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Growing Up With Diversity: Psychological Perspectives

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Abstract

Diversity, in many parts of the world, is increasing in its prevalence and in its complexity. How do children and adolescents negotiate that complexity, and how can developmental and social psychology inform our approach to studying diversity? In this introduction to the Special Issue we outline the key themes and challenges in studying children's reactions to diversity, and consider how they *meet* the challenge learning about the nuances of relations between individuals from multiple social groups. We describe findings from international perspectives, each tackling an issue of diversity in young people from areas including ethnic and racial diversity, national identity and religious diversity. We explore the ways in which these papers can help to frame a new way of understanding the challenge of diversity in

social development. We argue that while psychological theory can inform our understanding of the field, and help to develop applications for addressing current and future problems, there is a need to (a) reach consensus on how psychology understands diversity, and (b) ensure that research embeds the concept of diversity in selecting participants, developing research questions, and considering the context in which research is applied. (188 words)

Keywords: child, diversity, group, identity, social

Societies progress and, as they do so, people increasingly encounter new and different types of social groups. Young people can benefit from the opportunities this brings, but must also face the challenges that arise from grappling with growing and new forms of diversity. Young people's experiences of this diversity, the context in which they are socialised, and their reactions to it, have important implications for future generations. These implications and the questions they present go to the heart of social, developmental, community and applied psychology. Indeed, understanding how children and adolescents negotiate shifting patterns of diversity to become productive, competent and moral social actors is a key challenge for those concerned with equality, opportunity, education, social justice and inclusion.

This Special Issue brings together interdisciplinary perspectives from social, developmental and applied psychological research that examines how diversity shapes our social psychology and how we respond to it. The papers focus on understanding the experiences of children and adolescents and outlining the causes and consequences of these experiences for social development. Together, they address key theories and themes within applied, social and developmental psychology. This Special Issue offers a state-of-the-art collection of work in an important and emerging field of study in the social sciences,

identifying existing knowledge and suggesting a road-map for future work where psychology can frame, inform and address issues of growing societal and moral importance.

1. A Social and Developmental Psychology of Diversity

Difference, in its social and interpersonal forms, has long been a topic of interest for social psychology. However, our lives, our children's lives and those of future generations are increasingly marked by diversity (for a discussion of essentialism, intersectionality and terminology here, see Brah, 1991). Demography suggests we are entering an age of increased societal diversity. For instance, in the United Kingdom, by 2056, racial and ethnic minorities are predicted to form one third of the total population (Coleman, 2010). Across Europe, recent years have seen a steady rise in the number of immigrants, and children and adolescents born to immigrant parents (OECD/European Union, 2015, see Martiny, Froehlich, Deaux & Mok 2017). And diversity extends across social categories to include ethnicity and race, religion, gender, disability and many other areas. In order to anticipate the changes and consequences of these shifts in societal dynamics and constitution, psychology needs to understand young people's experience of diversity, how they are shaped by it and respond to it.

Research in social and developmental psychology has articulated how understanding membership of our own and others' groups is an important social skill and an important psychological process. Intergroup contact research has demonstrated the impact of diversity on adults' and children's attitudes, emotions and behaviours (e.g. Pettigrew, et al., 2011). Meanwhile developmental psychology has expanded our understanding of developmental changes in ethnic and racial identity in children and adolescents (for review see Verkuyten & Fleischmann, 2017).

Intergroup dynamics and behaviours have long been a focus of social psychological research, yet the diversity of research participants has not always been as representative of

society as it might be. Historically, much intergroup work has tended to parse off ethnic or other groups and to examine the differences, conflicts, or attitudes between them. While such work is doubtless important and informative, it often reproduces difference and distinctiveness and neglects cohesiveness as a feature of groups that is distinguished from aspects of individuals' social identities.

A diverse psychology (or psychology of diversity) takes a range of identities in a group as its starting point and seeks to explore group behaviours from a different direction or a more naturalistic way. Traditional approaches to research on intergroup relations also often compounded bias: the vast majority of research on contact has been conducted with white, undergraduate students in North America or Europe. Moreover, this has tended to focus on contexts in which two groups are in contact with one another (e.g., Leman et al., 2013). While this may accurately reflect the cultural landscape of some, it by no means represents the way in which diversity is experienced by all (e.g. emerging “super-diverse” cities).

From the perspective of developmental psychology understanding diversity is partly a cognitive skill (understanding that there are different groups, understanding the self as a member of some of those groups, and understanding that different groups often have different perspectives. In this respect much of the developmental context has a socio-cognitive base and the task of the developing child is at once understanding and connecting up the conceptual and interpersonal domains of action. It is, then, no coincidence that recent work on social development in the area has focussed on unpicking how children understand social groups and their consequences (e.g., Rutland et al., 2012).

However, growing up with diversity is more than a socio-cognitive puzzle that children must solve, but a process of identity development that runs alongside increasing socialisation into a complex social world. That is a world that is complex in many ways: it is important also to understand how young people form relationships, learn to become competent social

actors, understand discrimination, equality and justice, are influenced by family members and others. Indeed, young people's understanding of and orientation or attitude to diversity itself is an increasingly important component of the developmental process, and is also essential to our understanding of how children grow up with diversity.

2. Overview of the Special Issue

The special issue showcases social, developmental and applied psychology research that reflects the shifting cultural landscape of modern society and experiences of diversity in that landscape. It purposefully (and unashamedly) focuses on the experiences of both minority and majority groups, and the social psychological theories and processes that underpin young people's experiences with and within them. It explores the socialisation processes associated with learning about and reacting to diversity.

This research spans multiple contexts: Turkish-origin immigrants in Germany; children from ethnic and racial majority and minority backgrounds growing up in diverse (and 'super diverse') areas in the UK; bicultural adolescents; native Dutch, Turkish Dutch and Moroccan Dutch adolescents; and ethnically diverse German youth; perceptions of the Roma community in Macedonia among Roma, Macedonian, Albanian, and Turkish young people in Macedonia; British children's reaction to moral and religious issues in diverse communities in the UK. While there are common themes, it is not a straightforward matter to extrapolate findings from one context to another and the context in which development and diversity happens is a fundamental component needed to further our understanding of the psychology of diversity. These papers shine a light on the particular experiences of children growing up with diversity: the formative influence of social context is a central issue for work in the area (Leman et al., 2017) and is a theme touched upon by many of the contributions to the present Special Issue.

3. Emerging Themes and Papers in the Special Issue

Researchers have begun to uncover the far-reaching impact of diversity on, for example, children's identity, acculturation, classroom performance, competence, well-being and creativity (Benner & Crosnoe, 2011; Brown et al., 2013; Rutland et al., 2012; Knifsend & Juvonen, 2014). Notably, research has also highlighted the complex interplay between children's experience of diversity and their developing cognitive abilities which may restrain how young people understand and perceive the outgroup during contact (Rutland & Killen, 2015). Furthermore, extensive research has established adolescence as a critical period for developing ethnic and racial identity development, which is crucial for well-being (e.g. Yip, Seaton & Sellers, 2006). In an increasingly diverse world, understanding how young people experience diversity, how they are shaped by it, and the strategies used by young people to manage diversity, is essential for the well-being and success of future generations.

This special issue shines a light on current and emerging themes in the study of diversity in young people, reflecting established lines of research as well as recent advances in the field. Several common themes run throughout the issue: developing identities in a diverse world, intergroup contact, discrimination and exclusion.

3.1. Developing Identities in a Diverse World

In developmental psychology, adolescence is recognised as a critical period in the development of ethnic and racial identity (see Verkuyten & Fleischmann, 2017). Much research has focussed on homogenous contexts and communities or developmental processes in distinct ethnic groups. Yet there are important developmental questions about how children understand self and others in diverse contexts, where the task of understanding social categories is more complex than, say, understanding a simple binary distinction between majority and minority groups. With increasing societal diversity, there is an increasing cognitive and social demand on children to interact with others in effective and appropriate (socially desirable) ways - to understand and negotiate a route through that complexity.

Traditional, "duolithic" or rather static theories of intergroup relations may not adequately capture the task, for the developing child, of understanding the fluidity and nuance of social groups, social categories, and their own social identity.

An increasingly diverse and fluid society also poses problems for securing representative samples of research participants, and perhaps even raises questions about the appropriate methodologies required to examine young people's social development.

Of particular focus in this Special Issue is the experience of young migrants. We still know comparatively little about the development of young migrant's identities in diverse or super-diverse contexts, or the development of non-migrant youth's attitudes and relationships in such contexts. The daily reality of migration means that young people have often internalized multiple identities or cultures as part of their self. One of the major challenges facing migrant children or children from migrant families is balancing various identities, including national and ethnic or cultural identity. These identities can be perceived as incompatible, causing acculturative stress and negatively impacting well-being. How young people negotiate their various identities, and the antecedents and consequences of this, is a crucial question for academics studying the experience of diversity among young people (and adults).

Drivers of identity development, and the link between young people's developing multiple identities and their integration and acculturation is a theme that is evident throughout this special issue. Several important new findings have emerged from numerous diverse perspectives and national contexts. For instance, Martiny, Froelich, Deaux and Mok (2017) study the multiple identities of Turkish-origin adolescents in Germany, and Benbow and Rutland (2017) examine biculturalism in Black British adolescents in the UK. Jugert et al. (2017) explore ethnic and national identity in British ethnic majority and minority children.

Palmer, Rutland, Cameron & Blake (2017) consider the process of ethnic socialisation, an important aspect of ethnic identity development.

Muldoon, O'Donnell and Minescu (2017) consider an important and somewhat under-researched area of diversity research: the role of parents and families in developing a sense of national identity. Without doubt parents are important and early socialising agents and may often hold a perspective on diversity that differs from that experienced by their children. The researchers collected survey data exploring conceptions of national identity from 34 families who were visiting the National Museum of Ireland. Results underscore the impact of parental views and attitudes on their children's understanding of their Irishness, and a strong sense of national identification drove a greater interest in identity exploration.

Benbow and Rutland (2017) explore the theme of identity, and focus on a group who are of particular interest when studying children's experience of diversity, namely *bicultural* adolescents. As the authors explain, for this group diversity is more than an experience, it is an integral part of their selves. The researchers argue that for these individuals, their whole development is linked to their 'bicultural competence', that is, their ability to negotiate their multiple identities, and function in multi-ethnic or multi-cultural environments. This study reveals, for the first time, a positive link between adolescents' bicultural competence and their subsequent psychological adaptation. Bicultural competence may be particularly important for identity formation in early adolescence, and can help many young people to negotiate diversity in their everyday lives.

Intercultural competence is a further important element in promoting positive intergroup relations in diverse contexts. To explore how far self-perceived and other measures of intercultural competence differ by ethnic group and age, Schwartzenthal, Juang, Schachner, van de Vijer and Handrick (2017) surveyed minority and majority ethnic group German youth (11-18 years) in ethnically diverse schools. Ethnic contact and ethnic identity

exploration were, as expected, positively related to intercultural competence. Intercultural competence increased with age, but self-reported intercultural competence did not, highlighting the importance of self versus other perspectives in evaluating young people's reactions to and understanding of diverse contexts.

The research in this special issue advances our understanding of the complex relationship between developing multiple identities, integration and acculturation strategies, and key social-emotional outcomes, among young people in diverse contexts. Taken together these papers emphasise how social identities frequently underpin social development, and demonstrate the need for questions of identity to be front and centre of work in understanding how young people understand, manage and respond to themselves and others in diverse contexts.

3.2. Intergroup contact

The broadly positive impact of cross-group friendship on children's intergroup attitudes is well-established, and findings from many studies suggest that children in diverse environments benefit from increased diversity in their friendship groups (see Jugert & Feddes, 2017 for review). However, research also indicates that when provided with the opportunity for cross-group friendships, young people do not always take these up. Indeed, they tend to favour friendships with peers from the same sorts of social background as themselves (e.g., gender, race, class; termed *friendship homophily*). Self-limiting friendship choices act as an obstacle to effective intergroup contact and can exacerbate negative or conflictual intergroup relations in the longer term.

In order to understand friendship homophily researchers have begun to shift their focus from the outcomes of cross-group friendship, to understanding the *predictors* of these important relationships. This research asks: what are the individual or situational conditions that encourage cross-group friendship formation, and what are the hurdles that make such

friendships more problematic. Research presented in this special issue advances these critical questions in several important ways.

The research extends our understanding of the complex relationship between identity, acculturation and contact. The ways in which young people experience diversity, and engage in contact with members of other groups, is likely to be shaped by their emerging identities (national, ethnic and religious). For the first time, Jugert et al. (2017) identify a link between ethnic identity and friendship homophily among ethnic minority children. In particular, the authors find that individual differences in friendship homophily can be moderated, over time, by the extent to which a child is immersed in a diverse social context. The significance of this work is that it suggests that diverse communities have an inherent positive effect on cross-ethnic friendship choices in young people; diversity propagates cross-ethnic friendship.

Martiny et al. (2017) bring together two lines of research, contact and identity, and advance our understanding of multiple identities in migrant children by showing the complex interplay of identity, contact and integration. They explore how situational variables (in this case intergroup contact) can shape identities, as well as examining the consequences of holding these identities for feelings of integration among Turkish-origin adolescents in Germany. They focus on the *inter-relationship* between three types of identity: national identity, ethnic identity and dual identity. The analysis revealed a negative relationship between ethnic and national identity, suggesting these are incompatible, while dual and national identity were positively related. Their second study also found a positive relationship between *contact with Germans*, and national and dual identity, and feelings of integration. These findings highlight the importance of positive contact with the host society for feelings of integration, and also identifies a further positive outcome of dual identity, 'feeling at home' in the host country.

Kamberi, Martinovic and Verkuyten (2017) explored how Roma adolescents, a minority group in Macedonia, and those of non-Roma origin (including Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish young people in Macedonia), endorsed empowerment of the Roma community. The study gives direct evidence of a relationship between outgroup contact and endorsement of empowering this minority group. Interestingly, not only was endorsement of empowerment connected with more positive feelings toward the Roma community and fewer negative stereotypes, but was also guided by a sense of social injustice for Turkish and Albanian youth. Thus positive contact between groups may be a sufficient condition for attitude change, but the motivations (reasoning) behind this may well vary depending on the different groups with which individuals identify. Such a finding has important implications for social contact and cohesion in diverse contexts.

In their longitudinal study, Jugert et al. (2017) examined how the friendship decisions of young ethnic minority and majority children in the UK are shaped by the strength of their ethnic and national identity, school ethnic composition, and social-emotional adjustment. They focus in on the relative importance of individual factors (social-emotional adjustment) depending on school diversity. Jugert and colleagues report that among ethnic minority English children, peer problems and ethnic identity are associated with more friendship homophily (preference for same-group friendship). Moreover, ethnic minority children who were highly identified with both their ethnic group and English (i.e. bicultural identity) *did not* show more friendship homophily. That is, ethnic minority children were more likely to have friends from other ethnic groups if they identified with a superordinate and shared identity i.e. national (English) identity. The authors conclude that, based on their findings, high ethnic density schools are most beneficial for children in terms of their friendship homophily: children in diverse schools are more likely to benefit from diverse friendship groups.

McKeown, Williams and Pauker (2017) also examined predictors of cross-group interactions, using an imaginative story-book intervention programme that aimed to encourage intergroup contact among 4-6 year olds in a racially diverse school context. Impact was assessed by pre- and post-intervention assessments of seating behaviour in the school lunchroom. While pre-intervention seating was marked by clear preferences for sitting with the racial ingroup, immediately after the story book intervention this self-segregation along race lines disappeared. However, two days later the pattern of race-linked segregation had disappeared. The researchers argue that interventions need to be sustained to ensure enduring benefits of interventions to increase intergroup contact.

An important message to emerge from this collection of papers is an understanding that how identity develops is shaped by multiple social forces including contact and acculturation, as well as how experience of contact could in turn shape development of identity and acculturation strategies.

3.3. Diversity, Inclusion, Exclusion and Discrimination

Understanding children's perspectives on group-based exclusion in a diverse world is important for maintaining good group relations and reducing discrimination. A consequence of living in more diverse communities, and attending more diverse schools, is increased exposure to group-based victimisation and exclusion, specifically discrimination based on religion, nationality, ethnicity or race: while friendship is the positive side of intergroup contact, exclusion and discrimination are its dark side. Young people's response to and understanding of discrimination is a final theme to emerge in this Special Issue.

Previous research has examined children's reasoning about social exclusion based on religion, ethnicity, nationality and gender. In this special issue, Tenenbaum, Leman and Aznar (2017) examine children's evaluation of group-based exclusion in situations where it is *endorsed* by societal institutions. Specifically, Tenenbaum et al. (2017) examined children's

(8-10 and 12-14 year olds) reasoning about gender- and religion-based exclusion from single-gender and single-faith schools, and play contexts, based on group membership. Exclusion based on gender was rated as being more acceptable than exclusion based on religion, and exclusion from school contexts was rated as more acceptable that exclusion from play contexts. Crucially, the participants also invoked different types of reasoning depending on the type of exclusion. The researchers argue that children in the UK may have been socialised to accept segregated schooling.

Understanding how young people respond to inequality and discrimination is important for understanding how they operate in diverse communities and schools. Continuing this theme, Palmer, Rutland and Cameron (2017) concentrate on young people's response to witnessing group-based bullying (in this case verbal racism) in a hypothetical scenario. They investigate how young people's intended bystander responses (passive, prosocial, aggressive) are related to ethnic identity socialisation (i.e. the messages they receive about intergroup relations and prejudice and discrimination) and intergroup contact. This study includes the perspectives of both ethnic minority and majority adolescents in a diverse community. They find that high quality cross-group friendships reduce the less desirable bystander responses, particularly among older adolescents. Meanwhile, ethnic socialisation was also associated with more desirable bystander responses, but only among the ethnic minority participants. This research is the first to uncover a link between identity development, intergroup contact and response to discrimination.

4. Future Directions

The research in this special issue reflects a field that is vibrant and growing in importance and illustrates the need for a greater understanding of the issues young people face in an increasingly diverse world. From these papers we can identify several important future directions for research into development and social diversity.

First, there is a clear need for more robust longitudinal data in this area. Longitudinal research can help to establish the direction of relationships between key variables, as well as to understand the long-term impact of young people's experience of diversity in childhood, as they move through adolescence and adulthood. Not only can such information provide causal accounts of development, but could also help to match processes to young people's experience of diversity in systematic ways. In this field collecting useful data is compounded by a sometimes rapidly changing societal context. For instance, the recent movement of large numbers of refugees across Europe has created a new set of issues for European societies. Young people are not immune to this or to the messages, rhetoric and politics that accompany such change.

A second, related, challenge for the field is to grapple with the messiness of understanding and incorporating social context (and changes in context) into theorizing about diversity. Social psychology has a somewhat better track record of seeking to explore the ways in which psychological processes are embedded in broader social contexts. For the developing child changing social context is yet another aspect of complexity to understand and perhaps this is a reason that few developmental psychologists have truly sought to explore the issue (for an exception see Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Again, related, a third set of challenges are methodological. Across research in psychology there is a need for a more diverse range of participants, and this is particularly germane to studies for younger generations who are experiencing more diversity in their everyday lives. However, it is also worth asking whether there needs to be a greater range in the methodological approaches used by researchers if we are to capture aspects of the experience of diversity. More importantly, there may be aspects of change and psychological processes that are being missed with what is still an emphasis on publication of more traditional, experimental approaches. Mixed methodologies, added together with robust longitudinal

studies have the potential to provide a rich source of information for understanding about individual development and the impact of context on shaping that development. More high profile, mixed method and longitudinal studies are needed in the area.

Our special issue features papers from studies with *children and adolescents* growing up with diversity. However, a fourth area for potential future work is to focus on lifespan changes in reactions to and attitudes towards diversity. Developmentalists are increasingly interested in psychological changes as young people move into adulthood. Understanding generational shifts in the field, along with potential developmental changes in adults, could usefully inform theories of diversity. Moreover, understanding adults' reasoning about diversity is important for a fifth area requiring focus in the future: a greater understanding of the relative importance of different socialising forces in a child's life. How far and to what extent (and when, in the course of development) parents, peers, teachers, media, influence children's understanding of and reactions to diversity is another feature of social complexity that needs to be understood better.

These challenges aside, the future prospects for research into diversity in young people are great. In a changing world, and an increasingly diverse one, there is more than ever a need for increasing our knowledge about how children and young people understand, reason and behave in response to diversity and, in turn, applying that knowledge to promote social cohesion and positive youth development.

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