a science and profession and as a means of promoting health, education, *and human welfare*" (italics added). Likewise, the mission of the Association for Psychological Science is to "promote, protect, and advance the interests of scientifically oriented psychology in research, application, teaching, and *the improvement of human welfare*" (italics added).

? Diversity is accused of buzzword or PC status, according to many.

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

Let's pause and sum up. A psychological study of diversity shares with demographers and policy makers an interest in social categories and historically disadvantaged groups. However, the most prominent theme in a psychological study of diversity is the concern with social justice. So, as we proceed through the chapters of this book, we will strive to gain a psychological understanding of diversity *and* acknowledge the social injustices faced by people from various social groups. At the end of the book (Chapter 12), we will focus directly on interventions and strategies for reducing prejudice and promoting social equality and harmony. This book must also address two shortcomings in the psychological research on social difference. First, research attention to diversity has been dominated by a small number of dimensions: gender and, to a lesser extent, race and disability (see Figure 1.1). Race and gender affect our thinking about others more than other social categories do; this may explain the greater research activity on those dimensions of diversity. The research priorities displayed in Figure 1.1 may also reflect broader societal efforts, and the psychological research involved in those efforts, to extend equal rights all based on gender and race. Still, there are many other dimensions of diversity and social injustices that affect the members of those groups that students of the psychology of diversity must confront. Second, psychological research favors finding differences between groups of people over similarities between, and differences within, groups of people (Jones, 1994). For example, tens of thousands of studies document the (relatively few) psychological differences between men and women. This same research obscures, however, both the many ways that men and women are alike as well as the diversity within the populations of men and women. A psychology of diversity must therefore accentuate shared qualities between, and diversity within, groups of people. The goals of a psychological study of diversity are listed in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3 The Goals of a Psychological Study of Diversity

A psychological study of diversity must:

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

The Psychology of Diversity: A Conceptual Framework

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

Diversity Is Socially Constructed

The Individual Is a Social Perceiver

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

own interactions with and memory for disabled students, we would probably underestimate their numbers in the student population. In sum, the extent of diversity that we perceive in our schools, organizations, and communities is influenced by our natural limitations and biases in dealing with an overwhelming amount of social information.

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

The Individual Is a Social Actor

Not only are we social perceivers, we also act within our social contexts in ways that have implications for diversity. We typically bring into our interactions with other people a set of beliefs and expectations about them. These expectations can function in two ways: guiding the way we act toward other people and influencing the way others react to us. Here's an example. Psychological studies have demonstrated that most of us feel tension and uncertainty in interactions with physically disabled people. These feelings may stem from the belief that handicapped individuals have special needs with which we are uncomfortable or unfamiliar. Our beliefs about disabled people may lead us to avoid them, or keep our interactions with them brief and superficial, thereby contributing to their differentness from us. Moreover, our suspicious and avoidant actions actually contribute to, rather than ameliorate, their marginalization and dependence on others. In other words, our behavior often sends signals to other people about their differentness and how they are expected to act, leading them to live up to (or, more commonly, down to) those expectations. In this way, our behavior toward others actually alters the extent of difference in our social environment.

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

Diversity Is a Social Influence

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

Influence on Identity

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

Influence on Behavior

The experience of diversity extends beyond how we identify ourselves and includes how we behave. Just as our actions toward others that are guided by category-based expectations have implications for the perception of diversity, others' behavior toward us follows *their* beliefs and expectations about us and influences how we experience a diverse world. Others' beliefs and expectations about the traits and behaviors of the members of a social group comprise a role—a script for conducting oneself in the ongoing drama of life. However, social roles are a double-edged sword. On one hand they are comfortable contexts in which to live because playing the expected role brings the approval of others. On the other hand, social roles are limiting; they constrain what a member of a social group should be or do. For example, there is still a strong collective belief in this society that women are best suited for roles that involve nurturant, supportive, and helpful behavior. Not surprisingly, women greatly outnumber men in such

occupations as elementary school teacher, nurse, and secretary. Adopting this female role in one's behavior is associated with opportunities in those vocational areas, as well as a cultural stamp of approval at playing the woman role appropriately, but also place women at an economic disadvantage. You can see, then, how our behavior is not ours alone, but is shaped by cultural forces that stem directly from social differences.

Summary

- Diversity is difference based on one's sex, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, national background, income and education level, first language, religion, and appearance—and these are just the major categories of social difference!

- A psychological study of diversity must consider how social categories are tools for viewing and evaluating other people; that diversity is not limited to historically disadvantaged or visible groups; that diversity is an escapable and value-neutral aspect of our daily living; and that a concern for social justice must accompany the study of social difference.

- The psychology of diversity is based on two principles. One, through our thoughts, judgments, and actions, we shape and distort the raw material of objective social differences. Two, the diverse social contexts in which we live shape our identities and actions.

DI   **Diversity Issue 1.1: Does White + Black = Black?**

President Obama has a White mother and a Black father, making him the most famous biracial or multiracial person in America. And yet, most people think of Barack Obama as Black rather than biracial. Indeed, he was hailed in the media as the first Black president of the United States. In *Dreams of My Father*, President Obama tells of his conscious decision to think of himself as a Black American (Obama, 2004). How do you think of people who are of mixed-race background? Do you think of a biracial person in terms of one race and, if so, which one? Researchers Destiny Peery and Galen Bodenhausen (2008) examined this question by having White people look at racially ambiguous faces that either were or were not paired with information about the biracial/bicultural background of the person. What did they find? Compared with the no-information condition, when participants were given information about the biracial background of the person, they reflexively categorized the face as Black rather than White. However, when asked for more thoughtful, deliberate responses, the participants acknowledged the person's biracial identity. This study suggests that Whites automatically categorize multiracial people into minority categories, but also that knowing another person is from a mixed-race background helps White perceivers think about people in multiracial/multiethnic terms.

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

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

KEY TERMS

Diversity   2

Melting Pot   11

Multiculturalism   11

Color-blindness   12

FOR FURTHER READING

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

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

Online Resources

United States Census Bureau

http://www.census.gov/

A great site to appreciate the diversity of Americans. From the main page follow the "People & Households/American Community Survey" link. The American Community Survey is an annual look at Americans' income, education, race and ethnicity, disability, and more.

United States Census Bureau 2011 Statistical Abstract

http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/hist_stats.html

The U. S. Census Bureau's Statistical Abstract shows historical data: current and past census figures for demographics and many other variables. This site allows one to appreciate changes in American diversity across time.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

http://www.cdc.gov/

This site is excellent for finding basic prevalence statistics on diversity dimensions such as obesity and disability, and also how those dimensions relate to health. From the main CDC page, use the index to find pages on overweight/obesity (under O) and disability and health (under D).

National Center for Healthcare Statistics

http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/

For those interested in seeing how health-related outcomes are related to disability, obesity status, or demographic variables. From the main page, use the index to find research on disability and health (under D), then continue on to "more data and statistics."

National Center for Education Statistics

http://nces.ed.gov/

For those interested in seeing how educational outcomes vary by gender or race. From the main page, go to Tables/Figures, then Search Tables/Figures. Select a year and type in "gender" to get a feast of educational data for males and females.

National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior

http://www.nationalsexstudy.indiana.edu/

Findings from a large representative survey of Americans' sexual behaviors, conducted in 2010, including data on same-sex identity and behavior.

United States Department of Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines

http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/index.shtml#latest

For the latest definitions, measurement, and data on poverty.

The U.S. Census Bureau also has a poverty section:

http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty.html

American Religion Data Archive

http://www.thearda.com/

A site with membership statistics of religious denominations in the United States. ARDA also provides learning modules for studying social issues that are related to religion in America (e.g., Evangelicalism, science, and homosexuality).

The Pluralism Project

http://pluralism.org/index.php

This site, through advocacy, resources, and research, enables people to explore the diversity of religions and faith traditions in the United States. From the home page, go to "America's Many Religions." Pick a religion to find links to statistics, news, essays, and multimedia presentations.

American Psychological Association

http://www.apa.org/

A national organization of academic and practicing professional psychologists. A good place to learn what psychologists do and how they do it.

Association for Psychological Science

http://www.psychologicalscience.org/

A national organization of psychology more devoted to the scientific and research than to the professional aspects of psychology.