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# Further Conceptualizing Ethnic and Racial Identity Research: The Social Identity Approach and Its Dynamic Model

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This article proposes a further conceptualization of ethnic and racial identity (ERI) as a fundamental topic in developmental research. Adding to important recent efforts to conceptually integrate and synthesize this field, it is argued that ERI research will be enhanced by more fully considering the implications of the social identity approach. These implications include (a) the conceptualization of social identity, (b) the importance of identity motives, (c) systematic ways for theorizing and examining the critical role of situational and societal contexts, and (d) a dynamic model of the relation between ERI and context. These implications have not been fully considered in the developmental literature but offer important possibilities for moving the field forward in new directions.

In the past decades, the number of studies on ethnic and racial identity (ERI) has steadily grown. ERI is increasingly seen as an essential consideration in development, especially for the normative development of ethnic and racial minority youth (Rivas-Drake, Seaton, et al., 2014; Smith & Silva, 2011). Illustrative of this growing interest are calls for the integration of ERI as a fundamental topic of developmental research (Lee Williams, Tolan, Durkee, Francois, & Anderson, 2012) and in counseling psychology (Ponterotto & Mallinckrodt, 2007), and a set of landmarking articles, including an integrated conceptualization, in *Child Development* (2014) of the ERI in the 21st Century Study Group (in short: Study Group).

Given the historical and contemporary focus placed on ethnicity–race within U.S. society, it is understandable that the great majority of theoretical work and empirical findings are related to this particular national context. Yet, continuing migration and growing cultural diversity have made ERI an increasingly important topic of research and policy-related concern in many countries around the world. Furthermore, as an international and interdisciplinary enterprise, child development research should consider different national contexts and the value of different perspectives and theoretical traditions for studying ERI. Similar to García Coll et al. (1996) who argued that mainstream developmental models were not specific enough for the study of racial and ethnic minority populations, it could be argued that the existing ERI models are not sufficient for examining minority youth in different societies. Particularly, the ERI research tends not to fully consider alternative theoretical approaches, such as the social identity approach (Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2010; Spears, 2011).

The aim of this article is to focus on the conceptualization and research of ERI from the social identity approach. My central argument is that ERI research will be enhanced by fully considering this approach. These implications of doing so include (a) the conceptualization of social identity, (b) the importance of identity motives, (c) systematic ways for theorizing and examining the critical role of situational and societal contexts, and (d) a dynamic model of the relation between ERI and context. My guiding assumption is that different theoretical approaches might prove to be necessary to develop a comprehensive understanding of adolescents' ERI in the 21st century, in relation to the society they grow up in.

I will start by briefly considering some conceptual issues and how these shape theory and research. This involves the constructs of ethnicity and race, and the meaning of social identity. Subsequently, I will discuss some key aspects of

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developmental research and of the social identity approach that includes social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorization theory (SCT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Then, I will consider the question of identity dimensions and the broader importance of identity motives. This is followed by a discussion of the situational and societal implications of the social identity approach for studying ERI. Subsequently, the dynamic relations involved in ERI and context will be considered (Figure 1).

Similar to, for example, the multidimensional model of racial identity (Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998), the social identity approach is "adevelopmental." Yet, my aim is to show that this approach has important implications for studying the development of ERI (cf. David, Grace, & Ryan, 2004; Sani & Bennett, 2004), implications that add to the developmental literature and can move the field forward in new directions (see Table 1).

## Conceptualizing ERI

Ethnic–racial identity is a concept that establishes a bridge between individual psychology and the structure and function of social categories and groups in society. It is concerned with thoughts and feelings that are linked to the ethnic–racial categories and groups to which people belong or to which they are assigned. Hence, what is at stake is not that what makes a person unique but on similarities to some (e.g., coethnics) and differences from others (other ethnics).

In the United States context the terms ERI are commonly used; sometimes as different constructs, sometimes interchangeably, and the Study Group has recommended against a distinction between both constructs and proposed the metaconstruct ERI (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). This recommendation is based on North American empirical findings that demonstrate considerable overlap between ERI and how it relates to adjustment. At the same time, it is acknowledged that the social construction of race and ethnicity can be quite different in other national contexts. Thus, although the psychological impact of ethnic and racial discrimination and the processes by which youngsters explore and form an ERI might be quite similar, the identity-related beliefs and meanings can be different. National contexts in which minority groups are indigenous, or have a history of slavery, colonialism, migrant labor, or refuge, provide different sources of knowledge and beliefs for developing an understanding of what it means to belong to an ethnic–racial minority group. Youth's attitudes and beliefs about their ethnic–racial group, its relations to other groups, and its position in society are bound to differ considerably depending on the historical, social, and political context.

Additionally, in other national contexts, other group distinctions might be more important. For instance, in many continental European countries the terms race and racial identity are rather exceptional, although the use of the concept of racism for forms of prejudice and exclusion is common. Rather than racial identity, the focus is more on religious identity, in particular of Muslim minority and immigrant youth, and the ways in which religion and ethnicity intersect. For example, for young British Pakistani (Jacobson, 1998) and Moroccan Dutch (Verkuyten, Thijs, & Stevens, 2012), Islam has become a more meaningful source of social identity than ethnicity. In countries such as Israel, Poland, Bulgaria, Malaysia, and Mauritius there can be such a close connection between ethnicity and religion that a distinction is almost impossible to make (Dimitrova, 2014; Fleischmann, 2011; Ng Tseung Wong & Verkuyten, 2015). Yet, developmental research on ERI has mostly ignored religious identity, which means that there is a lack of theorizing for understanding identity development in countries and contexts where religion is pivotal for minority youth, as well as a lack of attention for the role of religion in relation to ERI in the United

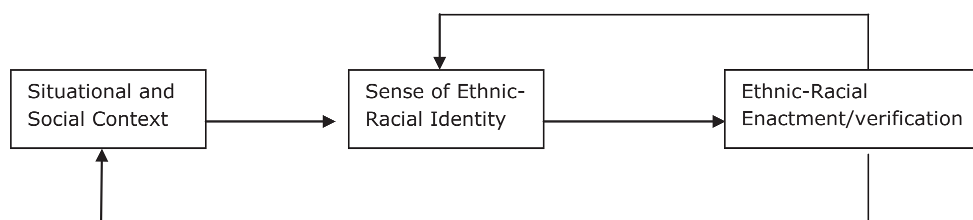


*Figure 1.* A model of the dynamics of ethnic–racial identity, based on Klein et al.'s (2007) study.

Table 1
*Social Identity Perspective, Identity Motives, and Ethnic and Racial Identity Development*

| | Late childhood | Adolescence | Emerging adulthood |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cognitive processes | Self-projection | Self-stereotyping | Self-stereotyping |
| | | Self-projection | Self-projection |
| Identity motives | Esteem | Distinctiveness | Continuity |
| | Belonging | Efficacy | Meaningfulness |
| Sociostructural context | (Im)permeability | Permeability | Permeability |
| | | Legitimacy | Legitimacy |
| | | | Stability |
| Situational salience | Readiness | Readiness | Readiness |
| | | Normative fit | Normative fit |
| | | | Comparative fit |

States context (but see Kiang, Yip, & Fuligni, 2008; Lopez, Huynh, & Fuligni, 2011). In contrast to ethnicity, a religious identity evokes a sense of the sacred and emphasizes doctrinal teachings and ritual practices (Mitchell, 2006). A context in which religious resources are used to define and boost ethnicity offers other opportunities and constraints for identity development than a context in which ethnicity and race intersect.

## Developmental Research

With longitudinal methodology, large samples, and increasingly sophisticated statistical techniques (see Schwartz et al., 2014), developmental researchers examine ERI as an internal structure that gradually develops within the self-concept. The focus is on the ways in which ethnic or racial group membership come to be represented as an integral part of a developing sense of self. The question "who am I as an ER group member" is answered in terms of internalized, individual meanings that develop progressively during adolescence. The focus is on "identification of the self *as* a certain kind of person" (Thoits & Virshup, 1997, p. 106).

In addition to the various beliefs and attitudes that individuals have about their ethnic–racial group membership, developmental research examines the processes by which ERI is explored and formed. For example, following Marcia's (1966) ego identity statuses, Phinney (1989) describes four ethnic identity statuses (diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved) based on the processes of exploration and commitment. Other models emphasize the importance of the encounter with racism and discrimination that triggers racial identity exploration and movement through different stages of identity development, such as the pre-encounter, encounter, and internalization stage (Cross, 1991). These models articulate how within a context of racial discrimination youth gradually develop positive identification and pride in their racial group. Furthermore, socialization within the family, at school, and in peer groups is considered to play an important role. For example, warm and supportive parenting as well as family cohesion have been found to be associated with ethnic commitment and a more mature identity (e.g., Kiang, Witkow, Baldelomar, & Fuligni, 2010). In addition, there also is research on ethnic–racial socialization in minority families and how this can improve children's knowledge and ethnic pride, and their resilience against ethnic–racial discrimination (see Hughes, et al., 2006). These developmental models differ in various respects and have been further adapted and refined (see Cockley, 2007). Yet, they emphasize that through processes of socialization, maturation, and individual experiences and commitments, an internalized set of beliefs and attitudes about one's ethnic–racial group membership is gradually formed and maintained.

Developmental theories are also increasingly interested in understanding how ERI relates to and is combined with other social identities such as family, local, and national identities (e.g., Kiang et al., 2008; Syed, 2010). The underlying assumption is that the different identity domains are all part of a single, less, or more integrated overall sense of identity. Adolescence is seen as a critical period for developing a coherent overall sense of self, whereby the various identities derived from different group memberships differ in subjective importance or centrality but are all part of a single (hierarchically ordered) identity (Erikson, 1968; Syed, 2010).

## The Social Identity Approach

The social identity approach (or perspective) involves various subtheories that share the interactionist metatheory linking psychological processes with societal and social factors (Abrams & Hogg, 2004; Reicher et al., 2010). A basic assumption is that the way in which psychological processes play out is dependent on social context. The objective is to generate a distinctive group-level psychology that goes beyond individual-level dispositions, characteristics, and concerns. The core proposition is that people act not only as individuals but also as group members with shared perceptions and goals. The question "who am I, and where do I belong" is not answered in terms of internalized, individual meanings but rather in terms of characteristics and social experiences that we share with other ethnic or racial group members. The focus is on "identification of the self *with* a group or category as a whole" (Thoits & Virshup, 1997, p. 106), whereby the self extends beyond the individual person to the shared category.

This was first developed in SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) in which a distinction between personal and social identity is made. The former refers to an individual's sense of personal uniqueness and the latter to one's belonging to certain social categories and groups. SIT is concerned with intergroup relations, has a motivational focus, and emphasizes the importance of the broader, more enduring societal context. In particular, the theory argues that people want to develop and maintain a distinctive and positive social identity. The reason is that we have a basic need for seeing ourselves positively (positive self-esteem). Because part of our self-concept is defined in terms of our group memberships, we prefer to see our in groups in a more positive light compared to groups we do not belong to.

SCT (Turner et al., 1987) further developed the cognitive elements of the social identity perspective by arguing that the self can be defined at different levels of abstraction. Sometimes this is in terms of individual uniqueness (personal identity), and at other times in terms of particular group memberships (social identities). At the level of social identities, SCT specifies how social categorization causes people to think, feel, and behave as in-group members. Self-descriptions such as "I am an African American" or "I'm Chinese" should connote the sense of "we" and "us" to properly constitute an ERI. SCT also gives an account of when and why particular social identities become subjectively salient in specific situations and how the content of the social identity varies with context (see below).

From the social identity approach, the question of multiple identities is less about an integrated internal structure or establishing a sense of coherence. Whether the totality of all one's social identities (*plural*) adds up and forms a singular, overarching identity (*singular*) is not the main topic of concern (Brewer, 2001). The focus is more on how in particular contexts specific social identities become relevant, overlap, and relate to each other. Different identities can involve contrasting meanings, competing demands, and different loyalties and allegiances to others. For example, there can be value incompatibilities that make it difficult to be a member of one's ethnic minority group and the national community at the same time (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2012). There can be attempts to define the boundaries of group belonging broadly (e.g., a Mexican American who considers Mexican as well as American people as in-group members) or rather narrowly (e.g., a Mexican American who identifies only with those who have a similar combined identity). Compared to the latter, the former represent higher social identity complexity with more openness to out groups (Knifsend & Juvonen, 2014; Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

## Social Identity Processes

Developmental research on ERI often refers to SIT by citing Tajfel's (1981, p. 251) well-known and generic definition of social identity as "that part of the individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership." Although this definition might suggests otherwise, the main focus in the social identity approach is not on the ways in which ERI is incorporated into the self and represented as an integral part of one's self-concept. Rather, the emphasis is on the reversed process whereby the self is considered similar to the ethnic or racial group. This is best captured by the process of depersonalization that entails "a shift towards the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person" (Turner et al., 1987, p. 50).

The key psychological processes are not exploration and commitment but rather self-stereotyping and assimilation. The self becomes depersonalized, which implies a redefinition toward group-based

characteristics and attributes. Through self-stereotyping, the attributes and behaviors of the individual self are assimilated *to* the representations of the group as a whole rather than the other way around. According to SCT, the "distinguishing feature of social identity is self-referential cognition that identifies 'we' and 'us', rather than 'I' and 'me', as in personal identity" (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994, p. 454). With ERI, how one thinks and feels about oneself depends on the shared representations of the ethnic–racial group and how one's group is doing. Thinking about "us" Mexican Americans or "us" Turkish Dutch has significant effects on one's orientation toward others who do and do not share that identity. It involves expectations, group loyalties, and specific collective norms, values, and beliefs. It also involves a concern with the relative position of Mexican Americans or Turkish Dutch compared to other social groups, whereby one's self-feelings are assimilated to the fate of one's fellow group members. This conceptualization has various implications, which open up new avenues for developmental research.

### *Developmental Implications*

Processes of self-stereotyping and assimilation affect the content of ethnic–racial identity because the self extends beyond the individual person to a more inclusive social unit. This means that these two basic processes have to emerge in development in order for ERI to be subjectively meaningful. With age children gradually develop an understanding of group differences and what characterizes their own ethnic–racial category. This is important because the process of self-stereotyping requires such an understanding, which makes the assimilation of the self to typical in-group attributes and characteristics possible. This understanding depends, in turn, on children's cognitive capabilities and the information provided by the social surrounding. In a Piagetian perspective, an egocentric child assumes that other people see, hear, and feel the same as the child does. From middle childhood on, children become less egocentric and increasingly sensitive to group differences (Aboud, 1988). They gain social-cognitive competencies, develop ethnic–racial perspective-taking abilities (Quintana, 1998), and have more experiences with groups in various situations. As a result they develop increased understanding of how groups work, become more sensitive to group norms (e.g., Abrams & Rutland, 2007), and develop abstract understandings of intergroup differences (Karcher & Fischer, 2004). Research on gender identity has shown that, already in middle childhood, children are able to self-stereotype and to show sensitivity to comparative contexts (David et al., 2004; Sani & Bennett, 2004). Yet, the process of self-stereotyping becomes more likely and important across the adolescent years and into adulthood (Table 1).

This does not mean that egocentric thinking is limited to childhood and does not occur in later periods of life (Elkind, 1967; Rycek, Stuhr, McDermott, Benker, & Swartz, 1998). For example, adolescents are often faced with social environments that are unclear or require a protection of the self, which may lead to egocentrism. Furthermore, research has shown that people identify with groups that lack clarity in their identity content (Van Veelen, Otten, Cadinu, & Hansen, 2016). In these groups there is no clear group information available for defining the self. This means that self-stereotyping is not the only route to ethnic-racial identity. Another cognitive route is the process of self-projection, whereby personal self-attributes are projected onto the group. Children can expect others of their ethnic–racial group to be similar to themselves. With self-projection the self is used as a heuristic to make group judgments, and this process is more likely when the information about one's ethnic–racial group and its members is rather unclear or ambiguous (Van Veelen et al., 2016).

Thus, the mental overlap between self and ethnic–racial group emerges via self-stereotyping, top-down ("I am like my group"), and self-projection, bottom-up ("the group is like me"). Developmentally this raises the question of how these mutual processes develop and influence each other in forming ERI. Adolescents gradually develop the capacity to assimilate their sense of self to their reference group (Cross & Cross, 2008), and the advanced perspective-taking skills that gradually develop (Quintana, 1998) make the process of self-projection increasingly less likely (Table 1). Yet, it also raises the question about the social conditions that stimulate the one or the other process. For example, moving to an unfamiliar surrounding can imply a stronger tendency for self-projection. In such a setting, adolescents will rely more on their personal (stereotypical) views to shape an understanding of what the situational group differences are all about. Similarly, self-stereotyping requires a relatively clear group understanding for youth to assimilate to. However, increasing cultural diversity and rapid cultural changes often imply that groups are diverse and ambiguously defined. In contrast, in, for example, deeply divided societies, such as Israel

and Northern Ireland, or societies with strong ethnic group boundaries, such as Malaysia and Mauritius, children learn from very early on about the relevant group distinctions, making processes of self-stereotyping more likely at a younger age (Bar-Tal & Teichmann, 2005; Ng Tseung Wong & Verkuyten, 2015).

## ERI Dimensions

ERI developmental models make a distinction between different identity components or dimension, such as private and public regard, cognitive centrality, importance, values, and beliefs (see Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Additionally, there are nondevelopmental multidimensional models of ERI that make similar distinctions (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Sellers et al., 1998). These dimensions allow for a detailed understanding of ERI and its different meanings, and for examining how variation along these dimensions is related to psychosocial functioning and behavior (Lee Williams et al., 2012; Sellers et al., 1998). Social experiences and more sophisticated cognitive capabilities allow adolescents to gradually develop a better grasp of identity issues and to increasingly distinguish between different and more ERI dimensions. For example, youth can acknowledge and accept their ethnic or racial group membership as self-defining ("that is me"), without having a feeling of solidarity toward the group and its members ("it does not evoke a sense of interdependence in me"). Furthermore, the relevance and distinctiveness of the components can be examined in relation to the social context and the specific minority identity. For example, in identity-threatening situations and for Muslim minority identity, the connection between the different components tends to be stronger than in more harmonious situations and for ethnic identities (Dimitrova, 2014; Verkuyten, 2014). In the former case, it can be quite difficult for youngsters themselves, and for researchers, to make a meaningful empirical distinction between these components because they are experienced as an integrated whole in which high (e.g., religious) importance equals strong positive emotions, strong feelings of connectedness and shared fate, and involvement in specific (religious) practices.

The dimensions proposed differ somewhat between researchers, and the theoretical reasons for the distinctions are not always fully clear. For example, it often is not clear why certain components or dimensions are considered to be part of ERI rather than a cause or outcome: "Where does collective social identity end and related variables (causes, correlates, and consequences) begin?" (Ashmore, Jussim, Wilder, & Heppen, 2001, p. 239). In various developmental models and empirical investigations, racism and discrimination are considered to trigger ERI exploration and therefore to constitute an important cause for ERI development (e.g., Pahl & Way, 2006; Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Racism and discrimination contain the message that because of your ethnic or racial group membership you have lower status, are not valued, and that society looks down upon you. However, there is also theoretical and empirical research that argues that public regard is a part of ERI rather than a source of information that affects identity development (see Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Furthermore, ethnic behaviors such as language and involvement in cultural practices are sometimes used as criterion variables of ERI but sometimes also as dimensions of identity (see Phinney & Ong, 2007). Thus, ethnic behavior and interest and knowledge about one's ethnic–racial group are seen as part of identity and as outcomes predictable from ERI.

Tajfel's well-known definition of social identity refers to three dimensions, and researchers within the social identity tradition have argued that these three contribute to one's social identity: self-categorization, group self-esteem, and emotional commitment (e.g., Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999). Others, however, argue that identity centrality and feelings of interconnectedness and shared fate are also important dimensions. Furthermore, SIT's concern with disadvantaged minority identities suggests that negative public regard is a component of ERI, but public regard is also treated as a societal condition influencing ERI (e.g., Fleischmann, Phalet, & Klein, 2011; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). An extensive review has identified the major components that are distinguished and used in this research literature (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). Yet, this review is largely an overview of existing work and does not provide a theoretical integration. One way to approach this issue theoretically is to consider identity motives.

## Identity Motives

The different identity components or dimensions that are part of one's sense of social identity are associated with basic motivational principles of identity (Verkuyten, 2014). For example, the sense of belonging that an ERI can give relates to the

fundamental need for affective ties. Similarly, the positive affect that individuals feel toward their ethnic–racial group is related to the basic need to be socially recognized and valued.

In Erikson's theorizing, a subjective feeling of sameness and continuity and of coherence is important aspect of identity development. This is reflected in the emphasis on the development of a clear and coherent sense of group belonging in the ERI developmental literature. Furthermore, this literature tends to focus on the importance of positive attitudes and pride in one's group, and on ethnic or racial self-esteem more generally (Rivas-Drake, Syed, et al., 2014). Yet, the research on ERI development is not explicitly concerned with different identity motives.

SIT was developed for understanding intergroup relations, and in addition to the importance of cognitive coherence, the theory emphasizes the critical roles of the identity motives for self-esteem and distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Subsequent theorizing and research in the social identity tradition has extended the range of motives that can underlie social identity processes, such as belonging (Brewer, 1991) and subjective meaning (Hogg, 2000). However, the literature on these needs is fragmented and different motivations have been proposed by different theorists (see Vignoles, 2011). An attempt to integrate these views into a unified model of identity motives is motivated identity construction theory (Vignoles, 2011). In addition to motives for self-esteem and distinctiveness, it is proposed that people strive to establish and maintain feelings of belonging, efficacy, meaningfulness, and continuity within their social identities. Thus, people would not only be motivated to adopt and construct social identities that allow them to think positively about themselves in relation to others (self-esteem motive) and make them distinguishable from other people (distinctiveness motive), but will also embrace social identities that give them the feeling that they belong to others (belonging motive), make them feel competent and capable of influencing their environment (efficacy motive), give them a sense that their life is meaningful (meaning motive), and provide them with a sense of continuity over time (continuity motive). For ERI theory and empirical research, this conceptualization of identity motives is interesting for several reasons.

### *Developmental Implications*

First, from a developmental perspective there is the interesting and important question about the developmental trajectory of these identity motives (Table 1). In middle and late childhood, the identity motives for self-esteem and belonging are likely to be very important for ethnic–racial minority group children, as indicated by the extensive research on the psychological costs of ethnic peer devaluation, rejection, and exclusion (e.g., Niwa, Way, & Hughes, 2014; Osterman, 2000). Furthermore, the gradual development of ethnic–racial self-labeling, ethnic–racial knowledge and constancy, and perspective-taking ability (Quintana, 1998) probably increases the importance of ethnic–racial group membership for deriving a sense of distinctiveness and efficacy. In late adolescence and emerging adulthood the increasing capacity for formal operational thinking makes it likely that the role of the continuity motive and the meaning motive gradually become more prominent in ERI. All these motives can feed into a self-assured and secure ERI: You know what you are and where you come from, what the right thing to do and to think is, where you belong, what makes you proud, and what makes life meaningful. Yet, the simultaneous satisfaction of the different identity motives might also pose a challenge, especially when there are contradictory demands, such as belonging to a devalued minority group that provides a sense of continuity or maintaining a distinctive but negative minority identity.

The second reason is that the framework of identity motives gives a much broader perspective on why ERI is often so important for ethnic–racial minority youth. What is involved psychologically are not only feelings of self-esteem and distinctiveness but also a sense of belonging and the need for self-continuity, efficacy, and meaningfulness. For example, ethnicity with its ideology of ancestry and the perception of unique cultural traditions symbolizing peoplehood provide an important source for deriving a feeling of self-continuity and for answering the "questions of origins, destiny and, ultimately, the meaning of life" (Cohen in Eriksen, 1993, p. 45; DeVos, 1995). The social identity approach argues that social identities transform self-related terms from the personal self to the group self (Ellemers, 2012). Thus, ethnic identity involves not a sense of personal self-continuity, which is central in Erikson's theory (1968), but rather implies a sense of continuity that people derive from their shared membership in an ethnic group. It is about collective self-continuity that depends on the continuing existence of one's group from the past into the future (Sani, 2008).

Third, the conceptualization of identity motives suggests that there are different forms of identity threat (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). Being an ethnic–racial minority member does not only pose a challenge to the value of one's ERI, but can also imply a feeling of powerlessness, lack, or meaning, and lack of ethnic–racial continuity. Thus, the conceptualization and related measurement (Vignoles, 2011) of identity motives can give a more detailed understanding of different negative experiences of ethnic–racial minority youth in a particular social, historical, and political context. Furthermore, individuals employ a range of identity management strategies when their ability to satisfy particular identity motives is threatened or undermined. Depending on the context, these strategies can take different forms. For example, the self-continuity motive implies that people need a sense of connection between past, present, and future in their social identities (Vignoles, 2011). Therefore, societal developments (e.g., assimilation policies, cultural mixing) that are perceived as endangering the continuing existence of one's ethnic minority group or change it beyond recognition will instigate reactions of in-group defense and out-group rejection (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2013).

## Negative Identity and Sociocultural Context

According to Cross's (1991) "nigrescence" model, it is the encounter with racism that makes it difficult to ignore or deny that devaluation and discrimination influence one's life. Such an experience may incite the process of racial identity search and exploration. Although Phinney's ethnic identity model does not specifically address the role of exposure to racism or discrimination for identity development, there is longitudinal research on this link. This research finds consistent support for the proposition that experiences with discrimination and exclusion trigger adolescent's ethnic identity development: Discrimination predicts subsequent increases in racial and ethnic identity (see Quintana, 2007; but see Seaton, Yip, Morgan-Lopez, & Sellers, 2012). These experiences can lead to a process of forging a reactive ethnicity (Rumbaut, 2008) that does not only involve stronger ethnic minority group identification but also a sense of common fate and an oppositional culture in which mainstream norms and values are rejected (Ogbu, 1993). Yet, it can also instigate an assimilative response whereby there is lower ERI affirmation, less positive ERI self-feelings, and a distancing of one's ethnic–racial group (e.g., Romero & Roberts, 2003; Seaton, Yip, & Sellers, 2009).

SIT has provided a theoretical framework for conceptualizing the broader, more enduring societal context and how this affects minority members' attempts to develop a positive identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). According to SIT, the particular response to devaluation and discrimination depends on the perception of the three sociostructural variables of permeability, stability, and legitimacy. *Stability* refers to the extent to which group positions in society are considered to be changeable, and *legitimacy* refers to the extent to which the status structure is accepted as just. *Permeability* (or "openness") refers to the extent to which individual group members can leave one group and join another (passing). Perceived stability, legitimacy, and permeability, interactively, determine identity processes of ethnic–racial minority members. Depending on the nature of the social structure, minority members adopt different strategies to achieve a more positive social identity. The most basic way in which this can be done is to follow an individualistic social mobility path and dissociate oneself psychologically from one's devalued ethnic–racial minority group. This presupposes that the group boundaries are relatively permeable or open, indicating that membership in a higher status group can be achieved. Furthermore, this individual strategy is more likely when the status differences are perceived as stable and legitimate. Under these conditions, collective strategies to achieve positive social identity and to change the status quo are more difficult, making individual strategies more likely.

There is empirical evidence for this reasoning (see Bettencourt, Dorr, Charlton, & Hume, 2001), including research using cardiovascular measures (Scheepers, 2013). For example, in a survey study among Turkish Dutch minority youth it was found that when the interethnic relations were believed to be relatively stable and legitimate, perceived permeability was associated with lower Turkish identification and higher Dutch identification (Verkuyten & Reijerse, 2008). Hence, in a perceived stable and legitimate intergroup structure and when the Turkish Dutch adolescents saw opportunities to be accepted in the Dutch majority group, they tended to dissociate themselves more from their Turkish minority community and to associate themselves more with the Dutch. These results support the claim that in a perceived stable and legitimate intergroup structure with permeable group boundaries, ethnic minority group members tend not to use strategies of reactive identity and collective action,

but rather in-group disidentification and individual mobility (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Increased in-group identification and collective action are more likely when the boundaries are believed to be rather impermeable or closed (e.g., because of a "color line") such that ethnic minority members cannot improve their individual position. In addition, for collective action to occur, the intergroup structure has to be assessed as undeserved or illegitimate, and there should be the belief that the structure is not stable but can be changed.

### *Developmental Implications*

The importance of perceived stability, legitimacy, and permeability indicates that ERI processes do not take place in a societal vacuum and can be conceptualized and examined in terms of sociostructural beliefs. From a developmental perspective this raises interesting questions about how children and adolescents develop an understanding of the nature of ethnic group boundaries, and the stability and legitimacy of the social structure (Table 1). Older children tend to have rather fixed understandings of ethnic–racial group differences (Hirschfeld, 1996). The increasing social exposure in the adolescent period combined with the more flexible thinking about group differences (Aboud, 1988) can be expected to lead to a less rigid, more permeable understanding of ethnic group boundaries. Furthermore, although older children have a sense of societal inequalities and their legitimacy (Emler & Dickinson, 2005), they tend to hold views that are consistent with the status quo and do not readily perceive institutional discrimination (Brown & Bigler, 2005). Gradually during adolescence a more sophisticated moral understanding of society develops, including the legitimacy of the societal positions of large-scale social categories and groups. Still, later the belief that the societal system is not given and that the status quo can actually be changed is added to this (Berti, 2005), and this makes collective action more likely. Thus, the social identity approach makes it possible to formulate specific developmental predictions and to connect more systematically the ERI research with the extensive literature on social development and children's understanding of society (Barrett & Buchanan-Barrow, 2005).

## Identity Salience and Situational Context

Developmental research mainly focuses on the gradual acquisition of an inner sense of ethnic–racial self. The concern is with understanding the social-ecological factors and processes involved in the long-term socialization and formation of an ERI, and its implications for adolescents' well-being and adjustment. More recently, research has also started to examine the situational dynamics of ERI by investigating how ERI salience and meaning depends on the immediate situation (Kiang, Harter, & Whitesell, 2007; Sellers et al., 1998; Yip & Douglas, 2013). At any given moment, particular situations make ERI salient and relevant for youth's daily lives. For example, the multidimensional model of racial identity (MMRI; Sellers et al., 1998) is concerned with the salience and meaning of an individual's racial identity at a given point in time.

Following Kurt Lewin's argument that situational behavior is a function of individual dispositions and the immediate environment, ERI salience is considered to depend on the combination of individual differences and situational characteristics (Sellers et al., 1998; Yip & Douglas, 2013). The individual differences are conceptualized in terms of ERI status (e.g., achieved, foreclosed) or trait-like differences in ERI importance or psychological investment. Situational characteristics are understood in terms of, for example, interactions with coethnic peers, engagement in ethnic behaviors, public and private settings, and ethnic–racial school and neighborhood composition (Yip & Douglas, 2013).

The MMRI draws in part on the social identity approach and for SCT the question when a particular social identity becomes psychologically salient is central. Identity salience is considered to depend on what is called perceiver readiness (or accessibility) and situational fit. The former refers to relevant individual aspects that a person brings to the situation such as past experiences, enduring group identifications, expectations, and goals. For example, an adolescent for whom ERI is a central aspect of the self will easily (is ready to) think in ethnic–racial terms in a particular situation at a particular moment. Additionally, this adolescent can feel more positive about being a member of his or her ethnic–racial group when ERI is situational salient (Yip, 2005; Yip & Fuligni, 2002). Furthermore, higher levels of identity salience across situations have been found for adolescents with an achieved ethnic identity compared to adolescents in the moratorium stage (Yip, 2014).

The other aspect of SCT concerns the notion of situational fit, which offers a systematic conceptualization of the perception of the immediate situation. Individuals will define themselves and others in

terms of the social identity that best explains or fits the situational similarities and differences among people. The theory makes a distinction between comparative and normative fit. The former indicates that situational variation in identity salience is a function of the comparative context. Individuals will self-identify in terms of their ethnic background when the similarities with coethnics that are present are greater than the differences with other ethnics (high metacontrast ratio). For example, if a situation contains both Chinese and Vietnamese adolescents, then their respective ethnic identities are likely to be activated. But when the situation also contains African Americans, then it becomes more likely that their Asian identity is salient. According to SCT, identity salience depends on intergroup comparisons and not simply on the presence of ethnic–racial in-group or out-group members.

Normative fit refers to the content or social meanings of social identities and is evaluated in relation to the existing stereotypical and normative expectations. When in a particular situation the attributes or behavior conform or match these expectations, the identity is more likely to be salient. Thus, to categorize oneself in a particular situation as a Chinese American as opposed to a Vietnamese American, one must not only differ (in attitudes, beliefs, behaviors) from Vietnamese more than from Chinese (comparative fit) but must also do so in the right stereotypical direction (fit the normative content). Importantly, this also implies that the meaning of ERI can differ across situations. The MMRI argues that racial salience depends on the immediate situation, and that salience makes more stable personal attitudes about the meaning of being Black relevant (Sellers et al., 1998). SCT, however, proposes that the content that is ascribed to the ERI varies with situational context. Identity content is actively construed in order to capture the distinctive meaning of one's ethnic–racial group in comparison to other ethnic–racial categories that are situationally present. What it means to be an African American will differ in relation to Hispanic Americans or White Americans. In an experimental research among Chinese Dutch young adults, it was found, for example, that they described themselves as more emotionally controlled, more reserved, more obedient, and more modest in comparison to the native Dutch than in comparison to other Chinese (Verkuyten & De Wolf, 2002; see also Barrett & Davis, 2008; Sani & Bennett, 2004).

### *Developmental Implications*

SCT emphasizes the fluidity in individual's understanding of who they are and how they relate to others in the social world. Enduring ER commitments and trait-like ER group identification are not ignored, but the focus is on the self as a dynamic system and the cognitive processes involved in the situational salience of particular identities. This perspective has developmental implications. For example, the principle of metacontrast requires the cognitive ability to consider situational differences within and between groups. This involves relatively complex, abstract understandings of intergroup differences (Karcher & Fischer, 2004). Furthermore, the principle of normative fit indicates that not only the cognitive ability for intergroup comparisons is required but also knowledge about group stereotypes and normative beliefs. Ethnic–racial stereotypes and beliefs are already present at a relatively young age (McKown & Weinstein, 2003) and children are increasingly aware of what is considered appropriate group behavior (Abrams & Rutland, 2007), whereas the perception of within- and between-group differences requires more advanced cognitive capabilities. This suggests that considerations of normative fit will occur earlier in development than perceptions of situational fit (Table 1). Yet with age, decision about normative fit also will become more nuanced and diverse because of the accumulation of further knowledge about what is considered appropriate for different ethnic–racial categories.

## ERI and Social Context: A Dynamic Model

Developmental research emphasizes the important role of context in shaping ERI processes and content. The social context has an impact on the acquisition of feelings, norms, beliefs, customs, and ideologies that are associated with belonging to a particular ethnic or racial category. ERI development is associated with proximal contextual factors like family ethnic–racial socialization, peer networks, school settings, and neighborhood characteristics, as well as more distal factors such as community norms, societal disadvantages, and transnational ties. A variety and complex set of contextual influences is examined in an increasing number of empirical studies (see Lee Williams et al., 2012; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Yip & Douglas, 2013).

This research is mainly concerned with the ways in which the context shapes ERI. The reversed links of ERI to identity performance and competent identity enactments are typically not made explicit but rather implied (but see Cross & Strauss, 1998). The predominant understanding is that "an ethnic identity is an internal structure that can exist without behaviour" (Phinney & Ong, 2007, p. 272). However, the social identity approach argues that a social identity is sustainable to the extent that it can be expressed in practice (Reicher et al., 2010). Social identities are not like private beliefs but require social validation. Adolescents can feel that they belong but can face identity denial, whereby their claim on an ethnic–racial identity is not accepted or recognized by others (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Furthermore, youth can try to hide or minimize their ethnic background in a process of individual mobility (permeable group boundaries) or because of being afraid to express feelings about their ethnic group (Driedger, 1976). Moreover, from the social identity approach the social context is not simply given but also shaped by ERI expression, both individually and collectively. The dynamic relations implied are presented in Figure 1, which is based on Klein, Spears, and Reicher's (2007) study.

### *Social Validation*

Social identities are about social categories and groups, and there is a desire to verify socially who you are as a group member, regardless of whether the social identity is positive or negative (see North & Swann, 2009). Individuals can employ various strategies in interactions with others for creating a self-verification context (bottom arrow, Figure 1). For example, minority youth can choose to interact with coethnics who confirm their ethnic identity and avoid outsiders who do not. Selective interaction provides the social context for identity validation. Youth can also lay claim to an identity by displaying identity cues, for example, by dressing or acting a certain way or using a particular speech style. The choice of clothing, behavior, accent, and posture are social prompts or interaction strategies that make others to validate and accept one's group membership. The social recognition depends on the extent to which a social identity is expressed in appropriate verbal and nonverbal behavior. With that behavior, an identity classification can follow, and others behave toward you in a manner that confirms your identity (North & Swann, 2009). An example is a study on how African American youth uses hip-hop culture, particularly rap music, to form and negotiate their Black identity in everyday interactions with other African Americans (Clay, 2003). It is shown how acceptance as authentically Black depends on one's ability to master the tools of hip-hop performance, that is, the right language, clothes, pasture, attitude, and bodily gestures. Youngsters who are insecure about their acceptance and position in the group will want to confirm their group membership by enacting it even more strongly. This example indicates that identity claims involve crucial issues of group acceptance and support, and by displaying identity cues youth can try to create a context in which their ERI is verified.

This discussion of identity validation and self-verification should not give the impression of a one-way street: youth trying to confirm socially what they believe about themselves. There is also a feedback loop (top arrow in Figure 1) because the way you enact your identity influences how you understand yourself. Social identities are communicated and negotiated in interactions and the outcome of this can affect one's sense of ERI. Identity enactment elicits reactions from others and claims on, for example, identity authenticity can be questioned or rejected. The feedback given by others can make you unsure of what you are and where you belong or, on the contrary, can make you feel strong and confident. When you enact the right hip-hop language, clothes, pasture, and bodily gestures, you are accepted and you feel truly Black. But it is not easy to feel a proper member of one's ethnic group when language proficiency is an important ethnic marker and you do not speak the language (Belangér & Verkuyten, 2010).

### *Shaping the Social Context*

SIT argues that minority members who believe that their lower status is illegitimate and unstable, and that passing is not viable, will show more in-group solidarity and will be more likely to engage in collective action to achieve a different societal order (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identities do not only reflect the world as it is but are also instrumental in trying to make the world the place one wants it to be (bottom arrow Figure 1). This important aspect of social identities has been largely ignored in ERI research because the emphasis is on individual responses to racialized experiences and one's disadvantaged social position.

According to SCT, "social identity is the cognitive mechanism that makes group behavior possible" (Turner, 1982, p. 21). A shared sense of "us" transforms individual relationships because people

see each other as belonging to the same category or group, and they start to act on the basis of the collective understandings, beliefs, and norms that define who "we" are and what counts for "us." Thus, a shared sense of "us" gives unity and direction and therefore is an important basis of social power. It can turn a disparate collection of separate individuals into a collaborative social force, a force that can try to achieve identity-related goals, such as shown in the civil rights struggle, and other struggles for ethnic–racial equality and justice around the world. For example, among Muslim minority youth in Europe, identification with Islam and religious youth organizations form the basis for collective action and protest against inequality and exclusion (Cesari, 2003).

This does not mean that those who identify together automatically agree. There is almost always dispute and disagreement within groups. There are many ways to be Black or British Indian, and there are strong debates about what it means to be a Muslim living in the West. Yet, social identities provide an important basis for mutual influence and the development of a common understanding (Turner, 1991). When people are encouraged to think about themselves as belonging to the same category or group, there is an expectation of agreement and a motivation to reach consensus on the meanings and implications of the identity. A common identity means that you are similar in one way or another and belong together, and this leads group members to seek agreement and try to create consensus. In contrast, people tend to assume that they disagree with members of another group because they are not like "us" and therefore do not share "our" perspective. When in London, a Pakistani and an Indian adolescent define themselves in terms of their ethnic identities they will expect to have different views, beliefs, and goals. However, if they meet in a school context to discuss school matters, their shared school identity motivates them to find and develop common understandings and agreements.

This collective perspective and the role of ERI in shaping the social world draw attention to the fact that social identities do not only have an expressive function but also an instrumental one. These identities play a critical role in achieving goals related to the preservation or improvement of the standing of one's group as a whole. Collective action is an important strategy for challenging and changing discriminatory practices and trying to improve the rights, power, and influence of one's ethnic–racial group. This requires a sense of "us" and can happen in a local context of school or neighborhood where minority youth not only act together to change the situation but also on a regional or national level when youth gets involved in ethnic or racial (transnational) movements by actual participation and via the social media (Cohen & Kahne, 2012).

## Discussion

The U.S. society places a relatively strong focus on ethnicity and race, and this has led to an increasing number of studies on the development of ERI. The theoretical, conceptual, and empirical work has resulted in a substantial and rich body of literature that, understandably, reflects the particular U.S. context. Yet, child development research is an international and interdisciplinary endeavor in which different national contexts and theoretical traditions should be considered. The relevance of the national context relates to many issues, including the terms that are used and how they are understood. This makes it important to realize that the concepts guiding theories and empirical research in the United States (i.e., ethnicity and race) should not self-evidently be applied to other societies and (implicitly) used as the frame of reference for the field.

Theoretically, I have tried to argue that the social identity approach offers important and novel questions for development research on ERI. This perspective places its major theoretical emphasis on a dynamic self that mediates the relationship between social structure and individual social behavior. Although the perspective is "adevelopmental," I have tried to show that there are important developmental and contextual implications for the study of ERI (cf. Sani & Bennett, 2004; David et al., 2004). For several of these implications there is empirical evidence, but the developmental aspects should be examined more fully and systematically in future research. Thus, the suggested age-related processes that are summarized in Table 1 are meant as theoretically informed directions for further developmental research on ERI in different social contexts. For example, and in addition to cognitive capabilities such as perspective-taking ability and abstract thinking about groups, cognitive processes of self-stereotyping, self-projection, and the capability to evaluate intra- and intergroup differences are likely to play a role in ERI formation and its situational salience. This raises the question about the development of these processes and capabilities, and how they relate to each other.

Furthermore, and building on the important role of self-esteem derived from group membership, social-motivational dynamics are involved in determining the meaning of ERI during developmental periods. The emphasis in most of the ERI research is on the esteem motive (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014), which is not only important but also limited. Various other basic needs that are uniquely important can be involved in ERI. There is substantial evidence that when any of these is lacking or threatened, people show signs of distress and engage in coping strategies (Vignoles, 2011). Furthermore, the various motivations must become operational at some point during the course of development. This means that it can be expected that there are age-related changes in the role that these identity motives play in ERI and in the ways in which minority youth tries to balance the simultaneous satisfaction of the different motives. Additionally, some identity motives play a more important role in some social identities than in others. For example, ethnic and religious identities might be especially appropriate for deriving a sense of continuity and meaningful existence. The continuity and meaning motives will be particularly important in situations in which the continued existence of one's ethnic group is at stake (e.g., assimilationist context), whereas feelings of powerlessness and low self-esteem are more likely when one's group is marginalized and excluded.

The social identity approach further provides systematic ways for conceptualizing and examining the critical role of societal and situational contexts. ERI research recognizes the importance of context and the situational dependency of ERI salience (e.g., Sellers et al., 1998), and various studies have examined the role of parents, schools, neighborhoods, and other proximal and more distant contexts (see Lee Williams et al., 2012; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Yip & Douglas, 2013). In addition to this work, the social identity approach offers a principled and theorized way for examining contextual and situational variation. It draws attention to sociostructural beliefs about the permeability of group boundaries and the stability and legitimacy of the relationships between ethnic and racial groups. Furthermore, SCT provides a systematic theoretical framework for examining the cognitive processes involved in the situational activation of ERI. This theory goes beyond research that investigates identity salience in relation to situational circumstances such as public and private settings and ethnic–racial school composition (Yip & Douglas, 2013) by conceptualizing the underlying cognitive processes involved in making ERI psychologically salient.

The social identity approach also argues that ERI is not only influenced by or reflects the social context but also forms a basis for bringing certain social realities into being (Figure 1). From this approach, an identity can only be sustained when it can be expressed and validated in practice. On an individual level this implies identity enactment in trying to verify socially what you subjectively feel or claim to be. By displaying identity cues, youth try to validate and negotiate their ERI, and identity enactments feed back into their sense of ERI. On the collective level, a shared sense of "us" provides unity and direction. ERI can be an important basis for social power in trying to achieve a different social order. The basis for this argument is the specific conceptualization of social identity. Developmental research is predominantly concerned with the ways in which ethnic–racial group membership is incorporated into the individual's structured self-concept. The social identity perspective focuses on the reversed process of self-stereotyping whereby the self is depersonalized toward that which typifies one's ethnic–racial group. The emphasis is on the identity processes that serve to unite and shape the thoughts, feelings, and actions of those who belong to the same ethnic–racial category. These are important processes that allow research on ERI to more fully consider the agency of minority youth in trying to shape the social world so that it comes into line with their own beliefs, goals, and values.

ERI research has been ongoing for several decades and continues to grow. The great majority of studies have been conducted in the United States context. Yet, questions related to ERI are increasingly being asked in many societies around the world and in relation to different minority groups. This means that we have to be careful not to (implicitly) turn conceptualizations that make sense in one particular national context into the "lingua franca" for thinking, evaluating, and reviewing ERI research. This would be unfortunate for our attempts to develop an interdisciplinary and international field of child development and for enhancing the field's contribution to the positive development of youth across the globe. A broader perspective allows us to assess to what extent similar processes are involved in how youths explore and form their ERI, when and why their ERI becomes situational salient, and how this identity is enacted and becomes the basis for collectively trying to shape the world as one wants it to be. Such a broader perspective is critical for more fully

understanding the different attitudes and beliefs that youngsters develop about their ethnic–racial group and group membership.

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