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IS MULTICULTURALISM BAD FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS? REDEFINING INCLUSION THROUGH THE LENS OF IDENTITY SAFETY

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In the late 1990s, Susan Okin wrote a withering critique of multiculturalism in her essay “Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?” that sparked a lively debate about the claims racial minority groups make to acknowledge their existence and whether they clash with norms of gender equality (Okin, 1999). Inspired by her title and critique, we believe social psychologists could benefit from a critical analysis of multiculturalism as it relates to racial minorities in the United States, specifically African Americans. Although our arguments apply to multiple groups in the United States, we focus on African Americans because their full inclusion in mainstream institutions has been historically contentious (Glazer, 1997; Olson, 2001). Moreover, architects of multiculturalism often judge the effectiveness of multicultural policies by the degree to which African Americans are effectively incorporated into a given institution (Glazer, 1997).

Multiculturalism refers to the general notion that group differences should be the basis for mutual respect and that these differences should be valued. Typically, multiculturalism stands in contrast to so-called color blindness, the idea that people are universally similar and that group differences should be minimized (Plaut, 2002). By no means do we plan to offer a critique of

multiculturalism as severe as Okin did in her article. Much good has come from multiculturalism, and African Americans have benefited from institutional policies and practices in which diversity is valued, endorsed, and supported (Carbado & Gulati, 2004; McHugh, Nettles, & Gottfredson, 1993). Yet, because multiculturalism explicitly acknowledges and values the centrality of group identity for people from diverse backgrounds (Glazer, 1997; Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2000; Plaut, 2002; Tropp & Bianchi, 2006), and because it tends to be contrasted with color-blind ideologies that deemphasize group identity (Markus et al., 2000), it is tempting to conclude that multiculturalism is unequivocally good for African Americans and color blindness is unequivocally bad.

We aim to shift conversations away from the multiculturalism/color blindness dichotomy toward a third approach to diversity—what we and others have termed *identity safety* (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005; Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2000; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Dittmann, & Crosby, 2008; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002; Walton & Cohen, 2007). Like multiculturalism, identity safety explicitly acknowledges that diversity can be a source of value. But it also emphasizes that people from different social groups and backgrounds can experience the same social contexts in similar ways but that various barriers in mainstream institutions can also prevent them from doing so (Markus et al., 2000; Steele et al., 2002). In many school and corporate settings, people from different social groups contend with different *identity contingencies*—that is, ways in which their experiences differ as a consequence of numeric underrepresentation, social hierarchies, explicit and unintended discrimination, and stereotypes (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). The goal of identity safety is to systematically identify the identity contingencies unique to each social group in a given setting and to mitigate the ways in which identity contingencies undermine some people's experiences. We argue that identity safety is a viable alternative to both multiculturalism and color-blind ideologies and review findings from several research studies that demonstrate its utility.

SETTING THE STAGE: MULTICULTURALISM AND IDENTITY SAFETY IN MAINSTREAM SETTINGS

The term *multiculturalism* is traditionally used by scholars to stress the importance of cultural diversity, the recognition of diverse ethnic, racial, and cultural groups, and the explicit valuing of this diversity in mainstream settings (Markus et al., 2000; Plaut, 2002; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000). Theories of multiculturalism prioritize cultural groups (as opposed to individuals) as the cornerstone with which a person's identity is constructed,

shaped, and constituted (Kymlicka, 1999; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). Importantly, a cultural group can be based on any number of identities, such as age, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, geography, and physical or psychological ability.

Multiculturalism is not merely a theory. It serves as a framework for policies and practices, a set of normative beliefs, and a guiding ideology about how people should behave in diverse settings (Gerteis & Hartmann, 2007). Multicultural education, for example, is designed not only to broaden students' educational base but also to foster self-esteem and positive intergroup relations by emphasizing respect for people from diverse backgrounds (McHugh et al., 1993). Accordingly, multiculturalism in educational settings can take the form of diversity-related initiatives, such as ethnic studies majors and sponsored minority-targeted orientations, events, and tutoring programs. These initiatives may also involve sanctioning of professors and students who violate or disrespect multicultural norms, as well as creating admissions practices that consider diversity as one of many factors (Glazer, 1997).

In corporate settings, multiculturalism highlights the benefits of a diverse workforce and recognizes employee differences as a source of strength (Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008). Organizations can use several strategies to achieve and effectively manage diversity in the workplace. For instance, "diversity days" may be organized to celebrate the cultures of different employees, and diversity trainings may target managerial stereotyping and increase cultural awareness (Stevens et al., 2008). Such multiculturalist approaches often necessitate the creation of diversity manager positions, diversity committees and task forces, affinity groups, networking programs, and mentoring programs—most of which are designed to reduce the social isolation felt by female and ethnic minority employees (Dobbin & Kalev, 2007; Thomas & Kanji, 2004).

By contrast, identity safety emphasizes that people from different social groups and backgrounds have the potential to experience the same social contexts in similar ways and that doing so is an ideal that organizations should strive for (Markus et al., 2000; Steele et al., 2002). Identity safety also acknowledges that people from different social groups bring different perspectives, values, and experiences to mainstream institutions. Consistent with multiculturalism, in identity safety, this heterogeneity is seen as a source of strength and value. But identity safety also presumes that within-group variability is as meaningful as between-group variability. Consequently, in identity safety, people should be perceived, treated, and evaluated primarily as individuals.

In positing the idea that people from different backgrounds have the potential to experience a social context in the same way, identity safety also posits that various barriers can prevent people from doing so. People's experiences may differ significantly as a function of their social-group background

(e.g., Steele, 1997; Steele et al., 2002). This difference in experience occurs because people from different social groups simply perceive settings from different perspectives. In a given situation, different people may contend with different *identity contingencies*.

A key goal of identity safety is to mitigate the ways in which identity contingencies can undermine some people's experiences in mainstream settings relative to others. Consequently, in an ideal setting, people's experiences and outcomes would be determined primarily by their individual interests and aptitudes, and where their group identity is relevant, it would be a source of advantage and value, not disadvantage and threat. We call such environments *identity safe*. Importantly, to reduce negative identity contingencies, it is effective neither to essentialize group identity and differences, as is risked by multiculturalism, nor to ignore the reality of group identity, as is risked by color blindness. Instead, what is required is a theory-based, empirical assessment of the ways in which each group identity can potentially undermine people's experiences and of effective strategies to mitigate such identity contingencies.

Both multicultural and identity safety frameworks have the potential to be most effective in modern pluralistic societies in which underlying assumptions about ethnic, cultural, and religious groups include the notion that each group deserves equal recognition, representation, and treatment in a given mainstream institution (e.g., corporation, school, or government institution; Brubaker, 1992). They also have the potential to be effective in societies where cultural, religious, and ethnic group memberships are distinct from political membership and distinct from citizenship (Brubaker, 1992; e.g., although African Americans tend to vote for the Democratic Party, there is no policy or explicit rule that racial identity is tied to the Democratic Party). Indeed, acknowledging and valuing the distinctiveness of outgroups are best considered long after conflicts have subsided and both advantaged and disadvantaged groups have come to share common goals of fostering social cooperation. We emphasize that in the absence of these conditions, other policies and frameworks that focus on reducing conflict between groups, incrementally building trust (see Swart, Turner, Hewstone, & Voci, this volume) and establishing forgiveness (see González, Manzi, & Noor, this volume) might be more applicable than either multicultural or identity-safety frameworks.

Yet, identity safety is a paradigm shift relative to multiculturalism, just as the iPhone is a paradigm shift from the more pedestrian cell phone. Identity safety is an *empowerment* framework in that it seeks to identify the unique identity-based concerns that each disadvantaged group contends with and tailors intervention toward addressing those concerns. In this sense, the power and potential of identity safety lie in its ability to move beyond formulaic equal representation of all groups at all times, as multicultural frameworks

emphasize. Visual symbols and cultural representations of multiculturalism—rainbows with stripes that are the same size, colorful interlocking hands, ethnic minority dolls of different hues orbiting the a globe, and the like—amusingly depict a type of stubborn equal recognition that identity safety attempts to avoid. In this sense identity safety is akin to Nadler and Shnabel’s needs-based model of reconciliation, a socioemotional approach to reconciliation that assumes that the nature of injury to a group’s identity differs for advantaged and disadvantaged groups because they arise in different contexts (see Nadler & Shnabel, this volume).

IS MULTICULTURALISM BAD FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS?

Research on attitudes toward multiculturalism has yielded two main findings that provide the background for the rest of this chapter. First, multiculturalism appeals more to minority group members, such as African Americans, than to majority group members, such as White Americans (Lambert & Taylor, 1988). Indeed, minority group members prefer multiculturalist ideologies over assimilationist ideologies, such as color blindness (Brug & Verkuyten, 2007; Ryan, Hunt, Weible, Peterson, & Casas, 2007; Verkuyten, 2005). Second, opposition to multicultural ideologies is typically limited to Whites (Haidt, Rosenberg, & Hom, 2003; James, Brief, Dietz, & Cohen, 2001). Presumably, White youth are socialized to perceive that making racial distinctions of any kind is wrong and thus, as adults, display more favorable attitudes toward and feel more comfortable with color-blind ideologies (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Given evidence that African Americans view multiculturalism more favorably than Whites, it is often simply assumed that multiculturalism is “good” for African Americans. We think this assumption requires a more critical and nuanced analysis.

Another issue involves disconnects between multicultural ideals and their implementation “on the ground.” While theoretical advances offer important guidance for how multicultural initiatives should be implemented, multicultural policies, programs, and practices often fall short of these ideals (Glazer, 1997; Olson, 2001; Stevens et al., 2008). Consider the University of Wisconsin’s attempt to illustrate its diverse enrollment by digitally embedding an African American student in an otherwise all-White crowd of Wisconsin football fans on the cover of a university brochure (Durhams, 2000). As this example illustrates, representations of diversity and multiculturalism may be ill-conceived or misguided and in some instances may do more harm than good (Roediger, 2005). Moreover, the discrepancy between African Americans’ attitudes and lived experiences with respect to multiculturalism may lead them to hold favorable attitudes in the abstract yet be skeptical of its implementation

(Tropp & Bianchi, 2006). Thus, rather than evaluate all forms of multiculturalism favorably and equally, we propose to ask instead about the identity-based concerns African Americans have in mainstream settings and whether multiculturalism attenuates or aggravates those concerns.

In this chapter, our aim is to interrogate the assumption that because multiculturalism acknowledges the centrality of group identity, it is good for African Americans. We do this by highlighting four primary limitations of multiculturalism as a guiding ideology about diversity in mainstream American organizations. First, multiculturalism may enhance stereotyping and subtyping. Second, multiculturalism may aggravate the experience of intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Third, multiculturalism often fails to explicitly challenge racial inequality. Fourth, in some respects there are inconsistencies between multiculturalism and the on-the-ground strategies African Americans use to achieve racial equality.

Limitations of Multiculturalism

The Risk of Stereotyping and Subtyping

One limitation of multiculturalism is comically illustrated by an episode of the TV series *The Office* (Novak & Kwapis, 2005), in which the office manager organizes “Diversity Day.” Each employee has to tape to his or her own forehead a randomly assigned index card that assigns him or her a racial identity. The employees cannot see their own cards and hence do not know which identity they have “taken on.” Employees are then asked to interact with their coworkers in such a way that their coworkers will guess the race written on their own card. As the African American man slaps a “Black” card on his own forehead, the office manager, in an effort to display his diversity prowess, engages the office worker in a conversation about collard greens, a stereotypically African American food, and one that this particular employee does not eat.

Just as this episode illustrates how identity can be unnaturally and uncomfortably highlighted, multicultural policies and practices may place people at risk of being uncomfortably categorized. By describing and categorizing cultural differences, multiculturalism, by definition, defines groups. And while categorization can be affirming if it advances an inclusive multicultural agenda, it can also result in stereotyping (Ryan et al., 2007; Wolsko et al., 2000). Indeed, not only can multiculturalism inadvertently lead people to categorize others, but it can also produce and construct identity by making assumptions about what constitutes the contours of that group and how members of that group should behave (Carbado, Fisk, & Gulati, 2008). Accordingly, multiculturalism may lead people to perceive outgroup members who are in some sense prototypical members of their constituent groups as more representa-

tive of that group than people who are nonprototypical members (just as people perceive a robin as more of a bird than an ostrich is).

Take, for instance, a search committee's goal of increasing the representation of African American faculty on a college campus. Committee members' assumptions about how different demographic and personal attributes define racial identity—such as the relative importance of physiological attributes (e.g., skin color) versus ideas or perspectives (e.g., the study of civil rights; Jackson, Stone, & Alvarez, 1993)—may determine the kind of African American they seek out. If a search committee views race as a demographic attribute, they may unwittingly recruit African American faculty who physiologically look Black without consideration for personal attributes. Or if the committee views race as a constellation of ideas and perspectives, the committee might be more apt to recruit African American faculty who adhere to what they perceive to be African American perspectives (e.g., Langston Hughes scholar). As a consequence of such hiring decisions, the university could end up enhancing the representation of African American faculty while simultaneously engaging in discrimination—hiring only those African American faculty who conform to a particular set of identity-relevant attributes. How people operationalize their commitment to multiculturalism may thus shape the kinds of people they value in a setting.

In our view, much more work is needed to examine how multiculturalism interacts with people's lay theories about race to affect their attitudes toward and perceptions of racial and ethnic minorities. However, some recent research is consistent with our claims. For example, an experiment by Gutierrez and Unzueta (2010) showed that people exposed to a multicultural ideology preferred stereotypic Black targets (e.g., those who had interests in basketball or hip-hop) *more* than counterstereotypic Black targets (e.g., those who had interests in surfing or country dancing). By contrast, people exposed to a color-blind ideology preferred the counterstereotypic target more. These results illustrate how people link diversity ideologies to people's individual attributes. They are also consistent with our broader argument that multiculturalism can lead people to engage in stereotyping by highlighting prototypical outgroup members.

Aggravating the Experience of Intersectional Invisibility

A second limitation of multiculturalism is that it may reinforce or aggravate the invisibility of people with multiple subordinate group identities. *Intersectional invisibility* refers to the general failure of people to fully recognize individuals with intersecting identities as members of their constituent groups (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). People who have multiple subordinate group identities (e.g., Black women, Black gay men, White lesbians) tend to be defined as nonprototypical members of both groups to which they belong.

Because these individuals do not fit the prototype of either identity group, and because multiculturalism attunes people to prototypical aspects more than nonprototypical aspects (Carbado et al., 2008; Gutierrez & Unzueta, 2010), multiculturalism may cause people with multiple subordinate group identities to be marginalized in comparison with more prototypical members of their constituent groups.

The problem of intersectional invisibility is clearly illustrated in a case study about IBM's diversity initiatives (Thomas & Kanji, 2004). In 1995, IBM launched an ambitious initiative designed to increase the retention and promotion of employees from underrepresented groups. To accomplish this goal, IBM created eight executive-level task forces to broadly represent ethnic, gender, and sexual identities. By every benchmark, this diversity initiative was innovative: It was ambitious—encompassing the entire company; it was inclusive—employees of all ranks were invited to participate; and it was endorsed by executives at the highest levels of IBM (Thomas & Kanji, 2004).

The problem was that each employee was invited to affiliate with only *one* of the eight groups: Asian, Black, gay and lesbian, Hispanic, Native American, people with disabilities, White men, and women. From the perspective of an intersectional person, the dilemma is clear. An African American gay man, for instance, must decide whether to affiliate with the Black group, whose mission was to focus on improving the institutional culture for African American employees through partnering with senior and junior African American executives, or with the gay and lesbian group, whose mission was to secure domestic partner benefits. Either way, the African American gay man will miss meaningful opportunities relevant to his life and career and will be less visible to an entire group of constituents than would be a more prototypical African American man or White gay man.

Although intersectional invisibility can certainly occur in the absence of multicultural policies and practices, initiatives born out of multiculturalism may exacerbate the experience. African American feminist scholars have long connected the rise of multiculturalism with the deepened invisibility of African American women in historical and contemporary feminist movements (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1981; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Some might claim in exasperation that at least multiculturalism is preferable to no ideology at all. We certainly agree. But two points are worth noting. First, people grossly underestimate the number of people who possess intersectional subordinate group identities. Consequently, multicultural ideologies that intend to recognize, describe, and acknowledge cultural differences may privilege some identities and marginalize many others. Second, the challenges associated with multiculturalism and multiple identities highlight the need for a

guiding ideology that can account for the dynamic and situated nature of identity across different settings. We return to this issue at the end of the chapter.

Failure to Explicitly Interrogate Structural Inequality

A third limitation of multiculturalism centers on the relationship between recognizing racial differences and combating structural inequality between groups. Despite their educational, occupational, and political gains, African Americans continue to face gross disparities relative to Whites in wealth, home ownership, employment, educational attainment, and health outcomes (Hochschild, 1995). Multicultural frameworks tend to emphasize acknowledging and valuing cultural differences. But it remains unclear whether such frameworks explicitly address structural inequality in more fundamental ways (Andersen, 1999; Glazer, 1997; Olson, 2001).

Sociologist Margaret Andersen (1999) coined the term *diversity without oppression* to describe how multiculturalism fails to address the ways in which racial differences structure social life. She argues that multiculturalism is situated outside of the context of systemic inequality and thus that people who advocate for multiculturalism shift attention away from race and racism toward an amorphous dialogue of “cultural difference” (Andersen, 1999). Critics of multicultural curricula advance similar arguments, claiming that such curricula can diminish or mystify deep structural inequalities, especially with respect to race, by emphasizing cultural recognition instead (Glazer, 1997). In this sense, multiculturalism may serve as a moral credential (Monin & Miller, 2001) that allows members of privileged groups to downplay or dismiss structural inequalities because they feel they have recognized and valued minority cultural groups.

Social scientific evidence supports the idea that multiculturalism can obscure power and structural inequality. Majority group members tend to think of multiculturalism as a descriptive term to signal heterogeneity without implied power relations (Bell & Hartmann, 2007). They also tend to conceptualize culture as cosmetic or as peripheral to the true self (Plaut, 2002). Furthermore, when asked to explicitly contextualize racial inequality within the context of multiculturalism, majority group members’ responses range from confusion to irritation (Bell & Hartmann, 2007).

One potential consequence of diversity without oppression is that it can lead to an intriguing variation of color blindness. Advocates of multiculturalism may divorce laws, policies, and accountability practices that have traditionally been central to achieving racial equality—affirmative action, reducing racial achievement gaps, eradicating racial profiling and racial stereotyping—from their broader agenda. Multiculturalism can then become a set of ideologies, practices, and policies through which people acknowledge

cultural differences, but these differences are severed from meaningful action aimed at achieving racial equality.

Inconsistencies Between Multiculturalism and How African Americans Attempt to Achieve Racial Equality

A fourth limitation is that whereas African Americans typically prefer multicultural ideologies over color-blind ones (Ryan et al., 2007), they often cope with the possibility of being stigmatized in daily life by using egalitarian, individualist, and color-blind strategies. Legal scholar Richard Ford (2002) observed the following about African Americans during the Civil Rights era: “Some of the most passionate advocates of color blindness, strong racial integration, and even assimilation were people of color who truly believed in the moral justice and pragmatic necessity of these goals” (p. 32). Recent empirical research suggests that African Americans continue to combat racism with egalitarian and individualistic strategies.

For African Americans, the primary goal in most mainstream institutions is to combat stigmatization and achieve racial equality. Sociologist Michèle Lamont (Lamont & Aksartova, 2002; Lamont & Fleming, 2005) has found that both elite and working-class African Americans seek to achieve this goal by highlighting their intelligence and competence in the workplace in an effort to demonstrate that racial stereotypes do not apply to them and/or that such stereotypes are unfounded. Whereas working-class African Americans employ individualistic rhetorical strategies that the elite do not—such as color-blind religious themes (e.g., “We are all Children of God”; Lamont & Aksartova, 2002, p. 31)—both working-class and elite African Americans draw on themes of economic egalitarianism (e.g., “money makes us equal”; Lamont & Aksartova, 2002, p. 34), individualism, and personal competence as rhetorical strategies to resist stigmatization.

African Americans also tend to draw on commonalities between people, as highlighted in sociologist Elijah Anderson’s (1999) research on corporate executives. Anderson outlined the archetype of the successful African American corporate executive: one who feels a strong need to personally believe that his or her presence in the organization is not due to race but is due to excellence and accomplishments in business. Accordingly, African American corporate executives, particularly those who have successfully integrated themselves into the corporate culture, publicly embrace the meritocratic norms of the company and explicitly project the appearance of color blindness. This produces, Anderson argued, a color-blind self-presentation style in the workplace:

In management, in the various and sundry issues of the corporate world, members of the periphery [e.g., African American corporate executives]

like to appear colorblind, indicating that race plays a limited role in their understanding of the social world, but they display some ambivalence in this regard . . . It is with such ambivalences and reservations that, on a social basis [African American corporate executives] tend to fraternize with both blacks and whites, often believing they are making little distinction on the basis of skin color, but yet doing so all the while. It is within this context, from this benchmark, that they project a kind of cosmopolitanism ideal.” (pp. 12–13)

Similarly, Barack Obama, the first African American president of the United States, frequently emphasizes how we can reduce racial polarization by focusing on common interests among racial groups (see also Eibach & Purdie-Vaughns, 2009). For instance, he has suggested that African Americans can gain more widespread support for the cause of racial justice by “binding our particular grievances . . . to the larger aspirations of all Americans” (Obama, 2008, p. 264) and that we can “pursue our individual dreams, yet still come together as a single American family” (Obama, 2008, pp. 102–103). Such common interest frames promote a color-blind view of society, downplay group differences and encourage people to focus on shared objectives (see also Gaertner & Dovidio, this volume).

Why might African Americans, from the working class to the White House, express and enact color-blind rhetorical strategies, when color blindness may at times disadvantage their group? Color blindness may be an ideology that denies the existence of White privilege and obscures racial inequalities, but it is also an ideology that can be used to advocate for racial equality and race-neutral treatment (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). When it provides a means to promote fair treatment, African Americans may ironically prefer this form of color blindness over multiculturalism. This reasoning is not without its challenges, namely, the psychic struggle that accompanies enacting color blindness in the workplace (Anderson, 1999) or disambiguating which form of color blindness is at play, a process that consumes cognitive resources (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). Nevertheless, multiculturalism in which group identities are highlighted and celebrated may not provide African Americans the same means to contend with race and racial identity in mainstream settings.

TOWARD A MODEL OF IDENTITY SAFETY

In general, at their best, we assume that diversity ideologies like multiculturalism and color blindness represent different means toward achieving a common goal: equal opportunity and inclusion in mainstream settings for people from all social groups. But neither ideology promotes this goal in a non-problematic way. Multiculturalism risks reifying social categories—by treating

people as members of a group first and as individuals second. Color blindness can deny the reality of people's group identities and the power of these identities to shape the experiences and outcomes of people from minority groups. Insofar as people wish to be perceived and treated as individuals rather than as group ambassadors, it is important to highlight their individual experiences while still acknowledging the importance of group identity. We believe that identity safety attempts to achieve this balance by acknowledging the *individual* experiences of members of minority groups while nevertheless recognizing how group identity affects these experiences.

In what follows, we outline two approaches to achieving identity safety in mainstream institutions. One approach focuses on identifying features of a given environment that give rise to negative identity contingencies. The other focuses on securing a felt sense of social belonging in settings where negative identity contingencies exist.

Achieving Identity Safety

Identifying Cues in the Setting That Trigger Threat

One way to make a setting identity safe is to identify what it is about the environment that conveys a risk of devaluation and alter those aspects of the setting. Because stigmatized group members' concerns are tied to specific settings, such group members draw information from features or cues in those settings that hold relevance for their group's status. Therefore, identifying features or cues in the setting that explicitly or implicitly convey devaluation and then objectively changing them should alter the psychological experience of members of a given group.

To test this process, we (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008) first identified two cues that African Americans use to discern the value accorded their racial identity in corporate workplaces: (a) the number of other minority group members and (b) the stated diversity philosophy of the organization—that is, whether the setting stresses color blindness or the principle of valuing diversity. African American professionals received brochures delivered from a corporate booth at a job fair designed to appear authentic. Minority representation in the organization (high or low) was experimentally manipulated via the number of “minority consultants” depicted in the brochure. Diversity philosophy (color blindness or valuing diversity) was presented in the form of a quotation from the company president. After exposure to these cues, we elicited open-ended judgments from African American professionals about the kinds of concerns and positive experiences they expected to face in the company's workplace. These judgments were coded for the degree to which they focused on identity contingencies relevant to African American professionals' racial identity. We also assessed institutional trust and motivation.

Our results revealed that these cues, though seemingly subtle, had powerful effects on African American professionals. These professionals anticipated that the corporation would value minorities, and they reported a high level of trust and anticipated a high sense of belonging in all conditions but one. In the condition in which they were exposed to two devaluing cues—a low minority representation and a color-blind diversity philosophy—African American professionals' motivation and institutional trust plummeted. Moreover, they reported more threatening and fewer affirming identity contingencies in this condition. Additional experiments showed that these effects were not found among White professionals, as their group identity is not at risk in corporate settings. They are thus less attentive to such cues.

Other studies reveal differences in the kinds of cues to which members of different groups attend. Female professionals, for instance, report concerns about gender power dynamics and, accordingly, attend to cues such as gender representation (high or low) and communication styles (competitive or relational) in corporate settings (Grewal, 2007). Gay men and lesbians face their own identity-relevant concerns. They must decide whether to conceal or reveal this aspect of their identity. Accordingly, gay men in corporate settings are attentive to social intimacy cues (i.e., interactions that require detailed knowledge of others) and are attentive to situations that require social intimacy disclosures (e.g., "What do you like to do in your spare time?"; Sedlovskaya & Purdie-Vaughns, 2009). Taken together, the research we have summarized thus far illuminates the promise of one approach to increasing identity safety: reducing identity-related threats embedded in a given setting.

Securing a Felt Sense of Belonging

Another example of a strategy to reduce identity contingences is an intervention to secure people's sense of social belonging (Walton & Cohen, 2007). This intervention begins with the premise that an important consequence of being underrepresented and negatively stereotyped in a setting is to feel uncertain about social belonging—about whether others will include and value one in that setting. As a consequence of this uncertainty, people may perceive even commonplace negative events in school settings—like critical feedback from an instructor or social rejection from a peer—as evidence that they do not belong in school. This interpretation may sap people's motivation to work hard in the setting. This is a type of identity contingency—it arises because, in light of underrepresentation and negative stereotypes, negative social events carry a more threatening meaning to some students than to others.

To reduce this form of identity contingency in academic contexts and to create an identity-safe academic environment, the social belonging intervention conveys to students that negative social events and feelings of non-belonging are common for all students in a new academic setting but that

these negative experiences dissipate with time and eventually most students come to feel at home. This message conveys to underrepresented students that such experiences are not specific to them or to their social group and are not diagnostic of their actual belonging or that of their group. The treatment is thus intended to buttress underrepresented students' sense of belonging and motivation in the face of negative social events.

An initial test of the intervention included a sample of African American and White American 1st-year college students attending an elite university. Students read the results of a survey of ethnically diverse upper-year students at their school. The survey indicated that negative social events and feelings of nonbelonging are normal in the transition to college and dissipate with time. The materials were designed to lead students to attribute such events to the difficulty of the transition to college, rather than to a lack of belonging on their part or on the part of their racial group. In the control condition, students learned how the social-political attitudes of students change over time, controlling for the provision of normative information and for the representation of growth over time in college.

For White students, who have little cause to doubt their belonging in school, the treatment had little effect. However, the treatment had many benefits for African American students. In the week following its delivery, the treatment buffered African American students' academic motivation against negative social events. In the control condition, African American students' motivation dropped precipitously on socially adverse days; in the treatment condition, their motivation stayed high even on adverse days. Notably, the treatment did not reduce African American students' experience of social adversity. In both conditions, African American students experienced similar levels of social adversity. Instead, it changed the meaning of adversity so that it no longer conveyed a global lack of belonging in the school environment.

The treatment also increased African American students' self-reported engagement in behaviors that promote academic success, such as e-mailing with professors. Moreover, in the next semester, African American students in the treatment group earned grades that were one third of a grade point higher than those of students in the control group (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Subsequent analyses tracked students' academic outcomes over the following 3 years of college through senior year. The treatment effect continued to boost African American students' grades over this period. A second, independent cohort of students replicated this long-term gain in grades. Although important questions remain about the mechanisms by which this treatment works, one possibility is that it led African American students to experience and perceive the academic environment as welcoming and inclusive of people like them—to experience it as identity safe.

Although methodologically different from the research on cues described earlier, research on the social belonging intervention shares the notion that reducing the experience of identity-related threats rooted in a setting may improve the experiences of members of underrepresented groups.

More broadly, by identifying group members' identity-relevant concerns and aspects of settings that convey information about their identity value, one can circumvent several of the limitations associated with multiculturalism described earlier. For instance, identity safety is not associated with a guiding ideology about prototypical behaviors and strategies a group should employ. An identity-safety approach offers the possibility that group identity matters, but architects of identity-safe approaches, such as policymakers, systematically determine *if*, *how*, and *when* in each setting. Such a strategy obviates stereotyping and subtyping of both prototypical and intersectional group members. Furthermore, identity safety draws explicit attention to institutional transformation—that is, to key aspects of settings that require change to remove systemic sources of inequality. Identity safety has systemic inequality at its core and celebrating group membership at its periphery. Thus, it would be difficult to water down identity safety into “identity safety without oppression,” as can occur with multiculturalism.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, there has been a growing need to shift the focus in thinking about intergroup relations from reducing conflict to optimizing intergroup relations; in short, there has been a call for positive intergroup relations. One aim of this chapter was to critically assess multiculturalism. We believe that a serious consideration of positive intergroup relations requires a critique of current frameworks and policies that aim to optimize contact between disadvantaged and advantaged group members. Furthermore, we introduced identity-safety theory as part of a new dialogue about how to improve the *individual* experiences of members of minority groups, nevertheless recognizing how group identity affects these experiences. Our research suggests that relatively simple but theory-based strategies can enhance historically marginalized group members' experience and achievement in mainstream settings while reducing threats based on group identity.

Two insights from identity-safety theory and research offer starting points for real-world intervention. First, organizations should begin to move away from diversity programs that lump all individuals with a specific identity together, because such programs exacerbate the tendency for individuals to be perceived exclusively through the lens of their group. Second, organizations aiming for positive intergroup relations should move away from programs with

formulaic identity groups because different groups face unique identity-based concerns in the same social context. The future of programs and policies that embrace cultural differences lies in identifying identity-related threats relevant to each group and how they affect people's experiences in each specific setting. While this may seem hopelessly abstract, every day companies use research about how students learn to design flexible learning programs that accommodate a diversity of learning styles and abilities among students. Just as educators are rethinking one-size-fits-all approaches to education, so must we rethink one-identity-fits-all multicultural programs. Given these insights, reducing identity-related threats that are rooted in the setting may be the most effective intervention to move toward positive intergroup relations.

Ultimately, the benefits of any diversity ideology, whether it is color blindness, multiculturalism, or identity safety, relies on the care with which it is implemented and the degree of institutional scaffolding that accompanies it. It will take more than new theories to fully include historically marginalized groups in mainstream settings. Lasting change requires widespread institutional movements driven by sustained activism that challenges systemic inequality and discourages people from becoming complacent as progress is made toward ensuring that all people can thrive in mainstream school and work environments.

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