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***IDENTITY ECONOMICS:
How Our Identities Shape Our Work, Wages, and Well-Being***

George A. Akerlof and Rachel E. Kranton. Princeton University Press, \$24.95 (200p)
ISBN 978-0-691-46648-5

This bound economic research paper will have little appeal to a mainstream audience, and Akerlof and Kranton have not convincingly shown that their “frontier” field of economics is truly a distinct field with its own concerns.

Identity Economics picks up where behavioral economics left off, bringing in social contexts to study why people make the decisions they do regarding work, education and daily life. The authors use examples such as work in relation to the Women’s Movement, education at both successful and failing schools, and personal choices by discussing poverty and race. Unfortunately, the authors’ examples are unique and isolated and this makes it difficult to generalize their study across a population.

The authors set up each new set of examples using a method with “social categories,” “norms and ideals,” and “identity utility.” This type of language and treatment could turn off all but the most gung-ho social scientists. It would have been more interesting if the material had more fully delivered the promise of the subtitle, but instead, each example discussed was relatively isolated. After all, how many women work at an iron ore mine? The authors did not extrapolate this to show how the *reader’s* identity might shape these very important features of their life, or how the *reader’s* identity might be shaped *by* them. The questions asked at the end were more intriguing than the ones answered throughout the book – “What explains different identities and norms across countries? What might explain the rise and fall of group conflict?” are definitely fodder for further discussion.

In short, this area seems promising, but what the book didn’t say is more compelling than what it contains.

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