The United States is becoming more racially and culturally diverse than ever. Accordingly, issues of diversity are crucially important for the harmony and growth of our society. The need is thus urgent to cultivate an understanding of how people interact with individuals with backgrounds and appearances different from their own. Yet, these cross-group interactions can be tense, intimidating, and 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 work focuses on fundamental questions regarding the perception of race 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 the U.S. My primary research area centers on 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 literature on multiracial person perception; I am the sole author on a review article on this topic (Chen, 2019).

Others’ research on multiracial person perception 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. For example, I have investigated the factors that determine how racial minorities perceive part-ingroup/part-White multiracials, in particular whether they engage in hypodescent and why or why not (Chen, Kteily, & Ho, 2019; Chen & Ratliff, 2015; Ho, Kteily, & Chen, 2017. In Ho, Kteily, and Chen (under review), we provide an integrative theoretical review of perceiver and target factors impacting hypodescent and set an agenda for future work in this area.

I have also examined the development and use of the novel “Multiracial” category in social perception. In societies with large multiracial populations, 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. In Chen and Hamilton (2012), I established that perceivers do not use the Multiracial category with the same accuracy and efficiency that they use 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. Our findings were consistent with the idea that egalitarian people may be more willing to validate non-traditional identities.

Throughout my work in this area, I have only found moderate support for hypodescent. 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). I have argued that the field needs to develop a more systematic understanding of the dispositional and contextual moderators of hypodescent. In Gaither, Chen, Pauker, and Sommers (2019), 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. Building on this work, I am currently developing a theoretical framework for understanding the moderators of White Americans’ use of hypodescent (Chen, Pauker, Gaither, Hamilton, Sherman, & Meyers, in prep).

Moreover, I have 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 such as stereotyping and discrimination. Therefore, we must obtain a deeper understanding of what categories are applied to multiracials most frequently and why. Chen, Pauker, Gaither, Hamilton, and Sherman (2018) documented a novel categorization bias, the minority bias: when
people encounter racially ambiguous Black-White faces, they quickly judge them to be “non-White” and then generate alternative plausible categories to which they could belong. We found that the most frequent categorizations of biracial faces were Latinx or Middle Eastern, suggesting that biracial people may experience stereotyping and discrimination based on these social identities (as opposed to Black).

In ongoing research, I am investigating perceivers’ automatic stereotyping of biracials with respect to perceived threateningness (Rivers, Chen, & Sherman, R&R at JPSP). With my doctoral student, Jasmine Norman, I am investigating how others’ perceptions might impact the experiences of multiracial individuals. We have examined how others’ viewing them as racially ambiguous increases the likelihood that multiracial individuals identify with the broad Multiracial group (Norman, & Chen, in press). In another paper (Norman, Franco, & Chen, under review), we investigated how multiracial individuals’ experiences of social rejection from White and non-White racial in-groups relate to their mental well-being. With Ms. Norman and my second doctoral student Yeseul Nam, I am preparing a methodological paper to introduce the American Multiracial Face Database, a set of high quality face photos of real Multiracial people, to academic researchers (Chen, Norman, & Nam, in prep).

My research on racial categorization processes carries broad implications for basic knowledge of the social construction of race. For example, Chen, Couto, Sacci, and Dunham (2017) documented 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 person perception. Our work also sparked a new discussion on the need for increased understanding of intergroup relations from a cultural psychological perspective. Stemming from this work, I have cultivated a collaboration with economist Andrew Francis-Tan (National U of Singapore) to investigate skin tone biases in Asia.

**Perceptions and Experiences of Organizational Diversity.** 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. I am collaborating with doctoral students Rachael Goodwin and Sammi Dodson and Prof. Tina Diekmann (Department of Management) to understand the persistent gender gap in leadership pursuit (Goodwin, Dodson, Chen & Diekmann, under review).

In addition, I have examined on what basis people perceive organizational diversity. In Chen and Hamilton (2015), I tested a novel conceptual framework of “diversity.” I hypothesized and found that perceivers associate “diversity” with two concepts: the numeric representation of minorities and the social acceptance of minorities within a group. Whereas White perceivers focus on diversity in terms of representation, racial minorities think of both representation and acceptance as necessary for achieving diversity in an organization. Following up on this research, doctoral student Danielle Geerling and I have investigated the extent to which individuals’ race and gender impact their perceived ability to diversify a group. We find that Black women are perceived to be more “diverse” than men of color, White women, and White men; however, attention to gender diversity increases the perceived diversity of White women, but not that of Black women.

In ongoing research, I have proposed that fostering supportive social relationships are key to increasing students’ belonging, in particular when they are underrepresented in a given context. Consistent with this idea, Chen, Geerling, Norman, Espino-Pérez, and Gable (under review) found that STEM doctoral students’ perceptions of support from their faculty mentors (especially mentors’ provision of advice) predicted students’ self-efficacy, belonging, and engagement immediately and up to six months later. To build on this result, I applied for an NSF CAREER award (“Fostering broader participation and thriving in STEM: A comprehensive investigation of faculty mentorship of doctoral students,” Total Costs: $807,800) in July 2019.