Acknowledging the Whiteness of Motivation Research: Seeking Cultural Relevance

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This commentary revisits compelling arguments put forth by the contributors to this special issue on the role of race and ethnicity in academic motivation research. First, an overview of how race and motivation have been positioned in prominent theories of motivation is provided and juxtaposed with those offered in culturally responsive pedagogical approaches championed by multicultural educators. Special emphasis is placed on how teachers' and learners' sociohistorical and cultural contexts might influence motivation. Second, the critical role of identity and membership complexity is explored. Third, suggestions for more culturally attentive research methods are offered. The final section includes research and practice recommendations for supporting the academic motivation of diverse learners. Challenges to theoretical and methodological assumptions about race, ethnicity, and culture are offered throughout, including a call to address the role that racism, power, and privilege have played in perpetuating inequality in motivation research conducted in the United States.

No one can be in the world, with the world, and with others and maintain a posture of neutrality. I cannot be in the world decontextualized, simply observing life. — Paulo Freire (1998, p. 73)

"Line up at the back of the room by skin color," came my professor's directive. It was the first day of a graduate school seminar. My classmates looked around at each other nervously, wondering if she was serious. "Go ahead," the professor repeated. "Stand up." I was feeling uncomfortable. I enjoyed being an observer. But moments later, I was baring my arms alongside fellow doctoral students as we positioned ourselves against the back wall of the room on the basis of our ... melanin. "Okay, good. Notice how you're feeling and where you are in the line," the professor continued. (I was standing somewhere near the fairer half of middle.) "Let's talk about what this means." Here, in one of the rare moments in my life, I was forced to confront my Whiteness. Thus began weeks of in-depth discussions about the social construct of race and the unearned advantages and disadvantages it has conferred to people in nearly all spheres of life. The activity shook me out of a slumber— one from which I am still awakening. What does Whiteness mean to me personally and to the systems I am a part of?

In the United States and around the globe, the costs of White supremacy are increasingly evident. Among children and adolescents, these costs are often first felt in the places where they spend most of their lives—school. Disparities in educational achievement and opportunity between children of different racial and ethnic groups have long been a feature of U.S. public schools (APA Task Force, 2012). Compared to their White and Asian American counterparts, African American, Native American, and Latinx students score lower academically, are more likely to face disciplinary sanctions, are assigned to lower academic tracks, and drop out of school at higher rates. Differential educational practices based on implicit and explicit stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination perpetuate disparities. These inequities come at high psychological, social, cultural, and economic cost, not only to people of color but to all people (Brown, 2017).

In this commentary, I argue that the contributions in this special issue signify the ways in which Whiteness has shaped research on *academic motivation*. I support this argument by framing my remarks around three emergent themes in this special issue. First, I address how race and ethnicity have featured in prevailing theories of motivation and emphasize the importance of contextualizing educational psychology research. Second, I consider the foundational role of identity and membership in academic motivation. Third, I describe how researchers might sharpen their methodological approach (i.e., the *who, where, when*, and *how*) in ways that reflect a more inclusive

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understanding of motivational processes. I then discuss the implications of these three themes for culturally responsive education and research.

I fully recognize the elusive boundaries and vast scope that the term "Whiteness" implies (see Andersen, 2003, for a critique). I nevertheless have elected to use the term to refer to the tendency of motivation researchers to prioritize perspectives, participants, measures, and ways of knowing that assume White as "normal" or default. I suggest that acknowledging the Whiteness of our research is an important step toward developing a more complete and just understanding of human motivation.

THEORETICAL FRAMING

Searching for Universals in a Sea of Whiteness

The contributors to this special issue have all noted that the bulk of pages published on human motivation and learning has been written by White men (and more recently women) who have based their theories of motivation on evidence largely gathered from other White people of similar social strata. Most motivation theories dominating educational psychology journals today have been crafted and refined under the assumption that human motivational processes are either absolute (culturally invariant) or universal (granting that the degree to which certain motives are expressed might differ according to environmental conditions). Implicit in these approaches has been an assumption that studying White people is an acceptable starting point for the development of theories of motivation for use with "other" populations.

This was evident at the 2017 American Educational Research Association (AERA) meeting where a panel of distinguished motivation theorists (all White; five men, one woman) spoke to a packed audience about their theories' contributions and prospects. After their overviews, Sandra Graham (2017), the discussant and a woman of color, offered the following observation:

> In the very excellent summaries that all of these presenters gave, never once was the word "race/ethnicity" mentioned …. I'm not going to ask you whether you've been concerned with diversity in your studies elaborating the theory, but I do want to ask you how important you think this issue is. Looking at your theory as a whole and the ethnic representation of samples, do you think that most of the subjects were White and middle class? And if the answer is "yes," "maybe," or "I'm not sure," how can you assure the young scholars and the senior scholars in this audience … that your theory has generality and relevance?

Her question was met with resounding applause. The scholars' responses largely reiterated their aim to discover universal principles. Identifying universals, Bernie Weiner (2017) explained, helps "still the waters to see a little deeper and decrease the complexity." He added emphatically, "I'm a main effect person …. I don't care who my sample is, really, because I'm looking for similarities." Weiner's views leaned toward the "top-down, theory driven, etic-oriented approach" described by Zusho and Clayton (2011) as "absolutist" (p. 248). From this perspective, motivational processes are viewed as culture free. The theorists flanking Weiner were more universalistic in their claims. Dale Schunk (2017) acknowledged that a social cognitive theoretical perspective described general principles but its application in educational settings depends on numerous sociocultural factors, such as ethnic/racial identity and immigration status. Ed Deci (2017) described cross-cultural studies that demonstrated the universality of fundamental needs.

Although the authors of this special issue suggest that a universal theory of motivation that is culturally grounded might one day be attainable, they point to the dearth of research evidence reflecting the experiences and perspectives of members of historically marginalized groups. They applaud the use of situative perspectives, noticeably absent from the AERA panel, in which motivation is viewed as "arising through [individuals'] participation in social, cultural, and historical contexts or systems" (Turner & Nolen, 2015, p. 168). Situative approaches recognize that the particular beliefs, values, and motives students develop are necessarily "fraught with ambiguity [and] sensitive to the occasion" (Bruner, 1996, p. 6). They acknowledge that the prominence and weight given to any particular motive must be understood in relation to systems of power, position, and privilege (Nolen, Horn, & Ward, 2015).

The Whiteness of prominent theories of motivation has, by default, framed motivational phenomena in terms of the dominant group (i.e., White middle-class people composing the global minority). No contributors make this point as directly as Gray, Hope, and Matthews (this issue), who note that publications in mainstream educational psychology reflect White norms and rarely incorporate race-based theoretical or methodological approaches (and see DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2014, 2017). Several adverse side effects of these theoretical and methodological oversights are described in all four articles. First, scholars fail to consider the role that being "othered" plays in the functioning of oppressed and marginalized groups. Second, motivation is divorced from the sociohistorical contexts in which learners and teachers operate. Third, motivation theory and research are assumed to be neutral and objective.

Framing the Problem: From Deficits and "Othering" to Needs as Universal

Urdan and Bruchmann (this issue) provide an abbreviated historical account of how researchers have framed a

cultural understanding of motivation. They note that some scholars have taken a deficit approach, assuming that, whether by nurture or nature, certain cultural groups have different motives and may even lack an achievement motive altogether. Some have explained ethnic minority students' motivation in terms of a defense against environmental threats both within and outside of their ethnic group. Even a framework like Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) oppositional stance defines the psychological experiences and motives of the "underclass" in terms of a response to the dominant group. Such an approach also reflects a deficit, explaining the motivation of oppressed individuals as a defense against those in power whose motives are assumed to be purer. Frames like these discount the fact that a healthy response sometimes involves defiance and that "sickness might consist of not having symptoms when you should" (Maslow, 1968, p. 7). From one perspective, motives and behaviors are considered maladaptive; from another, they can be viewed as a sign of health (e.g., the rejection of an oppressive system).

Needs-based theoretical frames have suggested that humans are motivated not only to overcome deficiencies but also to become fully actualized. Needs are hierarchically structured such that lower order needs (e.g., safety, belonging) must typically be fulfilled before higher order (i.e., growth, self-actualization) needs are sought (Maslow, 1968). The self-determination framework posits that the fulfillment of autonomy, relatedness, and competence needs is central to autonomous motivation, which is based on a universal set of identifiable "social and cultural nutrients" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 4). Dweck (2017) advanced a similar universal theory in which motivation is seen as a product of basic and composite needs, which are subsumed by an overarching need for self-coherence and integration. Needs are the constituents of goal-driven behavior, shepherded by beliefs, emotions, and tendencies that "can take very different forms in different cultures" (p. 694).

I have provided only a snapshot of the theoretical frames used to guide motivation research, focusing on those relevant to the articles in this special issue. This brings me to two critical observations. First, *how a motivational problem is framed will influence what researchers observe*. Carol Gilligan (1993), a pioneering psychologist who brought a feminine perspective to human development research, wrote that "theory can blind observation" (p. 25). In a field historically dominated by White male American scholars, it is unlikely that the theoretical mappings of human motivation fully reflect the experiences of all people.

Second, *once they have a paradigmatic framework, researchers are reluctant to modify it*. To do so would come at great cognitive and professional expense. As Kuhn (1970) suggested, "to desert the paradigm is to cease practicing the science it defines" (p. 34). Researchers are predisposed to look to the familiar for an explanation of the new (Dewey, 1933). They rarely abandon the frameworks in which they were trained. Critically investigating our own frames of reference is among our most challenging professional tasks. Kumar, Zusho, and Bondie (this issue) call on the field to consider its own shortsightedness by exploring other paradigms (e.g., critical race theory, culturally relevant pedagogy) that have done a better job of including the perspectives of marginalized groups.

Considering Contexts at Multiple Levels

The articles in this special issue note that, in theory and in practice, motivation researchers have not sufficiently considered the political, social, and cultural landscapes in which their studies have been conducted. Indeed, many have attempted to position themselves as impartial observers of universal principles, assuming these to be best understood in isolation from life's noisiness. This does not hold up to Freire's assertion that no human is impartial or decontextualized. Researchers must more honestly account for what a long line of educational psychologists have established: Students' cognition, emotions, motives, and social relationships have taken root in particular sociohistorical contexts.

Graham's (this issue) corpus of rigorous research demonstrates how context can be examined in a way that generates new theoretical insights and questions. Her work considers how the local landscape—in particular, the school's ethnic makeup—might alter students' perceptions of themselves and others by affecting cross-ethnic friendships, complex identity development, and perceived vulnerability. One key finding is that students' cross-ethnic friendships mirror lines of the U.S. racial power hierarchy such that students with low power are less likely to be befriended than are students of high power (i.e., White). Graham's research provides evidence that shifts in school demographics can also be distressing to learners, particularly when their ethnic group's representation declines. School context matters.

Nevertheless, much remains to be known about how school diversity and ethnic composition are connected to students' social relationships and to academic motivation and learning. The nature and strength of these relationships depend on how ethnic composition and diversity are operationalized (see Brown, 2017; Rjosk, Richter, Lüdtke, & Eccles, 2017). Is there a tipping point at which representation of one's group is motivationally advantageous? Moreover, is it motivationally consequential when a school's ethnic composition does not match the ethnic composition of the particular classrooms within it? Graham and her colleagues have begun to investigate such effects. When students attend "ethnically diverse" schools in which the highest performing classes are full of students with the lightest skin tones, a covert message of discrimination is readily apparent. Such patterns reinforce some of the most pervasive negative racial stereotypes—that students of

color are less academically capable. When the ethnic composition of their classes does not match that of their school, all students rate the environment as more oppressive (Juvonen, Kogachi, & Graham, 2017).

Graham's (this issue) observation that, by 2040, White students will be in the ethnic minority in U.S. public schools is statistically correct but potentially misleading. In different regions of the United States, students' opportunities for contact with cultural outgroup members vary widely. One of my undergraduate students who attended public schools in the Appalachian region of eastern Kentucky recently remarked that she had never been in class with a non-White student until she came to college. The demography of hometowns like hers is not rapidly changing. On the other hand, half of Kentucky's African American students live in Louisville's urban hub, where they account for more than 80% of students enrolled at some schools (Kentucky Department of Education, 2017). How will students in these distinct settings develop racialized identities, intergroup attitudes, and academic self-beliefs? Geographic context matters too.

Gray et al. (this issue) highlight the role of the U.S. sociohistorical context in which Black learners have been consistently denied membership and full participatory rights. They refer to Carter G. Woodson's (1933/1990) observation that schools in the United States "fail to cultivate the agency, strength, and skills of Black Americans, which may therefore be left underdeveloped" (p. 7). Schooling in the United States is still "structurally White" in that it promotes and sustains the cultural legacies, values, and behaviors of the White owning class. In this regard, many schools and those leading them often do fail to nourish students of color. This threatens not only students' sense of belonging but their very sense of who they are. But Woodson's claim also seems to carry a problematic assumption that human agency, strength, and intellect are at the mercy of the surrounding context to cultivate. Stories of human triumph in adverse circumstances tell of other possibilities. As Holocaust survivor Victor Frankl (1959) wrote, "Everything can be taken from a [hu]man but one thing: the last of the human freedom—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way" (p. 66). I am not promoting a "bootstraps" approach or suggesting that oppressed individuals are uniquely responsible for overcoming unjust circumstances. I simply note that context, although important, is not destiny. A scientific study of motivation must account for both the conditioned and agentic nature of human experience.

A situative approach to the study of motivation acknowledges that contextual features of the environment mean different things to different people (Nolen et al., 2015). As young people come to understand themselves as part of a larger social structure brought about by sociohistorical position and status, their perception of *choice* likely makes a motivational difference, as the contributing authors of this special issue suggest. Consider the following contexts in which choice may or may not be available: one's ethnic minority status (e.g., involuntary and voluntary; visible or not), one's source of income (e.g., parents' employment status, family wealth), one's home (e.g., location, amenities, access to resources, safety), one's schools (e.g., economic/social capital to relocate for top schools), one's classes (e.g., advocating to be placed in an experienced teacher's class, in a gifted program, or withheld from lower tracks), one's learning (e.g., power and privilege to have top teachers, hire private tutors), and even one's very identity (e.g., assigned by others or self). Researchers often compare groups of students using some or all of these categories but without a consideration of the underlying *perceptions* students have of their autonomous choice in such matters (*Have I/we been placed here or do I/we fully endorse being here?*).

Assessing perceptions of choice and status might be easier than assessing perceptions of discrimination, particularly among younger children (Brown, 2017). What might be the cumulative effect of not feeling autonomous or agentic in one or more of these areas? I raise this question because I endorse a view of human functioning that positions humans not as passive recipients of their environmental contexts but as agents who are capable of selecting and creating environments for themselves (Bandura, 1986). Even within the same imposed environment, two students may select quite different social contexts for themselves. This agentic capacity notwithstanding, young people often come to view themselves as powerless in a larger social structure that has robbed them and their families of position, status, and more (Kumar et al., this issue).

By considering not only the contextual features of learners' environments but also learners' perceptions of them, researchers will be better positioned to advocate for practices and policies that recognize the situated nature of motivation and the sociohistorical barriers facing youth who have been (and who still are) marginalized. One of the hallmarks of a social cognitive theory of learning and motivation is that our lives are both "partly fated and partly free" (James, 1899/2001, p. 95). What learners attend to, how they view the contexts in which they live, and whether they see themselves as agents is therefore central to how they develop and function.

Identity and Membership

Educational psychologists have accepted the centrality of self and identity in the study of human motivation (see Pajares & Schunk, 2006). Most studies on motivation feature some measure of self-perception as a precursor to human action, whether involving one's identity (Who am I?), one's perceived efficacy (Am I capable?), or one's personal regard (Am I worthy?). The collective work of this

special issue points to the relatively less frequent consideration of culture in self-systems as they relate to motivation.

From life's beginning, humans are members of social groups. Being a member of a group is an important part of determining one's place in the social world, developing a sense of esteem in one's self and in one's group, and differentiating one's self from outgroup members (Bigler, Hayes, & Patterson, 2017). How people come to see themselves partly depends on the meaning they make of their social memberships and how these memberships are viewed by others in their cultural environment (Kitayama & Uskul, 2011). Cultural and social identities can be complex. Even individuals who share phenotypic characteristics are *poly*cultural by virtue of their many cultural memberships, such as their ancestry, socioeconomic class, linguistic heritage, and family composition (Morris, Chiu, & Liu, 2015). Likewise, the manner in which one's social identity activates certain motivational sequences is contextually situated and therefore subject to change (Hand & Gresalfi, 2015). A young male high school student living in rural Pennsylvania participates in glee club, plays football, is Latino, and narrowly avoids academic probation. How might researchers begin to operationalize the young man's identity complexity and its effect on his motivation? As Graham (this issue) aptly observes, much depends on which social identity is most salient to the student at a given moment, something not well captured by universalistic approaches to understanding human motivation (or identity).

Psychologists have investigated the complexity of identity from many angles: developmental processes (e.g., crisis/resolution), status (e.g., achieved, foreclosed), domain (e.g., sexual, academic, athletic, ethnic), and evaluative components (e.g., centrality, salience, private/public regard). For example, in a review of research on Black racial identity, DeCuir-Gunby (2009) described the various ways in which the subjective experiences of Black students have been measured and how they differentially relate to academic outcomes and well-being. Some measures have been designed to capture all learners' ethnic identity, regardless of their ethnic heritage (e.g., Phinney, 1992). Deciding how to assess students' subjective identity in studies of academic motivation is not a straightforward matter and must depend on the particular research aims. Urdan and Bruchmann (this issue) suggest that researchers be mindful of the dynamic properties of identity, such as salience and valence. Gray et al. (this issue) similarly suggest that researchers consider one's sense of belonging *within* one's own cultural heritage group(s), which may be similar to a sense of private regard (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997). Together, the articles in this issue recommend that academic motivation researchers include subjective measures of racial, ethnic, and cultural identity, which have increased in number and breadth in the past two decades (e.g., Cokley, 2007;

Hughes, Del Toro, & Way, 2017; Oyserman, 2008; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Verkuyten, 2016).

Only one article in this special issue (Urdan & Bruchmann, this issue) discusses the role of intersecting identities as important associates of achievement motivation, despite the fact that all decry the tendency by motivation researchers to treat race and ethnicity as monolithic. To conduct research that considers the complexity of identity content will require contextualized approaches that "defy tidy developmental stories" (Galliher, McLean, & Syed, 2017, p. 2012). Such approaches address *intersectionality*—the ways in which an individual's multiple social identities jointly affect experience and psychological functioning (Crenshaw, 1991). Cole (2009) offered several recommendations for how researchers might consider intersectionality as it pertains to psychological processes such as motivation. For example, researchers should acknowledge that variation exists between individuals who identify with a particular group (e.g., there is no such thing as "the Latino experience"). One is not only female, one might also be Asian American, socioeconomically disadvantaged, a first-generation immigrant, and so on. Researchers must also understand the unearned advantages and disadvantages associated with one's membership in a particular group given the group's social and historical location. This involves seeking to understand the affordances of a learner's intersecting identities, not only as reflected in the social hierarchies of race and ethnicity but also in other social categories (e.g., immigration status, ableness, sexuality). Learners whose identities differ in certain respects might find points of commonality in other respects.

How is identity complexity ultimately related to motivation and learning? Research is mixed. On the one hand, identity complexity can serve as a safeguard from social/environmental threats such as discrimination and bias. An individual with a complex social identity may be better positioned to flexibly activate an appropriate response or to summon necessary resources in a given situation. But this depends on contextual factors. Graham's (this issue) research takes a person-in-context approach, making evident the ways in which one's ethnic identity interacts within particular racially diverse contexts to activate motivational processes. For example, attributional patterns following peer victimization differ according to students' ethnic representation at school. Less able to attribute their suffering to external causes, such as lack of power or status, students in the ethnic majority internalize the blame by overidentifying with it, whereas ethnic minority students who are victimized (particularly when also in the numeric minority at school) have many possible external explanations for their unfortunate situation.

These findings notwithstanding, plenty of evidence has pointed to the stress of having to navigate multiple identities, especially when one or more have been viewed as

"less than" or "other" (Gray et al., this issue), or when one's identities are in conflict with one another (Kumar et al., this issue). Compartmentalization of certain identities might allow young people to avoid cognitive or social conflict, but often this comes at a high psychological cost (Boykin, 1986; Galliher et al., 2017; McKown & Strambler, 2009). Du Bois (1903/1994) forewarned that the history of African Americans would be described in terms of such a tension in the Self: "this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (p. 2). Maslow (1968) similarly remarked that the average human regularly fights a "civil war within ... between the forces of the inner depths and the forces of defense and control" needed to manage external pressures (p. 156). Being a member of a negatively stereotyped group likely intensifies the battle. One might ask, then, what are the "inner depths" that bring about the "truer self"? How might they be assessed? What are their motivational implications?

The development of an integrated sense of self and of one's place in society is central to psychological well-being (Dweck, 2017). Basic threats to one's group memberships include feeling discriminated against, perceiving bias from others, sensing the ignorance of others to one's lived experiences, receiving overt and covert messages of "otherness," and being treated unfairly. These factors often do occur explicitly. But the perception that they *might* exist despite others' overt action is equally strong from a psychological perspective. Surrounded by threats, both real and perceived, a person might naturally employ self-protective strategies (e.g., withdrawal/ avoidance, self-aggrandizement) or might succumb in less desirable ways (e.g., depression, anxiety). The consequences of chronic uncertainty about whether one is fully accepted by one's social environment or not can have a lifetime of repercussions—academic, social, emotional, physical, and financial (Bigler et al., 2017; Brown, 2017). And, as the articles in this issue boldly note, institutional racism and White supremacy have made it much more difficult for students of color to feel like they belong in U.S. schools.

One potential solution is to help learners activate an "individuated identity" whereby they describe their affinities in their own terms (Urdan & Bruchmann, this issue). Core values interventions, in which student affirm their personal values through a brief writing exercise, have been shown to reduce racial achievement disparities (G. L. Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006). Self-affirmations affect motivation by triggering cognitive processes that mitigate environmental threats and promote a sense of empowerment (G. L. Cohen, Garcia, & Goyer, 2017). Exploring the intricacies of how individuals view themselves (e.g., integrational vs. disintegrational identity) and how structures in schools and in the broader environment promote (and thwart) positive self-development is a vital line of ongoing inquiry in motivation research.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Nearly three decades ago, Bruner (1990) denounced a tendency by psychologists to exalt "neat little studies" over approaches that would answer more complex questions about the nature of the mind and how it is shaped by culture. Too many psychologists, he argued, were engaged in "methodolatry" while ignoring more interesting psychological questions (p. xi). Not much has changed. The cleanly executed, sophisticated models that populate the pages of mainstream educational psychology journals will not result in generalizable principles about motivation "because contexts, attitudes, and meanings contribute systematic variance that must be included to reveal lawful ecological contrasts" (Ceci, Kahan, & Braman, 2010, p. 28). The methods that researchers have selected to examine motivation therefore contribute to incomplete theoretical knowledge that does not reflect the breadth of human experience (Urdan & Bruchmann, this issue). In this section, I consider how suggestions from the articles in this special issue inform the ways in which motivation research has been and can be conducted. Following a typical methodology, I consider the implications of this body of work on the *who, where, when*, and *how* of our research.

The Who

Graham's (1992) historical analysis revealed that White and middle-class subjects dominated the pages of psychology journals in the 1970s and 1980s. Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) described a continuing trend, noting that most research subjects in psychological science were WEIRD (i.e., Western [and White], educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) despite the fact that most humans do not fit this description. The educational psychologists whose words are published in this and similar journals are also predominantly WEIRD, so it seems understandable that they would seek the convenience of recruiting like-minded participants and the familiarity of seeing research like theirs make it through the publication gate.

In light of Freire's (1998) reminder that no one can observe the world and remain neutral, motivation research must continue to expand its *who*, in terms of not only its participants but also its investigators. When Graham (2017) launched her pointed question to the AERA panel about how particular motivation theories had addressed race, ethnicity, and culture, Urdan (2017) replied, "I would probably ask different questions if I didn't bring the frame that I bring as a White man." The field of educational

psychology, he added, should "diversify the people who are asking the questions and interpreting the research." Indeed.

What are the consequences of this limited *who* both in terms of the observers and the observed? I offer are a few.

1. Motivation theories and constructs are normed on Eurocentric samples and contexts.
2. Researchers therefore contribute to the marginalization of others who do not follow predicted, "default" patterns.
3. The implications for practice that researchers offer do not generalize to most individuals and sociocultural locations.
4. Researchers' own biases and privileges guide what they see and, in turn, the story they tell.

Welcoming diverse perspectives—indeed, *seeking and privileging* them—is therefore paramount to inclusivity in motivation research and theory.

The Where

As all contributions to this issue have emphasized, a culturalized view of motivation requires close attention to contextual factors that cue and activate different cognitive and motivational sequences. The four articles in this special issue take a U.S.-specific sociohistorical perspective, but motivation research has fortunately become increasingly global and cross-national as vibrant hubs of research have developed on several continents, casting new light on motivational processes in non-U.S. cultural contexts (see McInerney & Liem, 2018). Researchers should be sure to describe the broader contexts in which their research takes place. Ecological, semantic, geographic, and other contexts influence how motivational processes are selected and engaged (Ceci et al., 2010).

In their day-to-day lives, many learners must navigate diverse circumstances that present competing goals, values, and demands. As Kumar et al. (this issue) and others note, dissonance between the cultural values of home and school has been associated with lower academic motivation (e.g., Tyler, Burris, & Coleman, 2016). How is achievement motivation affected by discordant messages across other contexts such as those encountered online, in extracurricular activities, and in the community? Are dissonant *where*s felt more acutely by learners from particular racial or cultural identities? Withstanding environmental dissonance is not always easy or advantageous, but for some it might be accompanied by opportunities for growth. As Kumar et al. advise, researchers should continue to target the causes and effects of dissonance on motivation in complex learning contexts and to examine the ways in which culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies might alleviate some of this dissonance.

The When

An ecologically valid approach to understanding motivation considers the historical, political, and sociocultural contexts that shape individuals' beliefs, positionality, and interpretations in the world. Motivation is situated and dynamic; researchers must therefore recognize the *when* of their research (Nolen et al., 2015). This opposes any goal of reaching timeless generalizations about what motivates people. As Cronbach (1975) observed, "generalizations decay" (p. 122). How can the field and its methodological approaches be more sensitive to changes over time? For example, with respect to stages of human development, most motivational processes have been studied in mid- to late adolescence. Considerably less work has examined the motivational impacts of culture, race, and ethnicity during childhood, when identity development becomes more complex and awareness of discrimination and inequity first emerges (Brown, 2017). A sociopolitical consideration of time might also be useful. In the United States, for instance, investigators might ask how students from different ethnic groups have perceived their sense of belonging since the presidential election of Donald Trump or in light of certain immigration policy decisions. The emergence of more effective and differentiated real-time measures of motivation (e.g., biometric data, computer tracing) will also enable new ways of investigating the relative stability of motivation constructs in individualized ways (Urdan & Bruchmann, this issue).

The How

Perhaps the most important point raised by Urdan and Bruchmann (this issue) is that researchers' own theories guide how they have examined the relationships between culture, race, ethnicity, and student motivation. Their methods—the *how* of research—in turn reinforce researchers' assumptions about the motivation of diverse groups. Sophisticated statistical models and large samples are assumed to enable scholars to reach generalizations that become guiding theoretical principles. However, the "conceptual economy" afforded by oft-used quantitative designs that consider a handful of White-normed constructs is that "the flavor of the particular situation, individual, event, or object is lost" (Eisner, 1998, p. 38). A more nuanced understanding of motivation emerges from first-person accounts of motivation, beliefs, or goals obtained by subjective reports. Still, I wonder how much room is available for qualitative inquiry in motivation research. A glance at our journals shows that few pages are reserved for small total sample size, inductive models. Such studies are often deemed nonscientific, less rigorous, and lacking in external validity. I agree with Urdan and Bruchmann's central message: Diverse methodological approaches are needed, any

one of which must be viewed as offering a partial explanation.

Regardless of their methodological approach, researchers must be thoughtful when selecting the tools they use to carry out their work. Motivation constructs have complicated measurement histories. Gray et al. (this issue) note that learners' sense of belonging has been assessed in at least 18 ways, leading researchers to draw different conclusions about how belonging and its various features (e.g., affect, fairness, safety, perceived importance) are related to motivation. Like motives, identities are complex and multidimensional. As researchers seek to include measures that more sensitively assess race-, culture-, and ethnicity-based constructs (e.g., identity, socialization, opportunity), they will need to consider how to do so effectively in diverse learning environments. Measures tailored to the particular experiences of one cultural group (e.g., Black identity) are not likely appropriate for other groups. Items that refer generally to "your culture" might be problematic given the breadth of students' diverse, and intersecting, cultural memberships (A. B. Cohen, 2009).

One danger of using students' group membership in motivation research is that it treats each group (e.g., nationality, ethnicity, race) as a static entity—an error-free indicator of a set of values, beliefs, institutions, and behaviors that can "distinguish one group from another" (Banks, 1997, p. 124). Kumar et al. (this issue) suggest that the empirical landscape of academic motivation research would be enhanced by studies that promote culture to a prominent role and motives to a secondary one. Such an approach acknowledges that a learner's culture is not just "out there" in the distal sense; it is also "in here" in the personal sense, both by explicit adoption of sociocultural norms and by internalization of beliefs, norms, and behaviors that have been tacitly transmitted. Graham's (this issue) work provides an excellent example of methods that assess this distinction. Rather than assuming that overt group membership or participation in certain activities means that a student identifies with them, Graham and her colleagues asked adolescents to describe the group memberships that are important to them as well as the extent to which participating in these groups is something that they think ethnic ingroup and outgroup members would do. This provides a more personalized starting place from which to investigate other questions.

Just as group membership alone is insufficient for capturing students' subjective perceptions of their relationship to their social context, use of the classroom as a unit of analysis might overlook the meaning students make of their learning environments. Students who get along well with their teachers and perceive them to be fair likely reap a motivation benefit, whereas those who feel marginalized or discriminated against by their teachers or peers likely suffer motivationally. One way that researchers can better assess the effect of teachers and pedagogical practices on student motivation is by considering students' perceptions of their teachers' pedagogical approach (e.g., asset based, deficit based). This could be supplemented by assessing learners' perceptions of their teachers' beliefs and expectations (e.g., "My teacher believes that every student in our class can learn." "Teachers at my school value students of different cultural backgrounds."). Examining the association between what students and teachers believe to be the function of schooling and education (e.g., to overcome deficits, to view one another as resources) might also reveal aspects of the classroom climate that give rise to different motivational consequences.

Researchers might also consider group beliefs as the unit of analysis. Gray et al. (this issue) note the historical importance of collective agency among African-heritage community members, which includes the cultivation of cultural knowledge. As students learn about their own cultural heritage, how does their collective identity or sense of agency change? How does this affect them individually? The 2008 Obama campaign slogan, "Yes We Can," reflected a growing sense of social and political empowerment among African Americans as well as members of other cultural groups. How might participation in sociopolitical movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter) change Black students' collective and individual beliefs related to self, other, and academics (see Hargons et al., 2017)? Researchers might investigate the motivational function of culturalized collective beliefs.

The educational psychology community has lagged behind its social psychology counterparts in using measures that assess implicit thoughts and feelings, their antecedents (e.g., social primes), and their motivating power. The ways in which implicit or explicit forces jointly guide human behavior remain unclear (Urdan & Bruchmann, this issue). For example, Devos, Huynh, and Banaji (2012) suggested that discrepancies between one's implicit and explicit self-image can motivate actions that defend or protect the ego. They showed that individuals with high explicit self-esteem but low implicit self-esteem are more likely to become defensive and to engage self-enhancing strategies. Other research has demonstrated the ways in which one's social environment (real or imagined) can prime certain self-presentational styles, which in turn can influence internal self-beliefs and motivation. "An audience does not even have to be present to shape how people think about and present themselves" (Schlenker, 2012, p. 554). Urdan and Bruchmann suggest that implicit measures of motivation might be more predictive of behavior than explicit measures, but this will require further evidence. Educational psychologists might extend and replicate social psychological research by taking laboratory experiments to the more naturalistic setting of the classroom.

Excellent suggestions for the *how* of culturally-sensitive research that expand on many of the points raised in this special issue are provided by Awad, Patall, Rackley, and Reilly (2016). As they and these contributors have

suggested, measures of motivation must be meaningful and valid for the populations of interest. Researchers must use care when using measures validated with certain groups (most likely American, White, middle-class, native-English speakers) with other groups, and they must not assume that all respondents make similar meaning of items normed on WEIRD samples (Miller, Goyal, & Wice, 2017).

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The articles in this special issue raise many implications for research and practice. I have selected several of them to discuss in this section.

A Critical Approach: Confronting White Supremacy and Colorblindness in Research

Critical race theory challenges the notion that existing theories of academic motivation were developed with all learners in mind. The articles in this issue also highlight the ways in which school-based practices are not culturally neutral. In many U.S. public schools, classroom practices, rules, curricula, and ways of knowing are often laden with the values of the privileged and powerful whose aims, whether conscious or unconscious, are to maintain the current power structure (hooks, 2010). Particularly in moments of perceived or actual scarcity of resources, those holding power reassert their status and privilege in overt and covert ways, through words, gestures, practices, curricula, policies, and, yes, even theories (Kumar et al., this issue; Urdan & Bruchmann, this issue). Schools and the broader society provide routine reminders to certain students of their status as the unwelcome "other." These forms of discrimination can lead students to experience unquantifiable race- and class-based stress (Berliner, 2013). Gray et al. (this issue) rightly assert that educational research that is not properly situated sociohistorically can give way to color-blind recommendations that do not sufficiently address systemic structural inequities.

Unfortunately, many motivation researchers take such a color-blind approach. For example, popular motivation constructs such as "growth mindset" and "grit" have been decried as culturally blind antidotes to race-based achievement gaps that promote victim blaming and perpetuate the myth of meritocracy (e.g., Gorski, 2016). Former Boston high school principal Linda Nathan (2017) dispelled the myth that "grit" is the beacon of hope for students from marginalized identities. Through the compelling stories of her own students, Nathan explained that to view student motivation as the great equalizer is to "ignore the invisible threads of inequity that are far less likely to tighten around the necks of our dominant-culture students" (p. 105). Many motivation scholars reading this will agree. But Nathan's need to explain this is evidence that we researchers have

failed to offer a sufficiently critical message that reflects the complex micro- and macrocontexts in which children live and learn (Kumar et al., this issue).

Gray et al. (this issue) offer several helpful recommendations for researchers interested in questioning "the acultural assumptions" of our guiding theoretical frameworks. For instance, scholars can spend time in the settings that they are investigating. Grounded observations might help researchers more carefully consider how students from historically marginalized groups experience the school day, and how they are perceived by school personnel, fellow students, and themselves. In turn, scholars can provide a more thoughtful description of the context in which their studies take place (Awad et al., 2016). Researchers can also consider, and explicitly acknowledge, their own positionality in their research. Editors might prioritize the publication of studies that consider the cultural, racial, and economic climates in which motivation research has been conducted.

Culturally Responsive and Relevant Educational Practice

The Culturally Responsive and Relevant Educational Practice (CRRE) framework described by Kumar et al. (this issue) posits that meaningful learning occurs when (a) the content to be learned reflects students' cultural diversity, (b) the process of learning aligns with individual and cultural modes of learning, and (c) the school's sociocultural context is in harmony with the home's sociocultural context. From one perspective, CRRE seems to advance a set of pedagogical recommendations that are based on the principles of cognitive science and information-processing theory (Urdan & Bruchmann, this issue). Connecting to one's culture in meaningful ways is a powerful way to enrich cognitive processing, learning, attention, and underlying metacognitive processes (e.g., attention, self-regulation, interest, competence, engagement), which subsequently enhance motivation (Mayer, 2012). This is likely why Ladson-Billings (1995), foreshadowing the sentiments expressed in this special issue, noted that culturally responsive teaching is "just good teaching!" (p. 159).

From another perspective, however, the strong claims made by CRRE scholars are not fully supported by psychological research. For example, some claim that educational practices in the United States fail to provide a meaningful learning experience for students of color. Although this is true in one respect, it bears noting that critical race theory would not exist if students who were forced to sit through years of "imperialist, White supremacist, patriarchal" messaging were incapable of seeing meaning in and beyond it (hooks, 2016). From a psychological perspective, freedom confers the possibility of becoming conscious of how we have been educated, thereby marking "the essential difference between conditioned and determined existence" (Freire, 1998, p. 54). Insights from both cognitive science

and critical education acknowledge humans as meaning makers, capable of detecting discrepancies in their environment. These distinctly human capacities enable learners to exercise agency in their own lives and to challenge the status quo (Bandura, 1986). This fact does not dismiss the important realization brought to light by CRRE scholars that the American educational system, on the whole, validates and reinforces Eurocentric viewpoints as "correct," thereby marginalizing the viewpoints of members of the global majority (i.e., people of color). By juxtaposing CRRE with motivation research, Kumar et al. (this issue) effectively dispel the myth of cultural and racial neutrality and show how schools and curricula perpetuate inequality and undermine motivation.

What, then, can teachers and schools do to redirect (historically Eurocentric and racist) educational policies so that they are inclusive of all learners? Several contributors to this special issue contend that, to be maximally motivating, pedagogical approaches should be culturally reflective, culturally aligned, and harmonious between home and school. They describe a handful of research studies demonstrating how authentic attempts by educators to legitimize those who have been historically "othered" have improved students' achievement, engagement, and motivation. This is certainly a first step. But the preceding recommendations raise many questions. For instance, how and to what extent shall the *content* to be learned reflect each student's cultural heritage? How culturally aligned must the learning *processes* be (and with whose culture)? What indication will teachers have that sufficient *home-school harmony* is reached?

Several contributors describe "culturally valued" instructional approaches (e.g., hip-hop) that teachers have used to connect with their students. But, as Urdan and Bruchmann (this issue) point out, well-intended approaches for enhancing culturally relevance can, when poorly applied, promote racial and ethnic stereotypes or come off as insensitive or offensive. Such approaches might also be dismissive of within-group differences. The ultimate effectiveness of any approach in promoting learning and motivation depends on numerous factors, such as the school context, each learner's demeanor, the with-it-ness and artistry of the teacher, the quality of the student–teacher relationship, and the intersecting identities of all involved (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010). Each of these can be interesting points of inquiry in culturally relevant teaching and its impact on student motivation.

Another way that school environments can be culturally responsive is by embracing difference while creating inclusivity. Such learning environments communicate a sense that "you are at home here and free to express yourself as unique." Gray et al. (this issue) refer to this as creating opportunities for cultural distinctiveness. In this way, belonging is nurtured by schools and teachers who help learners feel connected to and affirmed in their cultural heritage and yet distinct as individuals. Education philosopher Maxine Greene (1993) observed that "the more continuous and authentic personal encounters can be, the less likely it will be for categorizing and distancing to take place" (p. 13). Gray et al. (this issue) and Kumar et al. (this issue) propose several ways in which this can happen, including cultural representation in curricula and cultural diversity among school personnel. They suggest that students feel more empowered when they perceive their teachers as critical, reflective thinkers who are willing to invite alternative viewpoints in their classrooms. These opportunities foster legitimacy, validation, esteem, and compatibility, all of which can increase achievement motivation.

Another way in which schools can legitimize students as citizens is by providing opportunities for authentic engagement within the broader community (Gray et al., this issue). The link between students' participatory civic engagement and academic motivation suggests that authentic engagement can be viewed as an "emancipatory" practice by enhancing students' sense of efficacy, social connectedness, and altruism. Investigating the mechanisms by which students' motivation is changed by civic engagement (and vice versa) provides an interesting path forward.

Clarifying the Role of Cultural Competence

Kumar et al. (this issue) contend that cultivating teachers' and students' cultural competence can enhance academic motivation and competence. They suggest that culturally competent teachers will be familiar with the history, customs, and values of the cultural groups represented in their school and show awareness of how culture informs their own and others' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. The antidote to cultural incompetence, they argue, is critical self-reflection, which involves questioning one's own values, assumptions, and ways of understanding the world. These are laudable pursuits that raise further questions. First, how do learners, educators, researchers, and policymakers engage in honest, critical self-reflection? Can they do so alone? Second, who decides when self-reflection has been sufficiently critical? What are its consequences? For instance, critical self-reflection might engender a level of paralyzing shame or guilt. It can also provoke fear and anger that deepen racial divides. Is it enough, for example, for a White woman to understand her power and privilege as she enters her classroom? This seems to fulfill the requirements of cultural competency that the authors put forth, but it may still be insufficient. As Sue (2017) argued, "The transformation to developing cultural competence and becoming a White ally is more than a cognitive or intellectual exercise. Lived experience and lived reality are crucial elements" (p. 712).

Some researchers have begun to investigate the types of lived experiences that foster cultural awareness and understanding. Teacher education programs can provide

opportunities (e.g., field experiences) for teachers to inter-act with individuals' different from them and to reflect on their own cultural frames of reference. Indeed, researchers have begun to investigate the relationship between teachers' experiences with culturally diverse students, exposure to multicultural education curricula, instructional practices, and motivational approaches (Kumar & Lauermann, 2018).

As the collective voices in this special issue well note, neither culture nor cultural competence is static. As one or both change, new frictions, joys, challenges, and opportunities emerge. One must search again to rediscover self and other in new contexts. This means that cultural competence can neither be "achieved" nor "maintained" as some have claimed. Because culture is inherently social, the adequacy of one's cultural knowledge and practice depends on the particulars of one's social environment.

The Motivational Impact of Being Seen

Learners who are members of historically marginalized groups often describe the experience of being invisible, silenced, and even erased. The teacher–student relationship is a daily occasion for the affirmation (or denial) of one's personhood. The harmful consequences of being overlooked or outcast have been well documented by educational and developmental psychologists (Brown, 2017). What, then, might be the corollaries of being seen? The Zulu greeting *sawubona*, literally meaning, "I/We see you," implies much more than these three words suggest. It offers an acknowledgment from one ancestral viewpoint to another, establishing the observer as witness not only to the other's presence but simultaneously to one's own (Bishop, n.d.). This serves as an invitation and agreement to reciprocal participation in the life of another person. The response, *ngikhona*, acknowledges, "I am here," or more precisely, "Until you saw me, I didn't exist." Being fully seen by another serves as a reflection of one's own inner capacities and as a recognition of one's connection to another, even another whose plight is unknown or different. It recognizes that one's well-being is connected to another's. In this way, to see others fully is the cornerstone of a socially just pedagogy.

This idea offers a ready connection between one of the foundational assumptions of CRRE (e.g., teacher as warm demander) and need-based motivation frameworks (e.g., need for relatedness). Noddings's (2013) notion of critical care describes just this type of interconnection.

> I do not need to establish a deep, lasting, time-consuming personal relationship with every student. What I must do is to be totally and nonselectively present to the student—to each student—as he addresses me. The time interval may be brief but the encounter is total. (p. 180)

Being seen involves a brief but total encounter. Warmth is conveyed by the teacher's willingness to see the student entirely and nonjudgmentally and to attribute to the student the best intent. CRRE has emphasized the role of teacher care in helping all learners succeed (Kumar et al., this issue), but I am not convinced that commonly used measures of care adequately capture this deeper sense of respectful connection. I urge researchers to consider ways to assess students' perceptions of being seen in this fuller sense and then to examine its connection to motivation and well-being.

Coming Full Circle

In his treatise on culturalizing educational psychology, Pajares (2007) described the tension many social scientists experience when describing particulars at the expense of advancing universals, and vice versa. Savvy educational psychologists have learned to pad their theoretical frameworks and interpreted findings with contextual caveats. But as writer Wendell Berry (2000) lamented, even this reconciliation is incomplete:

> However generous the acknowledgment of context, the results of the research still cannot be applied *both* generally and sensitively. Finally it is "brought home" to a specific community of persons and creatures in a specific place. If it is then applied in its abstract or generalized or marketable form, it will obscure the uniqueness of the subject persons or creatures or places, or of their community, and this sort of application is almost invariably destructive. (p. 147)

As we must situate and contextualize our research endeavors, we must also admit that we *ourselves* are socially, historically, and contextually situated. Keeping this in mind as we write for others, we can show proper discernment in the application of theoretical knowledge to human lives and systems (Jung, 1945/1998).

In one of his least cited but most insightful talks, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," William James (1899/2001) observed that "neither the whole of truth nor the whole of good is revealed to any single observer, although each observer gains a partial superiority of insight from the peculiar position in which he stands" (p. 129). All too often, and even within the pages of this special issue, we assume that our findings or our experiences reflect reality, neglecting to acknowledge the limits of our particular vantage point (Oyserman, 2017). We have gathered the data, invested our time, controlled for certain factors, and dutifully responded to reviewers. At each tick of the clock, it is easier to become entrenched in our belief that our grasp on reality is complete. However, we would do better to acknowledge our ignorance and to ask, "How [can we] act well—sensitively, compassionately, without irreparable

damage—on the basis of partial knowledge?" (Berry, 2000, p. 147).

As a field, we could stand to be humbler and more nuanced. For White researchers, this means recognizing the unearned privileges that allow us to remain blind to the experiences of non-White individuals with little personal or professional consequence. Acknowledging the Whiteness of our approaches need not lead to paralysis, however. Even "incremental steps taken in confrontation of Whiteness will help uncover deeper aspects of the problem and suggest further appropriate responses" (powell, 2012, p. 84). Thus is our challenge as educational psychologists.

CODA

During my years in graduate school, I frequently walked by the office of Professor Jackie Irvine, the same professor who encouraged me to confront my Whiteness on the first day of her graduate seminar. On her door was plastered a lone purple sticker bearing the large-font words of Audre Lorde (1984): "*Your silence will not protect you*" (p. 41). Lorde's words and Irvine's instruction serve as reminders that to engage in our work as if blind to race and color is to prolong racial injustice. Instead, the call is to engage in *antiracism* by striving "to change the norms and practices that allow racism to exist" in schools and in our research (Bonilla-Silva, 2018, p. 243). I would like to commend the authors of this special issue for their willingness to address the ways in which racism and White supremacy have affected research on academic motivation, particularly in the United States. Such courage, accompanied by a "sense of moral outrage and urgency on behalf of all children" (Irvine, 1999, p. 252), will be necessary for researchers and practitioners as they, in their unique ways, seek to help all learners thrive.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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