From: The Power of Us - *Harnessing Our Shared Identities to Improve Performance, Increase Cooperation, and Promote Social Harmony,* by Jay van Bavel and Dominic Packer

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CHAPTER 1

THE POWER OF US

Herzogenaurach is an idyllic town in southern Germany named for the river Aurach that flows through it. The river serves as a dividing line between two fierce rivals.

The saga began, as many do, with two brothers. The Dassler brothers—Adolf (Adi) and Rudolf (Rudi)—were cobblers, and before the Second World War, they made shoes together. From humble beginnings in their mother's laundry room, they founded the Gebrüder Dassler Schuhfabrik and specialized in producing athletic footwear.

The brothers' factory made the shoes that Jesse Owens, the Black American track star, wore for the 1936 Olympics in Berlin; Owens was wearing these shoes when, much to the chagrin of the German führer, Adolf Hitler, he won four gold medals. His victory gave the brothers international exposure, and sales of their shoes exploded.

No one is sure exactly how the brothers' conflict started. But according to legend, the rivalry was triggered by a bombing raid in 1943. Adi and his wife climbed into the same shelter as Rudi's family, and Adi exclaimed, "The dirty bastards are back again." Although Adi was probably referring to the Allied warplanes, Rudi apparently believed the insult was intended for himself and his family.

After the war, Adi and Rudi began a battle that would inflame and divide their hometown for decades. The Dassler brothers' shoe company did not survive. By 1948, the brothers had split the business, and Herzogenaurach became home to two of the largest shoe manufacturers in the world. On each side of the river, brand loyalty dominated.

These two shoemaking behemoths, collectively worth more than twenty-five billion dollars today, became bitter crosstown rivals. The conflict spread to employees and their families. The town's citizens identified exclusively with Adi's or Rudi's company. Walking about town, people would look down at each other's shoes, making sure that they interacted only with members of their own group. Thus did Herzogenaurach become known as the "Town of Bent Necks."

In her book *Pitch Invasion*, Barbara Smit describes how each side of the town had its own bakeries, restaurants, and stores.[1] Townsfolk from the other side were refused service if they wandered into the wrong establishments. Families were divided. Once-friendly neighbors became enemies. Dating or marrying across company lines was also discouraged! It wasn't until the

Dassler brothers died that the tensions eased and the companies established a rivalry that today is focused more squarely on business and the soccer pitch. But the brothers took their enmity quite literally to the grave: they are buried at opposite ends of the town's cemetery.[2]

The companies they formed live on. You know them as Adidas, founded by Adi, and Puma, founded by Rudi. The mayor of Herzogenaurach recently explained, "I was a member of the Puma family because of my aunt. I was one of the children who wore all Puma clothes. It was a joke in our youth: you wear Adidas, I have Puma. I'm a member of the Puma family." It wasn't until 2009, after Adi's and Rudi's deaths and decades of hostility, that the employees from both companies marked an end to the feud by playing a friendly soccer match.

The striking thing about the long and hard-fought battle initiated by the Dassler brothers was that it didn't stem from something one might consider weighty or important enough to divide a town. It wasn't about politics or religion. It wasn't about land, gold, or ideology. It was about shoes. Or, more accurately, it was about opposing identities based on shoes. Once these social identities were created, they exerted tremendous power, dictating where employees, their families, and subsequent generations lived, ate, and shopped.

The critical question, however, is not why the Dassler brothers went to war over shoes. After all, brothers have been among the most jealous of rivals since Cain and Abel. The question is why everyone else went along with it. Why did the rest of the town so readily embrace one side over the other?

PSYCHOLOGISTS ON A PLANE

When we travel, after squeezing our luggage and ourselves into cramped airline seats, we often end up in conversation with friendly strangers. These chats tend to follow a familiar rhythm. "Where are you from?" "Why are you going to Dallas [or Portland or Sydney or Taipei]?" And, of course, "What do you do?"

"Oh, um, I'm a psychologist."

Nine times out of ten, this elicits the same reaction. "Uh-oh—are you analyzing me? Can you read my mind?"

We usually laugh and brush it off. "Ha-ha, don't worry—I'm not *that* kind of psychologist." Every once in a while, though, just for fun, we give it a shot.

We are social psychologists and, even more specifically, psychologists who study social identities. We study how the groups that people identify with affect their sense of self, how they perceive and understand the world, and how they make decisions.

If they wanted to analyze a fellow passenger, other types of psychologists would ask different questions than we would. A clinical psychologist might ask you about feelings of anxiety and depression or about family histories of mental illness. An old-school

clinician might ask you about your dreams or your relationship with your mother. Personality psychologists might whip out a Big Five trait inventory and measure your levels of extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Others could inquire as to your birth order or the experiences in your life that you believe were most formative.

We would ask you about your groups: *What groups are you proud to belong to? What group memberships do you find yourself thinking about a lot? Which ones affect how you get treated by other people? With which groups do you feel solidarity?*

The answers to these questions give us some useful clues about who you are. We assume that you will tend to conform to the norms of these groups, enjoy their traditions, and feel pride in their symbols. We also expect that when you dissent and really speak your mind, it will be in these groups. This might seem surprising, but dissent is quite hard and people are often willing to do it only because they care deeply about a group.

We can infer that you will tend to like and trust fellow members of these groups and that you might be willing to sacrifice your own resources or well-being, if necessary, on their behalf. If any of your groups have serious rivals, we can also predict how you feel toward members of those groups and how you might treat them. And if we learn that you think one of your important groups is being treated unjustly, we have a pretty good sense of how you might vote, the causes you're likely to join, and who you will fight for.

There is, of course, much more to you than that. But this is just about as much analysis as anyone wants while stuck next to a stranger thirty thousand feet in the air!

When people travel and have these sorts of conversations, they often form a small, fleeting bond with each other. But these rarely turn into anything more. They rarely become part of someone's identity, for example.

In this book, we will talk a lot about how groups actually do become parts of our identities, so we should clarify what we mean by these terms. Fifty or one hundred and fifty people together on a plane are not a group—at least, not psychologically. They are simply a collection of people who, for the moment, share the same cramped space, stale air, and unappetizing food choices. But they lack a sense of solidarity, of being a collective, of sharing a bond. They do not possess a meaningful social identity as passengers.

Most flights pass entirely in this fashion. The flight attendants are probably a group and share a sense of identity, as are families or coworkers traveling together. But the plane's passengers, as a whole, are not.

Circumstances can change this, giving rise to a feeling of collective solidarity, even if only momentarily. On a stormy night a couple of years ago, Dom was flying home along the East Coast of the United States. From their tiny windows, the passengers could see a line of thunderstorms—massive dark towers of clouds, lit up eerily every few seconds as lightning coursed through them. As the

plane flew north, the pilots weaved their way between the clouds. It got rough, the small commuter plane jerking and shaking, creaking ominously. "We're hitting a bit of turbulence, folks," one pilot announced over the inevitably scratchy intercom, "but don't worry, we think we're gonna be okay!"

The words *we think we're gonna be okay* did not have the intended effect. Now people began to look at one another with unease. Conversations started between rows. Over the churning sound of the engines, passengers recounted stormy flights they'd had in the past, assuring one another that it would indeed be okay. And it was. The plane eventually escaped the storms and landed just fine, even on time.

But the psychology of that flight was different than normal. The common experience that everyone had been through was a foundation for a momentary collective bond and a sense of community. The passengers had survived something stressful and unique together. When the plane landed, everybody applauded. For a while together, they had shared an identity.

In this chapter, we will lay out some of the principles of identity that will provide a foundation for the rest of the book. This is one of them: although we have enduring, strong, and deeply meaningful long-term social identities, human psychology also provides us with a readiness to connect with each other in momentary solidarity. Some situations, such as administering the Heimlich maneuver to a colleague or hoping that your flight will land safely, help forge a sense of identity with others. When circumstances conspire to make us aware that we share a common experience or characteristic with others, a set of mental processes spontaneously kick into gear that causes us to feel like we are part of a group—nay, that causes us to actually *become* a group.

The consequences of this group-oriented psychology are profound. Our social identities provide a powerful basis for unity. But they can also be, as we saw with the Town of Bent Necks, a source of significant division.

A SOCIAL VACUUM

If one made an inventory of all the reasons groups come into conflict with one another, it would be a formidable list: competition over scarce resources, such as land, oil, food, treasure, or water. Battles over sacred beliefs, gods, and holy ground. Slights and insults long remembered. Glory-striving leaders seeking riches, fame, or better opinion polls. Misperceptions and misunderstandings. Fear of the unknown and fear of the other. Wars for status, for bragging rights, and for power.

It seems that intergroup divisions can be triggered over just about anything. Even, as it turns out, shoes. As we saw with the Town of Bent Necks, the basis for group identities and the divisions between them can be mundane from an outsider's perspective but deeply meaningful to group members themselves. Shoes might

seem like a trivial thing for people to rally around, but to understand how such seemingly arbitrary things can become a powerful basis for identities, we need to tell you about what we consider to be among the most important studies in the history of psychology.

These are known as the "minimal-group studies," and they started as what was essentially just a control condition.

Many things can work in combination to make different groups dislike one another, discriminate, and even want to cause one another significant harm. Conflict over scarce resources may combine with negative stereotypes and differences in power. These might be further inflamed by a leader's divisive rhetoric and reinforced by memories of old battles from decades or even centuries ago. All of these factors and more can combine in unique ways to drive intergroup conflicts.

To get a handle on the underlying dynamics of intergroup relations, social scientists would like to be able to isolate these different factors and study them separately, much as a chemist isolates a compound to better understand its properties. However, it is very difficult to isolate a single component of a real-life conflict between, say, religious, ethnic, or political groups because they co-occur. These factors tend to come as a package.

In order to resolve this problem and understand what causes conflict, Henri Tajfel and his collaborators at the University of Bristol hit upon a brilliant idea. Chemists create airtight vacuums when they want to isolate a compound, and using that logic, Tajfel and his colleagues came up with a way to make a type of social vacuum. They created a situation in which all of the factors involved in intergroup conflict—stereotypes, resource disparities, insults, and so on—were stripped away, leaving only the most minimal version of an intergroup context. It's a situation involving two groups but without any of the ingredients that generally produce discrimination or conflict.

Having created a social vacuum by removing all these key factors, they could slowly start adding different ingredients into the situation to see what produced discrimination and conflict. Adding a splash of resource competition here, a drop of stereotyping there, and so on would allow them to study how each of these ingredients affects relations between groups.

To create a vacuum, the researchers could not use preexisting, real-life groups because they came with a certain amount of psychological baggage. Instead, they assigned participants to completely novel groups on the basis of arbitrary and essentially meaningless criteria.[3] Participants in one study were informed they were "overestimators" or "underestimators" based on how many dots they thought were displayed on an image. In another study, they were placed in groups based on their preference for the abstract art of either Paul Klee or Wassily Kandinsky. But things were not what they seemed. The people in the overestimator group did not really tend to overestimate the number of dots, and the

members of the Klee fan group did not necessarily like *Twittering Machine* (yes, that is the actual name of a famous piece). In each case, the researchers had essentially flipped a coin and assigned people to groups based on chance. This ensured that their actual dot-estimation styles or artist preferences would have no bearing on how they treated in-group and out-group members.

Participants in these studies were then asked to allocate resources between members of their in-group (fellow Klee fans, say) and members of the out-group (those so-called Kandinsky fanatics). In several studies, participants divided money between an anonymous in-group member and an anonymous out-group member. The researchers took steps to ensure a social vacuum by keeping the situation as empty as possible. Participants had absolutely no interaction with other members of either group. There was no period of getting to know one another, no chance to form personal bonds, and no competition over resources. It was simply us and them, two minimal groups.

Participants' decisions were not zero-sum. This point is important because it meant that giving more to one group did not have to mean giving less to the other. Finally, their decisions had no direct bearing on their own outcomes—they could not personally earn more or less by behaving in particular ways.

The researchers assumed this would make an excellent control condition. With all possible reasons for discriminating between the groups presumably eliminated, it seemed like a solid basis for intergroup harmony. Once this was established, they could then conduct future studies where they systematically added in the different ingredients for intergroup conflict to find out exactly what mattered. But the results were startling, even to the researchers themselves.

People assigned to a minimal group, far from losing their intergroup bias, consistently discriminated in favor of their own group. If the coin flip had led them to believe they were Kandinsky fans, they gave more resources to a fellow Kandinsky fan than to a Klee admirer. And the opposite was true for supposed Klee enthusiasts.

Strikingly, people sometimes actually *maximized* the difference between the groups. Given the choice, they would allocate less money to an in-group member if it meant that an out-group member got even less.

The researchers had stripped away stereotypes, resource conflict, status differences, and everything else they could think of. So what was left? What residue remained in the social vacuum that could possibly account for people showing such clear preferences for these most arbitrary, short-lived, and meaningless of groups?

The answer that came to Henri Tajfel and colleagues was *social identity*.[4] It seemed that the mere fact of being categorized as part of one group rather than another was enough to link that group membership to a person's sense of self. Sitting there in the laboratory, people thought of themselves not as disinterested

observers in a weird resource-allocation experiment but as members of a real social group with value and meaning. Even in a social vacuum, people shared a sense of identity with anonymous strangers—simply because they believed they were part of the same group. Motivated to possess an identity that was meaningful and of value, participants took the only course of action they had available in the situation to make that true: they allocated more resources to in-group than out-group members. They acted to ensure that their brand-new identity was a positive and a distinct one—and in doing so, they began to advance their group's interests even though there was no obvious benefit to themselves as individuals.

Variants of these experiments have been conducted around the globe to examine how a shared sense of "us" can affect all manner of psychological processes, including attention, perception, and memory, as well as emotions like empathy and schadenfreude, that naughty feeling of pleasure in other people's pain we sometimes get.

Subsequent research has found that much of the bias that is created when someone joins and identifies with a group—minimal or real—is better characterized as reflecting in-group love than out-group hate. People typically like their own groups more, but this doesn't necessarily mean they dislike or want to harm out-groups. When people in minimal groups are asked to deliver aversive outcomes to other people, for example, they show less of a preference for their own group—they don't particularly want to cause the out-group harm.[5] In our own studies with minimal groups, we have found that people automatically feel positively toward in-group members but feel neutral toward out-group members.[6] Of course, relations between groups can become hateful, especially when factors like demeaning stereotypes, inflammatory rhetoric, or resource competition enter the situation. We will discuss these group dynamics throughout the book and tell you more about our own research on minimal groups. We have found that assigning people to an arbitrary group can immediately affect patterns of brain activity, change how they look at others, and, at least momentarily, override racial biases. The minimal-group studies have inspired much of our work and fundamentally reshaped how we understand the nature of human identity. They have clarified to us that there is no true social vacuum. In many ways, the psychology of groups is the natural human condition.

SHIFTING IDENTITIES AND CHANGING GOALS

For as long as humans have been capable of self-reflection, they have thought about the nature of the self. What does it mean to have a self ? What is its purpose? To the philosopher René Descartes, who was temporarily in doubt about the existence of all things, the self was a point of certainty from which he could reason everything else back into being: "I think, therefore I am." The philosopher Daniel Dennett has memorably described the self as the "center of narrative gravity." In other words, we are at the

hearts of our own stories.

But the minimal-group studies reveal that the human sense of self—your gravitational center—does not stay in the same place. With the flip of a coin, people constructed entirely new identities in a matter of minutes. The sense of self moves about, shifting between different aspects of identity. And this movement has consequences for how you perceive and make sense of the world, as well as the choices you make.

Over the course of a few hours, the same person's identity—the sense of self that is active at a given moment—might shift from self as individual in the car fighting through traffic on the way to work to self as employee representing one's company on a conference call to self as supporter of a political party arguing about the news on social media to self as sports fan watching a game on TV and, finally, to self as romantic partner at the end of the day. One person can hold all of these identities, and many more besides.

As the gravitational center of your self shifts, and as one identity or another is activated, the goals that motivate you and the people whose fates you are concerned with shift as well. More generally, as identity expands from an individual to a social or collective level of self, other people are brought within the sphere of your self-interest. *I* becomes *we*. *Me* becomes *us*. *Mine* becomes *ours*.

These motivational changes are beautifully illustrated by experiments conducted by social psychologists David De Cremer and Mark Van Vugt.[7] They started by classifying university students based on what is known as their "social value orientation." Social value orientation captures how much you tend to take your own and other people's interests into account when you make decisions. To measure your social value orientation, researchers ask you to imagine how you would divide different sums of money between yourself and someone else. Each time, you confront choices. Do you try to maximize your own earnings? Do you try to help your partner? Or would you prefer to widen the gap between yourself and the other person?

As an example, think about which of the following options you would choose. Option A gives you and your partner 500 points each. Option B gives you 560 points and your partner 300. Option C gives you 400 points and your partner 100. Which would you choose?

If you consistently choose distributions like option A, you have a *cooperative* or *pro-social orientation*, because the option provides an equal distribution of outcomes. If you prefer choices like option B, you have a more *individualistic orientation*, because you are maximizing your own outcomes irrespective of what other people are getting. Finally, if you are an option C kind of person, you have a *competitive orientation*, because this distribution maximizes the difference between your own and the other person's outcomes. This was the orientation that seemed to animate Adi and Rudi in the Town of Bent Necks, at least with respect to each other.

The researchers in this case lumped the individualists and

competitors together into a single category that they called *pro-selfs* and compared them to the *pro-socials*. Having figured out the participants' social value orientations, the researchers designed an experiment to manipulate which aspect of participants' self-concepts was most salient or active in the moment. They did this by randomly assigning them to complete a task that highlighted each subject's identity as either a university student or an individual. The researchers then measured how much they were willing to contribute in an economic game to a group composed of fellow university students.

These economic games were structured so that choosing to do what was best for the group required a degree of personal sacrifice—opting to give more to the collective and keep a little less for themselves. Unsurprisingly, the people who were classified as pro-social were always fairly generous. They contributed to their group regardless of whether their identities as university students had been activated or not, donating real money roughly 90 percent of the time.

The people with a pro-self social value orientation were different. Predictably, they were less generous than the pro-socials when their individual identity had been highlighted. In this condition, they contributed to the group a mere 44 percent of the time. They were half as generous.

However, this pattern was completely changed among pro-selfs when their social identity as university students had been made salient. When their identity was temporarily defined by membership in a group, generosity among pro-selfs nearly doubled, and they gave to the group 79 percent of the time. They were nearly indistinguishable from people with a pro-social orientation.

The implications of this finding are profound. It is unlikely that the people with pro-self orientations had miraculously become less self-interested. Instead, their self-interested motives had *transformed* from their individual self to a group self. This is one of the tricks performed by social identity. It transforms goals and can make even selfish people behave in pro-social ways.

CONTAINING MULTITUDES

> Do I contradict myself ?
> Very well, then I contradict myself
> (I am large, I contain multitudes.)
>
> —Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"

We are painting a picture of identity that is dynamic and multifaceted. People are often walking contradictions. They contain multitudes. But despite plenty of evidence that human identity is complex and changeable, this can still feel deeply counterintuitive. Our moment-to-moment experience tends to feel quite consistent and it can be hard to recognize, even in oneself, the flexibility of identity across time and place. On talking

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about this in a class, a student exclaimed in frustration: "If what you're saying is right, how many selves do I have? Who on earth am I?"

So who on earth are we? How numerous are the multitudes within us?

Social psychologists use a technique known as the twenty-statements task to tap into different components of people's identities. It's very simple; all you have to do is complete the sentence "I am _____" twenty times.

Here is a sampling from our own lists:

Dom	Jay
A professor	A father
A father	A scientist
A husband	A Canadian
Intelligent	A son
Stressed out	A social neuroscientist
A social psychologist	An optimist
A music lover	A kid from Fox Creek
A redhead	A hockey goalie
A Pennsylvanian	A social media addict
An amateur cook	A politics junkie

If you write your own list, you might note several interesting things. First, it's usually not too hard to come up with twenty or so items that you consider self-defining. We found ourselves slowing down a bit toward the end, but many aspects of ourselves came readily to mind.

Second, most people's lists include things that can be lumped into certain categories. Some are clearly about an *individual level* of self. Stable personality traits such as *intelligent* and *optimist*, as well as more temporary states like *stressed out*, refer to aspects of the person as a unique entity. These are characteristics that differentiate one person from another.

Other components refer to a *relational level* of self. To be a *father* or *husband*, for example, is to be someone in relation to at least one other person, and it is your role in the relationship that defines that piece of your identity. And other components involve a *collective level* of self; social identities like *Pennsylvanian* and *social neuroscientist* define you as a member of a category that you feel is important to who you are.

There are other interesting features of these lists. Research suggests that people are more likely to incorporate something into their identity if it is distinct and differentiating.[8] Red hair occurs naturally in only about 2 percent of the population, so it's more likely that Dominic would write *redhead* on his list of self-defining attributes than that Jay would write *brunet*. Some attributes can belong to more than one level of identity. Identifying yourself as a

redhead means viewing your hair color as a trait that differentiates you from others. But hair color can also serve as a basis for social categorization, a way of dividing the world into groups. Indeed, there are stereotypes about redheads as a category. As was said of Anne of Green Gables, perhaps the world's most famous fictional redhead, "Her temper matches her hair."[9] Understanding themselves to be a distinct group, redheads have even organized their own festivals, online communities, and dating websites.

The fact is that individual aspects of identity are hard to separate from social aspects of identity. This is true in at least two additional ways. First, many personal traits are inherently relative and gain meaning only in comparison to others. To self-define as intelligent, for example, is to consider oneself smarter than other people; to self-define as an optimist is to see oneself as more positively expectant than others. Importantly, the people against whom you assess yourself are generally people you consider to be relevant targets for comparison, and these are much more likely to be in-group rather than out-group members.

Second, the social groups we belong to shape the very experience of what it is to be an individual. The ways in which you strive to be an independent self are influenced by the norms of the groups you identify with. Norms are the accepted standards of behavior within social groups and influence how you behave. The more that someone identifies with a group, the more strongly he or she will tend to conform to that group's norms. In other words, strongly identified members are more likely than weakly identified members to think, feel, and act similarly to most other people in their group.

People from more collectivist cultures might be nodding along, but if you are from an individualistic culture, you might be reading this with some skepticism. You likely don't think of yourself as a conformist. However, it turns out that this is also a social norm!

Some groups have individualistic norms. For example, the American identity has a strong independent streak, emphasizing the importance of personal autonomy, responsibility, and individual rights and deemphasizing the importance of consensus and cohesion. What does this mean for strongly identified Americans? Their level of identification should lead them to conform more to the norms of the group, making them strive to be even more individualistic.

Does this mean that American individualism is really a type of conformity? The results of research by Jolanda Jetten at the University of Queensland and her colleagues suggest that indeed it is.[10] In one study, they found that strongly identified Americans expressed higher levels of individualism than weakly identified Americans. Thus, Americans who express their individualism are, in fact, conformists to a very strong social norm.

American norms create, in the immortal words of art critic Harold Rosenberg, a "herd of independent minds." We call it the *independence paradox*—that people who strive for independence

are often doing it to fit in! In contrast, in Jetten's research strongly identified Indonesians, members of a nation with more collectivistic norms, expressed higher levels of collectivism than weakly identified Indonesians.

Lest you think this is purely an issue of national culture, there is plenty of variation within nations as well. When we worked at Ohio State, we noted that the undergraduates were obsessed with fitting in, and a great many wore scarlet and gray, the school colors, with pride. And on game days, it wasn't only the students garbed in scarlet and gray—it was the whole city of Columbus. When the Buckeyes played football, more than a hundred thousand people would pack the stadium and chant in unison to traditional fight songs. As the team marched toward the national championship during our first year in Ohio, the entire city was immersed in identity rituals.

It was a rousing and fascinating anthropological experience for two lads coming from the University of Toronto, where the football team had recently set a national record by losing its forty-ninth game in a row. But when we moved to our current jobs at Lehigh University (Dominic) and New York University (Jay), the norms were radically different. It is rare to see an NYU student wearing the school colors, and the value these students cherish more than any other is "being interesting." To them, blending in means standing out.

Of course, people know different universities offer different cultures. This helps people to sort themselves, opting to join different types of communities depending on the local norms and educational environment. Applicants who have a strong desire to fit in with a highly cohesive community will likely have a better experience at Ohio State than at Lehigh. Applicants who have a strong desire to cultivate and embody a striking individuality will likely have a better experience at NYU than at Ohio State. It is also the case that after arriving on campus, students may find their identities changing to align more closely with their university's social norms.

Similar dynamics had played out in our graduate-student office at the University of Toronto. While Jay was fond of wearing flip-flops and ironic T-shirts, Dominic emulated professors a few years his senior and started showing up to work in a suit jacket. Before long, Jay found himself drawn to a brown corduroy blazer with elbow patches. While this shift seemed like the natural next step in Jay's growing sense of fashion, the reality is that it likely stemmed from his more dapper office mate and identification with the professors in his department. This is precisely how identity and norms shape our decisions. When Jay moved to Ohio State, and Dom followed a few months later, Dom was mortified to discover that everyone in Columbus thought he was emulating Jay! More troubling still, Jay did nothing to correct this misperception.

Hazel Marcus at Stanford University and her colleagues have studied differences in these sorts of norms between Americans who

live in urban versus rural settings.[11] In many big cities, people would be mortified if their best friends bought the same outfits or decorated their apartments in exactly the same way. Too much similarity impinges on their individualism. But in rural locations, people are more likely to believe that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery and take pleasure in sharing common experiences with their friends. This is why hipsters, obsessed with authenticity and uniqueness, cluster in gentrified urban neighborhoods, while odd deviations from the norm can lead to teasing or ostracism in more traditional rural communities.

One of the most important functions of groups is their ability to coordinate the behaviors and activities of many people at once. Like our friends the honeybees and our enemies the termites, humans are a hyper-social species, living together in collectives that range from the small scale (couples and families) to the truly massive (countries with hundreds of millions of citizens). Unlike beehives and termite colonies, however, the groups, organizations, and societies we build are endlessly evolving, allowing us to innovate, build new institutions, adapt to ever-changing environments, and benefit from the tremendous advantages of working together.

A great deal of this coordination is accomplished via conformity to norms. Conformity has been observed in every domain of life where researchers have looked for it. Experiments have revealed conformity in fashion, political and musical preferences, moral values, eating and drinking behaviors, sexual practices, social attitudes, cooperation, and conflict. What people think, feel, and do is influenced, often to a startling degree, by what they believe everyone else is thinking, feeling, and doing. And because they are bound to groups and identities, the particular norms that guide people at any given moment can vary depending on which parts of themselves are the most salient and active.

ARE BANKERS DISHONEST?

Bankers, like lawyers and politicians, don't have the best reputation when it comes to honesty. Gallup polling in 2019, for example, found that 20 percent of people rated bankers' honesty and ethics as low or very low, compared to just 3 percent for nurses and 6 percent for dentists.[12] Public perception of bankers' integrity worsened after the 2008 financial crisis and never fully recovered. Bankers were rated as having poor ethics by 55 percent of respondents, although they still had a better reputation than members of the U.S. Congress.

To examine how much the stereotype of bankers matches the reality of their behavior, economists at the University of Zurich—near the heart of one of the world's largest banking centers—devised a clever experiment.[13] They asked bankers at an international firm to flip a coin ten times and record how often it came up heads and how often it came up tails. The bankers were

told in advance that one type of outcome—either heads or tails—would be rewarded. So, for example, if heads were rewarded, they would receive the equivalent of about twenty dollars for every time the coin came up heads and nothing when it came up tails. To increase the stakes, bankers were informed that they would receive their winnings *only if* their total exceeded an amount won by a randomly selected participant in another study.

Critically, the bankers made their coin tosses in private, away from the prying eyes of the experimenter. They could, therefore, report any number of heads or tails they wanted, and no one would be the wiser. The incentives to cheat were strong, putting the bankers' honesty firmly to the test.

Before the bankers began the coin-tossing task, half of them were reminded of their professional identity with questions like "At what bank are you currently working?" Being asked about their occupation was expected to activate this aspect of their identity, making it highly salient prior to tossing the coin. In contrast, the other half of the bankers were asked questions that had nothing to do with their job, like "How many hours a week do you watch television?" This would get them thinking about their personal identity or other identities outside of work.

We don't know how many heads or tails any particular banker actually got; the outcomes really were private. But we do know that 50 percent of the time a coin is flipped, it should come up heads. By comparing how close the reported numbers of heads and tails in each condition were to what would be expected by chance, the researchers could determine whether bankers in one condition were more likely to cheat than bankers in the other condition.

Bankers asked about their television habits and other mundane aspects of their lives did not appear to cheat. On average, they reported flipping their coins to the advantageous side 51.6 percent of the time—which was not statistically different from chance. However, cheating was elevated among bankers reminded of their occupational identity! This group of bankers reported securing advantageous coin flips 58.2 percent of the time.

Are bankers dishonest? The answer, it appears, is that it depends on whether the bankers in question are thinking about themselves as bankers! Bankers, like everyone else, contain multitudes.

What this further suggests is that the question "Are bankers dishonest?" is not actually very meaningful. Whether one's identity as a banker will influence one's honesty depends on the norms of the banking community with which one identifies—norms that can differ between groups and presumably change over time.

This may be why a recent paper that looked at how activating occupational identities influenced honesty among bankers in the Middle East and in Asia did not find the same effect.[14] The norms of banks in these locations—and certainly the norms of the broader cultures in which they operate—are likely different from those in the original study.[15] There may also be differences among types of bankers; while those in the original study were primarily involved

in investment and trading, those in the second were commercial bankers who primarily dealt with loans.

ON REPLICATION

Concerns that previously published findings cannot be replicated have grown considerably in psychology—and, indeed, many scientific fields—over the past few years, leading to what some have called a "reproducibility crisis." As the saga of the banker studies highlights, making sense of what it means when a previous finding is not replicated is not always straightforward. Perhaps the original finding wasn't real. Maybe it was a statistical fluke (the chances of which can be increased with sample sizes that are too small), an artifact of dodgy data handling, or, in rare cases, outright fraud. In many other cases, if research finds a pattern of behavior in one context and not in another, it might reflect meaningful variation in factors that alter the results. This is one of the primary interests of social and cultural psychology. In the case of the banker studies, we think that there is a sound reason to suspect that different norms explain why some banker identities increase dishonesty while others do not. But the truth is that without further research, we don't know for sure.

For all of the research we talk about in this book, there is an important distinction to be made between findings from specific studies and the broader identity principles that they illuminate. In this case, there is a massive literature demonstrating that people are highly influenced by group norms, some of which we will talk about more deeply in later chapters. So if you have children or friends who work in banking, you shouldn't assume based on the study we described that they are ethically compromised in the workplace. You should, however, be interested in what sorts of norms their employers hold. And if you personally are thinking of taking a job in a bank—or anywhere else—we think that you should be especially interested in what the local norms are, because they will likely exert an important influence on your behavior and your life.

In this book, we have tried to focus on findings in which we have high levels of confidence. But the underlying principles of identity that this book is about are grounded in many more studies than we have room to discuss. The principles are supported by extensive lines of research conducted by multiple laboratories, often over many years. Not everything is settled, of course, and where ideas have evolved, controversies continue, and questions remain, we will talk about them. Indeed, how scientific understanding evolves over time is one of the most interesting parts of the story!

PRINCIPLES OF IDENTITY

This chapter lays out several key lessons about identities and the roles they play in people's lives. First, the groups people belong to are often fundamental to their sense of self and understanding of who they are. Second, people have a remarkable readiness to find collective solidarity with others and generate, even if only temporarily, a sense of identity based on common experiences, shared characteristics, and even random assignment to a new group. Third, when a particular social identity is salient and active, it can have a profound effect on people's goals, emotions, and behaviors. Fourth, most people are quite likely to conform to the norms associated with an active identity and try to act in ways that they believe will advance its interests, making personal sacrifices if necessary.

A great number of good things result when we create and share social identities with others. But there is another side to this: cooperation and generosity are bound by our identities. For every in-group, there is usually an out-group. Social identities can make people want to help members of their own groups, but it can also make them want to harm—or at least avoid helping—people who belong to other groups.

Speaking of conflict between groups, in this book we will talk quite a lot about political identities. In many nations around the world, political polarization or sectarian conflict is causing massive social strife. Politics in many places have become remarkably toxic.

When relations between groups harden and we start to see "our" interests as fundamentally opposed to "their" interests, the natural positive emotions and empathy we feel toward our own groups can shift in a dangerous direction. We start to think that we're not only good but that we're *inherently* good. And if that's true, then *they* must be intrinsically bad and should be opposed at all costs. Issues are moralized in ways that favor our point of view. We become less tolerant of dissent and vigilant against any deviance that threatens to dilute the all-important boundary between us and them. We see enemies without and within. We begin to believe that when it comes to pursuing our group's interests, any means justifies the ends. And when we do commit harm against others, it is often because we think it is pursuant to a larger, virtuous goal.

Many people don't realize how much competition relies on cooperation. When people play checkers or hockey or compete for a promotion, they implicitly agree to abide by a shared and mutually agreed upon set of rules. In politics too there are rules, written in constitutions and carved out by tradition and precedent. These rules, embodied by political institutions, allow rivals to engage in fierce debate and hash things out without resorting to bloodshed.

Effective institutions that provide fair rules and accountability are among the most important social goods a human society can

provide. And these institutions work as long as enough people believe in them, as long as they believe that there is something larger and ultimately more important than winning the next election. Toxic politics are especially dangerous when they undermine these beliefs. Things can get truly ugly when the loss of any sense of shared identity as citizens combines with a group's belief in its own righteousness, leading its members to think that playing by the rules is foolish or that the other side must be stopped at all costs.

We believe that these toxic patterns are products of standard group and identity dynamics but that these bad outcomes are by no means inevitable. Intergroup interactions and politics do not have to be this way. Understanding how identity works can help us make sense of what's going on and, perhaps, figure out how we can get out of this mess.

Although our social identities can be powerful forces in our lives, we nevertheless have agency and some level of control over them. All people belong to some categories that they don't especially value or identify with, even if others do. For this reason, when we as researchers study people's social identities, we don't assume that everyone in a category, whether it's gender, race, occupation, religion, or nationality (just to name a few), is equally identified with it. Instead, we often measure how much each person identifies with the group. We might ask people to rate how proud they are to belong to the group and how central it is to their sense of self.

Of course, people don't have full control over which groups they belong to, but they often have the capacity to choose which ones they embrace as identities. When you choose a college or a career, support a sports team, or register with a political party, you are actively selecting a certain identity. Likewise, if you abandon a party, quit a job, or even stop being a smoker, you are letting go of an identity. Given how much of people's emotions, beliefs, and behaviors are wrapped up in their social identities, the agency to choose which ones they care about, which ones will animate their choices, and which ones will define their relationship to the world is critically important. Indeed, these might be among the most important decisions anyone makes in life.

People also exert their agency when they dissent from group norms or take a more active role in leadership. Identity is central to both of these tasks. As we will explain, people are more willing to dissent if they care deeply about a group, and leaders are more effective when they can generate a shared sense of identity among their followers.

The premise at the heart of our book is that knowing how identities work can give us more control over their influence. As we said before, understanding social identity allows us to transition from asking "Who am I?" to figuring out "Who do I want to be?"

WHAT COMES NEXT?

The first chapters of this book look at how social identities shape how we experience the world and the decisions we make. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 describe how social identities provide the lenses through which we perceive events and how they influence some of our most important beliefs. Together, we will explore the role of identity in political partisanship, how new technologies, including social media, have made that partisanship worse, and potential solutions for bridging divides. In chapter 5, we examine why people value certain social identities more than others and how these identities imbue relevant symbols and objects with value.

Social identities always exist in intergroup contexts; we often exhibit biases in favor of our own groups and to the detriment of others. In chapter 6, we will examine the nature of biases—both implicit and explicit—and discuss how they are often grounded in long histories of oppression and institutional structures. Understanding how social identities work can offer solutions for reducing bias, but tackling systemic discrimination requires a broader scale of action.

Subsequent chapters will then examine how identities underlie collective action. In chapter 7, we discuss how social identities arise in response to adversity and provide a foundation for solidarity in pursuit of social change. In chapter 8, we will explore how insiders change their groups from within, how identity dynamics influence who dissents, and how groups can capitalize on a diversity of perspectives. Chapter 9 will explain the critical role that leaders play in all of these domains. We will examine how effective leaders seek to meet group members' identity needs, helping them figure out who they are and where they are going. The tools of identity leadership can be used for good or for evil.

Finally, in chapter 10, we speculate on what might lie in store for group life. We will focus on the challenges that humanity confronts regarding rising inequality, climate change, and threats to democracy. Effectively grappling with these issues hinges on understanding the role of identity.

Starting in chapter 2, we will delve into how identities alter perceptions, affecting how we filter and make sense of information in the world around us. Identities provide us with lenses through which we experience the world and make meaning, but they can also misdirect our attention and bias our judgments.