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# Social Psychology and Multiculturalism

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## Abstract

Questions of multiculturalism give rise to lively and important debates in many countries and in many spheres of life. Diversity is considered desirable and necessary for the development of secure ethnic identities and positive intergroup relations, but is also challenged for being inequitable and a threat to social cohesion. After considering conceptions of multiculturalism and relevant country differences, the paper discusses social psychological research on multicultural attitudes and the effect of multiculturalism on intergroup relations. Subsequently, three issues are addressed that are central in debates about multiculturalism and that present additional topics for social psychological research. The first concerns the importance of intragroup processes, the second the nature of religious identity and Islam in particular, and the third issue relates to tolerance and civil liberties.

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How to incorporate immigrant minorities and how to deal with cultural diversity? That is a question that is hotly debated in many societies and in all kinds of settings, such as cities, neighbourhoods, organizations and schools. One answer to this question is multiculturalism. Multiculturalism comes in many variations but in one way or another they all focus on differences and the benefits of diversity. As a principle, multiculturalism emphasizes equality between and respect for the pluralism of cultures and group identities. Multiculturalism is argued for in terms of positive intergroup relations and 'productive diversity' claiming that it represents an important national, organizational or commercial asset. It would also represent a crucial condition for learning and for the development of cultural competence (Fowers & Davidov, 2006). Multiculturalism has also been criticized, for example, for supporting orthodox in-group factions, ignoring internal diversity, as well as legitimizing illiberal internal rules and in-group oppression, particularly of women and children (Barry, 2001; Okin, 1999; Reich, 2002). Furthermore, it has been suggested that multiculturalism can lead to reified and essentialist group distinctions that promote group stereotyping and negative out-group feelings and that endangers social unity and cohesion in society (e.g. Brewer, 1997). Thus, multiculturalism is offered by some scholars as the solution to incorporating immigrants and managing cultural diversity (e.g. Parekh, 2000), while for

others it is in itself an exacerbating cause of conflict (e.g. Huntington, 2004).

What do social psychologists have to say about all this? What kind of multicultural issues do social psychologists examine and what has received less attention? This paper will first discuss some country differences that can have implications for social psychological findings. Then, a short overview of the existing social psychological research on multiculturalism is given with an emphasis on multiculturalism attitudes and intergroup relations. Subsequently, I will discuss three topics that are central in debates about multiculturalism but less so in social psychological research on cultural diversity: intragroup processes, religious identity and tolerance. Many of the research examples that I will give are concerned with the Dutch context. One reason is that most of our research is conducted in this country. Another reason is that the most overt and ambitious European experiment in multiculturalism was developed in the Netherlands but the recent retreat of multiculturalism is also most evident in this country (Joppke, 2004).

### **Multi-Multiculturalisms**

'Multicultural' and 'multiculturalism' are ubiquitous terms. They are heard in political debates, in the language of ethnic group leaders, in local government strategies and budgets, in educational settings, in health care, in popular media, in commercial marketing and in scientific publications. The widespread use of the terms 'multicultural' and 'multiculturalism' can be seen as marking a significant change in the discourses in which societies, schools, organizations, and so on, describe and understand themselves. However, given the wide range of actors, contexts, interpretations and usages of these terms, it is apparent that there is no single view or strategy implied. Multiculturalism can mean many things and can refer to practices, policies, attitudes, beliefs and ideologies. The different meanings and interpretations has led to the use of adjectives for distinguishing between forms of multiculturalism, such as 'critical and difference' multiculturalism (Turner, 1993), 'cosmopolitan and pluralist' multiculturalism (Hollinger, 2000) and 'liberal and illiberal' multiculturalism (Appiah, 2005).

In addition, policies and ideologies regarding diversity, minorities and culture vary greatly from one society to another (see Baubock, Heller, & Zolberg, 1996). Societies do not have the same history, the same collective representations of the nation and the same minority groups. These differences can affect processes of integration and people's attitudes. Social psychological research has shown, for example, that evaluations of multiculturalism and the endorsement of minority rights are influenced by categories of minority groups and the ways in which they are defined (Augoustinos & Quinn, 2003; Verkuyten, 2005a). Not all minority groups

are perceived to have equal moral claims. Multicultural recognition and rights is considered a more appropriate demand for 'involuntary' groups (original inhabitants, descendents of slaves, refugees) than for immigrant workers. These immigrants would have waived their demands and rights by voluntarily leaving their country of origin. Self-determination implies a personal responsibility for one's situation and position. Therefore, multiculturalism and minority rights tend to be endorsed less in relation to immigrant workers than in relation to involuntary minorities.

In the beginning of the 1970s, multiculturalism developed into an explicit political strategy in Canada that was formalized in the *Multiculturalism Act* in the 1980s. The idea spread to other immigration countries such as Australia and the USA, and multiculturalism developed into an official government policy term in the former but not in the latter country. In Australia, the multicultural ideology and policy started to develop in the mid-1970s and was directed against the idea of assimilation of immigrants and the, at the time, existing White Australian Policy. In the USA, the debate on multiculturalism is influenced by the civil rights movement, affirmative action policies, the 'cultural wars' in universities and education more generally, and minority-focused identity politics and politics of recognition.

Canada, Australia and the USA are settler societies or traditional countries of immigration. These countries are largely composed of immigrants and (in part) cultural diversity is a defining characteristic of these nations. Particularly in Canada and Australia, there have been attempts to equate 'national' with 'multicultural'. This implies the possibility of a positive association between national identification and the endorsement of multiculturalism. In contrast, in most European countries, there is a long history of established majority groups and issues of integration and cultural diversity are relatively novel. Immigration does not play a role in the national self-image making it more difficult for immigrants to be included and to 'belong'. European multiculturalism is not so much an identity option for society as a whole but has always been for immigrants and ethnic minorities only. This means that in European countries, there is more often a negative association between national identification and multiculturalism (Verkuyten, 2005b). Furthermore, cross-national acculturation research has found a positive association between national and ethnic minority group identification in settler countries, but a negative association in non-settler, European societies (Phinney, Berry, Vedder, & Liebkind, 2006).

However, there are also important differences between European countries. For example, it has been argued that in France there is little room for multiculturalism because the republican ideology focuses on individuals as citizens and tries to 'make Frenchmen out of foreigners' (Withol de Wenden, 2004). In contrast, countries such as Great Britain and the Netherlands have taken a more supporting view on diversity. As early as 1968, the British Home Secretary Roy Jenkins made a famous

speech in which he advocated a model of integration ‘not as a flattening process of uniformity but of cultural diversity, coupled with equal opportunity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance’ (Vertovec, 1998, 29). A state-sponsored ‘race relations’ industry emerged, backed by anti-discrimination legislation, and an emphasis on racial equality. Race was adopted as a category to address minority group disadvantages and was also meant to include immigrants of the Indian Subcontinent.

In the Netherlands, a policy of multiculturalism was adopted in the 1980s in response to the increased influx of ‘foreigners’. The recognition that many ‘guest worker’ migrants would remain in the country led to a policy for ‘integration with retention of the own identity’ (Entzinger, 2003, 63). Dutch policies saw immigrants according to their group membership and not primarily as individuals. The ‘pillarization’ tradition of institutionalized pluralism provided a wide range of cultural opportunities and group rights, such as local voting rights for non-nationals and public funding of Islamic schools. However, much has changed since the 1980s. The previous ‘ethnic minorities policy’ has gradually been replaced by a policy of civic integration with an emphasis on knowledge of Dutch society and command of the Dutch language (Entzinger, 2003). In public debates, multiculturalism has been described as a ‘drama’ and a ‘failure’, and assimilation has been proposed as the only viable option (e.g. Schnabel, 2000). This change in political and ideological discourse can have an impact on attitudes towards minority groups and on the patterns of group identification among these groups (Verkuyten & Zaremba, 2005).

### **Multiculturalism Attitudes**

Social psychologists have tended to examine multiculturalism in terms of attitudes and ideologies. Empirical studies on multicultural attitudes indicate that the general support for multiculturalism is not very strong among majority groups in many Western countries. Apart from Canada where majority members have been found to favour multiculturalism (e.g. Berry & Kalin, 1995), studies in other countries have found moderate support, such as in Australia, (e.g. Ho, 1990) and the USA (e.g. Critin Sears, Muste, & Wong, 2001; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2006), or low support, such as in Germany, Switzerland, Slovakia and the Netherlands (e.g. Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Pionkowski, Florack, Hoelker, & Obdrzáek, 2000; Van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998; Zick, Wagner, van Dick, & Petzel, 2001).

Multiculturalism is not only about the majority group accepting and recognizing minority groups, but implies acceptance and recognition on the part of minorities too. Some studies have examined the endorsement of multiculturalism among ethnic minority group members. In many (European) countries, multiculturalism is typically seen as identity threatening for the majority group and identity supporting for minority groups. For

minority groups, multiculturalism offers the possibility of maintaining their own culture and obtaining higher social status in society. Majority group members, on the other hand, may see ethnic minorities and their desire to maintain their own culture as a threat to their cultural dominance and group identity. Following social psychological theories that emphasize the role of group status and interests in the dynamics of intergroup relations (e.g. Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), it can be expected that groups are more in favour of multiculturalism when they see gains for themselves. Hence, it is likely that multiculturalism appeals more to ethnic minority groups than to majority group members, who in turn endorse assimilation more strongly. Several studies in different countries have confirmed this expectation (Deaux, Reid, Martin, & Bikmen, 2006; Verkuyten, 2005a, b, c; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006; Wolsko et al., 2006), including a study examining multicultural attitudes among majority and immigrant groups in 21 European countries (Schalk-Soekar, 2007). This group difference in attitudes towards multiculturalism is even stronger among majority and minority individuals who identify relatively strong with their own ethnic group (e.g. Simon, 2004; Verkuyten & Brug, 2004; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006).

This difference in attitudes towards multiculturalism can lead to problematic relational outcomes. A lack of reciprocal attitudes and beliefs with minority groups favouring multiculturalism and majority groups putting more emphasis on assimilation may hamper the realization of a positively diverse and equal society. Acculturation research has traditionally focused on immigrants' cultural changes and acculturation strategies (Berry, 2006). The outcome of the acculturation process depends not only on the immigrants' attitudes but also on the host society's preferences and ideas about what immigrants should do. In their interactive acculturation model, Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, and Senecal (1997) argue that intergroup relations between immigrants and majority groups are best predicted by the relative fit of immigrant strategy preferences and host society strategy preferences. According to this model, the fit can be consensual, problematic or conflictual. Research has shown that an increased mismatch between host and immigrant preferred strategies yields more negative intergroup relations (e.g. Pionkowski, Rohmann, & Florack, 2002; Zagefka & Brown, 2002).

## **Multiculturalism and Intergroup Relations**

A central aim of multiculturalism is to provide and promote a context for group acceptance and recognition. According to Berry (2006), multiculturalism tries to create a feeling of confidence among everyone living in a plural society. This confidence involves a sense of trust and acceptance of the other. In contrast, a lack of confidence implies feelings of threat and increased rejection of out-groups. Thus, multiculturalism is expected to

contribute to favourable intergroup relations. There is supporting evidence for this in educational settings (e.g. Hogan & Mallott, 2005) and also in social psychological research. Using survey data in the USA, Wolsko et al. (2006), for example, found that people who endorse multiculturalism see ethnic groups as more different from each other, but at the same time, view ethnic out-groups in a more positive manner. Thus, the group thinking inherent in multiculturalism seems to promote perceived group differences as well as a reduced tendency to evaluate the in-group more positively than the out-group. This latter association differs, however, between majority and minority groups. The endorsement of multiculturalism was associated with lesser evaluative bias for majority group participants than for ethnic minorities. Furthermore, in two studies in the Netherlands, it was found that the more strongly ethnic minority members endorsed the ideology of multiculturalism, the more likely they were to evaluate the in-group positively. In contrast, the more the Dutch majority participants endorsed multiculturalism the more likely they tended to be to evaluate the out-group positively (Verkuyten, 2005b).

These associations do not tell us anything about causal effects. A few experimental studies have directly examined the effects of multiculturalism on intergroup relations. Wolsko and colleagues (2000), for example, examined the impact of exposure to multicultural and colour-blind ideologies on intergroup judgements among white participants in the USA. They found stronger stereotyping and greater use of category information in their multicultural condition compared to colour-blindness. In addition, compared to the control participants, there was less pro-white attitudinal bias in both ideological conditions. Richeson and Nussbaum (2004) also studied white participants, examining them for automatic and explicit forms of racial attitudes. Participants exposed to a message endorsing colour-blindness showed greater racial bias on both forms of racial attitudes than those exposed to a message endorsing a multicultural perspective.

Both these studies were limited to white participants and the American context. In two studies in the Netherlands, an experimental questionnaire design was used in which multicultural and assimilation ideology were made salient in separate conditions (Verkuyten, 2005b). Multicultural recognition emphasizes a positive view of cultural maintenance by ethnic minority groups and acknowledges the distinctive identities of these groups. Hence, it can be expected that exposure to multicultural messages affects majority group members' out-group evaluation and minority group members' in-group evaluation particularly. Thus, the minority group participants were expected to show more positive in-group evaluation in the multicultural experimental condition than in the assimilation condition. In contrast, the majority group participants were expected to show less positive out-group evaluation in the assimilation condition than in the multicultural condition. The results of both studies were in agreement with the expectations. Hence, for both groups of

participants, multiculturalism was related primarily to the evaluation of the ethnic minority group rather than the majority group. This is in agreement with the multiculturalism discussion in the Netherlands and in other West European countries that focuses on the identity and societal position of ethnic minority groups.

These findings indicate that multiculturalism can have positive effects on intergroup relations, particularly for the evaluation of ethnic minority groups. However, multiculturalism raises many additional issues that have received less attention of social psychologists. Intragroup processes, the role of religious identity and (in)tolerance of concrete practices are among the more important issues and present three directions for social psychological research on multiculturalism.

### **Intragroup Processes**

Research on multiculturalism tends to focus on intergroup issues in which minority group acceptance, recognition and positive evaluation are key terms. This is in agreement with social psychological perspectives, such as social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994), that are centrally concerned with relations between groups that differ in position, status or power. However, multiculturalism has important intragroup implications and is fuelled by dynamics inside cultural communities. Group identities are fundamentally shaped by interactions with co-ethnics and by discourses about ethnic and cultural authenticity (Verkuyten, 2005c). Ethnic minority group membership involves issues of in-group acceptance and support as well as in-group obligations and pressures. Furthermore, multiculturalism has been criticized for supporting and justifying conservatism and repressive in-group practices (e.g. Barry, 2001). The emphasis on cultural maintenance and equality of cultures and the recognition of cultural diversity can legitimize, for example, the inequality of women (e.g. Okin, 1999) and authoritarian and insular childrearing practices (Reich, 2002).

In multiculturalism, a communitarian perspective is typically taken. Constituent cultural communities would provide the central context within which identities are shaped and the moral framework for self-understanding is provided. Only through having access to their own culture, the argument goes, people would have access to a range of meaningful options and, therefore, would be able to develop a secure and positive sense of self (Parekh, 2000). Hence, a particular group identity is prioritized and the recognition of this identity would sustain feelings of self-respect and self-esteem. But what about individuals that do not (want to) identify with their ethnic minority group but emphasize personal autonomy and individualism? For them, the group thinking inherent in multiculturalism and the emphasis on cultural identities might be



threatening. Individual mobility, for example, implies a disidentification with the ethnic in-group and a focus on personal characteristics and qualities as a basis of positive self-esteem. Among ethnic minority group members, individualism has been found to be negatively related to the endorsement of multiculturalism (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). Furthermore, in two experimental studies, it was found that multiculturalism does provide an unfavourable context for low minority group identifiers to feel good about themselves (Verkuyten, 2007a). Thus, multicultural recognition has something to offer to high minority group identifiers but appears to be threatening to the self-esteem of low group identifiers.

Multiculturalism is not only problematic for some minority individuals but also tends to recognize and legitimize a particular version of group cultures, one that holds sway in more traditional circles. The focus is on cultural communities and their 'essential' or authentic group identity. Social psychological research has shown that for ethnic minority groups, a stronger endorsement of multiculturalism is associated with higher perceived in-group essentialism (Verkuyten & Brug, 2004). Cultural essentialism allows multicultural notions to be used for claiming the right to cultural identity and the recognition of fundamental differences. The deconstruction of ethnicity and an emphasis on internal cultural heterogeneity is not very useful for those who want to make group claims and mobilize around notions of cultural recognition and rights. As a result 'many exponents of identity politics are fundamentalists – in the language of the academy, "essentialists"' (Gitlin, 1995, 164), and 'in basing itself on relatively permanent groups ... [multiculturalism] mirror[s] the very prejudices it opposes' (Wrong, 1997, 298). In multiculturalist policies and practices, there is a tendency of essentialist group thinking and to ignore the internal diversity and the critical, but less powerful, voices within communities. The notion of a singular 'ethnic or cultural community' belies the internal differences and tensions that exists and contradicts the liberal ideal of individual choice and voice.

Thus, there are many important and interesting intragroup issues that social psychologist can and should study when examining issues of multiculturalism. Rather than taking cultural groups and identities for granted social psychologists should examine how group understandings are produced and shaped by various community members in a vibrant field of identity debates and positions.

## Religion

Discussions about multiculturalism and group rights often subsume the question of religion under those of cultural diversity or explicitly exclude religion from the politics of recognition (Taylor, 1994). Multiculturalism tends to exclude faith and faith identities (Modood & Ahmad, 2007), and the same can be said about acculturation research. Questions of diversity,

however, are increasingly questions of religious diversity. In particular, Islam has emerged as the focus of immigration and diversity debates in Europe (Zolberg & Long, 1999). This is illustrated by the Rushdie affair in Britain, the headscarf controversy in France, the debate about the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad, and the national debates about Islamic schools and the place of other Islamic institutions, practices and claims within the deeply embedded secularism of most liberal democracies. It is clear that Islam has moved to the centre of debates and politics in European countries and is at the heart of what is perceived as a 'crisis of multiculturalism' (Modood & Ahmad, 2007). The Dutch majority, for example, considers 'unequal' gender practices and some family practices among Muslims as morally wrong, whereas Muslim immigrants reject the corresponding 'liberal' practices of the Dutch (e.g. Sniderman & Hagedoorn, 2007). Both groups see the same differences in, for example, family practices and values but evaluate these in opposite terms. A recent nation wide survey showed that 50% of the Dutch as well as 50% of the Muslim immigrants consider the Western and Muslim way of life as opposites that do not go together (Gijsberts, 2005).

Religious differences are increasingly being seen as contradictory and insurmountable. Muslim minorities know that the majority group reject some of their values and practices and the majority group knows that Muslims reject some of theirs. The result is a situation in which, for example, more than half of the Dutch majority population declares to have unfavourable opinions about Muslims (Pew Project, 2005), and more than half of Dutch Muslims report to have clear negative feelings towards Jews and non-believers (Verkuyten, 2007b). As Sniderman and Hagedoorn (2007, 26) conclude from their large-scale research 'there are parallel barriers of prejudice: a desire of many Western Europeans to hold Muslims at a distance combined with a desire of Muslims to keep their distance'.

Among a representative sample from the city of Rotterdam, Phalet and Güngör (2004) found that Islam was considered 'very meaningful and important' in one's life by 87% of the Turkish and 96% of the Moroccan population. In addition, around two thirds of the Turks and Moroccans had a very strong Muslim identity. Furthermore, in two Dutch studies (Verkuyten, 2007b; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007), it was found that around half of the Muslim participants had the highest possible score on a Muslim identification measure that consisted of six items that are commonly used in social psychological research (e.g. 'My Muslim identity is an important part of my self', and 'I identify strongly with Muslims'). Furthermore, around 45% had the highest possible score on statements such as 'the fact that I am a Muslim is the most important thing in my life', and 'being a Muslim is the only thing that really matters in my life'. These scores indicate ceiling level group identification and shows that it can be problematic to follow the standard practice in social psychological research

and treat group identification as a continuous variable. For the great majority of Muslims, Muslim identity is a given and not being a Muslim is not a real option. The same has been found in studies in Brussels, Belgium (Phalet, 2004), and in other European countries (Haddad & Smith, 2001; Vertovec & Rogers, 1999).

The strong Muslim identification found is probably related to global and national developments. The increased global tensions and divergences between the Western and Islamic world forces European Muslims to a position of having to defend and stress their religion. In addition, the public condemnation of Islam and the plea for assimilation in the Netherlands has increased the salience and importance of Muslim identification (Verkuyten & Zaremba, 2005). Islamic immigrant groups face high levels of threat to the value of their religious identity that leads to increased in-group identification among these groups and a politicized religious identity.

However, the total religious identification found is probably also related to the nature of monotheistic religions in general, and Islam in particular. Religion is often of profound importance to people's lives and religious groups are among the more salient buttresses of identity. As argued by Seul (1999, 553), religions 'supply cosmologies, moral frameworks, institutions, rituals, traditions, and other identity-supporting content that answers to individuals' needs for psychological stability in the form of a predictable world, a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and even self-actualization'. Very strong Muslim identification among West European immigrants was also found in the 1990s when the religious group tensions were much less (e.g. Modood et al., 1997). In addition, being a Muslim seems to imply a normative group commitment that is related to Islamic religion. For many Muslims, the declaration of faith (Shahada) in front of two witnesses symbolizes one's belief and commitment to Islam: one either is a Muslim who is committed to Islam or one is not. Religion is about convictions and divine truths, and for most observant believers, the core of the religious identity is non-negotiable making the idea of religious changes or compromises an oxymoron.

The success of multiculturalism depends on the existence of a larger society to which all groups belong. The recognition and valuing of group identities requires a sense of shared commonalities. Thus, a key question is whether it is possible to be at the same time a Muslim and a member of a (European) nation. Are Muslims accepted as co-nationals and do they want to belong? These questions are, of course, related because people who feel accepted do more easily want to belong. For the majority group, the question of loyalty to the nation is often central. Suspicions of disloyalty or a lack of commitment of European Muslims show up everywhere in society, in many countries, and seem to have a basis in reality. Almost half of the non-Muslim Dutch majority believe that Muslim immigrants are loyal to their country of origin and not to the

Netherlands (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007). As a kind of mirror image, around 50% of Dutch Muslims have been found to have low identification with the Dutch, and around 40% showed high disidentification in which a so-called oppositional identity is developed (Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2007). In addition, research has found that, for example, in Great Britain and Germany, the great majority of Muslims consider themselves primarily a Muslim rather than a citizen of their country (Pew Project, 2006).

Thus, many Muslim minorities wish to live in liberal Western societies but not really be part of them. One important reason is that they feel rejected and discriminated making them turn away from the society in which they live and even the Western world in general. This seems especially likely among young Muslims who have been born and raised, and are fully integrated in society, but feel that they are not really accepted and considered to belong (Buijs, Demant, & Hamdy, 2006). The patterns of racist exclusion and ethnic nationalism in many European countries do not make it easy to be a Muslim and a national at the same time. Another reason is that some Muslims argue that their religious tenets conflict with principles of a liberal democracy and, therefore, that they are not bound by these principles. A 'true' Islam is defined in contrast to Western thinking and a 'true' Muslim must distance him- or herself from the West. There is a clear conflict within Muslim groups between a growing minority that does not accept the norms of Western democracy and a moderate majority that does (Mirza, Senthilkumaran, & Ja'far, 2007). There is also growing evidence and concern about the increasing anti-Semitism and intolerance of sexual freedoms and homosexuals among Muslims living in Western countries (Schoenfeld, 2004). Compromises on the issue of sexuality is unacceptable for many Muslims who want to maintain their Islamic identities.

In Europe, questions of multiculturalism are increasingly questions of religious differences, and Islam in particular. Social psychology has paid relatively little attention to the nature of religious identity and to inter-religious relations (but see, for example, Cairns, Kenworthy, Campbell, & Hewstone, 2006; Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999; Rowatt, Franklin, & Cotton, 2005; Verkuyten, 2007b). This is unfortunate because religion is an important dimension for developing a positive social identity and religion is an important factor in social divisions and conflicts in many societies around the world. In addition, a study of religious identification can make a contribution to our thinking about the important process of group identification. For example, by questioning the standard practice of assuming that group identification is a continuous variable or a matter of degree.

## **Tolerance**

Social psychological research on multiculturalism tends to focus on multiculturalism attitudes, stereotypes and intergroup attitudes. Typically,

people are asked how they perceive and evaluate ethnic out-groups and it is examined whether an emphasis on the importance of acknowledging and respecting cultural diversity improves intergroup relations. Commentators and politicians, however, express worries about the relationship between democracy and multiculturalism. Cultural and religious pluralism is identified as an important obstacle for democratization because people can develop attachments to groups that are, in one way or another, inimical to democracy. This would be symbolized by the debate on free speech in relation to the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad, the *fatwa* against the British novelist Salman Rushdie, and the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. In Great Britain, a recent survey showed that 28% of Muslim youth prefer to live under *sharia* law and 42% agreed that *sharia* law is absolute and should not be interpreted to fit in with Western values (Mirza et al., 2007). Furthermore, 56% agreed that a Muslim women may not marry a non-Muslim, and 36% believed that apostasy is forbidden and punishable by death.

The hotly debated questions and issues related to multiculturalism are about concrete practices and actions. Should it be allowed that Sikhs wear a turban rather than a helmet on construction sites or a crash helmet when riding a motorcycle; should the practice of forced marriages among some immigrant groups be accepted; should it be accepted that Muslim teachers refuse to shake hands with children's parents of the opposite sex; should very light forms of female circumcision (*sunna*) be allowed; should all images of pigs be banned from pictures in public offices because these might offend Muslims' feelings; should it be allowed that civil servants wear a headscarf and that students wear a burqa or a niqab. It is around these concrete questions that multiculturalism is put to the test and ways of life can collide.

Social psychological research tends to focus on group perceptions and evaluations, and on the endorsement of multiculturalism, assimilation and colour-blindness as abstract ideological notions and principles. However, as is well known from attitude research (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), principle considerations differ from (the lack of) support for practical implications and situations. Studies on political thinking and behaviour, for example, show that people tend to support democratic rights in the abstract but often do not endorse the same rights in concrete circumstances (see Vogt, 1997). It is one thing to endorse the freedom of speech and demonstration in general, and another thing to apply these freedoms to, for example, radical Muslim groups living in a secular or Christian country. In trying to maximize the relevance and validity of research, social psychology should examine how people perceive and reason about these concrete issues. For example, by focusing on the topic of (political) tolerance and by using questionnaires as well as experimental designs.

Tolerance can be conceptualized in various ways, such as the valuing and celebrating of difference, the absence of prejudice and the putting up

with something that one disapproves of or is prejudiced against. The latter meaning of tolerance is a key condition for citizenship and democracy (Sullivan & Transue, 1999). Tolerance for dissenting beliefs and practices is not the absence of prejudice but rather a separate construct that emphasizes forbearance and not begrudging other people their own ways. Tolerance is an option when one dislikes something or someone and is the opposite of discrimination; when one endures or refrains from action although other's beliefs and practices are disapproved of or rejected. This kind of tolerance is crucial because it is the first and necessary step towards civility and a foundation for a diverse and just society (Vogt, 1997). People may disagree with one another, may have stereotypes and prejudiced attitudes but should at least agree about how to disagree. Historically, the concept of tolerance evolved from efforts to deal with the harmful and violent effects of religious conflicts (Sullivan & Transue, 1999). The presence of a great number of Muslims in Western European countries has given a renewed urgency to the idea of tolerance as a mechanism for dealing with diversity.

It is often argued that freedoms and rights characterize Western democratic societies and are of minimal concern to Muslims, or even contradictory to Islam (see Turiel, 2002). The right-based morality of Western societies would differ from the duty-based morality of Islam. There are some empirical findings that seem to support this line of thinking. These findings indicate that European Muslims are much less tolerant for dissenting beliefs and practices and for freedom of speech than non-Muslims. Among a representative sample from the city of Rotterdam, it was found, for example, that 75% of the ethnic Dutch, but only around 10% of the Turkish and Moroccan Muslims, agreed that it should be allowed that a magazine uses drawings and words to make God and religion ridiculous (Phalet & Güngör, 2004). This suggests that, compared to the ethnic Dutch, the two Muslim groups endorse core principles of civil liberties much less.

However, for two reasons these kind of findings should be interpreted with great care. First, developmental and political science research has shown that tolerance is not a global construct. Tolerance depends on whom, what and when people are asked to tolerate dissenting beliefs and practices. For example, Wainryb, Shaw, and Maianu (1998) found that adolescents tolerated the holding of beliefs about harmful practices more than acting on these beliefs, and that they were more tolerant towards dissenting information than dissenting moral values. The same has been found in an experimental study among ethnic Dutch adolescents examining tolerant judgements of Muslims' political rights and dissenting beliefs and practices (Verkuyten & Slooter, 2007a). Participants took into account various aspects of what they were asked to tolerate and the sense in which they should be tolerant. The type of actor, the nature of the social implication of the behaviour, and the underlying belief type all

made a difference to the tolerant judgements. For example, the level of tolerance was lower when the social implications were greater, and participants were more tolerant of practices based on dissenting informational beliefs than on dissenting moral beliefs. Furthermore, participants were more tolerant of people campaigning for public support for a particular practice (e.g. differential treatment of sons and daughters) than for the actual act itself.

The intergroup context is the second reason why findings on the endorsement of civil liberties by Muslims should be interpreted with care. In another study, we examined how non-Muslim and Muslim adolescents living in the Netherlands reason about civil liberties, including free speech, using concrete cases and publicly debated issues (Verkuyten & Slioter, 2007b). The differences found between the Muslim and non-Muslim participants were in agreement with their specific group positions in Dutch society. The rejection of freedom of speech was stronger among the Muslim than the non-Muslim participants when it involved offending God and religion and when it concerned Islam. Their support for civil liberties were quite similar to non-Muslims, however, when their religious group was not at stake but involved, for example, general psychological and physical harm. Thus, the results did not support the idea that freedoms and rights are of little concern to Muslims or contradictory to Islam (see also Turiel & Wainryb, 1998).

These findings for tolerance and civil liberties show that it is important to examine the social reasoning behind the evaluation of cultural practices. Social psychological research on multiculturalism tends to focus on stereotypes and group evaluations. What is also needed, however, is an understanding of the underlying criteria that people use to determine whether particular acts and practices are acceptable. Social domain theory (see Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2002), for example, proposes that people use moral (e.g. fairness, justice), social-conventional (e.g. group norms, traditions) and psychological (e.g. self-understanding, preferences) reasoning to evaluate and reason about specific behaviours and situations. Hence, a combination of social psychological intergroup theories and social domain theory (see Killen, Margie, & Sinno, 2005) might improve our understanding of the many and hotly debated multicultural controversies.

## Conclusion

Multiculturalism is concerned with complex issues that involve many questions and dilemmas. There are promises and there are important pitfalls. Considering the psychological and social importance of ethnic and racial identities, a focus on groups and group differences is understandable and, to a certain extent, useful, for example, for improving intergroup relations. It can, however, also lead to a situation in which these identities

become overwhelming or unidimensional and society, out-groups and in-groups oblige people to place this particular identity in the forefront of their minds and make it central in their behaviour. Multiculturalism can turn into an obsession with differences and group identities, leading to a widening of divisions between groups and a hampering of individual choices and opportunities.

Multiculturalism is about the delicate balance between recognizing differences and developing meaningful communalities, between differential treatment and equality, between group identities and individual liberties. There are different kinds of diversity and different forms of multiculturalism that try to accommodate cultural differences. Some differences are relatively easy to accept and to recognize, but others go against moral convictions and basic premises of society. There are limits to pluralism and moral diversity as there are limits to tolerance and what is acceptable. Tolerance does not imply the relativism found in some forms of multiculturalism that celebrate diversity and argue that one should refrain from value judgements in assessing other groups. Tolerance always has limits and does not imply a full acceptance and valuing of all social practices of other groups, such as potentially harmful activities, illiberal internal rules and undemocratic actions.

The debate on the way to manage cultural diversity continues and social psychologists increasingly try to make a contribution to these debates. In doing so, it is important to examine not only ethnic and cultural identities and intergroup relations, but also to focus on differences within groups and intragroup processes, on the ways that religious identities are understood and used in society and for organizing collective action, and on people's reasoning about tolerance and civil liberties related to concrete dissenting practices and behaviours.

### Short Biography

Maykel Verkuyten is a Professor at the Department of Interdisciplinary Social Science at Utrecht University. He is also Academic Director of the European Research Center on Migration and Ethnic Relations at the same university. His research interest is in ethnic identity and interethnic relations. His latest book is *The Social Psychology of Ethnic Identity*.

### Endnote

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