

The social and psychological benefits of multiculturalism

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Retreat from multiculturalism

- ▶ David Cameron, Prime Minister UK, Feb 2011



“State multiculturalism has failed”

- ▶ Angela Merkel, German Chancellor, Oct 2010



Multiculturalism has “utterly failed”

Greg Sheridan, *The Australian*, April 2, 2011

- ▶ ‘How I lost faith in multiculturalism’
 - Multiculturalism and social diversity have often been perceived by the dominant majority as threatening and potentially undermining of social unity



The People of Australia: Australia's Multicultural Policy

- ▶ “The Australian government is unwavering in its commitment to a multicultural Australia. Australia's multicultural composition is at the heart of our national identity and is intrinsic to our history and character.
 - ▶ Multiculturalism is in Australia's national interest and speaks to fairness and inclusion. It enhances respect and support for cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity.”
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Managing social diversity

- ▶ Increasing social and cultural diversity is typically presented as posing significant problems for social cohesion
- ▶ Prejudice, racism, and intergroup tensions/ hostility tend to be emphasised at the expense of the significant psychological and social benefits associated with increasing diversity:
 - Reduction in intergroup differentiation and prejudice
 - Reduction in group stereotyping
 - Increases egalitarianism
 - Generates more complex and inclusive forms of shared national identity

Crisp and Turner (2011)

Psychological Bulletin

- ▶ Experiencing diversity characterised by multiple social categorisations can have a positive influence on attitudes towards minority groups.
- ▶ The cross categorization model emphasises positive effects when shared identities that cut across existing intergroup dichotomies are made.
- ▶ When categorisations cut across one another, this weakens the salience of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ distinction.
- ▶ For example: Indigenous vs non-Indigenous Australians both have a common and shared identity as ‘Australians’
 - ‘Australians’ becomes a superordinate identity with which both groups can identify

- ▶ Categorisations that cut across categories have been shown to reliably reduce intergroup differentiation and intergroup bias (Crisp and Hewstone, 2007).
 - ▶ Likewise, multiple categorisations create a high level of category complexity which prompts a shift in thinking style from a simple categorical mode to a more complex and systematic mode of thinking.
 - ▶ Thus experiencing diversity can trigger less heuristic/simplistic perceptions of people.
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Stereotypical Inconsistencies

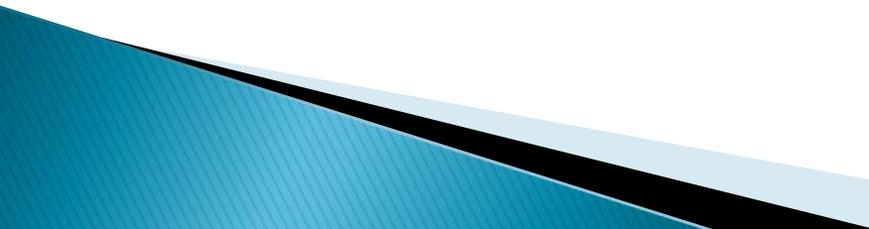
- ▶ Stereotypical inconsistencies are made salient when surprising category combinations are experienced:
 - such as a female mechanic or Australian Muslim
 - African-American US President or Woman Prime Minister
- ▶ Such combinations can generate more emergent attributes rather than relying on existing stereotypes.
- ▶ Emergent attributes are ones ascribed to category combinations that are independent of those associated with traditional stereotypes.

Repeated exposure to stereotype-challenging diversity

- ▶ Stereotype inhibition and suppression. With increasing experience of stereotypically challenging diversity, individuals automatically regulate the suppression of rigid stereotypes.
 - ▶ In turn this repeated experience of resolving inconsistencies encourages greater cognitive flexibility by stimulating generative thought.
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Will only occur under certain conditions

- ▶ The increasing ‘reality’ of multiculturalism does not guarantee more complex constructions of social identity, prevailing norms must be consistent with social diversity:
 - ▶ Political leadership is critical in providing a political climate that values social diversity and inclusiveness.
 - ▶ Political leaders must promote more inclusive and complex categories of national or civic identification that provide multiple groups inclusive shared (superordinate) identities
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- ▶ However – the very superordinate categories that can unify and be inclusive can also be mobilised to marginalise and exclude ethnic minorities
 - ▶ For example: The category ‘Australian’ – “we are all Australian despite our differences” (appeals to nationalism) can be mobilised flexibly to be inclusive
 - ▶ BUT it can also be used in narrow and restricted ways to exclude and marginalise
 - ▶ The category needs to be defined in ways that do not rely on outmoded stereotypes: emergent attributes need to be identified that are inclusive
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Benefits of social diversity

- ▶ 1. Intergroup benefits: potential to decrease intergroup differentiations within society and increase 'tolerance' between groups
 - ▶ 2. Psychological benefits: facilitates greater cognitive complexity, flexibility, and generative thought (creativity)
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Crisp & Turner, 2011

- ▶ “The experience of social and cultural diversity may therefore not only help encourage greater egalitarianism in social attitudes and behaviour but also have broader significance for the psychological well-being of individuals, groups, organisations and social and political systems” (p. 243).

References

- ▶ Crisp, R. J. & Hewstone, M. (2007). Multiple social categorization. In M. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, (Vol. 39, pp. 163–254). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- ▶ Crisp, R. J. & Turner, R. N. (2011). Cognitive adaptation to the experience of social and cultural diversity. *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 137, 242–266.