Advancing the applied psychology of inclusion and diversity:

A special issue by Fons van de Vijver

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Abstract

This introduction outlines key issues in research on inclusion—as the process of recognizing an individual's needs for both belonging and distinctiveness. Whereas past research often focuses on diversity in relation to discrimination, this special issue attempts to offer a positive lens and asks how we can build inclusive societies. The answers range from emphasizing similarities based on multiple group memberships (intersectionality); creating inclusive workplaces by nurturing leadership that is authentic, respectful, creating belonging and valuing individuals' unique contributions (ideas, skills, etc.); to developing bridging social capital as a means of cultural integration (vs. separation). The methodological approaches employed by the contributions in this special issue include an experimental vignette study, comparative studies of different ethnicities within a country and cross-culturally comparative work spanning multiple countries. The special issue is dedicated to the memory of Fons van de Vijver, who had initiated the special issue and sadly died last year.

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Sadly, Fons van de Vijver passed away while editing this special issue. Fons was an award-winning cross-cultural psychologist well known, for instance, for his contributions to advance cross-cultural research methods (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Through this special issue, Fons sought to advance our understanding of how individuals from diverse backgrounds can live together fruitfully and productively (e.g., van de Vijver, 2019). His death is a great loss to the academic community. As the special issue was disrupted by his untimely death, I provide an introduction in his place.

In most of today's societies individuals from different groups live together.

This diversity entails both opportunities and challenges. Diversity is growing as individuals migrate to other countries often in search of a better life or because they have been displaced by war and conflict (International Organization for Migration, 2019). At the same time, there is growing recognition of long-standing diversity within societies. Consider examples such as the Black Lives Matter movement, movements to recognize the rights of indigenous groups, or the #MeToo movement, which draw attention to inequalities, discrimination, and systematic disadvantage arising from diversity related to race, ethnicity, and gender. This special issue attempts to offer a positive lens and asks: how can we build inclusive societies?

Inclusion involves "... *the satisfaction of the needs of both belongingness and uniqueness*" (Shore et al., 2011, p. 1262). As Shore et al. (2011) outline, inclusion can be understood in terms of optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991) whereby individuals strive both to belong to other groups and thus to assimilate but also to maintain a sense of distinctiveness and individuality. Hence, inclusion derives from having both strong relationships with others who accept and respect the individual as a member of their group, and who simultaneously appreciate the individuality and unique personal qualities that the individual has to offer (Adams, Meyers, & Sekaja, 2019; Shore et al., 2011). Inclusion

contrasts with discrimination, whereby an individual is “regarded or treated as less favorably than others due to belonging to a certain social group” (Adams et al., 2019, p. 4).

At the heart of understanding diversity, discrimination, and inclusion is the well-established tendency of individuals to categorize ourselves and others as belonging to groups, based on observable or perceived features. Much research has examined in-/out-group categorization based on singular characteristics such as ethnicity. The first paper in this special issue, by Lusine Grigoryan (2019), draws attention to the fact that in everyday life we belong simultaneously to multiple groups—for instance, based on ethnicity, religion, gender, age, language, immigration background, education and profession, or social class. Such multiple cross-cutting group memberships are referred to as intersectionality or superdiversity.

Inclusion requires perceiving *similarities* with others to build “belonging,” that is, positive relationships with other group members. Grigoryan (2019) conducted a vignette study with six ethnic groups in Russia to investigate the causes and consequences of perceived similarity in this intersectional setting. She finds that individuals have multidimensional perceptions of similarity, which are predicted by in-group membership and status. In turn, greater perceptions of group similarity lead to more positive evaluations of members of the other group.

The second paper, by Adams et al. (2019), examines leadership as an antecedent of inclusion and discrimination in the workplace as well as the consequences of employee inclusion and discrimination for employee well-being (burnout and work engagement) and self-efficacy. In two studies, Adams and colleagues introduce the concept of positive leadership as an enabler of workplace inclusion. Positive leadership combines, as a higher-order factor, the highly correlated concepts of authentic, inclusive, and respectful leadership. Thus, positive leadership rests on leaders knowing and accepting their authentic self. It entails relating to

others in a way that creates high-quality respectful relationships as well as signals that the leader is accessible, interested in, and values the perspective, thoughts, feelings, and skills of followers (Adams et al., 2019). Their second study finds that the effects of positive leadership on enhancing employee inclusion and mitigating discrimination replicate across five countries (Germany, Iceland, Indonesia, the Netherlands, and South Africa). Furthermore, perceived inclusion and discrimination show the expected relationships with outcomes: higher inclusion and lower discrimination facilitate well-being and self-efficacy. Although this study investigated “only” five countries, these were culturally diverse and represent three different continents. Future longitudinal research across further diverse cultures will be welcome.

The third paper in the special issue by Alexander Tatarko (2020) reports on research conducted in Dagestan, a highly ethnically diverse Republic of the Russian Federation. It examines the integration hypothesis (Berry, 1997, 2017) in a non-WEIRD² research context (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) to provide insight into the social mechanisms (social capital) of cultural integration processes. Tatarko studies three ethnic groups that differ in religion and ancestral ties to Dagestan. For individuals from the smallest and most distinct ethnic group in Dagestan (ethnic Russians), he found support for the integration hypotheses: individuals’ orientation towards integration related positively to subjective well-being (life satisfaction) via enhancing bridging social capital (i.e. ties to members of other ethnicities). There was no relationship with bonding social capital (ties to acquaintances from one’s own ethnicity). Unexpectedly, for members of the most dominant and second most dominant ethnic groups (Avars and Dargins) separation

² WEIRD stands for western, educated, industrial, rich and democratic settings, which are over-represented in psychological research.

orientation was positively related to life satisfaction, in part via consolidating social relationships with members of their own ethnic group (bonding social capital).

All the studies provide important theoretical and practical insight into how we may create inclusive societies. Grigoryan's study (2019) highlights the potential to reduce intergroup biases and prejudice by emphasizing similarities originating from shared group membership, rather than emphasizing differences (diversity) between different groups. To reduce biases and prejudice, Grigoryan's study asks us to focus on the group memberships that we have in common with others (e.g., similar age, job, being a parent, living in the same neighbourhood), rather than the ones that may differentiate us (e.g., ethnicity, immigration status, religion). Adams and colleagues (2019) provide important evidence on how leaders across different cultures can create inclusive workplaces by being authentic, respectful, creating belonging and valuing individual's unique contributions (ideas, skills, etc.). Moreover, they show that doing so generates benefits for employee well-being including higher work engagement, lower burnout, and enhanced employees' self-efficacy. Individuals spend most of their waking hours at work. Positive leadership that creates workplaces where employees feel included can thus be a powerful driver of inclusive societies. Last but not least, Tatarko's (2020) study cautions us to be mindful that some groups in society may shy away from inclusion, perhaps because they feel it threatens their identities. Thus, while it is easy to endorse calls for inclusive societies, Tatarko's work reminds us that we need to account for local context.

This special issue feels particularly timely. The health challenges related to the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated economic downturn that we are encountering in 2020 have the potential to increase societal divisions. Working in an inclusive manner—in organizations,

businesses and our communities—has the potential to offer sustainable solutions to such challenges (e.g., Stephan, Patterson, Kelly, & Mair, 2016).

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