The United States is becoming more racially and culturally diverse than ever. Accordingly, issues of diversity are of crucial importance for the harmony and growth our society. The need is thus urgent to cultivate an understanding of how people interact with individuals with backgrounds, experiences, and appearances different from their own. Yet, these cross-group interactions can be awkward, intimidating, or even dangerous. Broadly, my research seeks to understand the perceptions and expectations that guide diverse social interactions, with the vital and far-reaching goal of promoting positive intergroup relations. My current research focuses on fundamental questions about the perception of race, especially racial categorization processes, and the diversity-related experiences of underrepresented minorities in organizations.

**The Perception of Race**

One of the newest topics in intergroup relations is the perception and experiences of multiracial people, who represent one of the fastest growing populations in our country. My primary research area centers around major questions of how people perceive multiracial individuals. These perceptions shed light on assumptions and beliefs that people hold about race and carry widespread implications for the future of race relations in the U.S (by 2050, approximately one in every five Americans will be multiracial; Farley, 2001).

I am one of the main contributors to the social psychological literature on multiracial person perception. Others’ research in this area has focused on White American perceivers, demonstrating that they (a) typically categorize Black-White multiracials according to a rule of hypodescent, associating them more with their lower status parent group than their higher status parent group, and (b) do so in part to preserve the hierarchical status quo. I have contributed a unique perspective and several advances to this literature.

I have examined the development and use of the novel “Multiracial” category in social perception. In societies with increased numbers of multiracial people, perceivers often adopt novel racial categories to accommodate these demographic changes (e.g., Brazil). However, due to the culturally reinforced view of existing monoracial categories as mutually exclusive and legitimate, I predicted that perceivers would have difficulty using a “multiracial” category. Across six experiments (Chen & Hamilton, 2012), I was able to demonstrate that perceivers in fact did not categorize multiracial faces as reliably as they categorized Black, Asian, and White faces. Multiracial categorizations took significantly longer than Black, White, or Asian categorizations. Further, only Multiracial categorizations were disrupted by manipulations of cognitive load and time constraints, providing strong evidence that they are less spontaneous than monoracial categorizations. In addition, I showed that perceivers used the Multiracial category less after reading a news article stating that race differences are genetically based. Altogether, this work established that perceivers do not experience the Multiracial category on par with White, Black, and Asian categories, and its use is further inhibited by the perception that monoracial categories are important, meaningful, and legitimate.

In follow-up research (Chen, Moons, Gaither, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2014), I found that individuals with strong egalitarian values were more likely to use the Multiracial category when categorizing Black-White multiracial faces. Interestingly, this relationship cannot be explained by individuals higher in egalitarian motives having more interracial friendships or lower implicit or explicit racial prejudice. Rather, the results are consistent with the idea that egalitarian people may be more willing to validate non-traditional identities.
I have also focused on diversifying this literature by specifically focusing on the factors that determine how racial minorities perceive part-ingroup/part-White multiracials. In Ho, Kteily, and Chen (2017), we investigated whether Black Americans associate Black-White multiracials more with their minority versus majority parent group and if so, why. The first two studies (including a nationally representative sample of Black and White Americans) directly compared Black and White Americans. We found that although both Blacks and Whites categorized Black-White multiracials as more Black than White, Whites’ use of hypodescent was associated with intergroup anti-egalitarianism, whereas Blacks’ use of hypodescent was associated with intergroup egalitarianism. Our next studies revealed that egalitarian Black Americans use hypodescent in part because they perceive that Black-White biracials face discrimination and consequently feel a sense of linked fate with them. Thus, our research establishes that the use of hypodescent extends to minority as well as majority perceivers. It also shows that beliefs associated with the use of hypodescent differ as a function of perceiver social status. In doing so, we broadened the scientific understanding of hypodescent, showing how it can be an inclusionary rather than exclusionary phenomenon.

In Chen, Kteily, and Ho (in press), I investigated Asian Americans’ perceptions of Asian-White biracials. Because the Asian/White boundary may be more permeable than other minority/White boundaries, I reasoned that Asian Americans are more likely than Black Americans to be concerned that biracials would prefer to identify as White and would be disloyal to their minority parent group. Consequently, Asian Americans might view biracials as more White than Asian. I predicted that Asian Americans’ concerns about biracials’ allegiances might be strongest when they perceive high anti-Asian discrimination because it increases the incentive for biracials to pass as White. I found support for our proposed theoretical model (anti-Asian discrimination → perceived biracial identity preferences as White → perceived disloyalty of biracials to Asians → categorization of biracials as White) in four studies, demonstrating for the first time that minority individuals’ perceptions of biracials’ allegiances are important determinants of their inclusion in or exclusion from the ingroup.

In addition to my research on how perceivers categorize multiracial individuals, I was the first to examine how perceivers implicitly and explicitly evaluate Black-White biracial individuals (Chen & Ratliff, 2015). In three experiments, I established that White perceivers readily transfer their negative implicit attitudes from one Black person to other Black people and Black-White biracial people, whereas Black perceivers did not transfer negative implicit attitudes from one Black person to anyone else. This work demonstrates novel downstream consequences of hypodescent in facilitating negative evaluations of biracial individuals. These findings are particularly important given that White perceivers transferred negative implicit attitudes to a biracial person in the absence of any negative information about that person and because implicit attitudes are difficult to control or change.

Throughout my work on the perceptions of multiracials, I have only found moderate support for hypodescent (i.e., multiracials being categorized according to their lower status racial group membership). Yet the existing literature suggests that hypodescent is the predominant mechanism by which people, especially White Americans, categorize Black-White multiracial faces (Freeman, Pauker, & Sanchez, 2016; Ho, Sidanius, Cuddy, & Banaji, 2013; Ho, Sidanius, Levin, & Banaji, 2011; Noyes & Keil, 2018; Peery & Bodenhausen, 2008, Experiment 1; Roberts & Gelman, 2015, 2017). Thus, I have recently sought to systematically investigate the moderators of perceivers’ use of hypodescent. In Gaither, Chen, Pauker, and Sommers (invited revision under review), we showed that the type of biracial face stimuli used (computer-
generated versus real) and the categorization task (Black/White vs. Black/Multiracial/White) dramatically impact the likelihood of hypodescent. Hypodescent only occurred when participants categorized real biracial faces using a two-choice (Black vs. White) categorization task, and not when they were categorizing computer-generated faces or when they utilized a less constrained categorization task.

Building on my previous work, I argued that the overestimation of hypodescent in the literature is misleading and in fact problematic, because the specific racial categorizations of faces lead to race-specific consequences for downstream processes. In other words, members of different racial groups encounter different forms of bias (Zou & Cheryan, 2017). Yet it is critical to understand how people actually perceive and treat multiracial people in the real world, and therefore we must understand what categories are applied to multiracials most frequently and why. In Chen, Pauker, Gaither, Hamilton, and Sherman (2018), I proposed that hypodescent was overestimated in the literature due to methodological constraints on participants’ categorizations of biracial faces embedded in existing paradigms. In three studies, I demonstrated that, when these constraints are removed, biracial faces are not categorized according to hypodescent. Instead, I documented a novel categorization bias, called the “minority bias.” Specifically, I found that, when people encounter racially ambiguous Black-White faces, they quickly judge them to be “non-White” and then generate alternative plausible minority categories to which they could belong. The most frequent categorizations of biracial faces were Latinx or Middle Eastern, suggesting that biracial people may experience stereotyping and discrimination based on these presumed social identities (as opposed to Black).

My research on racial categorization processes carries broad implications for basic understanding of the social construction of race and other social categories. For example, Carpinella, Chen, Hamilton, and Johnson (2014) investigated the psychological link between racial and gender categorization processes. Although race and gender are obviously independently occurring categories in the real world, we showed that these social group memberships are inextricably linked in the minds of perceivers. Across four studies, participants more readily categorized feminine faces as White and masculine faces as Black. This research has theoretical implications for existing models of social categorization, which have largely treated categorization processes as independent from each other, and stereotyping, suggesting a perceptual mechanism for the formation of gendered race stereotypes (e.g., “Black women are masculine”). Our findings also have practical implications for the perception of multiracial individuals, suggesting that the experiences of racially ambiguous individuals may depend highly on their gender group (e.g., Black-White men being more likely than Black-White women to be seen as Black).

Further emphasizing the social construction of race, in Chen, Couto, Sacci, and Dunham (in press), we proposed that cultural forces shape the conceptual, perceptual, and ideological construal of racial categories, and that these cultural influences have implications for cross-cultural differences in race perception. In this international collaboration, we ran three experiments in the U.S. and Brazil to illustrate the cultural nature of race. In Experiment 1, a target’s racial ancestry influenced Americans’ categorizations but had no impact on Brazilians’ categorizations. Experiment 2 showed cultural differences in the reliance on two phenotypic cues to race; Brazilians’ categorizations were more strongly determined by skin tone than were Americans’ categorizations, and Americans’ categorization were more strongly determined by other facial features. Experiment 3 demonstrated cultural differences in the motivated use of hypodescent, such that only anti-egalitarian Americans, and not anti-egalitarian Brazilians,
engaged in hypodescent when the racial hierarchy was threatened. These results proved consistent with the historical differences in the countries’ treatment of racial difference. Historically, hypodescent rules (such as one-drop rule laws) were created to preserve the current racial hierarchy in which White Americans were advantaged and Black Americans were subordinate. By classifying a person of mixed-race ancestry based on the race of the more socially subordinate parent (i.e., hypodescent), perceivers are protecting the size of the more advantaged class. Our findings broaden the field’s understanding of the specific ways in which race is constructed. Our work also sparks a new discussion on the need for increased understanding of intergroup relations from a cultural psychological perspective. As a result of this publication, I have cultivated a new international, interdisciplinary collaboration with sociologist Andrew Francis-Tan (National U of Singapore) to investigate the magnitude and implications of skin tone biases in Asia.

In other current research, I am providing a theoretical framework for understanding the moderators of White Americans’ use of hypodescent (Chen, Pauker, Gaither, Hamilton, Sherman, & Meyer, in prep). I am also investigating perceivers’ automatic stereotyping of biracials with respect to perceived threateningness (Rivers, Chen, & Sherman, in prep). With my doctoral student, Jasmine Norman, I am investigating the experiences of multiracial individuals. We have examined how racial appearance, and other characteristics, predict multiracial individuals’ strength of identification with the Multiracial group (Norman, & Chen, under review). In another paper (Norman, Franco, & Chen, in prep), we are investigating how multiracial individuals’ experiences of discrimination from White and non-White racial in-groups relate to their levels of mental health.

I have also produced theory-based opinion or review articles that will further shape this literature. Ms. Norman and I published a peer-reviewed commentary (Chen & Norman, 2016) on an article examining multiracial individuals’ perceived deservingness for affirmative action resources (Young, Wilton, & Sanchez, 2015). We outlined important future directions for the field, calling for additional understanding of minority perceivers’ impressions of multiracial people and integration of research findings across different types of methodologies. Recently, I was invited to write a broad survey article on multiracial person perception for Social and Personality Psychology Compass (Chen, under review). I am also co-authoring an opinion piece that advances the political psychological approach to studying the perception of multiracials (Ho, Kteily, & Chen, in progress). Finally, I am co-editing a special issue of Self and Identity with Sarah Gaither (Duke U) and Nicholas Rule (U of Toronto) that will focus on the perception and experiences of people with unconventional social identities, including multiracial identities (submissions due December 2018).

**Minorities’ Diversity-related Experiences in Organizations**

Another area of my research focuses on the expectations and experiences of individuals in historically majority-dominated contexts, such as academia and business. In one project, I documented a novel process by which minority underrepresentation within a domain discourages interest from potential outsiders (e.g., why there are still so few women in business; Chen & Moons, 2015). Whereas past research has only documented that minorities experience a lack of belonging in settings where they are underrepresented, I found that the lack of representation also leads minorities to doubt whether they will have interpersonal power, the ability to influence others, in those settings. Specifically, I found that a single exposure to
underrepresentation of women in MBA programs was sufficient to decrease women’s interest in and intention to approach the business domain because they expected to have low power in that context. I am currently collaborating with doctoral students Rachael Goodwin and Sammi Dodson and Professor Tina Diekmann (all affiliated with the Department of Management, Eccles School of Business) to extend these findings to mitigate the persistent gender gap in leadership pursuit.

In another paper, I examined lay definitions of racial diversity from the perspective of Whites and racial minorities. Although some studies have found that Whites and minorities differ in the specific group properties used as a basis for diversity judgments, I proposed and tested a novel conceptual framework of “diversity” in two studies (Chen & Hamilton, 2015). I hypothesized that “diversity” has two components: the numeric representation of minorities and the social acceptance of minorities within a group. Increases in a company’s representation and social acceptance independently led to increases in perceived diversity of the company among Whites. Among non-Whites, representation and social acceptance only increased perceived diversity of the company when both qualities were high. Together these findings strongly support a two-component model of diversity in which representation is a necessary but not sufficient quality for a group to be perceived as diverse by both Whites and minorities. Furthermore, this work highlights important conditions under which Whites and minorities are likely to differ in their perceptions of the group’s diversity level (i.e., when it is high in representation but low in social acceptance).

In ongoing research, I have proposed that fostering supportive social relationships are key to increasing students’ belonging, in particular for individuals or contexts with strong belonging uncertainty. To test this empirically, I am investigating the characteristics of faculty mentoring that facilitate or undermine doctoral students’ belonging and overall success in STEM, a context with strong belonging uncertainty for many individuals. I have run a large survey study (N = 190) in which we found that STEM doctoral students’ perceptions of support from their faculty mentors (especially mentors’ provision of advice and availability as role models) predicted students’ self-efficacy, belonging, engagement, and mental health immediately and up to six months later (Chen, Geerling, Norman, Espino-Perez, & Gable, under review). To build on this study, I applied for external funding from NSF’s Education Core Research program (“The role of social relationships in sustaining STEM achievement,” total costs: $499,918) in September 2017. The grant was not funded; however, I will incorporate the panel’s feedback and seek funding for this project from the Spencer Foundation in October 2018 and via the NSF CAREER Award mechanism in July 2019.

Earlier Research

While the above two sections summarize my current research focus, my earlier research closely informs my approach to those topics. Below, I briefly summarize my early research on basic social perception and social relationship processes.

The Formation and Application of Social Stereotypes

I have published three papers on the formation of individual and group impressions. Classic social psychology focuses on how people form impressions of others. Whereas the literature has always focused on how perceivers glean trait information about individuals from
observing their behaviors (e.g., Jane helped the old lady cross the street → Jane is nice), I extended this literature in two ways. First, although trait information is important because it enables perceivers to understand and anticipate others’ behavior, individuals’ social roles also provide valuable information about their goals, beliefs, and behaviors. In three experiments (Chen, Banerji, Moons, & Sherman, 2014), we documented that perceivers spontaneously and efficiently infer an individual’s social role from a single role-implying behavior (e.g., John motivated the group to tackle the problem → John is the group’s leader). Second, I documented that perceivers also spontaneously infer trait information about groups (STIGs; Hamilton, Chen, Ko, Winczewski, Banerji, & Thurston, 2015). Across five experiments, we examined the formation of spontaneous trait inferences about groups (STIGs) and their downstream consequences. For example, perceivers learning that a group of friends wanted to play tackle football instead of touch football unintentionally and efficiently infer that the group is aggressive. STIG formation led perceivers to rate groups as higher on the specific trait exhibited by their behavior (e.g., aggressive) compared to equally negative traits (e.g., unintelligent). Further, these trait inferences readily transferred to an individual joining the group after the trait-implying behavior occurred. The documentation of STIGs provides a novel mechanism by which people form impressions of groups and apply these impressions indiscriminately to its members, in other words, the formation and application of stereotypes.

In another paper, I examined how existing stereotypes can influence intergroup interactions even before they begin (Moons, Chen, & Mackie, 2017). Our research was the first to investigate the impact of emotion stereotypes on empathic forecasting (predicting others’ emotional reactions to future events). We showed that perceivers expect a Black person to react more angrily than a White person in response to the same negative event. These expectations are particularly concerning because they lead perceivers to the desire to avoid the Black person more than the White person.

**Cultural Shaping of Relationship Processes**

I have also examined cultural differences in close relationship processes. When coping with negative events, people across the world rely on their close others for social support. I argue that the specific way in which people derive benefits from their relationships varies cross-culturally.

The majority of research on social support does not incorporate a cultural psychological perspective. Yet, to provide social support successfully, an individual must balance between communicating interdependence and respecting the other’s personal autonomy. Given that the relative importance of maintaining interdependence versus autonomy varies across cultures, a person’s cultural background can influence the social support they tend to give. People in individualistic cultures generally value high self-esteem, positive affect, and personal freedom more than do people in collectivistic cultures. In line with these cultural differences, I predicted that people in individualistic cultures would provide support that affirmed the recipients’ self-worth and increased their positive affect without infringing upon their autonomy.

Chen, Kim, Mojaverian, & Morling (2012) documented that European Americans are more likely to seek and provide explicit support (support that directly addresses the stressor or the recipient’s emotional response to it) to their close others than are East Asians. Extending this research, I hypothesized that the provision of explicit support during stressful times would be diagnostic of high quality friendships among European Americans but not among East Asians.
Moreover, Asian Americans were more likely than European Americans to provide more *indirect* forms of social support, such as providing companionship, to their high-quality friends. My research highlights the central role that culture plays in shaping close relationships and social support processes.

Finally, in Pauketat, Moons, Chen, Mackie, and Sherman (2016), we showed that self-affirmation impacts individuals’ predictions of how they will feel following a negative event. Self-affirmation occurs when the self-concept is bolstered by reminders of alternative self-resources that can be used to cope with a threat, such as a reminder of individuals’ important values and how they live up to those values. It is a motivational tool that is frequently used to buffer individuals from the psychological consequences of actual negative experiences such as stereotype threat. We extended this literature by showing that self-affirmation can also reduce the predicted impact of negative events, potentially decreasing individuals’ averseness to taking risks. These findings support recent theorizing that self-affirmation activates or enhances the psychological immune system, increasing people’s ability to cope with negative events and also, as we documented, their anticipated ability to cope with future negative events.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, my research addresses questions of fundamental and critical importance in today’s diverse society. I am grateful to the University of Utah for supporting my research agenda, and I look forward to continuing this work as an emerging leader in intergroup relations.