

The 'Refugee Crisis': Challenges for Research and Policy

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Integrating Refugees in Higher Education and Europe: Challenges and Best Practices

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Overview

- Ideologies of cultural diversity
- Challenges for researchers and practitioners working with refugees
- Transferring scientific evidence into public policy
- Recommendations

Ideologies of cultural diversity

- From definitions to ideology or the power of words: crisis, refugee, legal vs. illegal, minority vs. majority...
- The 'refugee crisis' as a **frame** for meaning making (Entman, 1993): Frames define a problem [a crisis], diagnose its causes [the refugees], make moral judgments [threats against social order and public health] and suggest policies [construction of Fortress Europe].
- The rise and fall of multiculturalism (Kymlicka, 2010): From celebrating diversity across western democracies in the 1970s and 1980s to the re-assertion of ideas of nation, common values, and citizenship (e.g., see Merkel's and Cameron's statements on 'failing multiculturalism').

Ideologies of cultural diversity

- **Multiculturalism** implies a positive acceptance of ethnic, cultural and racial diversity. Multicultural models are associated with greater inclusiveness, less bias and more engagement of non-dominant groups (Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009), although considerable variation is witnessed across countries or ethnic groups.
- **Colorblind** policies intentionally ignore group differences. Although portrayed as a mechanism to decrease discrimination, in practice they justify existing inequality and bring about stronger racial bias (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012).

Ideologies of cultural diversity

- **Polyculturalism** acknowledges people's racial and ethnic backgrounds but focuses on the numerous connections among groups due to their past and present interactions. It is associated with positive intergroup attitudes for both dominant and marginalized groups (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010).
- The **omnicultural imperative** compels us to give priority to human universals; then, group-based differences are recognized in a second stage. This 'dual-track' approach is expected to improve intergroup relations by enhancing superordinate group identities and to diminish radicalization (Moghaddam, 2012).

Ideological components of diversity

- The discourse on managing diversity in modern pluralistic societies entails several dimensions, some of which are not readily visible, yet they are hard to disentangle:
 - ✓ Cultural components, e.g., language, values, customs, everyday habits, dressing styles, food, etc.
 - ✓ Identity components, including nation, religion and race
 - ✓ Power components, e.g., social inequalities, distribution of wealth, gender issues
 - ✓ Political components, e.g., political self-placement and participation
 - ✓ Contextual components, e.g., economic turmoil, the role of history

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Challenges for researchers and practitioners

- Psychological research and practice is bound to social and political contextual constraints often serving to maintain the status quo and cultural prejudices (Yakushko & Morgan Consoli, 2014).
- Some studies tend to either pathologize or idealize immigrants, thus individualizing their experiences rather than placing them within socio-ecological systems (Suarez-Orozco & Carhill, 2008).
- The focus on 'adaptation' implies a priority to help immigrants comply with the norms and become skilled employees rather than pursuit of their own goals.

Challenges for researchers and practitioners

- The link between traumatic events and mental health disorders among populations exposed to conflict and displacement has been established across a wide range of contexts (Steel et al., 2009).
- Immigrant and refugee insights have been studied using participatory action research and qualitative or mixed methods with an emphasis on community involvement and empowerment in order to create positive social change (Yakushko & Morgan Consoli, 2014).
- The conditions for positive intergroup attitudes have been examined through rigorous testing of theories regarding contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and extended contact (Zhou et al., 2018).

Challenges for researchers and practitioners

- Effective responses to the so-called refugee crisis must rely on robust research, thorough analysis, and good quality data. Evidence-based interventions are necessary.
- “There is nothing more practical than a good theory” (Lewin, 1952).
- Specific conditions and circumstances faced by the refugees must be identified and understood before implementing an intervention. The one-size-fits-all approach is not applicable.
- There is also need to evaluate existing programs and policies in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Effective interventions

- Social psychological interventions have been shown to reach large gains by introducing seemingly ‘small’ changes in the targeted populations (Yeager & Walton, 2011). This is achieved because:
 - ✓ they target the participants’ subjective experiences in context;
 - ✓ they implement persuasive yet stealthy methods for conveying psychological constructs; and
 - ✓ they tap into recursive processes in the participants’ everyday environments.

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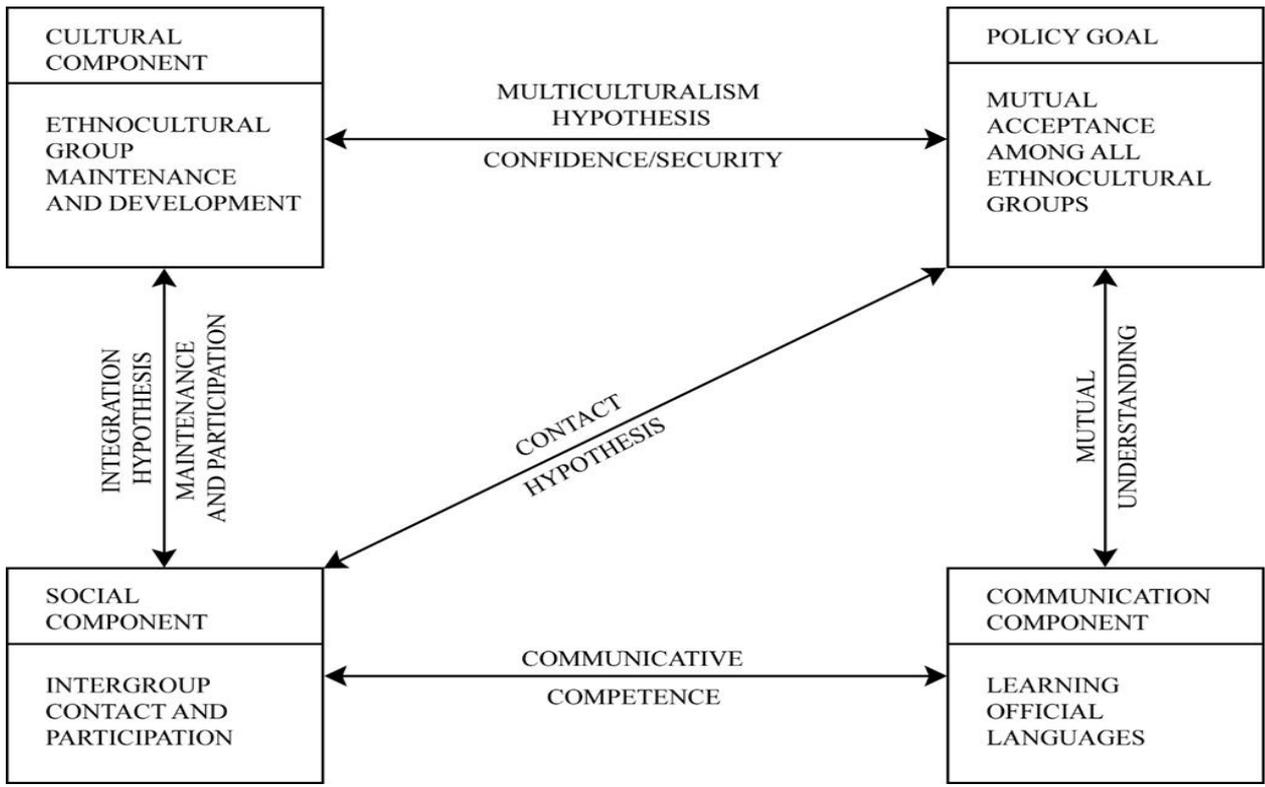
Transferring research to policy: Three axes

- **Researchers** must provide evidence of efficacy (do more good than harm under optimal conditions) and effectiveness (sustain impact under real-world conditions). Randomized trials as the gold standard for defining evidence.
- Requirements from **practitioners** include positive attitudes towards change, knowledge, responsibility and willingness for engagement. Supportive community networks are important.
- **Policy makers** must provide a transfer positive context that promotes evidence-based prevention and intervention programs in the public.

Transferring research to policy: Six steps

1. Identify where support is needed.
2. Ensure availability of scientific knowledge on how to handle a problem.
3. Identify reasonable starting points for action.
4. Establish a cooperation process with policy makers.
5. Coordinate development of intervention and implementation.
6. Transfer of program implementation.

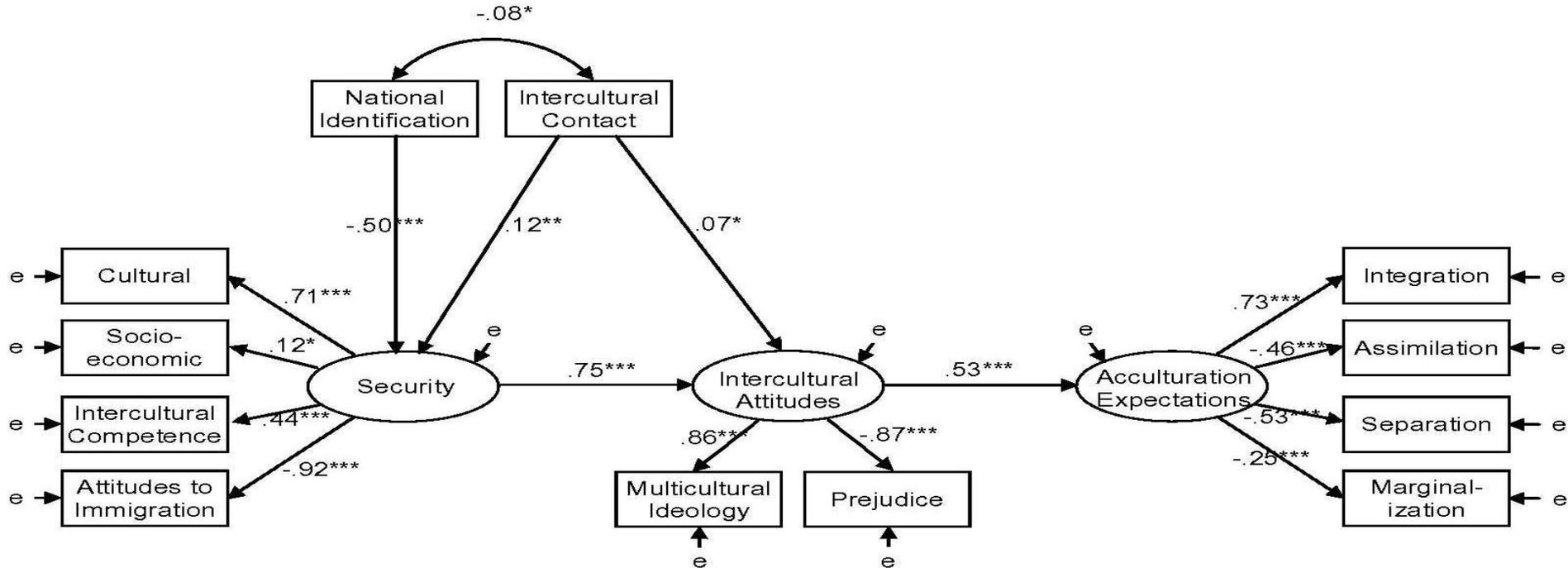
A framework to examine a multicultural policy



The MIRIPS core hypotheses

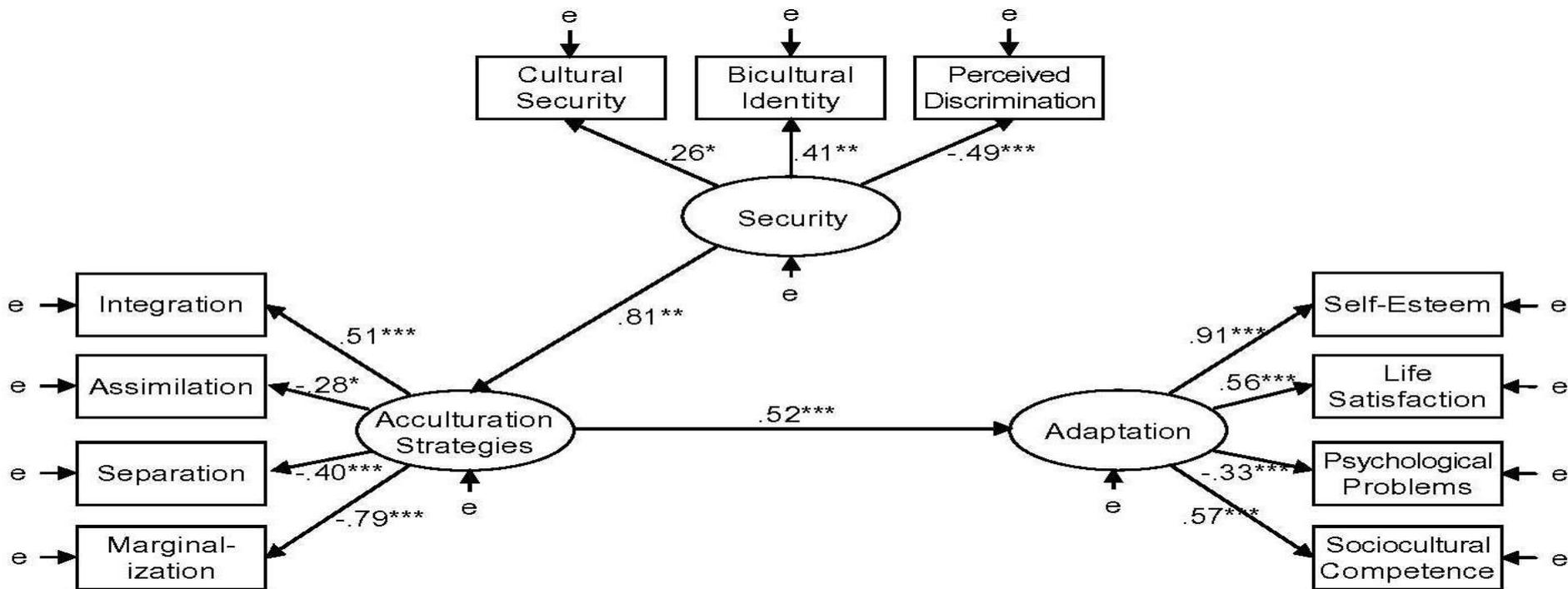
- **The Multiculturalism hypothesis.** When individuals feel secure in their place in a society, they will be able to better accept those who are different from themselves (e.g., ITT; Stephan & Stephan, 2000).
- **The Contact hypothesis.** When individuals interact and engage with others who are culturally different, they will achieve mutual acceptance (e.g., Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).
- **The Integration hypothesis.** When individuals identify with, and are socially connected to both their heritage culture and to the larger society, they will achieve higher levels of wellbeing (e.g., Berry, 2001).

Structural equation model of the combined MIRIPS hypotheses for the Greek participants



* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. $N = 449$. Values are standardized regression weights. CMIN=132.67, DF=42, $p < .001$; CMIN/DF=3.15; CFI=.95; IFI=.95; TLI=.92; RMSEA=.069; SRMR=.056 (Pavlopoulos & Motti-Stefanidi, 2017)

Structural equation model of the combined MIRIPS hypotheses for the immigrant participants



* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. $N = 449$. Values are standardized regression weights. CMIN=132.67, DF=42, $p < .001$; CMIN/DF=3.15; CFI=.95; IFI=.95; TLI=.92; RMSEA=.069; SRMR=.056 (Pavlopoulos & Motti-Stefanidi, 2017)

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Suggestions for policy

- ✓ *Security* has a key role in promoting intercultural contact; it includes both realistic and symbolic components; it is perceived differently by different subgroups.
- ✓ *Promoting various aspects of diversity* (in terms of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, special needs, etc.) and *minimizing inequalities* (in terms of power or social class) go hand-in-hand and should not be treated separately.
- ✓ Combining elements from *both the heritage and host cultures* is more beneficial for non-native populations than connecting to either one of the two cultures.

Directions for future research

- More research is needed:
 - ✓ with populations/communities from sending countries conducted in partnership with local researchers
 - ✓ with full engagement of the communities and/or populations it is intended to benefit
 - ✓ designed to have impact on practice, interventions, and policy
 - ✓ focusing on positive, instead of on problematic, outcomes
 - ✓ engaging refugees as active agents, designers and implementers

(adapted from Koller et al., 2017)

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