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Rethinking Multiculturalism: Toward a Balanced Approach

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Multiculturalism has succeeded in bringing much-needed attention to historically neglected minority populations. Despite the gains that multiculturalism has facilitated, as presently implemented, it may inadvertently contribute to reduced social cohesion and declining intergroup relations. We draw from social-psychological, including attitudinal and social-cognitive, perspectives to provide a theoretically and empirically informed analysis of why, despite many of its successes, multiculturalism often struggles to deliver on some of its laudable promises. We highlight three areas of concern regarding contemporary presentations of multiculturalism: (a) a strong emphasis on intergroup differences rather than a more balanced emphasis between differences *and* commonalities; (b) majority group members' perceptions that multiculturalism excludes them; and (c) framings of multiculturalism that evoke extrinsic forms of motivation. Finally, we provide several recommendations aimed at a balanced and scientifically informed understanding of multiculturalism. Although these recommendations are theoretically grounded and empirically supported, the proposed benefits of our approach need to be tested against alternative approaches.

KEYWORDS: multiculturalism, intergroup relations, multicultural, recommendations

In recent decades, multiculturalism has emerged as a sociopolitical movement that has profoundly shaped American psychology. For example, the American Psychological Association (APA) *Guidelines for Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists* states

that “psychologists are in a position to provide leadership as agents of prosocial change, advocacy, and social justice, thereby promoting societal understanding, affirmation, and appreciation of multiculturalism” (APA, 2002, p. 16). More recently, the APA document *Multicultural Guidelines: An Ecological*

Approach to Context, Identity, and Intersectionality (APA, 2017) asserts that

These guidelines . . . speak to the profession's recognition of the important role that diversity and multiculturalism play, both in terms of how individuals and groups define themselves, and how they approach others within the United States . . . and globally. (p. 6)

The institutionalization of multiculturalism in mainstream American psychology is further evidenced by the formation of APA's Minority Fellowship Program in 1973 to increase the number of ethnic minority professionals (Jones & Austin-Dailey, 2009), the establishment of the Office of Ethnic Minority Affairs to address ethnic minority issues (APA, 1993), the formalization of multicultural guidelines for counseling culturally diverse individuals (APA, 2003, 2017), and the inclusion of attention to cultural diversity as an accreditation requirement for health service psychology training programs (APA, 2015). Clearly, multiculturalism represents a central and increasingly influential component of American psychology, and we applaud the motives underlying a number of these efforts.

When discussing multiculturalism, it is crucial to be explicit about what specific aspects of multiculturalism one is considering. Multiculturalism, like arguably all constructs in psychology, is an open concept (Pap, 1953), lacking a strict or explicit (operational) definition (Schalk-Soekar & van de Vijver, 2008). As such, a challenge to scientifically evaluating assertions regarding multiculturalism is that numerous prominent scholars have defined it in substantially different ways (e.g., Hall, 2017; Hollinger, 2000; Sarmiento, 2014; Turner, 1993). For example, scholars have variously characterized multiculturalism as a moral philosophy (Fowers & Davidov, 2006), a political ideology (Kymlicka, 2018), an approach to immigration (Berry & Kalin, 2002), and a social justice ideology that entails both acceptance and active support for cultural diversity (Vera & Speight, 2003). Still, virtually all influential descriptions of multiculturalism, whatever their variations, share a common philosophical emphasis on the importance of *group differences* and celebration of *diversity* as a guiding principle (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014; Fowers & Richardson, 1996; Frisby, 2013; Verkuyten, 2007).

We focus here on this overarching, philosophical emphasis on group differences within multiculturalism.

Most psychological research on multiculturalism has compared multicultural approaches to colorblind approaches—the philosophy “that equality among groups is best gained by downplaying group distinctions and treating people as unique individuals” (Rattan & Ambady, 2013, p. 12). Most, although not all, research suggests that multicultural approaches outperform colorblind approaches with respect to managing diversity (see Plaut, Thomas, Hurd, & Romano, 2018; Verkuyten & Yogeewaran, in press, for reviews). In the present paper, we do not seek to rehash the arguments between multicultural and colorblind approaches. Rather, we highlight three needs for additional work *within* American multiculturalism and provide cautions against approaching multiculturalism in a manner that is not empirically based or theoretically informed. Indeed, although multiculturalism can produce positive diversity-related outcomes, it may also come with several deleterious, albeit unintended, consequences (Plaut et al., 2018).

Whereas some scholars have considered multiculturalism a net success in Western countries, others have deemed it a net failure. Specifically, some (e.g., Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014; Fowers & Davidov, 2006; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992) have framed multiculturalism as a much-needed moral philosophy that is beneficial to combating prejudice, developing positive intergroup relations, fostering multicultural competence, and bringing needed attention to marginalized cultural groups. In contrast, other scholars (e.g., Barry, 2001; Brewer, 1997; Frisby, 2013; Reich, 2002) have argued that multiculturalism contributes to essentialist group mentalities (Eberhardt & Randall, 1997; Wilton, Apfelbaum, & Good, 2019) that help to reify group differences and foster detrimental group stereotypes and divisions. As these scholars contend, multiculturalism may contribute to negative intergroup feelings that threaten social cohesion and thereby increase psychological distance among cultural groups. Thus, some scholars regard multiculturalism as a major solution to managing diversity-related societal issues, whereas others regard it as a major contributor to intergroup conflict.

But is it correct to frame the current state of multiculturalism in dichotomous terms, as either a success

or failure? One might reasonably conclude that, given its goals of highlighting group differences and improving intergroup relations, it may be more accurate to suggest that multiculturalism, as a “philosophy of group differences,” has succeeded in some respects but has been less successful in others. If multiculturalism in some form is ultimately to be deemed a net success, it is essential to identify the areas in which it has missed its mark, or at least not fulfilled its potential, and to highlight ways in which policies and practices that stem from multiculturalism can be adjusted to produce more favorable overall outcomes.

In the present article, we review growing evidence on multiculturalism and emphasize three reasons why this approach may sometimes struggle to deliver on its laudable promises. First, we draw from robust social-psychological, including attitudinal and social-cognitive, literatures that illustrate how a staunch emphasis on group differences can activate negative intergroup schemata. These schemata can inadvertently worsen rather than improve intergroup relations (e.g., Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2009; Moshman, 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987).

Second, although a primary goal of multiculturalism is to increase tolerance and acceptance of diverse groups, evidence suggests that minorities tend to perceive it as inclusive of their group, whereas majority group members tend to perceive it as excluding theirs (e.g., Brannon, Carter, Murdock-Perriera, & Higginbotham, 2018; Plaut, Garnett, Buffardi, & Sanchez-Burks, 2011; Schlesinger, 1998; Unzueta & Binning, 2010), arguably resulting in more rather than less intergroup tension.

Third, some multiculturalist education and policies evoke extrinsic rather than intrinsic forms of motivation and construe multiculturalism in concrete rather than abstract terms. Such policies can contribute to the perceptions among many majority group members that multiculturalism is divisive or coercive (Mahfud, Badea, Verkuyten, & Reynolds, 2018; Plant & Devine, 1998, 2001; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). Finally, in response to the concerns we lay out, we conclude with several empirically-grounded recommendations for multicultural education and policies intended to maintain an appreciation for diversity while reducing the possibility of harming social cohesion and intergroup relations.

The perspective advanced in the present analysis is based on the understanding that nearly all social policies involve complex trade-offs; few are 100 percent detrimental and entail no gains, and few are 100 percent beneficial and entail no negative costs. Such weighing of costs and benefits is, in part, a complex values question that goes beyond science. Still, well-corroborated psychological theory and empirical evidence have the potential to inform educators and policy makers regarding the presence and nature of these costs and benefits. Moreover, in our analysis, we do not suggest that *all* multiculturalism advocates are implicated in the concerns we lay out. Rather, we seek to identify potential concerns that may arise if multiculturalism is not approached or presented in an evidence-based manner. It is not multiculturalism writ large that we critique but rather specific aspects of multiculturalism and how they may be implemented.

ISSUE 1: GROUP DIFFERENCES AS THE CORE EMPHASIS OF MULTICULTURALISM

A good starting point for understanding why a strong, and in some cases overriding, emphasis on group differences can harm intergroup relations is to consider the scientific literature regarding cognitive processes operating in group interactions. Well-supported social-psychological perspectives have long noted that individuals naturally organize their perception of the social world according to discrete categorical distinctions (e.g., groups) that minimize within-category (ingroup) differences while highlighting between-category (outgroup) differences (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987). When between-group differences are over-emphasized, intergroup commonalities and similarities tend to be neglected (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014), often resulting in strong implicit ingroup-outgroup (we-they) distinctions (Brewer, 1997). This categorization into “us” versus “them” forms the basis of conflictual intergroup processes and is a primary reason that multiculturalist educators and policy makers should be careful not to reify already naturally occurring, divisive group differences (Dovidio et al., 2015; Moshman, 2011).

Specifically, as ingroup-outgroup distinctions become increasingly salient, an intergroup cognitive schema often emerges among group members. This

schema tends to display the following characteristics: (1) ingroup members are perceived to be more similar to the perceiver than outgroup members; (2) ingroup favoritism develops whereby positive qualities (e.g., trust, compassion, liking) generalize to ingroup but not to outgroup members; and (3) intergroup social comparisons emerge as ingroups and outgroups compete for social resources (Abrams, 2015; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al., 1987). This intergroup schema predisposes persons to perceive ingroups and outgroups as homogeneous, to cultivate a mutual distrust between ingroups and outgroups, to increase intergroup competition, and to boost preferential treatment of ingroup members (Brewer, 1997; Hogg, Abrams, & Brewer, 2017).

Research suggests that ingroup favoritism not only accounts for much discrimination toward outgroups (Greenwald & Pettigrew, 2014), but it may also lead ingroups to view their group as superior to other outgroups and render group members more willing to discriminate against outsiders (Brown, 2000). To be sure, the degree to which this negative intergroup schema produces negative consequences is likely to be moderated by several personality and contextual factors (e.g., power differences; see Plaut et al., 2018; Verkuyten & Yogeewaran, in press, for reviews). However, evolutionary pressures have probably shaped human minds to be *tribal* in nature, and in-group favoritism, out-group animus, and related cognitive biases are likely characteristic of all groups (Clark, Liu, Winegard, & Ditto, 2019; Wilson, 2014). Because the social categorization processes underlying this intergroup schema are evolutionarily derived and in part innate (Caporael, 1997; Liberman, Woodward, & Kinzler, 2017; Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000), its potent main effects are likely to generalize across many human populations and contexts.

An overemphasis on intergroup differences may also lead to collective identities that promote ethnocentrism and other forms of ingroup bias. To understand why, one must consider why ingroup formation and attachment arise, as well as the functions served by belonging to a social group. Group membership traces its functional origins to the evolution of humans as a species. According to theories of optimal distinctiveness (Leonardelli, Pickett, & Brewer, 2010), humans possess competing needs for

(a) inclusion and belonging and (b) differentiation. Social identification with an ingroup provides group members with both needs simultaneously, whereby the need for inclusion is met within the ingroup and the need for differentiation is met by drawing distinctions between ingroups versus outgroups (Vignoles, 2011). Accordingly, for individuals to identify with a specific social group, explicit rules of exclusion and inclusion must exist.

Because successful group membership entails both inclusion and exclusion, the processes that promote social cooperation and loyalty within the ingroup are not necessarily extended to outgroups. This distinction results in a type of *clique selfishness* that frequently manifests in hostility toward outgroups when interests of the ingroup are pitted against those of outgroups (Brewer, 1997; Campbell, 1982). Evidence suggests that further segregating people into distrusting and noninteracting groups decreases a community's social capital, particularly with respect to the obligations, trust, and common goals that characterize a stable and cohesive community (e.g., Coleman, 1988; Lancee & Dronkers, 2011; Putnam, 2007).

There is also evidence that a primary emphasis on group differences can result in race essentialism, the belief that racial differences are biologically based, inherent, stable, and immutable (Haslam & Whelan, 2008). In two recent experiments, Wilton and colleagues (2019) found that, compared with colorblind conditions, participants exposed to multiculturalism (operationalized by emphasizing group differences) expressed greater race essentialist beliefs (Studies 1 and 2) and decreased beliefs that racial inequality is a problem (Study 2). These findings can be explained by the fact that both multiculturalism and race essentialism are grounded in similar social-cognitive processes, namely social categorization.

Specifically, for individuals to value group differences, they must first recognize diverse individuals and categorize them accordingly. In this sense, a strong emphasis on group differences within multiculturalism lays the foundation for race essentialism because it also begins with recognizing racial differences as the basis for understanding and categorizing people. In other words, both multiculturalism and race essentialism are based on the same initial premise, namely that group differences constitute mean-

ingful distinctions and are a valid means of classifying people. Moreover, such a tendency to classify people into racial groups within multiculturalism has been shown to increase group stereotyping (e.g., Gutiérrez & Unzueta, 2010; No et al., 2008; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000).

Given the adverse consequences of ingroup-outgroup categorizations for intergroup relations and social cohesion, psychologists have proposed several models that center on changing how ingroups and outgroups perceive one another through minimizing some of the features of negative intergroup schemata. These models are based largely in intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), which suggests that group relations are improved by positive contact with outgroup members. Thus, the key question concerns how to structure the contact situation in a way that reduces the influence of divisive intergroup schemata and promotes positive intergroup interactions. Although each of these models adopts a different path toward positive intergroup relations, they share a common element: to minimize the reification of overly explicit and nearly exclusive focus on intergroup differences by restructuring how ingroups and outgroups perceive one another.

DECATEGORIZATION MODEL.

Because intergroup prejudice is theorized to originate from self-categorization into discrete groups, the decategorization model (or personalization model) suggests that the contact situation be structured to create opportunities for ingroup members to become acquainted with outgroup members at an individual level, thereby reducing the salience of strict categorical distinctions (Brewer & Miller, 1984). Knowing group members at the individual level assists in breaking down ingroup perceptions of outgroups as homogeneous units, which in turn replaces categorical identity groups with individual-based (deindividuating) information as the most important means of classifying people. Although research in this regard has been somewhat mixed, evidence suggests that programs and interventions utilizing decategorization models can decrease intergroup prejudice under personalized conditions (e.g., Bettencourt, Brewer, Croak, & Miller, 1992; Crawford, Jussim, Madon, Cain, & Stevens, 2011; Maras & Brown, 2000). However, one downside to this model is that decategorization

may be perceived by ingroup members as an attempt to minimize the importance of their social identity. If ingroup members feel pressured to discard a salient social identity, post-contact prejudice may resurface (Gonzalez & Brown, 2003).

RECATORIZATION MODEL.

Based on the notion that highly salient social identities may not change through decategorization, recategorization models (or common ingroup identity models) arrange the contact situation to focus on a superordinate social category that entails both ingroup and outgroup members as belonging to a broader, common social group (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993; Sherif et al., 1961). This model is premised on the notion that, as the superordinate identity is made salient, adopting a new, inclusive social identity will minimize intergroup prejudice because groups are likely to perceive themselves as comprising one overarching unit rather than two distinct units (“We are different in some ways, but we are ultimately all in this together”). Recategorization models and their ability to reduce intergroup prejudice have received consistent empirical support, as demonstrated, for example, by the success of “jigsaw classrooms” in reducing prejudice (Aronson & Bridgeman, 1979; Gaertner, Mann, Dovidio, Murrell, & Pomare, 1990; Gaertner et al., 2000; see also Gaertner & Dovidio, 2016, for review). Nevertheless, similar to decategorization models, recategorization models may be ineffective if they are perceived by group members as attempts to discard an important subgroup identity and assimilate into a larger social category.

DUAL IDENTITY MODEL.

Recognizing ingroup members’ need to retain social identities from their ingroups, along with the potential to feel pressured (or threatened) to give up their distinctive subgroup identities to assimilate into a larger social category, dual identity models suggest adopting a superordinate group category while encouraging retention of one’s unique subgroup identity (see Gaertner et al., 2009). Research has shown that overemphasis on intergroup commonality at the expense of one’s subgroup identities can have the unintended consequence of reducing minority group members’ motivation for social change (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009; Saguy, Tausch,

Dovidio, Pratto, & Singh, 2011; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Dual identity models boast impressive empirical support in laboratory and community settings, and are posited to reduce psychological threat associated with fears of pressured assimilation by encouraging simultaneous retention of one's heritage culture and adoption of a shared social identity among ingroup and outgroup members (Glasford & Dovidio, 2011; Gómez, Dovidio, Huici, Gaertner, & Cuadrado, 2008). However, an important boundary condition must be noted. When outgroup members stray from the ingroup's standards of what should constitute the superordinate identity, it may result in conflict over the definition of the superordinate group and produce a desire for intergroup differentiation, which in turn can result in negative intergroup attitudes (Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2008).

INGROUP PROJECTION MODEL.

Because standards of the ingroup are often used to judge outgroups, intergroup bias is likely to emerge any time an outgroup (or outgroup member) deviates from that standard. Accordingly, the ingroup projection model suggests that intergroup bias is reduced when the superordinate category is defined in terms of its diversity (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). When this occurs, ingroup standards are no longer used to evaluate outgroups. For example, if Americans value the United States for being multicultural, White Americans may be less likely to negatively judge non-White Americans for behaving differently because they view such behavior as a manifestation of American diversity. In other words, by defining the superordinate category in terms of diversity, majority groups may no longer view minority groups as homogeneous. When the outgroup is no longer viewed as homogeneous, deviation from the superordinate category is considered an expression of diversity rather than heresy. Empirical support has been found for the ingroup projection model in reducing intergroup prejudice across multiple contexts (see Wenzel et al., 2008; Wenzel, Waldzus, & Steffens, 2016, for reviews). A boundary condition of this model is that, if group members view their ingroup as highly prototypical of the superordinate group and attempt to impose this prototypicality on the group, members of the superordinate group may question the ingroup's position, resulting in intergroup conflict (Steffens, Reese, Ehrke, & Jonas, 2017).

Key Takeaways from Social-Cognitive Models

Taken together, empirically-supported social identity theories consistently highlight self-categorization processes that make group differences unduly salient as the basis for intergroup conflict. Consequently, social-psychological models designed to improve intergroup relations, although taking different paths, generally *deemphasize* rather than *emphasize* intergroup differences to minimize extreme us/them distinctions. Moreover, social-psychological researchers have increasingly emphasized the importance of ingroup members retaining their subgroup identity. This is because models aimed at improving intergroup relations often fail when ingroup members feel that they must discard their unique subgroup identities (e.g., pressured or forced assimilation). Indeed, identification with social groups provides group members with several psychological benefits, such as feelings of inclusion/belonging, social support, shared social realities, pride, and protection from outgroup discrimination (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Greenaway et al., 2015; Jetten et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, dual-identity and ingroup-projection models simultaneously encourage retention of one's subgroup identity *and* adoption of a common, superordinate group identity, because an exclusive or excessive focus on one's ingroup identity may come at the cost of social cohesion and positive intergroup relations. As such, it is important that ingroup members also recognize their membership in broader, superordinate groups, especially with an understanding of the diversity and complexity that characterizes the superordinate group. Educational programs that emphasize multiculturalism may sometimes focus too heavily, if not exclusively, on group differences. Yet recent meta-analytic research indicates that group differences in psychopathology between minorities and Whites are smaller in magnitude than differences both between and within minority groups (Causadias, Korous, & Cahill, 2018). The same principle holds for general intelligence (Neisser et al., 1996) and many other psychological individual differences, such as personality (see Foldes, Duehr, & Ones, 2008). Although multiculturalism may in part be defined by its celebration of group differences, this legitimate emphasis does not exclude emphasizing group similarities. To assume otherwise would court what logicians term the either-or fallacy (false dilemma fallacy), whereby one assumes that the optimal solution to a problem entails the selection of

one perspective or another rather than the embrace of both perspectives (Cavender & Kahane, 2009).

ISSUE 2: PERCEIVED EXCLUSIVENESS OF MULTICULTURALISM

In Western countries, research suggests that, although multiculturalism has gained significant traction among individuals in minority groups, it has also resulted in backlash from majority group members (and from fewer minority group members) (e.g., Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Joppke, 2017; Perry, Priest, Paradies, Barlow, & Sibley, 2018; Verkuyten, 2007; Zick, Wagner, Van Dick, & Petzel, 2001). This sharp discrepancy in attitudes toward diversity can serve as a significant source of intergroup conflict and hinder progress toward a cohesive society. In this scenario, minority group individuals tend to perceive multiculturalism as identity-supporting, whereas majority group individuals tend to perceive it as identity-threatening (Deaux, Reid, Martin, & Bikmen, 2006).

Additionally, these divergences in attitudes are augmented among minority and majority group members who identify more strongly with their ethnic groups (Verkuyten & Brug, 2004; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). If multiculturalism is to reach its full potential, there must be a broad acceptance and agreement regarding approaches to diversity on the part of both minority and majority groups. To narrow this divide, it is necessary to understand why majority and minority group members differ in their perceptions of multiculturalism as a philosophy worth supporting. Because minority groups tend to be more accepting of multiculturalism relative to majority groups, we focus here on reasons why many majority group members reject multiculturalism.

Most theoretical perspectives legitimately attribute many majority group members' (e.g., Whites') rejection of multiculturalism to identity threat, in-group bias, and either explicit or implicit racism (e.g., Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, & Ybarra, 2000; Sidanius, 1993; Stephan & Stephan, 2013; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). Additionally, a large and robust body of research consistently indicates that majority group members often perceive efforts aimed at addressing racial inequality as resulting in a potential loss of power, group status, or dominance (e.g., Eibach & Keegan, 2006; Jardina, 2019; Knowles, Lowery, Hogan, & Chow, 2009).

However, one factor that has received much less attention in multicultural discussions is majority group members' perceptions of multiculturalism as an ideology that excludes rather than includes their group. As noted by Verkuyten and Yogeewaran (in press), "Multiculturalism can also be considered as being asymmetrical because it focuses on ethnic minority groups and neglects the majority, which encourages resentment and fragmentation." As one example, in a content analysis of multicultural syllabi ($N = 54$) in counseling psychology, researchers found that although most (87%) courses focused on racial identity, only 11% included Whites as a racial/ethnic group (Pieterse, Evans, Risner-Butner, Collins, & Mason, 2008). According to most social-psychological perspectives (e.g., Abrams, Hogg, & Marques, 2005; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), humans have an innate need for inclusion and belonging. Consequently, feeling excluded may represent an attack on one's fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2004), and majority group members are not immune from these reactions. If majority group members perceive multicultural efforts as being for minorities only, they may feel ostracized and in turn be less supportive of such efforts (Hartgerink, Van Beest, Wicherts, & Williams, 2015; Williams, 2007).

Cross-disciplinary evidence similarly suggests that multiculturalism tends to be perceived by many as an exclusive rather than inclusive ideology. Indeed, historians, bloggers, and other academics have raised concerns that multiculturalism represents a subjugation of majority groups in exchange for acceptance and inclusion of minority groups (e.g., Auster, 2004; Fowers & Richardson, 1996; Michaels, 2006; Schlesinger, 1998; Shepherd, 2019). For instance, in a critical analysis of multiculturalism, sociologist Christian Joppke (2004) wrote that "it evokes and mobilizes around involuntary and mutually exclusive statuses and tends to render 'recognition' a one-sided act by the majority society only" (p. 238). Political theorist Bhikhu Parekh (2000) echoed similar sentiments: "in no theory of multiculturalism is the explicit act of 'recognition' reciprocal, denoting instead an act that goes from the majority to the minority" (p. 272). Indian-born British writer Kenan Malik (2015) commented,

Multiculturalism as a political tool has functioned as not merely a response to diversity but

also a means of constraining it. And that insight reveals a paradox. Multicultural policies accept as a given that societies are diverse, yet they implicitly assume that such diversity ends at the edge of minority communities. (p. 21)

Although these are but a few examples, they exemplify a perspective held by several scholars across disciplines that multiculturalism is geared toward inclusion of minority groups and exclusion of majority groups. But is this viewpoint corroborated by rigorous research?

In fact, controlled studies support the assertion that some Whites' perceptions of social exclusion partially explain why so many majority group members reject multicultural ideas. For example, research indicates that (1) Whites implicitly associate multiculturalism with exclusion rather than inclusion (Plaut et al., 2011, Study 1); (2) when Whites are explicitly included in the conceptualization of multiculturalism, they do not associate multiculturalism with exclusion (Plaut et al., 2011, Study 2); (3) Whites associate multiculturalism with their self-concept to a lesser extent than do minorities (Plaut et al., 2011, Study 3); (4) feelings of inclusion mediate the relationship between group status (White vs. racial minority) and endorsement of diversity (Plaut et al., 2011, Study 4); and (5) individual differences in the need to belong moderated the perceived attractiveness of organizations that espouse multicultural policies, such that Whites with a higher need to belong reported being less interested in working for organizations with a multicultural approach (Plaut et al., 2011, Study 5).

Thus, across multiple samples, methodologies, and conceptualizations of multiculturalism, Whites consistently associate multiculturalism with exclusion. Other studies have also found that U.S. Whites associated multiculturalism with non-White groups (Unzueta & Binning, 2010), and both Hispanics and Whites reported increased psychological distress (worthlessness, hopelessness, and depression) when they more strongly disagreed with multiculturalism (Samson, 2018). Ironically, in well-meaning attempts to be inclusive, the core and exclusive theme of emphasizing group differences within multiculturalism evokes feelings of distress and exclusion, rather than inclusion, for many Whites (see also Shepherd, 2019).

A final potential contributing factor to majority members' feelings of exclusion is the perception that

multiculturalist advocates sometimes appear not to afford the same respect and honor toward majority group members that they expect of other groups. For example, in a widely utilized text, Sue and Sue (1990) espoused the negative view of majority groups that some multiculturalists hold: "racism is a basic and integral part of U.S. life and . . . *all Whites are racist* whether knowingly or unknowingly" (p. 113, emphasis added). In addition to being impossible to falsify, such assertions may inadvertently fuel the impression that multiculturalism innately divides minority and majority groups into exclusive and mutually unfriendly categories.

Moreover, although there have been recent calls to follow Martin Luther King Jr.'s entreaty for Whites to become allies with minorities in the ongoing struggle for equal rights (Sue, 2017), the predominant focus of the multicultural literature is on what Whites must do to overcome their biases, in contrast to what minorities must also do to overcome theirs (see Atkins, Fitzpatrick, Poolokasingham, Lebeau, & Spanierman, 2017; Smith, Kashubeck-West, Payton, & Adams, 2017; Spanierman & Smith, 2017a, for reviews). As an illustration, in describing a *White ally*, Spanierman and Smith (2017b) concluded: "We acknowledge . . . that, regardless of their commitment and dedication to racial justice, White individuals likely cannot completely purge the impact of racist socialization from the deepest levels of their consciousness" (p. 609). With respect to developing multicultural competence among clinicians, Sue and Sue (2017) argued in their widely-used text, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse*, that

as members of a White EuroAmerican group, what responsibility do you hold for the racist, oppressive, and discriminating manner by which you personally and professionally deal with people of color? This is a threatening question for White people. However, to be effective in MCT (multicultural counseling/therapy) means that one has adequately dealt with this question and worked through the biases, feelings, fears, and guilt associated with it. (pp. 56–57)

Sue and Sue's statement presumes that White therapists are inevitably racist and cannot be effective in counseling culturally diverse individuals unless they

acknowledge and address their racism. However, outcome research related to therapists' multicultural competence has been mixed (see Ertl, Mann-Saumier, Martin, Graves, & Altarriba, 2019; Smith & Trimble, 2016; Soto, Smith, Griner, Domenech Rodríguez, & Bernal, 2018, for reviews). In fact, one study across 143 clients and 31 therapists indicates that clients' perceptions of their therapists' multicultural competence are not significantly related to more favorable therapeutic outcomes (Owen, Leach, Wampold, & Rodolfa, 2011). As noted by Fowers and Richardson (1996), from a multicultural perspective, racism and ethnocentricity are almost always taken to be characteristics of Whites.

However, this is not to say that there is no truth in some of the assertions made about majority group members regarding racism and power. Whites have held most of the power in Western countries for centuries, and many Whites have oppressed and continue to oppress minority group members. In addition, overt racism still exists in some U.S. communities (Gallup, 2020). These undeniable truths notwithstanding, racism and ethnocentricity are present to some degree in all groups and are a general rather than group-specific problem (see Richeson & Sommers, 2016; Triandis, 1994).

The key point is that majority group members should be evaluated on their merits, or lack thereof, and not be reflexively characterized collectively as members of a racist or oppressive group. If majority group members continue to be homogeneously described in this way, it is likely that multiculturalism will continue to be perceived as exclusive, rather than becoming the uniting force it can be if both groups are treated with the same degree of moral legitimacy.

ISSUE 3: FRAMINGS AND CONSTRUALS OF MULTICULTURAL INITIATIVES

With the rise of multiculturalism, numerous policy initiatives and interventions designed to reduce prejudice now permeate education, organizations, and society. Billions of dollars are spent each year on these initiatives even though few are grounded in well-supported theory or derived from basic psychological science (e.g., social cognition, group processes, cross-cultural psychology; Hansen, 2003; Paluck & Green, 2009). As a result, many multicultural interventions aimed at reducing prejudice and improving inter-

group relations might actually produce negligible or even iatrogenic (harmful) effects. Indeed, experimental evidence suggests that multicultural interventions sometimes increase rather than decrease prejudice, especially when they are presented in a manner that many majority group members perceive as coercive (Legault, Gutsell, & Inzlicht, 2011; Plant & Devine, 2001; Shepherd, 2019). Although negative outcomes of multicultural policies and interventions may be due partly to backlash from majority group members arising from perceived threat to social status and national identity (Jardina, 2019), there is growing evidence that such backlash may be attributable largely to how multicultural initiatives are motivationally framed and construed.

MOTIVATIONAL FRAMINGS.

Multicultural initiatives that target prejudice may be undermined and even backfire when they evoke ineffective forms of motivation. According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002), individuals self-regulate prejudice in diverse ways, and such self-regulation varies as a function of whether motivation is self-determined and autonomous as opposed to pressured and controlled (Legault, Green-Demers, Grant, & Chung, 2007; Plant & Devine, 1998). Individuals with self-determined motivation are driven by internal factors, such as adhering to personal values or pursuing the egalitarian goal of being nonprejudiced. For these individuals, striving to be nonprejudiced is rewarding and enjoyable.

In contrast, individuals with controlled motivations are driven to reduce prejudice for external reasons, such as pressure to abide by prescribed social norms, seek the approval of others, or avoid being ostracized for holding prejudiced attitudes. Research suggests that individuals with self-determined motivation to reduce prejudice exhibit less racial bias compared with individuals with controlled motivation (e.g., Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Devine, 2003; Legault et al., 2007; Plant, Devine, & Peruche, 2010). Thus, multicultural initiatives that attempt to reduce prejudice through targeting external rather than internal motivation sources may, ironically, backfire in some cases.

Experimental studies testing the effectiveness of prejudice-reducing interventions that evoke different forms of motivation have found that majority group individuals who are primarily externally motivated to

behave without prejudice tend to rebel against these initiatives. For example, Plant and Devine (1998) found that participants who harbored primarily external motivations to act without prejudice strategically altered their responses to avoid appearing prejudiced against Blacks in public situations but strongly endorsed stereotypical beliefs when revealing their responses in private situations. Plant and Devine (2001) later found that individuals high in external motivation but low in internal motivation to respond without prejudice felt compelled and bothered by pressure to comply with pro-Black initiatives; moreover, regardless of whether the pressure was imagined (Study 1 and 2) or real (Study 3), participants responded with angry/threatened affect when pressured to comply, resulting in backlash (behavioral and affective) in a likely attempt to reassert their personal freedoms. Further, Legault and colleagues (2011) demonstrated that priming people to reduce prejudice through external motivation (in this case, by invoking a societal requirement to reduce prejudice) displayed more implicit and explicit prejudice compared with those exposed to no intervention at all. In contrast, individuals primed with internal motivation (autonomous choice) showed less implicit and explicit prejudice relative to those in the control group.

In essence, Legault and colleagues demonstrated that multicultural strategies that pressure people to comply with anti-prejudice initiatives appear to be worse than no strategy at all – although independent replication of this finding will be critical. These findings suggest that, although some multicultural initiatives may reduce prejudice, attempting to reduce prejudice through external rather than internal motivation, such as through social control rather than autonomous choice, tends to engender a reflexive reaction that often increases prejudice. Still, these conclusions are mainly limited to laboratory demonstrations, and further evidence for their applicability to real-world settings is needed.

According to reactance theory (Brehm & Brehm, 2013), such responses against anti-prejudice initiatives may reflect intentional responses to threats to one's autonomy. Indeed, people feel autonomously motivated when they perceive their behavior as originating from an internal (personal choice) rather than external (social pressure) source. This is because ex-

ternal sources often bypass personal autonomy by attempting to compel a specifically prescribed way of thinking or behaving (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When autonomy is bypassed, motivation becomes dependent on external sources and internal motivation is reduced. As Waterman et al. (2003) note, "It is easy to imagine assigned activities (i.e., activities where self-determination is absent) . . . being perceived as drudgery rather than as engaging" (p. 1456). When external and controlling initiatives against prejudice become the primary sources of motivation, individuals experience reduced internal motivation and tend to rebel against these initiatives (Brehm & Brehm, 2013). Accordingly, prejudice-reducing initiatives that remove individuals' ability to freely choose egalitarian values and embrace diversity on their own terms may not only evoke hostility toward the source of pressure, but also result in overt rebellion against the goal of prejudice reduction itself (Legault et al., 2011).

CONSTRUAL FRAMINGS.

Whether multicultural initiatives are accepted or rejected by majority group members may also depend on whether they construe such initiatives abstractly or concretely. Abstract construals attend to the broader picture and address *why* the action or goal is important. Conversely, concrete construals attend to the specific details and address *how* the goal can be achieved (e.g., Henderson, Fujita, Trope, & Liberman, 2006; Trope & Liberman, 2010). Drawing from social-cognitive construal theories, Yogeeswaran and Dasgupta (2014) found that, compared with a control group, primes that facilitated construing multiculturalism in abstract terms by emphasizing its overarching goals and values reduced White Americans' prejudice toward ethnic minorities.

In contrast, primes that facilitated construing multiculturalism in concrete terms by emphasizing how multicultural goals can be achieved increased White Americans' prejudice toward minorities (Studies 1 and 2). Yogeeswaran and Dasgupta (2014) also found that abstract construals of multiculturalism reduced the degree to which Whites viewed diversity as a threat to national identity, whereas concrete construals increased this perceived threat (Studies 2 and 3). From a social identity perspective, exposure to concrete construals of multiculturalism that

ask Whites to consider the specific steps needed to achieve multiculturalism activate the concern that prototypical American culture and values are being threatened by ethnic minority cultures and value systems (Kauff, Asbrock, Thörner, & Wagner, 2013; Verkuyten, 2006).

Although construing multiculturalism in abstract terms appears to reduce reported prejudice among majority group members, Rios and Wynn (2016) raised the concern that in real-life contexts it may be necessary to implement concrete multicultural policies to improve intergroup relations, particularly if minority groups feel that multicultural initiatives never translate from conversation into practice. This scenario poses a challenge, because focusing on concrete multicultural policies to accommodate minority group members may be perceived as more threatening to majority group members' national identity—and in turn may increase prejudice. So how can multiculturalism be construed concretely to appeal to minority groups and simultaneously be perceived by majority group members as nonthreatening?

To address this problem, Rios and Wynn (2016) proposed construing multiculturalism as a concrete opportunity to learn about other groups of people. This proposal runs contrary to “harder” concrete multicultural policies that center on changing policy to accommodate diverse groups (Citrin, Sears, Muste, & Wong, 2001). Rios and Wynn presented a sample of White participants with a passage to read that focused on why multiculturalism is important and how it could be incorporated into American society. Participants were then assigned to conditions in which they were asked to (a) write down three ways in which Americans could learn more about differences between groups (multicultural-as-learning condition) or (b) write down three policies that American institutions could implement to increase awareness of group differences (multiculturalism-as-policy condition). Results indicated that Americans who highly identified as White exhibited less prejudice in the multiculturalism-as-learning condition compared with the multiculturalism-as-policy condition. These effects were mediated by individuals' perceptions of how diversity benefits themselves and society. These findings provide provisional but encouraging evidence that even highly identified majority group members

may react more favorably to concrete multicultural policies when these policies are presented as collaborative learning opportunities that are beneficial to their group and society.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Although multiculturalism has achieved important milestones, such as directing attention to historically neglected and marginalized populations, the philosophy underlying some of its current presentations has the potential to weaken social cohesion and even harm intergroup relations. Perhaps a contributing reason to the negative state of intergroup relations is that multiculturalism is often presented and implemented in a way that is not adequately informed by empirically supported psychological theory (Paluck & Green, 2009). Accordingly, rather than discard multiculturalism as a failed doctrine, we seek to provide a number of theoretically and empirically informed recommendations in hope of assisting multiculturalism in becoming a more uniting force. Moreover, there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach for multiculturalist policies, and virtually every policy entails a complex set of trade-offs. No policy is likely to be completely harmful without any gain, and no policy is likely to be completely favorable without any cost. The recommendations outlined here serve as general principles that are adaptable to a variety of contexts and are designed to optimize outcomes for multicultural policies and initiatives.

Suggested Multiculturalism Recommendations

GUIDELINE 1.

Balance the currently strong emphasis on intergroup differences with a similar emphasis on intergroup commonalities when discussing multicultural diversity. Although diversity initiatives typically highlight how individuals are different from each other, such discussions do not exclude simultaneous discussions of intergroup similarities. Social-psychological, including social-cognitive, perspectives have long noted that the intergroup cognitive schemata that emerge from overemphasis on group differences can predispose to intergroup conflict (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2014; Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000; Turner et al., 1987). Moreover, most approaches to prejudice reduction and improving intergroup relations simul-

taneously emphasize (a) the maintenance of distinct, subgroup identities *and* (b) the adoption of common, superordinate identities and values (Gaertner, 1993; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Wenzel et al., 2016). Whereas encouraging maintenance of subgroup identities removes ingroup members' perceived threat of forced assimilation, adoption of a common, superordinate identity may help to minimize the "us" versus "them" distinction that lies at the heart of intergroup conflict. Studies conducted in naturalistic settings on multiethnic high school students (Gaertner, Rust, Dovidio, Bachman, & Anastasio, 1996), banking executives who underwent largescale corporate mergers (Bachman, 1993), and college students from blended families (Banker & Gaertner, 1998) indicated as individuals felt more strongly that they belonged to a common group, there was less bias in affective reaction among high school students, less intergroup anxiety among executives, and increased family harmony among college students, respectively.

GUIDELINE 2.

Explicitly include *both* minority *and* majority group members in multicultural discussions and conceptualizations. Many or most theoretical perspectives have attributed majority group members' rejection of multiculturalism to racism, identity threat, and loss of group dominance or social status (Eibach & Keegan, 2006; Knowles et al., 2009; Stephan & Stephan, 2013; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). However, research has shown that many majority group members perceive multiculturalism to be exclusive rather than inclusive, and that such perceived exclusiveness explains in part whether or not many majority group members would be more supportive of multiculturalism. Evidence from controlled studies indicates that when majority group members (Whites) are included in multicultural conceptualizations and discussions, they do not exhibit such bias toward multiculturalism (Plaut et al., 2011, Studies 1–5). Moreover, in some classrooms, Whites are not even included as a racial group (Pieterse et al., 2008). As such, it is critical that both minority and majority group members be explicitly included and valued in discussions of multicultural policies and initiatives. Also, if majority groups feel included, they may be more supportive of multicultural efforts aimed at assisting minority communities.

GUIDELINE 3.

Openly acknowledge intragroup diversity within majority groups rather than collectively characterize them as racist or prejudiced. As noted in our review, some multicultural initiatives collectively characterize majority group members as inevitably racist and prejudiced, at least implicitly (e.g., Spanierman & Smith, 2017; Sue & Sue, 1990). Apart from being largely or entirely unfalsifiable, such collective characterizations are likely to elicit negative reactions from many majority group members and perhaps damage the likelihood of their endorsing multiculturalism as a philosophy worth considering. As long as majority group members continue to be described in this way, multiculturalism may well continue to be perceived as exclusive and result in backlash among many majority group members. As noted by Triandis (1994), racism and prejudice are characteristic of some members of all groups, and we must acknowledge the intragroup diversity that exists with respect to both racist and nonracist individuals across all cultural groups. By explicitly highlighting such diversity when discussing multiculturalism, multicultural initiatives may receive greater support among majority group members and contribute to a greater willingness on the part of majority group members to assist in efforts aimed at empowering minority groups.

GUIDELINE 4.

Utilize multicultural initiatives that target intrinsic (e.g., autonomous choice) rather than extrinsic (e.g., mandate and social pressure) motivations. Many initiatives designed to reduce prejudice target extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation through applying social pressure, evoking fears of being labeled racist or bigoted if multicultural ideas are not endorsed, and stimulating avoidance behavior such as encouraging adoption of multiculturalism to prevent ostracism (Legault et al., 2007; Plant & Devine, 1998). Not only are extrinsically-focused initiatives potentially ineffective (Plant & Devine, 1998, 2001; Shepherd, 2019), but they may sometimes produce more negative effects than no intervention at all (Legault et al., 2011; Plant & Devine, 2001). When multiculturalism is experienced as compelled rather than voluntary, majority group members may display reactance because they perceive it as an attack on their autonomy (Brehm & Brehm, 2013). However, multicultural initiatives based on autonomous choice and framed as

egalitarian goals worthy of pursuit tend to elicit less negative reaction and are associated with less implicit prejudice among majority group members (Amodio et al., 2003; Legault et al., 2007; Plant et al., 2010). In essence, it is important to avoid multicultural strategies that pressure individuals to comply because they may engender reflexive reactions that increase rather than decrease prejudice.

GUIDELINE 5.

Avoid concrete construals of multiculturalism that exclusively emphasize *how* rather than *why* to implement multicultural policies. Many multiculturalist policies and initiatives focus primarily on the specific, concrete steps that society must adopt to implement such policies, with insufficient time devoted to explaining *why* such policies are beneficial and worthy of adoption among all groups. However, if one focuses exclusively or unduly on *how* multiculturalism can be implemented in society without adequately explaining its *raison d'être*, many majority group members often perceive multiculturalism as an imposition of minority group values on majority group values, as well as a threat to their national identity (Jardina, 2019; Kauff et al., 2013; Verkuyten, 2006). Conversely, when multiculturalism is discussed in abstract terms, that is, according to the reasons why society should pursue the philosophy, majority group members exhibit less prejudice (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). As such, it is important to focus not only on the *hows* but also on the *whys* of multiculturalism. Construing multicultural initiatives as learning opportunities that are beneficial to all groups may also be useful; majority group members may be more accepting of multiculturalism when they perceive the benefits that multiculturalism might confer to their group (Rios & Wynn, 2016).

CAVEATS, CONSIDERATIONS, AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS

We have laid out several critical issues that warrant attention if multiculturalism is to be approached in a more scientifically informed and pragmatically effective manner. These concerns include an undue emphasis on intergroup differences and insufficient emphasis on *both* diversity *and* common intergroup values and identities; framings of multiculturalism that have resulted in majority group members per-

ceiving the philosophy as exclusive and perhaps even hostile to their group; and well-meaning but largely ineffective multicultural initiatives that evoke extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivations. However, the arguments presented in the present analysis of multiculturalism should be considered in light of several caveats.

Specifically, despite being grounded in psychological theory and empirical evidence, the proposed benefits of our approach to multiculturalism have yet to be tested against alternative approaches. Indeed, although several experiments have compared colorblind versus multiculturalism approaches for managing diversity (Plaut et al., 2018; Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, in press), to our knowledge, no studies have examined whether an approach to multiculturalism that balances group differences with commonalities confers more positive benefits (and less harm) than approaches based exclusively on downplaying (colorblind) or emphasizing (multiculturalism) group differences. Thus, we encourage researchers to directly compare the approach presented in the present paper with existing approaches to multiculturalism using rigorous experimental designs.

In addition, the literature on multiculturalism outcomes has yielded largely mixed results. Consequently, it is unclear which group differences when emphasized yield more positive versus negative outcomes. It is plausible that emphasizing certain group differences may contribute to positive outcomes such as heightened empathy towards minority individuals and awareness of their struggles. At this point, however, there is relatively little conceptual or empirical guidance for conjecturing which of these outcomes will emerge, and which specific multicultural interventions will elicit them. Moreover, social identity perspectives have long noted that social group identities can become more salient in some contexts than others (Abrams, 2015). Thus, the extent to which emphasizing group differences produces positive versus negative outcomes may depend in part on the immediate social context. A fruitful avenue for future research would be to tease apart which group differences and what conditions are linked to beneficial versus harmful multicultural outcomes.

These caveats notwithstanding, multiculturalism in contemporary American psychology, as defined by an emphasis on group differences and diversity,

represents a powerful force that continues to grow in influence. We believe strongly that multiculturalism, if carefully implemented, has the potential to reduce prejudice and positively influence all groups in society. Although multiculturalism has refocused much-needed attention on historically marginalized minority groups, many of its current framings may pose a largely unappreciated threat to social cohesion and intergroup relations.

To address these issues, we proposed five overarching recommendations that can be applied to several contexts. Our intention in providing these recommendations is to strengthen potentially ineffective areas of multiculturalism rather than to dismiss the philosophy writ large or to revert to previous strategies that served as impediments to cultural appreciation, such as strict assimilationist or exclusively colorblind policies. We hope that even if researchers, educators, and policy makers across disciplines disagree with our arguments, they will seriously consider our challenges and proposals and aim to ground multicultural initiatives within solid psychological theory corroborated by empirical evidence.

NOTES

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1. Here and elsewhere, we define prejudice in the classical sense as “a negative evaluation of a social group or a negative evaluation of an individual that is significantly based on the individual’s group membership” (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003, p. 414)

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