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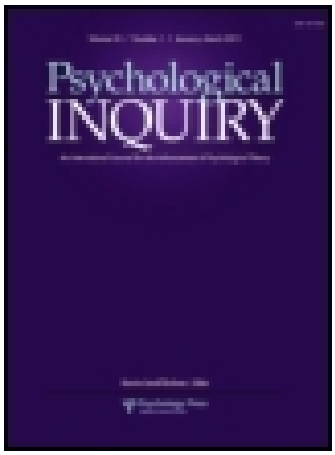

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Toward a Diversity Science: The Longest Journey Begins With the First Step

James M. Jones [a]
[a] Department of Psychology , University of Delaware , Newark, Delaware
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Toward a Diversity Science: The Longest Journey Begins With the First Step

James M. Jones
Department of Psychology, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware

Vicky Plaut's wonderfully cogent, concise, yet comprehensive analysis of sociocultural perspective on diversity is an excellent first step toward a full-blown diversity science. I have been writing on prejudice and racism for 40 years and see the need for a shift in emphasis to a diversity perspective. My current writing, along with Jack Dovidio and Deborah Vietze (Jones, Dovidio, & Vietze, in press), focuses on updating the prejudice and racism paradigm of social psychology to a diversity science approach. Plaut's target article does an excellent job of pointing the way.

In 1970 when I began the first edition of *Prejudice and Racism* (Jones, 1972), I wanted to write about racism as I saw, experienced, and understood it. Prejudice seemed tepid as a cause of the large-scale racial inequality. The riots, the Black Power movement, the aggressive demands for Black Studies, and the early government-sponsored programs designed to reverse centuries of racial injustice and oppression ushered in a new society of rising expectations and demands for social change. Institutional and cultural racism defined the complexity of this new society, and made it clear that bigotry and authoritarian personalities were inadequate to account for the continuing strains of conflicted racial dynamics.

A less obvious shape-shifting influence at the time, but equally significant, was the Immigration and Nationality Act (INS, Act of 1965, Pub.L. 89-236). The Act abolished the national-origin quotas that had been in place since 1924, resulting in new immigration from non-European nations profoundly changing the ethnic makeup of the United States. Immigration doubled between 1965 and 1970 and doubled again between 1970 and 1990 (Frum, 2000).

When I wrote the second edition of *Prejudice and Racism* (Jones, 1997), it was clear to me that *diversity* of the U.S. population was an increasingly complex consideration in efforts to achieve social justice. However, the second edition was still framed by anti-Black racism and White or mainstream society's culpability at the individual, institutional and cultural levels. I also made it clear that although the biological basis of race was no longer scientifically viable, it was essentialized in sociocultural meanings thus continuing its significance as a basis of stigma discrimination and oppression. I proposed that race and its oppressive racism consequences were socially construction via racialization projects that drew upon cultural meanings; institutional practices and policies; and individual attitudes, emotions, and behaviors. This dynamic can be traced over time in recursive fashion as a top down process where culture drives individual behavior, or bottom up where individual beliefs and behaviors shape culture (see Figure 1), with both processes mediated by institutional structures, practices, and policies.

I framed the core racism/oppression argument in terms of White over Black, echoing DuBois's (1903) famous enunciation of the problem of the 20th century as the problem of the color line. However, I closed the book with a brief coda on "diversity is a strength in the species and in society." I argued that diversity was good for the species, echoing E.O. Wilson's claims (Wilson, 1992) and for individuals in the form of self-complexity (Linville, 1987), and for our nation. I argued that racism undermines diversity both between and within groups, and thus was an impediment to social progress and justice.

Plaut's cogent analysis of the need for a sociocultural perspective on diversity—and the critical role that scientific methods, both theoretical and empirical, can play—connects beautifully with my earlier writings on prejudice and racism, and with the current work we are doing on diversity. The remainder of this commentary offers my reflections on the need for and characteristics of diversity science.

The Diversity Hypothesis: Multiple Viewpoints, Divergent Outcomes

Increasing diversity of the U.S. population has been a fact for over a century, and, as noted earlier, has greatly escalated in the past 30 years. And, as Plaut notes, current estimates are that by 2042, no racial/ethnic group will constitute a majority of the U.S. population. But not only is diversity inevitable, it is compelling! U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor wrote in her majority opinion (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003) majority opinion that the U.S. Constitution does not "prohibit the [University of Michigan] law school's narrowly tailored use of race in admissions decisions to further a compelling interest

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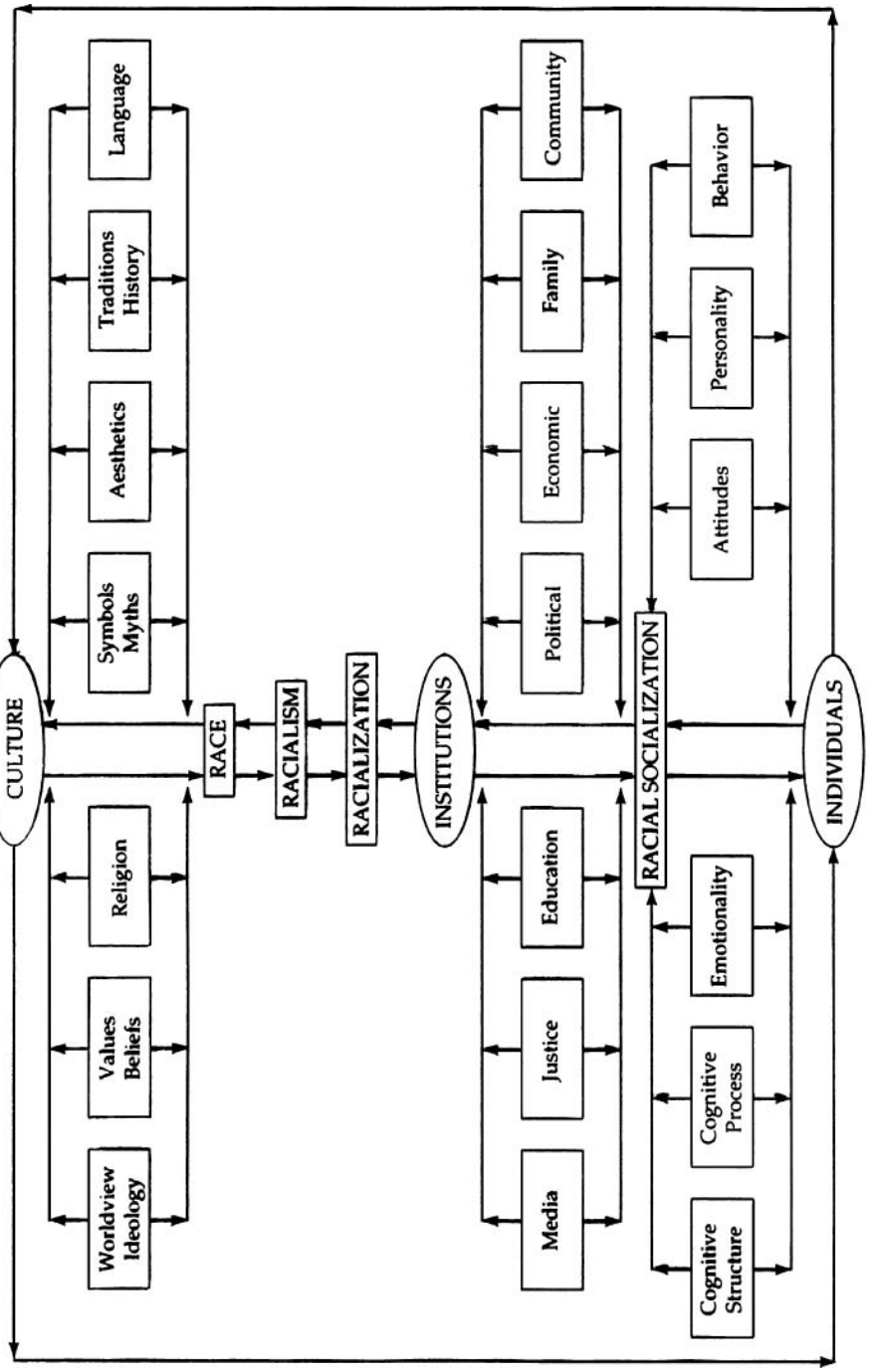

Figure 1. A graphic representation of the intersecting levels of influence on racial dynamics. Adapted from Jones (1997, p. 506).

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in obtaining the educational benefits that flow from a diverse student body." Diversity is inevitable and beneficial.

The diversity hypothesis (Jones, Lynch, Tenglund, & Gaertner, 1999) proposes that if "the goal of diversity is to achieve a successfully functioning arrangement among diverse peoples, who work in concert or cooperation with each other, [then we need to understand] . . . the conditions under which positive outcomes for diversity arrangements can occur" (p. 55). Drawing upon the nature of Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, we argued that positive consequences of diversity occur when four conditions are met: (a) Full participation occurs for members of diverse ethnic racial and cultural groups across all levels of society, (b) the degree of participation approximates an appropriate index of representation for racial and cultural groups, (c) common purpose across these levels of diversity is created, and (d) cultural identity is valued.

The contact hypothesis has been scientifically investigated for a half a century with extremely significant results (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The contact hypothesis was conceived in a climate of legalized racial discrimination, and a focus on the historical legacy of slavery and Jim Crow in relation to White–Black relations. The diversity hypothesis rests on the premise that diversity is both inevitable and desirable, and that positive consequences of diversity are undermined by prejudice and racism, in that they curtail both full participation (access and commensurate outcomes) as well as numerical representation.

Social psychological literature has offered compelling research and supportive theory that illustrates and Plaut's discussion and analysis represents that well. Two aspects of the diversity hypothesis that are not so well reflected in Plaut's article (although not unacknowledged) are the last two points, common purpose combined with preferred and valued collective identities. For many, these two principles are in direct conflict. One of the biggest challenges of diversity science is to demonstrate the conditions under which common purpose and valued collective identities combine to create favorable conditions for diversity.

This problem is well illustrated in Plaut's juxtaposition of a color-blind versus a multicultural approach to diversity. The color-blind approach explicitly ignores or rejects the diversity hypothesis principle of valued collective identity. Or at best considers it irrelevant to fairness and social justice. All people are different from each other. The maximum possible human difference is among the 6.5 billion of us on the planet. Difference in general is not the issue, but difference that matters in particular ways is. We are quite familiar with the social categorization tendencies and how compelling drawing distinctions among people can be, even when those distinctions are trivial (e.g., differences in dot-estimation frequencies). But having created a social category for people, our psycho-logic looks for essential attributes that uniquely define membership in the category (Medin & Ortony, 1989).

Noted American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald is reported to have observed to his equally noted writer friend Ernest Hemingway, "The rich are different from us." To which Hemingway is reported to have replied, "Yes, they have more money." Fitzgerald was implying some *essence* that distinguished rich people from others, but Hemingway rejected this essentializing attempt in favor of a simple and superficial distinction. Essentializing groups exaggerates differences among them and creates a chasm between and among them that is often difficult to bridge. For example, the category divide hypothesis (Prentice & Miller, 2006) illustrates how essentializing group differences can make it more difficult to see commonalities and to forge understandings and comfortable interactions across group boundaries.

Diversity science must address the substantive complications that arise from differences that are perceived as meaningful and socially and psychologically relevant to ongoing interactions and outcomes. Research by Shelton and Richeson (2005) suggests that even when people from different groups have similar preferences and attitudes, those differences are not bridged by the similarities they actually share. The concept of pluralistic ignorance suggests that in spite of the desire of members of a group to interact with members of another group, they often don't because they think the other will reject them and has no interest in interacting with them. The other person often feels the same way, and both avoid contact with the other. Their reasoning is exactly the same, but each thinks the other is avoiding them. The net of this tendency is that intergroup interaction is limited, and diversity in institutional settings is isolated into social/cultural enclaves or zones of comfort.

Racial/ethnic/cultural identity carries in varying degrees the idea of essential differences. Racial cultural identity has been shown to increase the likelihood of perceiving racial discrimination which, in turn, is related to poorer psychological well-being (e.g., Sellers & Shelton, 2003), but it can also buffer these negative psychological effects. Being sensitive to rejection on the basis of race (RS-race; Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002) has been related to a reduced sense of belonging in university settings, poorer relations with dorm-mates and poorer academic performance. However, the relationship between alienation from the university and poorer academic performance is mediated by ethnic identity (Mendoza-Denton, Pietrzak, & Downey, 2008). They found that although high ethnic identity in combination with high RS–race led to reduced identification with the institution, this combination did not lead to decreased grade point average over time. For those low in RS-race,

ethnic identity was positively related to intentions to stay in school as well as to increases in grade point average. The implications for diversity practices are that ethnic identification *can* promote academic success but only when students have reason to expect that they will not be rejected because of their background and racial identity. The authors suggest that these findings "underscore the importance of promoting achievement and institutional affiliation not by discouraging ethnic identification but rather by changing the institutional environment and climate to ensure all students have reason to feel welcome within the institution" (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2008, p. 349).

The diversity hypothesis juxtaposes common purpose with valued cultural identity. One of the important goals of diversity science, then, is to unravel this Gordian knot. The objectives of the diversity hypothesis are to understand the conditions that facilitate, and the psychological mechanisms that produce positive benefits of diversity in a given setting.

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Black–White Dynamics Are Necessary But Not Sufficient to Understand Diversity

There is no doubt that the sociocultural model of how discrimination and oppression disadvantages its targets is the history of Blacks in the United States. Plaut defines "Black exceptionalism" as the idea that Blacks experience racialization to a greater degree than other groups such as Asians and Latinos. As a prototype of how marginalization, negative stereotyping, oppression, and dehumanization, the American psyche and culture are suffused with this Black–White image. And if, as Shweder and Sullivan (1993) argued, culture and psyche make each other up, it is not surprising racialization was perfected for Blacks.

Sears and Savalei (2006) considered three diversity prototypes: the *assimilation prototype*, characterized by the immigration and assimilation of non-English Europeans during the 19th century, and a corresponding decline of an ethnic distinction and its correlated cultural and social differences; *Black discrimination prototype (Black exceptionalism)*, characterized by legalized discrimination against African Americans, a unique system of slavery, Jim Crow, and a racial color line that blocked Blacks' assimilation into the broader society and their mobility into more advantaged statuses that forcefully influence our society to the present day; and a *multiculturalism prototype*, that encompasses a wide variety of other groups combating inequality and disadvantage including women, Native Americans, Chicanos, Asian Americans, the disabled, gays and lesbians, children, fetuses, devout Christians, and others, and is based on the rhetorical and activist tactics of the Black civil rights movement, and presumes that Asians' and Latinos' histories in the United States are analogous to those of African Americans.

Sears, Citrin, and van Laar (1995) found support for the Black exceptionalism argument, by showing that White racial stereotypes and prejudices were greater toward Blacks than other ethnic minority groups; these racial attitudes were more highly crystallized or organized for Blacks than other groups; these stereotypes and attitudes toward Blacks had more influence on Whites' attitudes toward social and public policies when Blacks are the targets or beneficiaries (e.g., crime in the streets; death penalty, affirmative action, welfare, and assistance to the poor) *and* toward policies more generally directed at other disadvantaged ethnic groups with relatively little relevance to Blacks (e.g., immigration and multilingualism).

My point in presenting this is simply to suggest that "both/and" not "either/or" logic should be the standard for directing our perspective on diversity. The Black/White binary is necessary, but it is not incompatible with the "Non-White/White" binary. I would further argue that even talking about these comparisons in binary terms obviates the broader sociocultural perspective of diversity. Diversity science must somehow keep all combinations in view. I think that diversity is more than the sum of differences.

We realize that the almost exclusive focus on the perspective of Whites in the analysis of prejudice and racism was flawed. The need to look at majority–minority interactions is important. But equally important are other bases of interaction, including interactions between, among and *within* racial, ethnic, cultural, gender and other groups (Black–Latino; Black–Asian; gay–straight, men–women, Black–Black, etc.). Diversity is implicated whenever there are interactions between and among people who differ on a relevant attribute or criterion. Multicultural, multiracial, monogendered, and transgendered dynamics further complicate simple difference analysis. This is not a race to the bottom (whose experience of oppression is more profound?).

An important reflection of a sociocultural analysis is the multicultural framework. I find that White students in my Black Psychology course usually come in with a colorblind idea. They are often taught that color doesn't matter; people are just individuals and should be treated that way. And they truly believe this is the correct and fair way to relate to people of different groups. But research shows that a colorblind ideology can promote not prevent racial bias (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000). Moreover, a multicultural ideology seems in general to produce more positive effects on racial attitudes.

But multicultural ideologies have their limits, too. In our lab, we added a third perspective we call "critical multiculturalism" (CM; Engleman & Jones, 2007). CM recognizes and honors different cultures while

addressing and contesting the differential cultural capital attributed to groups as a result of hegemonic power relations, and it critiques the multicultural approach for focusing on cultural differences and failing to address the central issue of racism and inequality within society. We exposed participants to all three ideologies and found that colorblind ideology generated greater in-group favoritism and out-group derogation, that the propensity to blame the individual for poverty was reduced by the multicultural prime and even further by the CM prime, that structural reasons for poverty were more likely to be endorsed by those primed with CM, and that the CM message induced participants to allocate more funds to structural and economic change organizations. So acknowledging and even valuing differences is not enough. Understanding the need and wanting to do something about the cumulative effects of biases, structural and personal, is an important aspect of diversity outcomes.

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Diversity Science: Problems and Promise

What is diversity science? In part it is old wine in new bottles, repackaging traditional theory and research on prejudice, stereotyping, and intergroup relations in a new diversity framework. I think to effectively retrofit this work into a diversity science framework, we need a guiding set of principles, axioms, and theoretical propositions. We may further need to modify the basic research question and practical applications of the science. The diversity hypothesis was offered as a baby step in this direction.

But I think diversity science must be more than this. Diversity is inherently a multidimensional, multifaceted, multilevel concept. Figure 1 is my schematic representation of a sociocultural model of diversity. Psychological analysis is largely in the head of individuals and is therefore limited by our ability to assess what a person thinks or feels at a particular time. But as with cultural psychology's burgeoning interest in cultural products as a unit of analysis (Morling & Lamoreaux, 2009), we need to find ways to get beyond the limitations of single-brain mental representation. But even with this limitation, I think we have made great progress in conceptualizing dynamic systems of interaction, and overtime influences of thoughts and actions. The idea that a specific attitude, measured in a specific way, could predict a specific behavior in a specific situation is primitive compared to what a diversity science formulation demands of us.

The duality of "belonging" (to groups, institutions, society, culture) and "uniqueness" (individuality, difference, intersectionality) is captured scientifically by optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991). How can we simultaneously be similar and different? Optimal distinctiveness theory proposes set points and driving mechanisms for balance within this oppositional framework. Diversity science must inform our ability to identify positive outcomes in complex multifaceted contexts and the mechanisms that produce them.

Part of the problem lies with the idea that diversity conflicts are not always resolvable by binary either/or logic, right versus wrong thinking. The intergroup relations literature has historically framed the problem between perpetrators and targets, in-group versus outgroup. This approach is in part responsible for the *victimology* thinking by Blacks (see McWhorter, 2000), and self-hatred models about Blacks (Kardiner & Ovesey, 1951). Conversely, Whites are seen mostly as *privileged* (McIntosh, 2003) and/or p*rejudiced* (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Trying to escape this binary is like answering the "when did you stop beating your wife?" question.

Although to be sure we must bring "the other" into a framework of moral concern (Opotow, 1990), sometimes difference is difference. Some differences matter and some, not so much. The first amendment guarantee of free speech runs against the 14th amendment's guarantee of equal protection. Both are valid and good, but at times are in conflict. Diversity creates challenges to notions of fairness, equality, and social justice that become more complicated with increasing diversity. A diversity science must cut through this growing complexity with increasingly complex theories and multilevel, multidimensional analytical frameworks. As the late social psychologist Bill McGuire once observed, "If you have a pretzel-shaped world, you need a pretzel-shaped theory to explain it."

Racial identity, too, is inherently multifaceted. The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997) separates the affinity for one's group (centrality and regard) from the ideology one holds about how members of one's group should think and act in relation to their group as well as to other groups (emphasize their group's uniqueness, or collaborate with others with shared oppressed fate, or focus on our common humanity or assimilate into the prevailing social order). Cross's Nigresence theory (Cross, 1991; Vandiver, Cross, Worrell, & Fhagen-Smith, 2002) similarly distinguishes ingroup affinities (Afrocentricity) and outgroup enmities (anti-White) from a broader cultural frame (multicultural inclusion). Acculturation theory and research also illustrates this duality by framing the intersection of identity exploration and commitment in terms of integration, assimilation, separation and diffusion (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Bourhis, Berrette, and Moriconi (2008) acknowledged and demonstrated the dual influences of immigrant and host perspectives on the trajectory and success of acculturation.

Another critical element of diversity science is understanding diversity within diverse groups! We often

tend to treat groups as single entities based on racial, gender, ethnic nationality, and religious labels. But we know full well that there is substantial diversity among people who share common labels. Essentializing these groups is unwarranted and potentially detrimental both psychologically and scientifically. This issue is best reflected in the growing concept of intersectionality (Cole, 2009).

Intersectionality describes analytic approaches that simultaneously consider the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage. Cole (2009) argued that to properly advance psychological research (which I more broadly label diversity science), we need to attend to diversity within social categories, to acknowledge that social categories connote hierarchies of privilege and power influence social and material life, and that it is important to look for commonalities across categories commonly viewed as deeply different. Again, we see the seeds of a diversity science have already been planted.

We know a lot, but these literatures lack an overriding theoretical umbrella. A fully embodied diversity science framework could provide that cohesion and direction. Diversity theory must organize our thinking about three levels. First, social structure/order/policies and institutional climate play a critical role in the production and benefit of diversity. Here as with cultural psychology, we need an interdisciplinary approach, joining in with sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists, among others. We already have examples of these collaborations (e.g., Sears & Savalei, 2006). Second, intergroup relationships and intersectionality is the place where interactions occur and take shape based on the macrolevels previously noted. Social psychology has focused much of its attention on intergroup relations and with excellent results. We know that multicultural contexts necessitate thinking and acting differently.

For example, Grossman and Charmaraman (2009) explored the content of White racial identity in three high school contexts: White majority, White minority (predominantly Latin), White minority (multicultural). The biggest differences were between White majority and White minority (Latin) schools. For example, when White students were the minority in predominantly Latin schools, they were more likely to examine their racial identity, compared to those in mMajority White schools; were more accepting of race and learning about people from behaviors that derive from their race; and were more accepting of diversity, and less accepting of White privilege.

The context is important and must be an integral aspect of diversity science. Learning how contexts matter and how to create them will be an important objective of diversity science. Should each affinity group (based on race, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation) have its own context or comfort zone in which to create meaningful environments, or is it better to provide a multicultural context in which each affinity group has "its own space" within a common structure and is encouraged to interact toward "common purpose with other groups"? What is the right mix? What best confers psychological well-being and performance excellence and intergroup harmony? Can diversity science help answer such questions?

Third, at the individual level, identity, attitudes, beliefs, and cognitive processes result from social structure and interaction, but they also help shape the nature of interactions and, ultimately, the social structures and policies themselves. Broadening the diverse representation in institutional and social settings changes the nature of the interactions within them and leads to new opportunities for different kinds of interactions and the need for different structures. Diversity is a catalyst for change. But for change to be positive it needs to be managed. Diversity science can help us understand which sorts of changes will be productive and which not.

Conclusion

I conclude by acknowledging the important contribution of Plaut's article. She has given us a broad conceptual perspective to guide the development of diversity science, given us many reasons why it is important to do so, and provided some basic directions that appear most fruitful to follow. I have underscored these positive contributions and urge us to move further down this path by producing a theoretical framework and a research agenda to elaborate it. The research agenda should also be connected in a meaningful way to applications of diversity science that change institutions in ways that realize the positive benefits of diversity, improve overall equity, and enhance institutional performance and the psychological and physical well-being of all members of the institutional community.

Note

Address correspondence to James M. Jones, Department of Psychology, University of Delaware, 224 Wolf Hall, Newark, DE 19716. E-mail: jmjones@psych.udel.edu

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