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CHAPTER 3

A FRAMEWORK FOR STUDYING SOCIAL IDENTITY AND COPING WITH DAILY STRESS DURING THE TRANSITION TO COLLEGE

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Over the past several decades, psychological theory and research have substantially improved our understanding of how stressful life experiences can undermine health, well-being, and the accomplishment of valued goals (Anderson, McNeilly, and Myers 1993; Clark et al. 1999; Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Whereas initially this research focused on reactions to major but infrequent life events, more recently it has focused on the mundane and chronic stress that emerges in daily life (Bolger and Eckenrode 1991; Bolger and Zuckerman 1995; Swim, Cohen, and Hyers 1998). One source of chronic stress that research has begun to examine is membership in a traditionally stigmatized or devalued social group (Clark et al. 1999; Cross, Smith, and Payne 2001; Cross and Strauss 1998; Major et al. 2003; Major and O'Brien 2005; Miller and Kaiser 2001; Miller and Major 2000). By focusing on stress processes in daily life researchers can investigate the microprocesses linking membership in historically devalued social categories with greater risk for stress-related physical and mental illnesses and relative underachievement (Clark et al. 1999; Steele and Aronson 1995). This work is a critical means of answering the important question of why, given the minimization of structural barriers to equality, members of traditionally stigmatized groups continue to experience relatively poorer health, lower achievement outcomes, and greater psychological alienation than members of non-stigmatized groups.

In this chapter we describe a framework for studying how membership in a devalued group is experienced in daily life during an important life transition. We draw on the stress and coping literature to help understand the processes linking membership in such a group to negative psychological outcomes during the transition. We also

draw on the social- and personal-identities literature to link the experiences of stigmatized individuals with the ways they identify with the social groups they belong to and with their conceptualization of themselves as individuals. Although negative experiences have typically been the focus of the research on stigmatized group members, we will also consider the positive experiences associated with group membership.

Having outlined a framework for studying stress, coping, and identity activation in daily life, we will use that framework to examine how one's membership in historically devalued groups (for example, ethnic-racial, gender, sexual-orientation, or religious minority groups) influence daily life during the transition to college by presenting and reviewing data from a daily-diary study of undergraduate students entering college. These students provided daily reports of the activation of their social and personal identities in positive and negative contexts, as well as the strategies they used to cope with each situation. Using the data, we assessed the effects of each coping strategy on the well-being and adjustment of students and explored how these effects varied according to students' social and personal identities.

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL
IDENTITY ACTIVATION

The term "identity" has been used to signify the core features of the self that individuals carry with them throughout their daily experiences and that provide a lens for viewing the world. They reflect how individuals view themselves as well as how they think others view them (Erikson 1968, 1980). An individual may have multiple identities, some based on membership in a social group such as those defined by race or gender, and some based on unique personal characteristics such as personality or physical appearance (Brewer 1991; Chatman and Eccles, chapter 5, this volume; Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 2002; Luhtanen and Crocker 1992). Although these identities are often stable characteristics of the individual, contextual cues determine which of an individual's identities is active or salient at any particular point in time (Deaux and Major 1987; Steele and Aronson 1995). For example, in contexts where an Asian American woman may be the only female, gender may become her most salient identity, whereas for the same individual, being in an environment where she is the only Asian American among females, ethnicity may become the most salient identity. Further, the specific identity that is activated within a context may influence whether individuals appraise a situation as stressful, and if so, how they cope with it. For example, a feature of one's personal identity, such as the tendency to view the self as likely to be rejected by potential romantic partners, may be activated in situations where acceptance or rejection by an intimate partner or new friend is a possibility. This expectation of rejection would also influence how the individual copes in the situation, for example, using ingratiation to ensure acceptance or self-silencing to avoid rejection (Downey and Feldman 1996). Alternatively, a stigmatized identity such as race or gender may be activated within the same individual in the context of an academic stressor, as when being evaluated by a university professor. This activation may lead to expectations of discrimination on the basis of the stigmatized identity and to the subsequent deployment of coping strategies, such as academic disengage-

ment or a motivated challenge response to prove the professor wrong (London, Downey, and Dweck 2005; Mendoza-Denton et al. 2002).

The relatively separate literatures of personality (emphasizing unique individual characteristics) and social stigma (emphasizing group-based identities) have focused on how identity affects the appraisals and experiences of individuals. However, there is the need for a more comprehensive view of the self that incorporates both personal and social identities simultaneously and that clarifies their role in appraisals and coping (Andersen, Downey, and Tyler, chapter 10, this volume).

Indeed, in the literature, much research has focused on how stigmatizing characteristics, especially visible stigmas such as ethnicity and gender, may increase exposure to stress by subjecting the stigmatized to the scrutiny and potentially discriminatory behavior of prejudiced others (Miller and Major 2000). Researchers are now beginning to examine under what circumstances and for whom membership in a stigmatized group is stressful. For example, Claude Steele and colleagues provide empirical evidence of the contextual cues that may activate a threatened social identity in such a way as to undermine academic performance and heighten physiological stress responses (Blascovich et al. 2001; Steele and Aronson 1995; see Lawrence, Crocker, and Dweck, chapter 2, this volume, for a review). Margaret Shih et al. (2002) have extended this work to show that when different identities within the same person are made salient (even within the same context), individuals can differ in their performance and engagement. Capitalizing on the fact that Asians are positively stereotyped in math whereas women are negatively stereotyped in math, Shih et al. (2002) examined the performance of Asian women on a math task. When participants' Asian identity was activated, they performed better than when their female identity was activated. Thus, the same stressor can yield different outcomes in the same person depending on which of their identities is activated.

The laboratory-based research of Steele, Shih, and others illustrates the complex role of social-identity activation by demonstrating variability in the impact of the same objective situation on members of stigmatized groups. However, findings from field research on members of such groups importantly caution against focusing only on social identity when investigating how individuals negotiate important challenges (Strauss and Cross, chapter 4, this volume). Thus, while in this chapter we focus on the experiences of members of traditional stigmatized groups through the activation of their stigmatized social identities, we are also careful to explore their attributions to personal characteristics outside of their stigmatized social identities.

APPLYING THE STRESS AND COPING FRAMEWORK TO STUDYING THE IDENTITY PROCESS DURING THE TRANSITION TO COLLEGE

An individual's entry into a new context is a ripe opportunity for studying the relations among identity activation, stress, coping, and adaptation. During important transitions, people often draw on their preexisting frameworks (that is, identities, beliefs, and experiences) to understand their new roles and environment (Lazarus and

Folkman 1984; see Ruble and Seidman 1996). Many students experience the transition to college as an acute stressor that is marked by frequent, but often minor negative events, low levels of social support, and declines in physical and mental well-being (Gall, Evans, and Bellerose 2000). Researchers emphasize that a new college environment may challenge the meaning and value of an identity because it involves a move away from family and support networks to a new and unfamiliar environment that is initially less comfortable and supportive (Deaux and Major 1987).

Although entering college is a significant stressor for all students, a central finding of the stress and coping literature is that the same objective stressor may not be experienced uniformly (see Lazarus and Folkman 1984). To account for individual variability in the perception and impact of objectively similar stressors (such as entering college or the death of a loved one), Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984) outlined a model of the psychological process mediating the occurrence of a stressful event and one's appraisal of and reaction to it. The model highlighted the importance of how the individual evaluates an experience on two levels. Primary appraisal involves assessing whether a situation presents a challenge, threat, or potential for loss. This appraisal yields an evaluation of the perceived stressfulness of the situation. Secondary appraisal, or coping, involves evaluating the potential actions that might be used to manage the experience, as well as the potential success of each strategy employed. This model provides a framework for considering not only the context in which stress occurs, such as the transition to college in this research, but also factors that may mediate exposure to stress and negative outcomes, for example, drawing on personal or social identities to make sense of and deal with the stressor. Therefore, what the individual brings to the transition to college, in the way of identity-relevant schemas, should play a significant role in the transition experience.

Researchers studying life transitions indicate that "variables such as race, economic comfort levels, and gender influence whether a transition is represented as involving demands, alterations in relationships, and so on" (Ruble and Seidman 1996, 838). Thus, social and personal identities may play a major role in how individuals experience and cope with the transition to college. For example, Lisa Aspinwall and Shelley Taylor (1992) report that women experience decreased physical health and increased negative mood during the initial period of their first year in college. Thus, this transition presents an important challenge for psychological adjustment, particularly for members of stigmatized groups.

For members of traditionally stigmatized ethnic or racial groups, the transition to a new environment, particularly in a university that is predominantly white, may be especially stressful. Awareness of being members of a visible minority may leave them feeling vulnerable to additional negative stressors such as prejudice and discrimination beyond the transition itself (Bowen and Bok 1998; Deaux and Major 1987). For example, as ethnic minority students make the transition from a heterogeneous high school environment to a predominantly white university, race is likely to be a more salient identity used to understand the negative experiences they encounter. This may be evidenced by ethnic-minority students' reporting more negative experiences with new classmates or roommates, discomfort with their white professors, or their experiencing exclusion from events or new relationships because of their race (Mendoza-Denton et al. 2002). However, identification with the stigmatized identity may also hold oppor-

tunities for positive experiences. For example, in the study described in this paper, many black students report feeling heightened positive affect and a sense of belonging to the university following positive race-related activities such as attending cultural pride parades within the community or attending meetings of black student organizations (Mendoza-Denton et al. 2002). Further, the desire to gain acceptance within the novel environment may dictate the kinds of coping strategies used. Thus, the following questions are particularly relevant to this line of research: What personal and social identities become activated during the transition to college? And what happens when each of these distinct identities is activated? Drawing on the literature on stigmatized social identities and psychological well-being, we focus on traditionally stigmatized identities as one subgroup of social identities, in addition to the activation of personal identities for students during this transition.

COPING

The stress and coping literature posits that the impact of a stressor depends not only on its appraised severity but also on how the individual copes with it. The stress literature initially focused on dispositional coping strategies, proposing that individuals tend to choose and use a particular strategy when faced with a stressor and that certain coping choices produce better outcomes than others. Research on rumination versus distraction (Nolen-Hoeksema 1987) and problem-focused versus emotion-focused coping (Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub 1989) exemplify this approach. For example, Susan Nolen-Hoeksema (1987) found that ruminating about one's difficulties, in contrast to distracting oneself, generally increased depression. In the same vein, the benefits and detriments of adopting problem-focused versus emotion-focused coping strategies have been extensively examined (Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub 1989), where problem-focused coping is associated with optimism, sense of control, and hardiness, while emotion-focused coping is positively associated with anxiety and negatively associated with feelings of situational control, hardiness, and self-esteem (Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub 1989).

Considerably less attention has been paid to contextual influences on coping, despite Lazarus and Folkman's original emphasis on the importance of both person and context. The stigma literature is beginning to redress the imbalance by examining how members of stigmatized groups respond to threats to their stigmatized identity within particular contexts. For example, Brenda Major and Toni Schmader (1998) found that African American students cope with the threat of negative evaluation through devaluation of and disengagement from the domain in which they are stigmatized (see also Major et al. 1998). For African American students, the activation of their ethnicity in an evaluative situation which holds historically negative achievement expectations may prompt a coping strategy that has negative effects on achievement, but positive and protective effects on self-worth. These observations highlight the importance of addressing the following question: When an identity is activated, what particular coping strategies are employed to combat the threat, and to what end are these strategies used across different situations? The effectiveness of the strategy used also depends on the goal of the individual, for example self-protection versus advancement. Both the choice of strategy and the effectiveness of the strategy chosen

are important, yet they are relatively neglected features of responses to identity threat (Bolger and Zuckerman 1995).

Though the coping literature identifies a wide range of coping strategies in response to stress, in this chapter we focus on three potential strategies for dealing with threats to one's identity: (a) confrontation (b) self-silencing, and (c) transformation and diffusion. We chose to focus on these distinctive strategies on the basis of pilot testing as well as on a measure of behavioral responses to perceived racism developed by Maya D. McNeilly et al. (1996). Factor analysis of the daily diary data confirmed their distinctiveness. Confrontation, operationalized as actively speaking out or confronting the source or circumstance of the threat, may be used in situations where the individual believes him- or herself to have been treated unfairly and where the presumed objective is educating or influencing a perceived perpetrator of the injustice. Self-silencing, operationalized as keeping the circumstances of the event to yourself, or accepting the situation, involves not expressing or acting on the perceived injustice or hurt. Here the likely objective is to maintain the relationship or to avoid further conflict or hurt. Finally, transformation and diffusion involves actively reframing or changing the subject of an interaction or using humor in a situation. This strategy may allow individuals to effectively deflate a threat.

Each of these strategies has potential costs and benefits. Speaking out may facilitate feelings of power and control over an interaction, giving the target a sense of vindication and accomplishment in righting a perceived wrong. However, it may also lead to alienation from others if the reaction is perceived as overly aggressive, or is not met with understanding or support from the perpetrator. Self-silencing may promote harmonious interactions, but at the cost of an undermined sense of well-being and control and increased rumination about the event. Finally, transforming the situation may allow for a diffusion of the potentially heightened negativity in an interaction and give the individual a sense of control; however, it may leave the individual susceptible to further threats from the same source if the threat was not directly addressed.

OVERVIEW

The literature that we have reviewed suggests that an adequate framework for understanding the experience of a stigmatized individual, particularly when making a transition to a new environment, involves:

1. Identifying exposure to stressors

2. Consideration of whether the stressor activates a particular identity or set of identities

3. Identifying the coping strategies employed to deal with the stressors

4. Understanding how various psychological outcomes are affected by these strategies

Within this model, the activation of a particular identity from among the individual's many personal and social identities will reflect both the individual and the context

and potentially influence the strategies used to cope with the threat and the outcome of the stressor.

USING A DAILY-DIARY METHODOLOGY TO CAPTURE IDENTITY ACTIVATION AND COPING

The design and analysis of our daily-diary study of social identity in the transition to college closely mirrors Niall Bolger and Adam Zuckerman's (1995) study of personality in the stress process. This approach realizes Lazarus and Folkman's (1984; Lazarus 1993) call for a microanalytic, process approach to stress and coping, and provides an important methodological attempt at patterning signatures of activation and coping within individuals (Lazarus 2000). It integrates both a nomothetic approach that allows comparisons across individuals (such as across males and females, and members of different racial groups) and an ideographic approach that examines relations among variables within an individual (such as activation of different identities or use of different coping strategies within the same individual; Allport 1937; Bolger, Davis, and Rafaeli 2003). The approach allows researchers to examine perceived exposure to different types of identity-relevant events in relation to social-category membership, the impact of exposure to such events on outcomes relevant to the accomplishment of an important life task, and the moderating effect of coping choices. Further, the methodology of reporting the occurrence of events on a daily basis limits the biases that retrospection may produce.

In the data that we review here, thirty-seven Caucasian, sixty-seven African American, and seventeen Asian students were recruited prior to the first day of classes to participate in a twenty-one-day daily-diary study. A little over half of the participants were female. They completed background measures and were then given a package containing seven-day structured daily-diary questionnaires to be completed nightly for the first twenty-one days of their first college academic year. The daily-diary questionnaires were two-page semistructured questions designed to assess the activation of various identities in relation to positive and negative events in daily life, and the coping strategies used to negotiate such events. In addition, the diary questionnaire assessed participants' attitudes, current mood, and sense of belonging at the university each day.

The data were analyzed to answer two questions. The first question concerned the association between perceived exposure to positive and negative identity-related events and social-category membership, that is, do members of stigmatized groups experience the college transition through the lens of their social identity? This phenomenon was examined using generalized estimating equation methods, or GEE (Diggle, Liang, and Zeger 1994). This approach takes account of the fact that there are multiple observations per person in estimating the effect of between-person characteristics such as gender and race on the occurrence of identity-related events.

The second question concerned the impact of positive and negative identity-related events on well-being and sense of belonging at the institution. In the case of negative events, we also assessed the extent to which the impact of an event was moderated by the use of each of the three coping strategies described. Analyses of the links between identity-related events, coping, sense of well-being, acceptance, and belonging at the

institution were conducted using a multilevel or hierarchical linear model, or HLM (Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli 2003; Bryk and Raudenbush 1992; Kenny, Kashy, and Bolger 1998). A detailed account of the specific analytic strategy is given in Bolger and Zuckerman (1995). Since the frequency of events related to each type of identity for the typical individual was low, the data looking at the impact of events were pooled across persons. Thus, in the analyses reported below the effects of identity-related events are treated as common across individuals, but each individual was allowed to have his or her unique level of a particular outcome given a random intercept.

Personal- and Social-Identity Activation During the Transition to College

Individuals have a great many potential identities on which to draw from to explain events they encounter. We limit our focus to six identities determined through extensive pilot testing to be relatively common and salient in an undergraduate population: race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, personality, and physical looks. These categories span both social identities (race, gender, religion, and sexual orientation) and personal identities (personality and physical appearance) and include concealable (religion and sexual orientation) and visible (race, gender, and physical appearance) identities. Each day, students wrote about a salient positive or negative experience they had that day and then indicated which of the six possible identities were activated in that experience (see the appendix for identity-activation examples). They could attribute the event to single or multiple identities (Brewer 1991).

The range of positive and negative identity-related events during the first three weeks of college spanned interactions on campus with new roommates, classmates, and professors, as well as events in the surrounding community such as parades, community activities, and parties. For example, positive race-related events reported by students were attending meetings of the black students' organization and going to the Caribbean Day parade in the community. Such interactions appear to reflect important daily enactments of identity around "bonding" with members of one's ethnic group, as described by Linda Strauss and William E. Cross (chapter 4, this volume). Negative race-related events included reporting feeling alienated as a result of being excluded from conversations or activities because of race (see the appendix for other examples of identity-related events reported).

Overall, during this transition, 64 percent of the events described were positive and 36 percent were negative. Participants reported important events relevant to one or more of the six identities on 19 percent of days. Neither the total number of identity-related events nor the number of positive or negative events reported differed by ethnicity or by gender. The only exception to this general pattern was that white males reported approximately equal numbers of positive and negative events while others reported more positive than negative events. This suggests that, contrary to much of the literature reviewed earlier, within this sample of students the transition to college was generally associated with positive identity-related events, including for those students from traditionally stigmatized groups. However, it may be the case that experiencing negative identity-related events on just a minority of days is

sufficiently stressful to significantly undermine well-being. Very few events were attributed to either sexual orientation or religion. This may either reflect the fact that these identities are concealable or that the sample included few members of sexual minorities or of religions that are actively stigmatized.

When a negative experience was reported during the transition, African American and Asian students attributed such experiences to their race or ethnic identity to a greater extent than did Caucasian students. For example, an African American student reported, "I had a hard time making new friends today because I think that people are intimidated by the fact that I am a black person from New York." African American and Asian students did not differ in the frequency of activation of race-ethnicity for negative experiences (although the specific experiences that activated this identity may have been very different for each group). Thus, for these two groups of students, being a member of a traditionally stigmatized group was related to the negative activation of their ethnicities to a greater extent than for Caucasian students. Similarly, women were more likely to report negative gender-related events than were men. When Caucasian students experienced negative events, they reported marginally greater activation of their gender identity—for example, "I felt intimidated in class because of my gender"—than did Asian students in negative contexts, and significantly greater activation of their religious identity than did African American students. Finally, there were no differences by race or gender in the frequency of activation of the personal identities (personality and physical appearance).

These findings provide evidence of the activation patterns of personal and social identities for African American, Asian, and Caucasian students during the transition to college. When negative events occur, students are more likely to attribute them to devalued social identities, such as being a woman or a member of a racial or ethnic minority, than to their personal identities (personality and physical appearance). Thus, in these three weeks, negative experiences tend to center around social identities rather than more personal characteristics of the individual, for members of traditionally stigmatized groups.

For positive events, there was a trend for race to be mentioned more frequently by Asian Americans than by African Americans. Race was also activated significantly more often by both Asian Americans and African Americans than for Caucasians under positive circumstances. For example, an African American student reported, "I joined the Minority Recruitment Council" as a positive event, while another student reported, "I attended a party hosted by two black fraternities. It felt very good to be having a good time with so many people who looked like me." One Asian student reported, "I went to a Chinese students club meeting and met a lot of people. I also learned a few things." Thus, these two groups also experienced greater positive race-ethnicity identity activation than Caucasian students, suggesting that they may use their identities to understand both positive and negative experiences to a greater extent than white students do. Finally, women used gender significantly more than men to understand positive as well as negative events, again suggesting that a stigmatized identity may be more centrally meaningful in the life of the individual, and thus it may be used more frequently as a frame for understanding both positive and negative experiences.

Psychological Well-Being and Sense of Belonging During the Transition to College

The diary assessed a variety of emotions potentially experienced by students in reaction to events they reported. Our study focused on feelings of well-being and feelings of rejection. A well-being index was based on the following eleven emotions: feeling supported, cared for, accepted, appreciated, loved, happy, confident, pleased, successful, satisfied, and content. A rejection index was created from three emotions: feeling rejected, alienated, and unwelcome.

Because a key task during the transition to college is to develop a sense of comfort and belonging within the institution, we explored the level of connection students felt toward the university in general and toward their classmates, roommates, and professors each day. The items for belonging at the university instructed the participants to indicate the degree to which they felt thrilled to be at the university, felt that they fit in, and felt welcome at the university.

Experiencing positive or negative gender events did not impact well-being outcomes for men or women. However, this was not the case for race-related events. On days when students recorded a negative race-related event (for example, "I was in [the bookstore] and the security seemed to be following me"; "I felt a little out of place when I was talking to a group of people because I was the only black person"), students felt a marginally lower sense of belonging at the university, that is, they felt less connected, comfortable, and welcome. The effect of a negative race-based event on feelings of either rejection or happiness were significant only for men, who felt a reduced sense of belonging, greater feelings of rejection, and more unhappiness following such events.

Clearly, experiencing negativity because of one's race could undermine well-being and sense of belonging; and the opposite is true for positive race-relevant experiences. When students reported a positive race-related event (for example, going to the black student union, or having a conversation with suite mates) they experienced a significant increase in sense of belonging at the university. The effects of positive race-related events did not differ by sex. This finding lends support for the view that identity-affirming events can lead to a greater sense of connection and comfort within one's environment. Tracy McLaughlin-Volpe, Rodolfo Mendoza-Denton, and J. Nicole Shelton (chapter 9, this volume) discuss the benefits of positive intergroup friendships for developing a sense of belonging and well-being in their chapter.

Together these results suggest a continuing vulnerability to experiencing alienation on the part of members of ethnic and racial groups that remain minorities in institutions that have historically devalued their group. For women, having numerical equality within the context may dampen the negative effects of gender-related negativity on sense of belonging. Although this seems to be the case here, ongoing research shows that women who anxiously expect rejection because of their gender have greater feelings of alienation and discomfort within the university setting than those low in gender-based rejection anxiety (London et al. 2005).

In terms of personal identities, there was a consistent significant effect of experiencing negative personality-related events on the well-being of students during the transition. Positive and negative events attributed to personality included being complimented on one's personality and having others show personal interest in the student or communicate trust in and comfort with the student, as opposed to being excluded from events

with friends and suite mates. When a negative event was attributed to their personality, students felt a reduced sense of belonging and felt more rejected and less happy. Positive personality-related events showed a trend toward a beneficial impact, but the effects were neither as strong nor as consistent as the effects of negative events attributed to one's personality. Events related to one's physical looks did not significantly impact the outcomes examined. Thus, both social and personal identity attributions have a strong impact on how connected students feel to their surroundings.

Coping with Identity Activation: Implications for Well-Being and Sense of Belonging

Next, we assessed the implications of the three strategies described previously for coping with a negative event captured in the diary. Silencing was indexed by two items, "accepting it" or "keeping it to myself." Confrontation was indexed by six items, including "speaking out" and "trying to prove them wrong." Transformation and diffusion of the stressor was indexed by two items: "using humor" and "changing the subject." There were no significant race or gender differences in the frequency of use of each type of coping strategy; however, as to be expected, to the extent that individuals used self-silencing responses they were less likely to use confrontation strategies. Neither of these types of strategies was significantly associated with the use of transformation and diffusion.

The moderating effects of coping strategy were most pronounced for race- and personality-related events. Following a negative race-related event, students felt a significantly greater sense of belonging to the university when they used transformation as a coping strategy, but felt a significantly reduced sense of belonging when they used self-silencing. The effect of confrontation was nonsignificant. The same pattern emerged for feelings of rejection and for total happiness, although in the case of total happiness the positive effect of transformation was not significant.

In the case of a negative event based on personality, individuals felt greater feelings of rejection and reduced sense of happiness irrespective of the type of coping used. However, the type of strategy used moderated the effect of such an event on sense of belonging. Both confrontation and self-silencing were associated with a reduced sense of belonging, whereas transformation reduced the negative impact of a personality-related event.

How often did students actually use these coping strategies when either a race- or personality-based negative event occurred? Confrontation was used in 13 percent of the events; self-silencing was used in 24 percent of the events, and transformation was used in 11 percent of the events. These usage patterns were comparable across types of event. Thus, the most effective coping strategy, transformation—because it reduced the negative impact of the events—was used less frequently than silencing, which was consistently the most used and least effective mode of coping.

CONCLUSION

This chapter began with the question, How do people's identities shape their daily experience as they negotiate important life tasks such as the transition to college? To

answer this question we sought to forge a link between the stress and coping litera-
ture and the literature on stigma and identity. The study that we have described illus-
trates the utility of a framework that considers the relative exposure of individuals to
stressful situations, the ways people appraise situations in relation to their multiple
social and personal identities, and the ways they cope in situations they deem threat-
ening to their identity.

Perceived Exposure to Identity-Relevant Events

Although the number of positive and negative events reported by students during
the transition to college were the same irrespective of race and gender, members of
historically devalued groups, women and minorities, were more likely than those
who were not, men and Caucasians, to attribute significant daily events to gender and
race. Thus, it would appear that social-category membership is consciously used as
an interpretative framework to the extent that the category is devalued. It is note-
worthy that African American and Asian American students experienced both more
positive and more negative events that they viewed as race-related during the tran-
sition to college than did Caucasian students. In addition, across the sample the level
of belonging to the university was relatively high. Thus, the transition period may
provide many opportunities for positive race experiences for members of historically
devalued groups (see Strauss and Cross, chapter 4, this volume).

Significant daily events were ascribed as frequently to personal identity (physical
appearance and personality) as to social identity. This was true within gender and
racial groups. This finding echoes Strauss and Cross's (chapter 4, this volume) find-
ing that among African American students, "individualism," which is a focus on the
self as an individual rather than within a social framework, was most often reported
as the behavioral enactment used to negotiate situations. Thus, our findings support
Strauss and Cross's declaration that social-identity research should not lose sight of
the centrality of individuality in the efforts of members of devalued groups to make
sense of their world.

Not surprisingly, gender differences emerged in the appraisal of identity-related
events. To the extent that men used a social identity to explain an event, they used
race. Women were equally likely to use race and gender. These findings highlight the
importance of considering how people draw on the multiple identities at their dis-
posal to view and understand their experiences.

It is important to note that study participants identified positive or negative
events related to the six identities targeted in the study on fewer days than they
reported no such events. This suggests either that significant daily events are typi-
cally not appraised in terms of identity or that we omitted other important identi-
ties that students use. Many significant events may have been viewed as having
occurred by chance or because of contextual factors, and it is possible, too, that nor-
matively important identities may have been omitted (for example, social-class
membership). Also omitted were uncommon but highly salient identities, such as
being physically disabled. Future work may better approach investigating identities
in daily life by having individuals describe their central identities prior to the diary

component of the study and to investigate daily experience relevant to these identities in the diary study.

The diary approach does not permit us to distinguish how social-category membership shapes objective exposure to certain experiences from how it impacts the subjective interpretation of the same objective event. Availability of objective observations of the type of daily events described by study participants would probably not resolve this problem. Although we know of no study with adults, observational studies of the daily interpersonal experiences of children at school have been undertaken. In a study of children's exposure to rejection in daily life, Stephen Asher, Amanda Rose, and Sonda Gabriel (2001) found that many of the rejection incidents they observed were ambiguous to the observer with respect to underlying intent. Thus, the children necessarily drew on an interpretative framework to understand their experiences as do the students in this study. In the initial stages of college, a context that frowns on overt expressions of race- or gender-relevant negativity, individuals may be particularly reliant on preexisting interpretive frameworks to understand their new world.

Finally, people differ considerably in the extent to which they invoke social and personal identities to explain their daily experience. This suggests the importance of looking for sources of individual differences in identity activation. For example, sensitivity to status-based rejection would appear to be one important source of within-status group variability in perceived exposure to identity-linked events. We have found this to be the case for race in the present data set. To the extent that African Americans are high in sensitivity to race-based rejection, they report experiencing more race-based negative (but not positive) events during the diary period (Mendoza-Denton et al. 2002). In work currently under way in our laboratory, Bonita London et al. (2005) have shown that to the extent that women are sensitive to gender-based rejection they also report experiencing more gender-based discrimination.

Consequences of Identity-Relevant Events

With the daily-diary approach it was possible to compare students' sense of belonging at college and their general sense of well-being and feelings of rejection on days when they experienced an identity-related event compared to days when they did not. Of the social identity–related events, only race-related experiences had a consistent impact on the outcomes examined. This identity may be the most salient as members of traditionally stigmatized groups, in this case African Americans and Asian Americans, enter an environment in which they are in the minority. Further, the impact of events ascribed to personal identity, specifically personality, was actually stronger than that of events ascribed to social identity. When an event is interpreted as personal, its benefits or costs cannot be attributed to arbitrary membership in a social group. Judging a negative event as being based on one's membership in a stigmatized group may protect the individual from the sense of self-devaluation that personal rejection elicits (Crocker and Major 1989). On the other hand, attributing positive events to group membership rather than to the self may deprive the individual of the sense of efficacy that should emanate from being able to link positive outcomes with personal efforts.

The three outcomes we examined were chosen because they were predictive of long-term outcomes. However, it will be important for future research to investigate a broader array of outcomes, including behavioral variables, such as time spent studying, academic or other types of help seeking, and physical health symptoms.

Moderating Role of Coping

Prior research on social identity has paid little attention to how people cope with the negative identity-relevant events in daily life (for an exception, see Strauss and Cross, chapter 4, this volume). Research using the daily-diary methodology to study stress and coping has established that how people cope with daily stressors influences their well-being (Bolger and Zuckerman 1995; Tennen et al. 2000). In the present study we examined three coping strategies that appeared especially pertinent to dealing with unpleasant social situations, especially situations involving interpersonal rejection and discrimination: confrontation, self-silencing, and transformation. The use of confrontation as a coping strategy did not improve things when the event was race-related and it harmed things when the event was deemed to be due to one's personality. Although confrontation may be necessary and useful in certain situations in order for an individual to communicate his or her beliefs, concerns, and emotions, it did not appear to facilitate a smooth transition to college. Self-silencing, inhibiting one's reactions, may protect against an escalation of the negative interaction, however, it does so at a cost. When individuals self-silenced, they experienced a diminished sense of belonging, perhaps because this reaction fostered rumination. Finding that self-silencing had a cost on well-being is in line with prior evidence that silencing the self can lead to depression and anxiety and is often negatively related to adjustment during the college transition (Haemmerlie et al. 2001).

The more beneficial third strategy, transformation, was not used as often as confrontation and self-silencing by students during the transition. Actions that transform a negative situation, via the use of humor or changing the subject, may allow individuals to benefit from the event, perhaps because such actions may promote a sense of being in control of the situation (see Stewart and Dottolo, chapter 8, this volume, for an in-depth view of coping with graduate school). Transformation may have a downside, however, as it can also result in individuals' not actively dealing with the threat, and may foster negative outcomes for self- and group-esteem, which we have not measured here.

Thus, our review of this research suggests that coping matters and that the impact of negative identity-related events, such as a race-related event, are best understood in light of how the situation was coped with. Nonetheless, the study leaves a number of questions unanswered. For example, it does not indicate why one coping strategy is chosen over another. Possibly, events that elicit a transformative reaction are less negative than those that elicit less beneficial coping strategies, however our examination of brief qualitative descriptions of the events did not support this view. It is also possible that the individuals' general sense of belonging at the university or their overall well-being influences the coping resources available to the individual when facing any particular event. Thus, those who feel marginalized, unwel-

come, or depressed may be unable to muster the energy or effort needed to engage in the type of strategic, flexible, and discriminative coping that allows them to regulate and thus transform the social situation. Instead, when feeling distressed or unwelcome, people may be more likely to engage in more impulse-driven fight-or-flight reactions that emerge in confrontation or self-silencing. It is also important to acknowledge that the measure of coping that we used was limited. A stronger test of the moderating impact of coping on identity-relevant stressors awaits the development of better measures of how individuals cope with such stressors (see Strauss and Cross, chapter 4, this volume).

The study permits us to make general claims about the efficacy of each type of coping, but the measures do not capture the fact that in some situations, a particular coping strategy—remaining silent or confrontation—may be the most appropriate. This leaves us with the dilemma of how to distinguish effective from ineffective coping without peeking at the outcome of interest. We would argue that a critical distinction is whether the coping strategy used is consciously chosen (reflective) as being in line with one's long-term goals or impulsive and geared toward immediate goals or reactions. Our current research showing that self-regulatory competency protects high-rejection-sensitive people from the personal and interpersonal difficulties characteristic of that disposition supports this distinction (Ayduk et al. 2000; Ayduk, Mischel, and Downey 2002).

Caveats

Two important caveats need to be considered when evaluating the study described in this review. First, because we examined same-day associations between the occurrence of an event and outcomes of interest, it was not possible to determine unambiguously the direction of causality in the associations that we documented. One way around this would be to examine whether the occurrence of an event today predicted change from today to tomorrow in outcomes of interest. Analyses revealed no significant cross-day effects. This was true whether we used today's event to predict cross-day change in belonging, happiness, and rejection or today's sense of belonging, happiness, and rejection to predict the occurrence of an event tomorrow.

Second, the fact that identity-related events occurred relatively rarely placed important limits on the types of analyses that we could undertake. Ideally we would have liked to treat each type of event and each type of coping (where relevant) as random effects in the multilevel analyses that we undertook. However, events of interest (and consequent coping strategies) did not occur with sufficient frequency for this to be possible. The limited number of events in combination with the limited sample size also meant that the statistical power to test whether identity-related processes differed by identity group was low and thus the absence of significant effects should be treated cautiously.

These caveats notwithstanding, we demonstrate the value of drawing on theory and methods from the stress and coping literature to further our understanding of how individuals draw on their multiple identities, both social and personal, during the negotiation of an important life task, making the transition to college.

APPENDIX: EXAMPLES OF IDENTITY ACTIVATION

Race or Ethnicity Activation

NEGATIVE

- I had a hard time making new friends today because I think that people are intimidated by the fact that I am a black person from New York.

- I felt uncomfortable with some people from my floor because they were having a conversation, which I was excluded from because of my race.

POSITIVE

- Had a meeting with the black student organization, made me feel welcome and the people involved were very receptive.

- I attended a party hosted by two black fraternities [or sororities]. It felt very good to be having a good time with so many people who looked like me.

Gender Activation

NEGATIVE

- I felt intimidated in class because of my gender.

- I was teased about "being a girl" (weak and so forth) by a floormate.

POSITIVE

- I think a lady in the office of admission extended a job application deadline because I was a black female.

- I received a rose because I was female.

Personality Activation

NEGATIVE

- I'm starting to suspect that my French teacher is scared to call on or talk to me. Today, the only reason he called on me is because, for a length of time, I was the only one raising my hand.

- Some friends at home sent me a rather offensive e-mail for some strange reason, which bothered me.

POSITIVE

- Somebody complimented me on my personality.

- My suite mates seemed interested in me.

Physical-Appearance Activation

NEGATIVE

- I felt uncomfortable in physical education because of my weight.
- Was followed by a young man trying to get my phone number.

POSITIVE

- I wore a summer dress and people told me I should be a model. They told me I had the face and body for it.
- Because of my looks, I was invited to a party.

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