When Whites' Attempts to Be Multicultural Backfire in Intergroup Interactions

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Abstract

Whites' attempts to enact multicultural ideals in intergroup interactions can sometimes have negative interpersonal consequences. This paper reviews the instances when Whites' efforts to acknowledge, appreciate, and learn about racial and ethnic differences can make people of color's group identity uncomfortably salient (*minority spotlight effect*), make people of color feel that certain attributes are being imposed onto their group identity (*positive stereotyping*), or make people of color feel precluded from another group identity (*identity denial*). Each of these situations introduces a hurtful discrepancy between how people of color are seen by others and how they wish to be seen. Suggestions for how to "do" multiculturalism in ways that avoid creating this discrepancy are discussed.

In a 1976 speech, President Jimmy Carter defined American society as a "beautiful mosaic" rather than the proverbial "melting pot": "Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams" (Shapiro, 2006, pg. 137). Indeed, in the last few decades, one of the prominent diversity ideologies that have emerged to promote intergroup harmony is *multiculturalism* (Plaut, 2010). Multiculturalism is often held in opposition to colorblindness, which proposes that people should be treated and judged as individuals, and racial and ethnic differences should be ignored. In comparison, multiculturalism proposes that people should acknowledge, appreciate, and learn about racial and ethnic differences, as these differences impact our lived experiences.

In the ongoing debate over which of these two ideologies is better for improving intergroup relations, social psychology has largely fallen on the side of multiculturalism (for reviews, see Rattan & Ambady, 2013; Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013). People of color generally prefer multiculturalism to colorblindness (Ryan, Hunt, Weible, Peterson, & Casas, 2007) and benefit from the pro-diversity social policies associated with multiculturalism (e.g. affirmative action) (Citrin, Sears, Muste, & Wong, 2001). The psychological engagement of employees of color in an organizational environment is positively predicted by the White employees' endorsement of multiculturalism (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009). For Whites, greater endorsement of multiculturalism predicts less evaluative bias against people of color and greater support for pro-diversity social policies (Wolsko, Park, & Judd, 2006). Relative to colorblindness, priming Whites with multiculturalism lowers their explicit and implicit bias against Blacks (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004) and leads them to express more positive comments towards people of color (Vorauer, Gagnon, & Sasaki, 2009).

With multiculturalism being positioned as the better approach to intergroup relations, some Whites may be motivated to "do" multiculturalism as a way to position themselves as better people. Indeed, a prominent concern for Whites is not to be seen as racist when interacting with people of color (e.g. Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002; Plant & Devine, 1998; Richeson & Shelton, 2007). Endorsing multicultural ideals, which is associated with having lower bias

(Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Wolsko et al., 2006), may be one particular way in which Whites try to avoid appearing prejudiced. White liberals in particular tend to renounce racial prejudice (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004) and respond more receptively to multiculturalism and its pro-diversity message compared to White conservatives (Citrin et al., 2001; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). Thus, while multiculturalism is enacted in schools, the workplace, and through public policy, Whites may also take it upon themselves to enact multiculturalism, as they've interpreted it, in their everyday interactions with people of color.

Unfortunately, as promising as multiculturalism is as an ideology, its ideals can often be implemented poorly "on the ground" (Purdie-Vaughns & Walton, 2011, pg. 163). The current paper focuses on a recent but substantial area of research examining how Whites' attempts to "be multicultural" in intergroup interactions can backfire from the perspective of people of color. The situations discussed below, although not inherently representative of multiculturalism, reflect ways in which Whites may practice being attentive to racial and ethnic group membership and identity. However, whether due to ineptitude, miscommunication, or even hostile or aversive intentions, these practices can end up being enacted to poor effect. Specifically, Whites' attempts to acknowledge, appreciate, and learn about racial and ethnic differences can lead to negative interpersonal consequences when these attempts introduce a discrepancy between how people of color are seen by others and how they wish to be seen. As a result, Whites may end up being perceived in the very way they were hoping to avoid (i.e. as prejudiced). The flawed practice of multicultural ideals may impede multiculturalism's goal of improving intergroup harmony (Plaut, 2010) and instead cause threat and discomfort in people of color and confusion and resentment in Whites, who may interpret failed interactions as the result of people of color being hypersensitive.

We explore three reasons that Whites' attempts to enact multiculturalism can backfire in intergroup interactions. Whites' attempts to acknowledge racial and ethnic differences can lead to the *minority spotlight effect*, making people of color feel uncomfortably aware of their group identity (Crosby, King, & Savitsky, 2014). Whites' attempts to express appreciation of racial and ethnic differences can manifest as *positive stereotyping*, making people of color feel that certain attributes are being imposed onto themselves and their group (Siy & Cheryan, 2013). Finally, Whites' attempts to learn about racial and ethnic differences can result in *identity denial*, making people of color feel precluded from another important group identity (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). We discuss these current challenges that arise when attempting to enact multiculturalism in intergroup interactions, as well as how to "do" multiculturalism in ways that are not harmful towards people of color.

The Minority Spotlight Effect

A White teacher holding a discussion on the Civil Rights Movement looks out into their classroom for the next student willing to contribute. In hopes of injecting the conversation with a greater diversity of experiences and voices, they point towards the lone Black student in the room. "I'm sure you can speak to this," the teacher says. "What's the African American perspective on this topic?"

A main tenet of multiculturalism is the acknowledgment of racial and ethnic differences and the distinct histories, values, and experiences of different groups (Ryan et al., 2007; Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013). Thus, Whites may consider it appropriate and even considerate to seek out people of color's viewpoints and ask them to share their perspective on subjects relevant to their group membership. For instance, given people of color's greater experiences with racial inequality, Whites acknowledge them as better sources of information on the subject of racial discrimination (Crosby & Monin, 2013). Accordingly, Whites often engage in *targeted social*

referencing, taking note of people of color and using them as social references when confronted with discussions about racial prejudice and discrimination (Crosby & Monin, 2013; Crosby, Monin, & Richardson, 2008).

However, from the perspective of people of color, this manner of attention can lead to the *minority spotlight effect*, in which people of color feel uncomfortably singled out when their group membership is made salient (Crosby et al., 2014). In a within-subjects study, Black students imagined their group membership being non-salient in a classroom (i.e. imagine a typical day in class) as well as their group membership being made salient (i.e. imagine the professor making an inflammatory racial comment). In the scenario where the professor made a racial comment, Black students reported a greater degree of negative emotion, feeling as if they were the focus of the other students' attention, and feeling as if they had to represent their racial group. These feelings were heightened if they also imagined that they were the only Black student in the class (compared to a class with several other Black students), suggesting that the minority spotlight effect is exacerbated by solo status.

To simulate the minority spotlight effect in a follow-up study, White, Black, and Latino participants listened to arguments about sociopolitical issues over headphones in a room with two White confederates who were ostensibly listening to the same thing. Although confederates looked at all participants the same amount of time, Black and Latino participants who listened to a race-relevant (i.e. affirmative action) argument estimated that the confederates looked at them more often than Black and Latino participants who listened to a non–race-relevant argument or White participants who listened to either argument. Black and Latino participants who listened to the race-relevant argument also reported feeling the most in the spotlight and the highest level of feeling lonely, self-conscious, singled out, and uncomfortable.

Both individual and structural approaches can be taken in order to prevent people of color from experiencing the minority spotlight effect. First, Whites must be sensitive towards the possibility of singling out people of color in discussions about race and ethnicity. This does not mean Whites should completely avoid or neglect to acknowledge race, which is a tactic that has its own set of negative social consequences (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008). However, discussions should be pursued in ways that do not make people of color feel tokenized and pressured to represent their entire racial group. Rather than asking for "the African American perspective" on the Civil Rights Movement, the White teacher could engage students of color without calling unwarranted attention to their group membership and singling out their perspective as being "outside the norm." Indeed, framing the high status group (e.g. Whites) as the one that needs to be explained instead may have more positive outcomes (Bruckmüller, 2012; Lowery & Wout, 2010). Similarly, rather than "typecasting" people of color into distinctive but limited roles (Kanter, 1977; Niemann & Dovidio, 1998), Whites should work to include people of color and integrate their viewpoints in discussions that are not just related to race.

Furthermore, people of color's feelings of discomfort and burden are heightened by solo status (Crosby et al., 2014). Those who find themselves the sole person of color in a given setting are vulnerable to the negative emotional and performance-based outcomes associated with feeling chronically distinctive (Niemann & Dovidio, 1998; Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2002; Sekaquaptewa, Waldman, & Thompson, 2007). Thus, the minority spotlight effect may be best attenuated by actively seeking to improve the representation of people of color in classroom and workplace environments. Increasing minority representation would also aid efforts to combat other diversity-related issues such as racial performance disparities (Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2002), and benefit the performance of Whites and the collective group as well (Milliken & Martins, 1996; Sommers, 2006; Sommers, Warp, & Mahoney, 2008).

In summary, Whites may attempt to practice multiculturalism in intergroup interactions by acknowledging racial and ethnic differences and asking people of color to provide a unique

perspective. However, such attention can be burdensome for people of color, who are made to feel as though they are not only speaking for themselves, but being seen by others as token representatives for the entirety of their group and their group's experiences.

Positive Stereotyping

"No matter what their route, young Asian Americans…are setting the educational pace for the rest of America and cutting a dazzling figure at the country's finest schools," espoused the 1987 TIME Magazine article entitled "Those Asian American Whiz Kids." This article led to perhaps puzzling boycotts from Asian Americans who eschewed the magazine's portrayal of their group.

Multiculturalism encourages not only the acknowledgment but also the appreciation of racial and ethnic differences. Whites who are motivated to be appreciative towards other racial groups may consider it complimentary to remark to an Asian American, "Asians are so good at math!" or to an African American, "You guys are so good at sports!" Although such statements communicate positive stereotypes, positive stereotypes are not considered prejudice in the same way as are negative stereotypes (Mae & Carlston, 2005) and are still likely to be expressed despite growing anti-prejudice norms (Bergsieker, Leslie, Constantine, & Fiske, 2012).

However, people of color may not construe positive stereotypes all that positively. Blacks who observed Whites praising Blacks' athletic abilities (e.g. "One thing I noticed about Black people is that you all are just unbelievable natural athletes") responded negatively, evaluating those individuals as prejudiced and unlikable (Czopp, 2008). American Indian students exposed to American Indian stereotypes with relatively positive associations, such as the warrior chief or Indian princess, expressed a lower sense of personal and community worth, and fewer achievement-related possible selves (Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008). In a study of Asian American stereotypes, a majority of Asian American participants expressed ambivalence or negativity towards the "model minority" stereotype that depicts their group as high-achieving and successful, while only 26.3 percent viewed the stereotype positively (Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997).

Three reasons have been identified that explain why positive stereotyping may backfire in intergroup interactions and cause negative responses from people of color (see Czopp, Kay, & Cheryan, in press, for the other negative societal consequences of positive stereotypes). First, people of color feel depersonalized by positive stereotypes, or judged solely on the basis of their group membership rather than their individual traits and merits (Siy & Cheryan, 2013). In an independent cultural context such as the United States, in which the self is defined as unique from others and value is placed on individuality (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), being depersonalized can be a particularly threatening experience. In one study, US-born Asian Americans were partnered with a White confederate to complete two exercise packets, one math and one English. All Asian Americans were assigned to the math packet, but in the experimental condition, the confederate also remarked to them, "I know all Asians are good at math." Relative to those in the control condition, Asian Americans who were positively stereotyped reported stronger feelings of anger, annoyance, and offense. They also rated their partner more negatively (e.g. not easy to get along with, insensitive), an effect that was mediated by their greater sense of being depersonalized (Siy & Cheryan, 2013).

Being the target of a positive stereotype may also indicate to people of color that they are being negatively stereotyped by implication (Siy & Cheryan, 2015). In a scenario similar to the one above, Asian Americans were partnered with a White confederate who either stated a positive stereotype (e.g. "I know all Asians are good at math") or did not. Asian Americans who were positively stereotyped were more likely to subsequently believe that their partner was also

ascribing negative racial stereotypes to them (e.g. being a bad driver, being bad at English) and more likely to perceive their partner as prejudiced and insensitive.

Finally, positive stereotypes make people of color feel pressured to live up to the expectations of their group (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000; Son & Shelton, 2011). Asian American college freshmen with other-race roommates participated in a daily diary study for three weeks (Son & Shelton, 2011). For Asian Americans who had White roommates, higher stigma consciousness (e.g. higher expectations of being perceived according to their group membership) led to feelings of anxiety and the perceived need to change in order to fit in with their roommate. This effect was partially mediated by Asian Americans' concerns about appearing smart when interacting with their roommate. Thus, Asian Americans who are high in stigma consciousness may be especially worried about and sensitive to being positively stereotyped as intelligent, which contributes to various negative outcomes in their intergroup interactions specifically with Whites.

Going forward, Whites who wish to appreciate group differences, as multiculturalism recommends, should do so in a way that recognizes the substantial and meaningful individual differences in the extent to which people demonstrate their group's typified norms (Leung & Cohen, 2011). Whites' appreciative remarks may be better received if they acknowledge this variability (e.g. "Many Asians tend to have interdependent values") rather than make generalizations ("Asians are so interdependent"). Indeed, perceptions of out-group variability can improve intergroup relations (Er-rafiy & Brauer, 2012, 2013) even more so than solely positive out-group perceptions (Brauer, Er-rafiy, Kawakami, & Phills, 2012).

Furthermore, and on a broader level, Whites should be aware that positive stereotypes are capable of evoking negative responses despite their positive valence. Although the subtle activation of positive stereotypes can have beneficial effects for people of color (Shih, Ambady, Richeson, Fujita, & Gray, 2002), the *blatant* expression of these stereotypes in intergroup interactions is often unappreciated (Czopp, 2008; Siy & Cheryan, 2013), as it makes people of color feel as though they have been reduced to a single trait that may not represent who they are or how they wish to be seen by others. Thus, rather than omitting positive stereotypes from the popular definition of prejudice, Whites should recognize that for many people of color, being positively stereotyped can very much feel like being the target of prejudice. Acknowledging positive stereotypes as a form of prejudice may help attenuate not just their negative interpersonal consequences but also their role in legitimizing structural inequality and undermining the desire for social change (Czopp et al., in press).

In summary, Whites may attempt to practice multiculturalism in intergroup interactions by appreciating racial and ethnic differences through the expression of positive stereotypes. However, positive stereotypes can make people of color feel judged on the basis of their group membership, ascribed negative group stereotypes by implication, and concerned about living up to the expectations placed on them. In each case, people of color react against being seen through the lens of attributes imposed onto their group identity, resulting in the varied negative interpersonal and emotional costs of stereotypes that are presumed to be positive.

Identity Denial

Rep. Curt Clawson, a freshman Republican congressman from Florida, made an unfortunate gaffe when he remarked towards Nisha Biswal and Arun Kumar during a 2014 House hearing, "I am familiar with your country. I love your country. […] Anything I can do to make the relationship with India better, I'm willing and enthusiastic about doing so." After a confused and awkward pause, Biswal, an Indian-American and US state department official, replied, "I think your question is to the Indian government."

For Whites who are unfamiliar with being the target of such an experience, Rep. Clawson's statement may represent a misfired but well-meaning attempt, in the spirit of multiculturalism, to understand Biswal and Kumar's unique racial and ethnic backgrounds. However, from the perspective of people of color, these interactions are often interpreted as a form of *identity denial*, or being miscategorized or unrecognized as a member of one's social in-group (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Questions such as "How long have you lived in this country?" or "Where are you *really* from?" communicate not genuine interest and curiosity, but rather an implication that the target – perhaps a Latino person living in the United States or an Iranian person in Canada – could not actually be of American or Canadian nationality. And to people of color for whom a certain identity is central to their self-concept, having that identity denied introduces a threatening incongruity between one's internal and external self-categorization (Trujillo, Garcia, & Shelton, 2014; Wang, Minervino, & Cheryan, 2013).

Given the comparatively recent and salient immigration histories of Asian and Latino Americans, these groups are particularly vulnerable to the ubiquitous line of questioning, "Where are you *really* from?" Many report facing the assumption that they are not American in their daily lives (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Huynh, Devos, & Smalarz, 2011). For Asian and Latino Americans who feel every bit as much American as their White counterparts, having their American national identity unrecognized is painful, causing feelings of offense, anger, and annoyance, as well as disliking for the perpetrator (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Guendelman, Cheryan, & Monin, 2011; Wang et al., 2013).

People of color are confronted with the denial of other social identities as well. Flores and Huo (2013) found that a strong majority of Asian and Latino participants (91 percent) reported having had an experience in which their national origin identity was miscategorized or treated as interchangeable with another national origin. In the following experimental study, Asian and Latino participants who imagined an instance of national origin identity denial (e.g. "a friend asking about your plans to celebrate Cinco de Mayo, which is a Mexican holiday, when you are actually from El Salvador") experienced stronger negative emotions and negative perceptions of the imagined interaction partner. Similar results were found among Asian Americans who, after being miscategorized as having another ethnic identity (e.g. a Chinese American being mistaken for Korean), exhibited disliking of their interaction partner (Trujillo et al., 2014). Mixed-race individuals also experience identity denial due to feelings of a "mismatch" or discrepancy between how they privately self-identify as (i.e. multiracial) and how they are publically identified by others (i.e. monoracial) (Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Everyday experiences in which they are unable to claim multiple racial identities (e.g. filling out demographic questionnaires on which they can only indicate one race) can be sources of tension and pressure, leading mixed-race individuals to exhibit lower motivation and self-esteem (Townsend, Markus, & Bergsieker, 2009).

People of color are not passive targets and may utilize various *identity assertion* strategies to reaffirm their denied identity (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Trujillo et al., 2014). Asian American participants who were asked by a White experimenter "Do you speak English?" spent more time listing American TV shows on a subsequent survey, compared to Asian American participants whose identity was not called into question. Similarly, Asian American participants who were told by a White experimenter upon arrival, "Actually, you have to be an American to be in this study," reported greater participation in American cultural practices than what they initially reported on premeasures at least a week earlier (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Asian Americans also respond to identity denial by altering their food and health behaviors to signal an American identity, consuming fewer Asian dishes and more American dishes, which are notably higher in caloric content and fat (Guendelman et al., 2011). Thus, identity denial not only negatively influences Asian Americans' affect, but also the strategies that they engage in to reassert their identity may actively pose harm to their health.

To avoid causing identity denial, Whites' individual attempts to enact multiculturalism should first be accepting of the range of people of color's social group membership. People of color possess multiple identities in addition to their race, including nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. These identities are often complex, intersecting, and overlapping, rather than mutually exclusive, such that belonging to one group (e.g. Asian) does not disqualify someone from another (e.g. American). Indeed, the recognition of others' multiple identities can facilitate more positive intergroup relations and interactions (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007; Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015). Thus, more inclusive questions that allow people of color to define their own identities ("What is your ethnic background?") are more constructive and less hurtful than statements that reduce the autonomy and flexibility of those identities based on Whites' assumptions and expectations ("Where are you *really* from?") (Sanchez, Shih, & Wilton, 2014).

Furthermore, structural policies and practices can be reformed to similarly allow people of color to define their own identities as they desire. For instance, compared to forcing mixed-race individuals to mark only one racial identity on a demographic questionnaire, giving mixed-race individuals the option to indicate multiple racial identities avoided the negative self-esteem and motivation-related consequences of identity denial (Townsend et al., 2009). These small but important details can help reduce the discrepancy between how people of color identify themselves as belonging within a group, and how they are identified by others as outside of it.

In summary, Whites' attempts to learn about racial and ethnic differences may inadvertently preclude people of color from a group to which they actually belong. Questions such as "Where are you really from?" can backfire to make people of color feel as though their group identities have been miscategorized or unrecognized, an experience that can be highly threatening (Barreto & Ellemers, 2003).

From the Perpetrator's Perspective

Although our primary focus in this paper has been the pitfalls of multiculturalism from the target's perspective, below, we briefly address how multiculturalism may backfire in intergroup interactions from the perpetrator's perspective as well.

Research has demonstrated that multiculturalism can improve Whites' behaviors in intergroup interactions (Vorauer et al., 2009); however, these benefits are not unconditional (Vorauer & Sasaki, 2010, 2011). Because multiculturalism encourages Whites to adopt an outward focus and engage more deeply with racial differences, this manner of engagement can ironically lead to negative interpersonal outcomes in situations wherein these differences are not agreeable (Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013). A multicultural prime caused Whites high in prejudice (but not those low in prejudice) to convey less warmth towards people of color in an intergroup interaction, and feel more disturbed by cultural differences (Vorauer & Sasaki, 2010). In another study, relative to Whites who were not primed with multiculturalism, Whites primed with multiculturalism reacted with greater hostility after learning that a person of color disagreed with or rejected them (Vorauer & Sasaki, 2011). Similarly, after reading an article proposing a new registration policy that would grant students of color early registration access at the expense of White students, White students primed with multiculturalism (versus colorblindness) expressed greater explicit racial bias (Correll, Park, & Smith, 2008). Thus, while multiculturalism may prompt positive behaviors from Whites in low-conflict situations, in situations where Whites perceive racial and ethnic differences to be threatening, multiculturalism may backfire to prompt hostility and negativity instead.

Whites are not the only ones who may go awry in their attempts to enact multiculturalism. Given the complex nature of intra-minority relations, people of color are capable of filling the

role of perpetrator as well (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2008). For instance, non-Whites also express positive racial stereotypes about other groups (Bergsieker et al., 2012), and people of color can have their racial identity denied by members of their own in-group (Johnson & Ashburn-Nardo, 2014; Johnson & Kaiser, 2013). However, situations in which the potential perpetrator is another person of color, especially from one's own group, may be less automatically threatening (Brown, 1998; Wout, Shih, Jackson, & Sellers, 2009) compared to when the perpetrator belongs to the dominant group in power (i.e. Whites). As diversity ideologies impact not just Whites' behavior in intergroup interactions but the behavior of people of color as well (Vorauer et al., 2009), more research is needed to investigate the ways in which *intra-minority* attempts to be multicultural may manifest, and how such interactions play out.

Does Colorblindness Backfire Too?

Given the ways in which Whites' attempts to be attentive to group differences can backfire, it may be tempting to conclude that the solution is to ignore group differences instead. Indeed, colorblindness remains the more pervasive ideology in the United States (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012) and can be used to promote racial equality and unbiased treatment (Plaut, 2010; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008). However, significant criticisms have also been leveled against colorblindness (Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2002; Plaut, 2010), and a colorblind approach to intergroup interactions has its own set of pitfalls. Whites who practiced colorblindness and avoided mentioning race during a photo-matching task in which making racial classifications was appropriate exhibited less friendly non-verbal behavior and were perceived as less friendly by their Black interaction partners (Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, Pura, & Ariely, 2006). Compared to multiculturalism, priming Whites with colorblindness caused them to express more negative affect (Vorauer et al., 2009) and behave with more prejudice towards people of color, who experienced cognitive depletion following the interaction (Holoien & Shelton, 2012). Consequently, it does not seem any more preferable to always ignore racial and ethnic differences, especially in contexts where race is relevant (Apfelbaum et al., 2008) and significantly informs people's lived experiences (Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2000).

Taken together, the question becomes as follows: When is multiculturalism the better approach to intergroup interactions, and when is colorblindness defensible? The most advantageous strategy would be to educate people about the distinct benefits and limitations of both multiculturalism and colorblindness in different situations. Specifically, the effectiveness of either approach is contingent on the preferences and expectations of the people of color involved. In order to calibrate their behavior accordingly, Whites' should first be responsive to the interpersonal social cues that signal the appropriateness of one approach over the other. In interactions in which race is not central, people of color perceive Whites who bring up race to be more prejudiced than Whites who are more "colorblind" (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). Thus, when race is not salient and people of color have not indicated being interested in or open to talking about their race, it may be inappropriate for Whites to force the topic themselves. However, in interactions in which race is central and clearly relevant to the conversation, Whites who purposefully avoid race are perceived as more prejudiced (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). Thus, when people of color initiate a conversation about race and would rather their racial identities be acknowledged and heard, a response such as "I don't see you as a Black person" may be obtuse and insensitive.

Secondly, Whites should be aware of and educated about the broader diversity-related cues in the environment to which people of color are themselves often attuned. In a setting with high minority representation, a colorblind approach that emphasizes individual qualities may be appealing (Purdie-Vaughns & Walton, 2011; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). However,

settings with poor minority representation, and settings in which race has played and continues to play a critical role in individuals' life circumstances and experiences (e.g. educational settings), may be better served by an approach that does not devalue or ignore such racial differences (Markus, Steele, & Steele, 2002). Going forward, more research will be needed to identify which situations are better approached with multiculturalism, and which with colorblindness.

Doing Multiculturalism More Successfully

Being seen and understood by others as we see and understand ourselves is a common and shared desire (Swann & Read, 1981). Unfortunately, Whites' attempts to enact multicultural ideals in intergroup interactions can sometimes cause a harmful discrepancy between how people of color are seen, and how they see themselves and want to be seen by others. When poorly done, multiculturalism is prone to backfiring, as Whites' efforts to acknowledge, appreciate, and learn about racial and ethnic differences makes people of color's group identity uncomfortably salient (*minority spotlight effect*), makes people of color feel that attributes are being imposed onto their group identity (*positive stereotyping*), or makes people of color feel precluded from another group identity (*identity denial*). Thus, the *when* and *how* of "doing" multiculturalism are critical to its success.

As the United States' racial and ethnic diversity continues to grow at unprecedented rates, and individuals of varied backgrounds come into more frequent contact, it is necessary to improve upon our existing approaches to diversity. To the extent that people of color want their racial and ethnic identities to be recognized and celebrated, multiculturalism can have a beneficial impact on intergroup interactions. However, Whites should not let their own motivation to enact multicultural ideals take priority over how people of color themselves wish to be seen.

Short Biographies

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