

## INDIVIDUAL DIVERSITY AND LAY REPRESENTATIONS OF RACISM: PERSISTENCE OF THE ‘PREJUDICE PROBLEMATIC’

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**Abstract:** Celebrating diversity across individuals and prevailing assumptions about social discrimination are so tightly linked that we usually employ individual diversity as a cornerstone in developing and implementing any project against racism today. This article examines the lay representations and understandings of racism that individual diversity ideology is associated with, focusing particularly on lay explanations of racism, criteria for identifying racism and constructions of racism as a problem. A survey was conducted on a random sample of 375 Greek citizens. The results suggested a complex and contradictory relation among individual diversity ideology and lay representations of racism – a relationship that may cast doubt on whether individual diversity is indeed a good ideological weapon against racism. The discussion interprets this pattern of results in the context of prevailing assumptions about social inequalities and discrimination today.

**Key words:** Diversity, Lay representations, Prejudice, Racism

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*“That our individuality is socially produced is by now a trivial truth, but the obverse of that truth needs to be repeated more often: the shape of our sociality, and so of the society we share, depends in its turn on the way in which the task of ‘individualisation’ is framed up and responded to”* (Bauman, 2009, p. 4).

In the past few years, antidiversity rhetoric has all too often rearranged public agendas and even won elections, most profoundly in the UK and the US. With social inequalities having increased more than ever before, commentators have questioned the theorising of diversity and identities at the expense of other important issues, such as social class and inequalities, and criticised the indifference shown by political elites towards the living conditions of broad social strata (e.g., Halimi, 2016). Hence this may be no time to celebrate diversity, but it may be a good opportunity to reflect on this powerful concept, its social constructions and its effects in society today.

There is no ready consensus on what is meant by the broad term ‘diversity’: it may be associated strongly with racial and cultural heterogeneity; it may refer to ethnicity, religion, age, gender or education; and it may also stretch to differences in attitudes, values and beliefs (Ramos, Hewstone, Barreto, & Branscombe, 2017). On the ideological level, it may be pursued as an issue of social justice in the fight against the domination and exploitation of minority groups (e.g., Sampson, 1993), but also as an end per se which makes life more interesting, broadens perspectives and invites new ideas (Boli & Elliott, 2008). No matter which meaning prevails contextually, however, there seems to be a concrete common basis that is conspicuously normative: denying or feeling uncomfortable with other people’s difference – be it cultural or other social group membership, personal preference or choice – is likely to be seen as an expression of racist discrimination. This is by no means consensual, given the diffusion of antidiversity messages these days mentioned above, but it nevertheless applies to a very broad range of antidiscrimination postures and attitudes from radical antiracism to mainstream liberalism.

Notwithstanding the anchoring of diversity on cultural, ethnic, and other categorical differences, this article focuses on the emphasis placed on *individuals* within diversity discourses. In an analysis of what they call ‘facade diversity’, sociologists Boli and Elliott (2008, p. 542) claim that there may be ‘less diversity than meets the eye’ behind the colourful mosaic of cultural artefacts and tastes. They argue that the discourse of diversity is generated and sustained by individualisation processes, which place the highest value on individuals’ uniqueness and differentiation. These processes may reflect upon and be facilitated by, for instance, TV shows, fashion, advertising, Facebook and the rest of the social media, all of which fervently promote the expression of individual tastes and the choice of categorical

memberships in the name of diversity. In this line of argument, cultural and other collective identities may serve as valuable resources for building unique and distinct identities (Bauman, 2009). Though we lack systematic data, lay understandings of diversity may echo that emphasis on individuals; the Greek term for diversity (διαφορετικότητα) is a catchword suggesting respect for the *individuality* of people who may belong to minority groups by virtue of ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, physical ability, appearance and lifestyle; make different choices from those of other people; or express themselves in an allegedly unconventional way.

What makes the above ideas about individual diversity (ID) particularly relevant and highly appealing from an antidiscrimination perspective is the associated contention that each individual is unique, but all differences (should) count the same in people's eyes. In this regard ID ideas may be seen as part and parcel of what Wetherell (2012) calls the 'prejudice problematic': that is, the ideas, expressions and vocabulary that emphasize the role of individual prejudice and intolerance in social conflicts and ultimately seek solutions in changing how people see each other. As with any perspective, placing emphasis on some factors (here perception) implies displacing emphasis from others; in an ongoing debate, perceptualism has been challenged for reducing historical arrangements between groups and the role of institutions and structure to individual processes and behaviours (as in racism and sexism), and thus obscuring groups' social positions and interests, historical privileges and political mobilization processes (e.g., Adams, Biernat, Branscombe, Crandall, & Wrightsman, 2008; Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Wright & Baray, 2012). The present article adds that, in a 'world culture of diversity' (Boli & Elliott, 2008), the persistence of the prejudice problematic may owe much to widely accepted ideas about difference and diversity, namely the emphasis placed on each individual's fundamental difference from all others, and on self-expression and choice. Despite their relevance for understanding current construals of discrimination, these assumptions have hardly been empirically studied at all. More often than not, ID ideology is taken for granted and seen as a self-evident, appropriately inclusive spectrum for addressing and combating racism and discrimination. Therefore, the broad question asked in this paper is: which lay representations of racism and discrimination is ID ideology in fact associated with?

### ***Representations of racism and discrimination***

Classifying a behaviour as discriminatory or nondiscriminatory is not a straightforward task in most social contexts, and depends heavily on contextual variations including the various values and norms that are made salient (e.g., Devine, 1989; Gaertner &

Dovidio, 1986; McCoy & Major, 2007). As has been argued, practically any lay belief may be recruited to explain away and rationalize discriminatory treatment (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). However, the content of lay representations of racism and discrimination – that is, what these concepts are about in people’s minds – has been the focus of much less research. Billig (1988) was the first to point out the importance of empirically studying what people mean and, in particular, *do* when employing prejudice and related concepts in talk. He claimed that people may variably accuse others of prejudice in order to delegitimise the views of those others as irrational, while denying any accusation of prejudice directed at themselves, thus affirming for themselves their position within the community of normal, healthy individuals. Billig’s seminal approach was followed by a stream of discourse-analytic research such as Wetherell and Potter’s (1992) pioneering work in New Zealand and more recent contributions including research in the Greek context (e.g., Condor, Figgou, Abell, Gibson, & Stevenson, 2006; Figgou & Condor, 2006; Sapountzis, 2013). In the past 15 years there have also been a few studies on lay theories of racism in northern America employing conventional quantitative methods and techniques (Esses & Hodson, 2006; Hodson & Esses, 2005; Sommers & Norton, 2006).

In an important contribution Figgou and Condor (2006) identified four key ways in which an action or situation was framed in terms of racism or prejudice by their respondents in northern Greece: ungrounded categorisation, including both overlooking individual difference and overstating categorical barriers between ‘them’ and ‘us’; intolerance of real differences between groups; attributing intergroup differences to nature rather than social factors; and high-status groups’ antipathy to low-status group members. Variousy resembling and echoing formal social psychological theories of prejudice, these themes converge with findings in very different contexts, elicited with diverse research methods. Hodson and Esses (2005) examined what Canadian university students thought caused prejudice to occur and how in their view prejudice should be combated, with open-ended questions and measures of various prejudice-related beliefs. Their participants mostly cited ignorance and family influence as causes of prejudice, which tap the familiar themes of erroneous reasoning (ungrounded categorisation) and inappropriate upbringing and conduct (intolerance). Interestingly, in Hodson and Esses’s (2005) research, participants placed the least emphasis on real group differences and human nature, suggesting that individual factors should be seen as the proximal cause of prejudice and simultaneously distancing themselves from the appropriateness of internal attributions in explaining prejudice. Such ambivalence is an inherent element in construals of prejudice and racism. Sommers and Norton (2006) studied representations of White racism in the US across student and community samples,

focusing on perceived behaviours that count as racist and perceived traits of racists. Racist behaviour was associated with feelings of discomfort and unfamiliarity with Black people (including having trouble distinguishing them from one another), overt racism (e.g., discouraging kids from playing with Black children, thinking of Blacks as not suitable for certain professions), and denial of the problem (believing that anti-Black prejudice is no longer a problem). Racists were described mostly as *fearful of change* and *old-fashioned*, and were typically identified as *Southern* and *old*. Thus, only overt, allegedly old-fashioned forms of racism qualified as racism in those participants' eyes, although the same participants detected racism even in thoughts and feelings of uneasiness in the presence of Blacks. In Figgou and Condor's (2006) analysis, prejudice too was presented in abstract terms as pertaining to thoughts and feelings rather than to specific acts, whereas concrete behaviours of Greek citizens against immigrants were hardly ever construed as racist.

Ambivalence is a recurrent theme in analyses of lay representations of racism. As with other social constructions and debates over social issues, ambivalence is a function of the strategies people employ when communicating with others – that is, they strive to justify their social positions while maintaining legitimate self-images, as Billig's (1988) analysis suggests. Depending on their ingroups' position in a particular intergroup context, people may variably draw on the themes, for instance, that prejudice is inevitable or that prejudices may and should be eradicated, that society and the 'system' rather than individuals should be blamed for prejudice or, conversely, that individuals are to blame. At the same time, however, people will invariably disclaim prejudice for themselves ('I am not prejudiced, but ...'; Billig, 1988). The historical roots of the *prejudice* concept in the intellectual tradition of the Enlightenment give it another nuance of complexity that is worth noting. Signifying irrational thinking and backwardness, 'prejudice' stands for the reverse of what normal individuals should be and act like in the face of Reason and Progress. Therefore, prejudiced people presumably exclude themselves from what the prevailing ideology in modernity prescribes as an essentially human condition (Taguieff, 2001). As in Sommers and Norton's (2006) data, racists are disavowed as old-fashioned, backward and ignorant – descriptions that seem all the more paradoxical when they come from people who conveniently position themselves in support of human rights and equality for all.

### ***The present research***

Since ID ideology and its associations with lay understandings of racism have not been studied before, the research presented here is essentially exploratory. Before the main study, two pilot studies addressed ID ideology and lay representations respectively. In

the first pilot, 120 Greek citizens, most of them students at the University of Crete, were administered a questionnaire with 12 statements relevant to ID, drawn from public discourse about diversity. Based on exploratory factor analysis, five items were finally selected to make up a concise ID scale for the main study. In the other pilot study, 75 interviews with a heterogeneous Greek community sample were selected from a larger pool of semistructured interviews (conducted in the context of a social psychology workshop on representations of racism), and were content-analysed for commonly appearing themes. That analysis largely directed the selection and phrasing of the items addressing representations of racism in the main study.

The main study, presented below, tests the relationship between personal endorsement of ID ideology, on the one hand, and lay representations of racism and discrimination, on the other, in a Greek community sample. To this end it measured participants' ID ideology with the concise ID scale, as well as participants' views on three issues: what racism is about (explanations of racism), what it takes to identify racism (classificatory criteria) and how big a problem racism is (perceived impact). Participants' social dominance orientation (SDO; e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), a variable measuring in a bipolar way how much individuals like (or dislike) inequality between groups, was also measured as a relevant variable. Hierarchy-attenuating ideologies (as opposed to hierarchy-enhancing ones according to social dominance theory), such as ID, should correlate negatively with SDO (e.g., Levin et al., 2012). This study also included other measures, such as attributions for human differences and questions about perpetrators and victims of racism, which are not addressed in the present paper.

## METHOD

### *Participants and data collection*

Three hundred and ninety persons completed the questionnaires in the main study. Of these, 15 respondents were non-Greek citizens or failed to complete the questionnaires in line with the guidelines, and were dropped from the sample. The analyses were conducted on the responses of 375 participants. Age ranged from 18 to 63 years ( $M = 31$ ,  $SD = 12.06$ ), and 67.4% of respondents were female; 45.1% of participants were university students ( $n = 169$ ) and the rest were people employed in the private as well as the public sector, self-employed university graduates such as doctors and lawyers, entrepreneurs, unemployed and pensioners. Several of the nonstudents were schoolteachers ( $n = 89$ , 23.7% of the sample).

Most teachers were approached via the secondary-school teachers' union in Rethymnon, Crete, and completed the questionnaires on an electronic platform. The rest of the data were collected by undergraduate students enlisted in a social psychology workshop, who passed the questionnaires on to other students and nonstudents for partial course credit.

### **Measures**

#### *Individual diversity (ID) scale*

The ID scale featured the following five items (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .73$ ). Response scale ranged from 1 to 7:

*The most important characteristic of people is their uniqueness.*

*Young people can make their own unique plans that will be different from those of everyone else.*

*Everyone should unfold in life his/her inclinations and unique potential that reside within him/her.*

*Everyone makes his/her own way according to the choices he/she makes in life*

*Diversity across people is the most charming feature of human-kind.*

#### *Social dominance orientation (SDO) scale*

The four-item short SDO scale had recently been tested on another Greek sample (Pratto et al., 2013). Yet in the present sample the scale's internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .59$ ) was not any better than that reported by Pratto et al. (2013) for their sample in Greece. Example items are: *We should not push for group equality*; *In setting priorities, we must consider all groups* (reversed). Response scale ranged from 1 to 7.

#### *Explanations of racism*

Nineteen items (see Table 1) represented a wide array of possible responses on what racism is about. The items were selected after the data from semistructured interviews had been content-analysed, as mentioned above, and were designed to stand for as diverse a range of explanations of racism as possible. Responses were on a scale 1 to 7.

Principal Components Analysis (PCA) with oblimin rotation on explanations of racism produced a four-factor solution accounting for 53.3% of the variance (see Table 1). Factor 1 (ignorance/retardation) suggests both ignorance and backwardness as causes of racism, resembling the content of the factor that accounted also for the greatest part of variance in Hodson and Esses (2005). Factor 2 (psychological causes)

is represented by psychological explanations, such as attributing racism to a personality factor or to normal psychological processes, which invariably relieves individuals of responsibility. Factor 3 (exploitation) points to societal factors, exploitation and dominance. Lastly, Factor 4 (disease) represents racism as much like an epidemic affecting societies from within. The items loading heavily on each factor ( $> .45$ ) were collapsed to produce new variables: 'Ignorance/retardation' (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$ ), 'Psychology' (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .72$ ) and 'Exploitation' (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .67$ ); the internal consistency of the items loading on Factor 4 was poor (.53), so these items were not included in further analyses.

**Table 1. Component matrix from principal component analysis with oblimin rotation on explanations of racism**

	1	2	3	4
Racism results from ignorance and lack of culture	<b>.74</b>	-.09	-.02	-.10
Racism results from the wrong upbringing and education in the family	<b>.70</b>	.12	-.06	-.01
Racism is irrational hatred and malice	<b>.68</b>	-.21	.04	.32
Racism makes people lose their judgment and act like a herd	<b>.67</b>	-.01	.10	.13
Racism in societies shows how retarded and backward they are	<b>.63</b>	.17	.09	-.14
Racism is a psychopathological phenomenon; it's absurd	<b>.59</b>	-.01	.08	.37
Racism is a primitive aspect of humans that brings us down to the level of animals	<b>.48</b>	.03	.12	.24
Racism is directed mainly against people of lower social standing	.37	.18	.33	-.36
Racism is a personality factor present in all people	-.10	<b>.84</b>	.05	.01
Racism has its roots in normal human functioning, like our preference for our own group.	-.02	<b>.83</b>	.08	-.10
Racism resides mainly within us, and has nothing to do with people's social standing.	.09	<b>.70</b>	-.10	.14
The purpose of racism is to justify the subjugation of the powerless by the powerful.	.02	-.06	<b>.69</b>	.21
The purpose of racism is to justify the privileges of the powerful in a society.	.25	-.06	<b>.68</b>	-.15
Racism is a societal symptom that individuals are not so much to blame for.	-.34	.12	<b>.67</b>	.41
Racism is brought about by the social system, which relies on racism in order to impose itself.	.13	-.09	<b>.65</b>	-.27
Racism is mainly present in societal institutions and structure.	.11	.17	<b>.48</b>	-.08
Racism is directed against all people, irrespective of their social standing.	.12	.12	-.04	<b>.64</b>
Racism is a major threat that plagues societies much like an epidemic.	.25	-.04	.19	<b>.55</b>
Racism starts from individuals first and then moves to affect society and institutions.	.20	.37	-.22	<b>.50</b>
% of variance:	24.7	11.9	9.8	6.8
Eigenvalues:	4.70	2.27	1.87	1.30

**Note:** Loadings  $> .45$  in boldface.  $N = 375$ .



### *Perceived impact of racism*

Another eight items (see Table 2) addressed the impact of racism, and ranged from downplaying and negating the problem to magnifying its significance. Attention was paid to phrasing some items in broad, abstract terms (e.g., identifying racism as a major problem worldwide) and others in a more context-specific way (e.g., laying the blame on the national ingroup). Responses were on a 1 to 7 scale. PCA with oblimin rotation yielded three factors accounting for 63.7% of total variance (see Table 2). Factor 1 (Denial) comprises all items denying or downplaying racism; Factor 2 (Ingroup blame) represents the items that lay the blame for racism on the national ingroup; and Factor 3 (Major problem) represents the items emphasizing the urgency of recognizing and addressing racism as a problem. Collapsing the items loading heavily on each factor ( $> .45$ ) produced the following new variables: 'Denial' ( $\alpha = .72$ ), 'Ingroup blame' ( $r = .30$ ), and 'Major problem' ( $r = .51$ ) ( $r$  was used because there were only two items in the two subscales).

**Table 2. Component matrix from principal component analysis with oblimin rotation on perceived impact of racism**

	1	2	3	
There may be racism in other countries but not in Greece, because racism is alien to the Greek culture	<b>.84</b>	-.17	.19	
If all people stuck to their place and tried to face their own problems, there would be no 'racism'	<b>.82</b>	-.03	.01	
We need to order our priorities and find solutions to the enormous problems that Greece is faced with, and then deal with other problems such as racism	<b>.64</b>	.10	-.17	
Racism is a fake problem that has been invented in order to distract people from their real problems	<b>.63</b>	.16	-.10	
Greek society facilitates the flourishing of racism	-.08	<b>.85</b>	.13	
Deep inside Greeks are racist	.09	<b>.85</b>	-.02	
The rise of racism is a major problem that societies are faced with nowadays	.04	.08	<b>.80</b>	
Racism is a serious problem that is about integration and the rights of all people in our society	-.05	.01	<b>.78</b>	
	% of variance:	29.4	20.4	13.9
	Eigenvalues:	2.35	1.63	1.11

**Note:** Loadings  $> .45$  in boldface.  $N = 375$ .

### *Classificatory criteria for racism*

Three items were employed as possible answers to the statement 'We may speak of racism when:' The response scale was 1 to 7.

*Someone has even a thought suggesting lack of respect for another person.*

*There is intention to harm another person.*

*There is physical violence against another person for no other reason than his/her origin.*

### **Analysis**

A simple analytic strategy was employed following Hodson and Esses (2005). Explanations of racism and perceived impact were first entered in principal component analyses (PCAs). Based on PCAs, new variables were computed and, next, those new variables and classificatory-criteria items were correlated to ID and SDO. As a last test, key representation-of-racism variables were regressed to SDO and, in a second step, ID.

## **RESULTS**

### **Representations of racism**

The three variables representing *explanations of racism* differed significantly from each other,  $F(2, 732) = 104.41, p < .001$ ; 'Ignorance/retardation' was the most popular explanation ( $M = 5.39, SD = 1.04$ ), followed by 'Exploitation' ( $M = 4.84, SD = 1.03$ ) and 'Psychology' ( $M = 4.19, SD = 1.52$ ; all comparisons were significant at  $p < .001$ , Bonferroni test).

The variables representing the *perceived impact of racism* also differed significantly,  $F(2, 732) = 546.48, p < .001$ ; racism was recognised as a 'major problem' at a high level ( $M = 5.90, SD = .94$ ), was blamed on the ingroup comparatively less ( $M = 4.64, SD = 1.42$ ) and was overtly denied to the least extent ( $M = 2.88, SD = 1.39$ ; all comparisons being significant at  $p < .001$ , Bonferroni test). Lastly, differences between the *criteria* for classifying a behaviour as racist were also significant,  $F(2, 746) = 6.58, p = .001$ . Participants answered, in descending order, that racism should be detected even in thoughts suggesting lack of respect for another person ( $M = 4.57, SD = 1.71$ ); in intention to harm ( $M = 4.23, SD = 1.91$ ); and in physical violence against another person ( $M = 4.10, SD = 2.22$ ), with the difference between the latter two criteria being nonsignificant (other comparisons were significant at  $p < .05$ , Bonferroni test).

As in Hodson and Esses (2005), Table 3 presents bivariate and partial correlations between explanations of racism, perceived impact variables and classificatory criteria. The three explanation types were systematically related to other constructs, as an inspection of Table 3 suggests. Attributing racism to ignorance and retardation was clearly associated with seeing racism as a major problem and classifying even negative thoughts a racist, whereas the correlation with laying the blame for racism on the ingroup was significant (when variance from other variables was not partialled out)

but weak. The psychological explanation, on the other hand, correlated with both denying the problem and laying the blame on the ingroup, a rather contradictory pattern. Yet, when it comes to classificatory criteria, the psychological account correlated with identifying racism in the presence of physical violence or at least in intention to harm; that is, with more restrictive criteria for classifying a behaviour as racist. Finally, the comparatively more conflictual exploitation account correlated unequivocally with classifying even negative thoughts as racist, and seeing racism both as a major problem in general terms and as a problem that the ingroup should be blamed for. Note, however, the significant correlation between the exploitation account and denying racism as a problem, which adds an element of complexity we should probably not disregard.

**Table 3. Intercorrelations between explanations of racism, perceived impact, and classificatory criteria for identifying racism**

	Explanations of racism		
	Ignorance/ retardation	Psychology	Exploitation
<b>Impact of racism:</b>			
Denial	.07 [-.01 .20**]	.41** [.40** .38**]	.14* [.10 .18*]
Ingroup blame	.12* [.03 .01]	.22** [.20** .18*]	.23** [.19** .17*]
Major problem	.52** [.48** .54**]	-.06 [-.16* -.01]	.28** [.13* .29**]
<b>Classificatory criteria:</b>			
Even a negative thought	.33** [.26** .33**]	-.01 [-.07 .04]	.26** [.17* .26**]
Intention to harm	.05 [.02 .09]	.18* [.17* .03]	.09 [.06 .09]
Only physical violence	-.03 [-.05 -.03]	.26** [.27** .20**]	.02 [.01 -.01]

**Note:** \*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$ . First numbers in brackets are values when variance from other explanation variables is partialled out. Second numbers in brackets are values when variance from other impact of racism, or other classificatory criteria variables, is partialled out.

### **ID and representations of racism**

As expected for a hierarchy-attenuating ideology, ID correlated negatively with SDO,  $r = -.30$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, correlations of ID with the above variables draw a more composite picture (see Table 4). ID correlated significantly with the ignorance/retardation account of racism and the interrelated description of its impact as a major problem. It also correlated significantly with another two (also interrelated) variables: the psychological explanation of racism, and the denial of racism as a problem. Notably, the only explanation that ID did not correlate with was exploitation. As regards the classificatory criteria, ID correlated with identifying racism even in negative thoughts. However, note that when SDO was controlled for, ID also correlated at a significant level with identifying racism in intention to harm another person. These correlations

sketch out ID as a hierarchy-attenuating ideological construct closely associated with widespread antiracist assumptions regarding the causes, impact and criteria of racism. Yet, ID, unlike SDO, did not correlate with explaining racism in conflictual terms as exploitation, but also, like SDO, related to constructs that may justify racism: attributing racism to psychological factors, and denying racism as a problem.

**Table 4. Correlations of ID and SDO with explanations of racism, perceived impact, and classificatory criteria for identifying racism**

	ID	SDO
Explanations of racism:		
Ignorance/ retardation	.36 ** [.31 **]	-.28 **
Psychology	.15 * [.20 **]	.12 *
Exploitation	.07 [.03]	-.13 *
Impact of racism:		
Denial	.12 * [.26 **]	.40 **
Ingroup blame	.03 [.03]	-.05
Major problem	.25 ** [.17*]	-.35 **
Classificatory criteria:		
Even a negative thought	.19 ** [.16*]	-.14 *
Intention to harm	.07 [.12*]	.08
Only physical violence	-.01 [.08]	.23 **

**Note:** \*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$ . Numbers in brackets are values when variance from SDO is partialled out.

At the last stage of analysis, each of the most popular constructs relating to racism was regressed to SDO and ID, with SDO entered first and ID entered on a next step in hierarchical regression analyses. As can be seen in Table 5, entering ID as a predictor significantly increased the explained variance in all dependent variables (explaining racism as ignorance/retardation, recognising racism as a major problem and identifying racism in negative thoughts). Thus, we may assume that ID predicted these constructs over and above SDO.

**Table 5. Hierarchical regression analyses with SDO entered first and ID entered on a second step as predictors**

Dependent variables	Predictors	Step 1	Step 2	$R^2$ change	$F$ change
		B	B		
Explanations:					
Ignorance/ retardation	SDO	-.28**	-.19**	.081	34.71**
	ID		.30**		
Impact of racism:				.025	10.60*
Major problem	SDO	-.35**	-.30**		
	ID		.17*		
Classificatory criteria:				.024	9.03*
Even a negative thought	SDO	-.14*	-.09		
	ID		.16*		

**Note:** \*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$ . Regression coefficients are standardised.

## DISCUSSION

There may be many reasons to study diversity today, and all reasons might indeed 'be largely related to beliefs about difference' (Plaut, 2010, p. 82). The emphasis we so often place on each individual's fundamental difference from all others, on self-expression, choice and other related ideas circulating widely within a 'world culture of diversity' (Boli & Elliott, 2008), has not attracted attention as a relevant belief set – unlike the rich data social psychologists have accumulated on beliefs associated with appropriate policies for handling societal diversity (mostly multiculturalism vs. colour-blindness; for reviews see Guimond, de la Sablonnière, & Nugier, 2014; Rattan & Ambady, 2013). Despite the huge range across which they are spread (or perhaps thanks to that range), we tend to take for granted that individual diversity (ID) ideas form an essentially egalitarian and inclusive spectrum for addressing and combating inequalities, racism and discrimination.

This study set out to empirically test the relation between personal endorsement of some key assumptions in ID ideology, on the one hand, and lay representations of racism and discrimination, on the other hand, in a Greek community sample. To this end the main study measured participants' ID ideology, as well as their views on three issues: what racism is about (explanations of racism), what it takes to identify racism (classificatory criteria) and how big a problem racism is (perceived impact). Participants' SDO was also measured as a relevant variable. The results suggest that ID ideology was indeed selectively associated with some lay representations of racism, but these associations may be understood within a complex network of interrelations between the elements that hold lay representations of racism together. Therefore, the content and structure of lay representations need to be discussed at some length before we revert to the associations of ID ideology.

Participants' responses were organized in distinct theories in relation to the characteristics associated with racism, as past research also suggests (Sommers & Norton, 2006). Racism was mostly attributed to ignorance and retardation, a common theme in many contexts (Adams et al., 2008) which draws on a long intellectual tradition dating back to the Enlightenment (Billig, 1988; Taguieff, 2001). The psychological account and the more conflictual explanation of racism in terms of exploitation by the powerful are also well-contoured lay theories that have strong affiliations with scholarly accounts of prejudice and racism. However, the ambivalence that was present in the correlations of explanations of racism with other variables should not go unnoticed. The ignorance account safely related to acknowledging racism as a major problem worldwide, and identifying racism even in negative thoughts against another person, which are another two very common themes in

official antiracist rhetoric (as captured, e.g., in school curricula and training programs about diversity). Unsurprisingly, these themes were endorsed on average more than all others. Yet, on the other hand, the ignorance account was only weakly associated with laying the blame for racism on the national ingroup, suggesting that participants who view racism as a matter of ignorance would also tend to acknowledge racism as a major issue worldwide, but would not so much tend to see racism as a problem Greek society was responsible for (cf. Figgou & Condor, 2006). The other two lay theories of racism as identified in these data tell similar stories. Explanation of racism in psychological terms closely related to denying that racism was a problem, and to adopting restrictive criteria for classifying a behaviour as racist (such as the presence of physical violence, or at least an intention to harm), a fairly coherent set of ideas; however, it also related to laying the blame for racism on the ingroup, which is rather puzzling. Explaining racism as an issue of exploitation by the powerful related unequivocally to identifying racism even in negative thoughts and seeing racism both as a major problem in general terms and as a problem that the ingroup should be held responsible for, and it still also related to denying racism as a problem, which is certainly a contradictory statement.

It appears that lay theories and other representations of racism sketch out a composite map illustrating too the composite strategies by those involved. Indeed, lay theories may serve as ideological justifications for stigmatisation and discrimination (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003; Hodson & Esses, 2005), but their justificatory role seems to arise more clearly when they are viewed in context; that is, in association with other positions and attitudes. Thus, even blaming racism on the ingroup – by agreeing to statements such as ‘Deep inside Greeks are racist,’ or ‘Greek society facilitates the flourishing of racism’ – might paradoxically also rationalize racism when placed within a psychological account that presents racism as an inevitable feature of human nature (and therefore of Greek people). By the same token, denying the importance of racism by agreeing with the statement that racism distracts people ‘from their real problems’ may acquire a different meaning within an account that identifies racism as a means of coercion exercised by the powerful against powerless people – perhaps a tendency to agree with any account making a case of deliberate deception and distraction exercised by the powerful (or the ‘system’) against the powerless. As the literature suggests (e.g., Hodson & Esses, 2005; Jackman, 1994), depending on the context, asserting that society rather than individuals should be blamed for discrimination, or even attributing discrimination to economic factors, social inequality and other factors identified by social scientists, may variously be recruited in order to justify discriminatory treatment of others.

In a ‘map’ drawn this way with unclear and overlapping lines, ID ideology appears

to pull some of the lines together and form a new pattern. A 'progressive' ideology itself, as the negative correlation with SDO suggests, ID was closely associated with the most popular, widespread antiracist assumptions regarding the causes of racism (ignorance or retardation), its impact (a major problem worldwide), and the criteria for identifying racism (even in negative thoughts). And yet, it also related to two contingent constructs that justify racism: attributing racism to psychological factors, and denying racism as a problem. Importantly, ID did not relate to explaining racism in societal terms as exploitation of the powerless by the powerful. What all this may come down to is a contingency of ID ideology with a conception of racism that points directly to human psychology: racism rests uncomfortably on ignorance and backwardness, but also resides within individuals as a propensity to think ill of other people. Traced in any negative thought and lack of respect towards others, racism is denounced as a major universal problem people are faced with. But if racism exists predominantly in our heads, as the ID view seems to suggest, it might lie behind everything and, at the same time, be nowhere; it might be as real a problem as it is, literally, a fictional one.

This is by no means the only way to interpret the lay understandings of racism that relate to popular ID ideas. Denying racism by endorsing ethnocentric and overtly xenophobic statements (such as *If all people stuck to their place and tried to face their own problems, there would be no 'racism'*) goes beyond the interpretation suggested above, though it certainly does invite more research. However, it is unlikely that such future research would tell a tale of nice people worshipping diversity as against nasty people addicted to thinking ill of individuals' differences.

Nevertheless, it appears that the resurgence of an individualist perspective placing the highest value on individuals' diverse expressions, choices and tastes may facilitate a reductionist understanding of social inequalities and discrimination in terms of psychological characteristics and processes, and thus direct attention away from the historical formation of inequality between social groups. In this regard ID ideology transcribes to and facilitates the *prejudice problematic* (Wetherell, 2012); that is, the view on social relations suggesting that the problem with racism and discrimination ultimately rests on how individuals (mostly dominant-group members) perceive other people (mostly minority-group members). An important implication is the common paradox that people may adhere to egalitarian postures and beliefs as to intergroup relations and, at the same time, dismiss inequality between groups as the outcome of historical intergroup arrangements and politics. This is all the more important because such views may turn the ongoing debate on diversity in a direction that might not shed light on why the antidiversity rhetorics of rightwing populist movements have been having such an impact.

### **Limitations of the present research**

This piece of research was largely exploratory, and thus no bold claims can be advanced. The cross-sectional design of the main study further dismisses any claim of causality, which the use of regression analysis might imply. It also needs to be acknowledged that in this opportunity sample, students and teachers –two groups having strong ties with ID ideology thanks to the latter’s impact on education– were overrepresented. More research employing other designs and techniques is under way and might address these problems more directly in future. Future research may also advance hypotheses on other effects of an ideology spread so widely as to inform a huge range of social practices and legislation, from counselling to education, and an array of very heterogeneous political discourses including most versions of antiracism today.

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