Cultural diversity and its implications for intergroup relations

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Discussions about diversity and multiculturalism are commonplace in education, organizations, and all levels of public policy and government. The current paper discusses new developments in the psychological literature on the implications of diversity and multiculturalism for intergroup relations by considering: (a) demographic diversity, (b) national policies on diversity and multiculturalism, and (c) ideological beliefs and discourse about diversity and multiculturalism. After considering the nuanced effects of diversity and multiculturalism for intergroup relations, we consider the nature and implications of interculturalism, a new and emerging diversity approach that has received little attention in the psychological literature. We conclude by highlighting the importance of studying diversity across multiple levels of analysis, perspectives, and intergroup outcomes.

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Diversity is currently a buzzword in many institutions, organizations, and local and national governments. The term is used to refer to differences in gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, culture, nationality, religion, political orientation, and viewpoint. In the present context, we specifically focus on the implications of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity (collectively referred to as cultural diversity here) on intergroup relations in pluralistic societies. Diversity is heralded by some as inspiring, innovative, and necessary, while others see it as disturbing, threatening, and disruptive. Diversity has been shown to have positive implications for intergroup relations in educational, organizational, and national contexts, but also negative consequences such as lower acceptance of ethnic minority groups and increased fragmentation of groups within society (for overviews, see Refs. [1,2••,3••,4••]). For this special issue on

Socio-Ecological Psychology, we focus on multiculturalism and its different meanings, while considering its consequences for pluralistic nations. We will then consider the meaning and implications of *interculturalism*, a new approach to diversity in the social scientific and policy literature.

Multiculturalism

Empirical research on multiculturalism uses the term in different ways. Multiculturalism can refer to (a) demographic ethnic/racial diversity, (b) policies that recognize and support cultural diversity, and (c) ideological beliefs and discourses. Research on these different understandings does not necessarily produce similar findings and raises its own challenges [5]. While research on demographic or contextual diversity takes a socio-ecological perspective by considering how physically living with diversity influences various intergroup outcomes, multicultural beliefs can shape our social environment via social distancing and engagement with diversity. Moreover, the effects of multicultural policies further depend on contextual diversity.

Demographic diversity

Scholars focusing on the influence of demographic diversity on intergroup outcomes (e.g. outgroup trust) face the challenge of operationalizing diversity (e.g. heterogeneity, proportionality), separating out its effects from many other contextual factors (e.g. socioeconomic diversity), taking self-selection processes into account (e.g. pro-diversity people moving to demographical more diverse settings), and explaining the processes by which diversity affects intergroup relations [6]. For example, the much discussed association between community diversity and (dis)trust [7] may be due to economic conditions and residential mobility [8]. Broadly, empirical evidence on demographic diversity and intergroup outcomes is mixed, and this is partly due to the fact that higher diversity implies higher intergroup contact opportunities, but also stronger feelings of threat [9]. Furthermore, research indicates that it is not demographic diversity per se, but rather the perception of diversity [10] and the change in diversity that matters. For example, taking economic conditions into account, a relatively sharp increase in diversity of one's community has been found to be a key predictor of Trump support in the US [11,12]. And White Americans have more hostile reactions when there is a rapid increase in the relative proportion of ethnic minorities [13,14]. Furthermore, not only does the rate of change matter, but also anticipated demographic changes that influence people's views. For example, experimental research has demonstrated that information about the changing racial/ethnic demographics increases White Americans' feelings of group-status threat and expression of explicit and implicit racial bias [15].

Yet not all forms of diversity are the same [16,17]. Recent work reveals that distinguishing between forms of diversity as percentage of people from a specific group living within a given region (i.e. *minority representation*), the presence of multiple groups in a specific context (i.e. *variety*), or the interconnectedness of various ethnic groups within a region (i.e. *integration*) can be uniquely informative. For example, implicit stereotypes about Black (versus White) Americans and weapons were weaker in metropolitan areas characterized by high degrees of variety and integration, but not minority representation [18]. However, implicit national exclusion of Asian Americans was less pronounced in metropolitan areas with higher minority representation and variety, but these were not influenced by integration [19]. Taken together, such findings reveal that demographic diversity as an aspect of the socio-ecological context has nuanced effects on intergroup relations depending on how diversity is operationalized, which intergroup outcomes are of interest, and accounting for other factors that may influence these relations.

Multicultural policies
Research on multiculturalism has also focused on the effects of multicultural policies for intergroup outcomes. This research faces the challenge of considering, for example, income inequality, degree of diversity, and welfare state arrangements as alternative explanations, and faces additional questions on the underlying processes involved. Nevertheless, some interesting findings have emerged in the literature. Cross-national research in Europe, for example, found that multicultural policies exacerbate hostility to immigrants and more hostile feelings toward the political system [20]. However, other multilevel studies reveal that multicultural policies diminish the gap between the national identification of natives and immigrants in European and non-European countries [21]. Other studies also find that multicultural policies go together with reduced feelings of threat [22] and lower anti-minority prejudice [23], and that multicultural school policies longitudinally reduce significant ethnic majority-minority gaps in belonging and achievement [24••]. And in an experimental survey study among a representative sample in Arizona and New Mexico, it was found that institutional support for welcoming immigration policies sets a local norm that can create a sense of state belonging among both newcomers and non-conservative US-born Whites [25••]. The effects of multicultural policies can further depend on demographic diversity as a key aspect of the socio-ecological context. For example, multicultural policies might be more effective for positive relations in less diverse contexts in which people have fewer opportunities for intergroup contacts [10].

Multicultural beliefs
Scholars examining the intergroup outcomes of multiculturalism as an ideological belief system face challenges in considering how multiculturalism is construed. This issue of construal is important because it refers to at least three key aspects that have been shown to affect the intergroup consequences of multiculturalism.

A first aspect relates to construal-level theory [26] which argues that abstract thinking implies construing information in terms of values (e.g. equality and fairness), whereas contextual and pragmatic consideration are more important for concrete thinking. Yogeeswaran and Dasgupta [27] manipulated the salience of abstract or concrete construals of multiculturalism in the USA ('why' versus 'how' multiculturalism) and found that abstract primes led to decreases in national identity threat and outgroup prejudice, while concrete primes increased national identity threats and outgroup prejudice. Similar results were found in experimental research in France and the Netherlands [28•, see also Ref. 3••]. However, multiculturalism may elicit less prejudice when it is construed as a concrete learning opportunity [29•]. Multiculturalism, therefore, requires careful consideration for how exactly it should be implemented in order to be successfully done.

A second aspect of how multiculturalism is construed relates to the groups that are perceived as benefiting from it. Multiculturalism is typically premised on the rights of minorities to maintain certain traditions and ways of life. As a result, it can lead to a backlash from the majority that perceive the ideology as threatening to their culture and national identity [10,27,30]. For example, research has found that multicultural ideology poses a threat to authoritarian majority members which leads to an increase in prejudice toward immigrants [31]. Furthermore, multiculturalism has been found to reduce prejudice when there is low interethnic conflict, but backfire when conflict is high [32,33]. Multiculturalism can also be considered as being asymmetrical because it focuses on ethnic minority groups and neglects the majority, which encourages resentment and fragmentation. Whites in the US, for example, were found to associate multiculturalism with non-white groups [34] and (along with Hispanics) reported increased likelihood of psychological distress (depression, hopelessness and worthlessness) when they more strongly disagree with multiculturalism [35•]. Whites can feel excluded by multiculturalism and an all-inclusive multiculturalism is required to prevent a backlash to diversity efforts [36]. Multiculturalism, therefore, requires accepting that all groups, including majority members, have needs for social belonging and motivations to protect their cultural interests [37].

A third aspect of how multiculturalism is construed concerns how group distinctions and social identities are conceptualized. Multiculturalism tends to focus on group differences rather than commonalities, and emphasizes the value of recognizing relatively separate, singular, and stable cultural groups and identities [38]. This can reinforce bounded categories ('Black', 'Hispanic', 'Irish', or 'Arab') and the protection of 'pure' forms of identity,

which may in turn stereotype and essentialize groups. For example, there is evidence that multiculturalism leads to more outgroup stereotyping [39] and participants exposed to multiculturalism expressed greater beliefs in the notion that racial group differences are valid, immutable, and biologically based, and a lower belief that racial equality is a problem [40•]. Multiculturalism, therefore, needs to avoid a unidimensional (race, ethnicity) and essentialist interpretation of group differences.

Interculturalism
The challenges faced by multiculturalism have led to considerations of alternative pro-diversity approaches, especially because multiculturalism is seen as inadequate in response to new realities. For example, there are an increasing number of people who have mixed origin and multiple identities, while ongoing processes of individualization and global migration have increased the number of people with transnational ties. Similarly, there is increasing urban and regional superdiversity, whereby hundreds of heterogeneous, ethnic, faith and language groups live together [41,42]. These new realities have led to considerations of a new policy paradigm, interculturalism [43•], that has been adopted by the European commission [44], UNESCO [45], and features in education programmes [46], and at the local level in the Intercultural Cities Programme [47]. Interculturalism is not necessarily at odds with multiculturalism, but puts more emphasis on developing intergroup contact and dialogue, stimulating identity complexity, and developing a sense of commonality and shared belonging. The distinction is similar to the one between interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary sciences [48,49]. Multidisciplinary refers mainly to research in which disciplinary perspectives about a particular topic are recognized and valued for their independent contributions to a portion of the puzzle, but these perspectives remain separate and are not integrated [48]. With interdisciplinary research, however, the interaction between disciplines is central and the aim is to synthesize disciplinary insights to create new and mixed forms of understanding [48].

Compared to multiculturalism, interculturalism emphasizes the importance of exchange and interactions between people of all origins, acknowledges multiple, complex identities, and focuses more on commonalities than differences [50••]. These three aspects of interculturalism overlap and form its defining characteristics as a unified construct. In one recent cross-national study in Europe, it was found that stronger endorsement of intercultural values, that are part of the practice of intercultural dialogue, was a strong predictor of positive attitudes toward immigrants [51]. Furthermore, across three large-scale studies conducted in the Netherlands and the USA, we tested a new measure of interculturalism and established its independence from multiculturalism and assimilation. Subsequently, we demonstrated that

interculturalism predicts positive intergroup outcomes, over and above, multiculturalism, and showed in a theoretically meaningful way it relates to various criterion measures such as reduced social dominance, reduced essentialism, and lower parochialism [52]. Additionally, using data from three experiments in three ethnically diverse nations (the Netherlands, USA, and New Zealand), we found that interculturalism reduces majority members' outgroup prejudice and increases their willingness to engage in intergroup contact, relative to controls in all three countries [53]. Interculturalism also proved to be effective in improving intergroup trust and cooperation using a behavioral game. Collectively, these studies establish the uniqueness of interculturalism from multiculturalism and show that interculturalism is a promising diversity ideology for improving intergroup relations in our rapidly changing nations.

Conclusion
The study of cultural diversity has become a major topic within psychology and produces valuable theoretical and practical insights. Its study involves different levels of analysis, dimensions, and forms (e.g. demographics, national policies, intergroup context, personal beliefs) with nuanced consequences for intergroup relations. Furthermore, in our rapidly changing world, narratives and approaches that dominate our thinking about cultural diversity (e.g. multiculturalism) may become increasingly limiting. Therefore, psychologists may need to continually improve upon the limitations of earlier approaches while considering new approaches (e.g. interculturalism) for dealing with the changing social realities created by growing diversity in different socio-ecological contexts. Furthermore, it is important to consider that questions of diversity involve multiple levels of analysis, differences between and within groups, various types of outcomes, and different processes leading to these outcomes [2••].

Conflicts of interest statement
Nothing declared.

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