People can procrastinate, invest too little, and give up too quickly to attain important self-goals. In this talk, Prof Oyserman focuses on identity-based motivation to understand why that might be, focusing on what people infer about the relevance of their future self to their current choices and what people infer from task difficulty. Contextual cues influence interpretations of task difficulty. Oyserman presents evidence that these interpretations are highly malleable—and are, in part, culture- and social identity-bound. Interpretation of difficulty affects students’ possible selves and academic performance, as shown in experiments with college students and children in high poverty contexts. Prof Oyserman offers an integrative process model and highlights implications for intervention.

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