

COM 325 Intercultural Communication /Fall 2025

Dr. Chen

Final Essay: Diversity vis-à-vis Integration: My Dialectical Take on Multiculturalism

Submitted by 910270194

Societies are increasingly becoming more multicultural as they grow, more complex challenges arise in navigating the delicate balance between the conflicting ideals of diversity and integration. Diversity creates a more inclusive space that recognizes and respects different cultural identities; alternatively, integration emphasizes the unity of different groups, having shared values, and norms to maintain cohesion. While focusing on diversity can assist in correcting ethnocentric thinking, it has the potential to destabilize, as it lacks structure, and complicates establishing shared norms and values. In order to understand these conflicting viewpoints, this essay will examine diversity and integration; exploring the tension and interplay between them, and the opportunities or conflicts they may bring.

In the context of intercultural communications, diversity can be defined as the recognition, and coexistence of various cultural identities (Samovar et al.). The diversity perspective creates an inclusive environment that broadens representation and voice of minority groups in the public sphere, allowing for more inclusion and participation, and encouraging tolerance of non-dominant cultural groups. Diversity has been shown to be beneficial in a variety of settings: educational, workplace, social, and civic. Studies have shown that college students that interact with a diverse set of peers have better rates of graduation, increased leadership skills, and are more civically involved down the line (Tienda).

Although diversity is commonly thought of as a positive perspective, it does not come without complications. The prioritization of multiculturalism holds the potential to undermine the values and norms of the dominant culture of that space. Without these shared values and norms, it can be difficult for governments to create a common national identity, which is key in maintaining social solidarity (Rodríguez-García; Samovar et al.; Wright and Bloemraad). Since diversity attempts to treat all cultural practices as equal it can raise some ethical concerns in regard to human rights, and gender equality.

Integration, from the perspective of intercultural communication, involves keeping one's cultural identity but still being involved within the dominant culture of that society (Berry). This perspective contrasts with assimilation which forces one to abandon their cultural ties. Research has shown proper integration practices can be beneficial for psychological and sociocultural outcomes; with individuals having higher life satisfaction, self-esteem and less stress than individuals who assimilated (Cheung-Blunden and Juang). Integration provides the opportunity for meaningful intercultural interactions and allows the differences between cultures to create an enriched society, rather than a separate one (Ng et al.). Social cohesion is another benefit of integration; as integration still emphasizes the collective norms and values, while simultaneously allowing individuals to maintain their culture and heritage (Rodríguez-García; Tienda).

While integration has been shown to be one of the most advantageous frameworks for supporting multiculturalism, challenges with this framework still arise. Integration does not remove the pressures that individuals from non-dominant cultures may feel to assimilate; individuals may still feel they are losing their culture or perceive that they are being pressured to forgo their ties (Woodson). In addition, proper integration is dependent upon social context, and what structural barrier may exist; societies that stigmatize alternate cultures, and barriers such as educational, economic, and racism can limit the ability of true cross-cultural interactions and the genuine goals of integration. (Ng et al.; Woodson).

Societies can be influenced by the conflict that can arise between diversity and integration; as each perspective has different goals; one seeks to recognize the different identities of each culture, while the other emphasizes the need for social cohesion through a shared civic identity. Both perspectives are valuable but often exist in conflict with one another. Diversity runs the risk of fragmentation; nonetheless, cultural identities are still needed. Rather than think of these perspectives in an either/or viewpoint, they can be embraced in synthesis; similar to models of transformative multiculturalism, or interculturalism. These models understand the importance

of meaningful engagement between cultures, while still maintaining personal cultural identity (Meer and Modood).

In order to create this synthesis, there can be no forced assimilation; rather there should be voluntary adaption in order to preserve and recognize one's own culture; yet practices must remain ethical according to democratic scrutiny to avoid any violation of universal human rights (Rodríguez-García). Intercultural engagement, interaction, cultural recognition, and shared norms should be prioritized in order to address the shortcomings that stem from diversity and integration on their own.

Multicultural societies have long struggled to solve the challenge of diversity versus integration; but this is not a singular problem that can be solved. The balance of diversity and integration is a dynamic issue that will continue to change over time, and any solution will require it to be renegotiated as changes occur. These perspectives can be used together, combining them they present an opportunity to safeguard the common good, yet still recognizing cultural autonomy. As the world continues to become more globalized, and our societies become more complex, the necessity of balancing the legitimacy of culture and shared civic values becomes vital to creating a coherent society.

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