

*Section: Theoretical reviews and research in PPT***THE INTELLECTUALIZATION OF MULTICULTURISM: IMPLICATIONS FOR POSITIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY****Andre R Marseille**

PhD, LPC. Lecturer at the Department of Counseling and Psychology, Chicago State University. Director at Safepaces Counseling, Coaching, and Consulting Services (USA)

Email: [dr.dre@safepaces.com](mailto:dr.dre@safepaces.com)

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**Abstract**

Western multiculturalism has emphasized reason, categorization, and a methodical analysis of race, identity, culture, and belonging. This academic emphasis has strengthened our understanding of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA), resulting in significant policies and programs. These efforts promote diverse appreciation and common humanity. However, this approach has unintentionally imbalanced our understanding of multiculturalism. This has resulted in the intellectualization of multiculturalism. By focusing on the cognitive features that concern multiculturalism, we risk forgetting its rich emotional depth that shapes our interactions with other identities and cultures. Positive psychotherapy encourages practitioners to analyze multiculturalism intellectually and emotionally to build meaningful connections. By focusing on capacities like trust, love, contact, and time, we can shift how mental health and DEIA professionals view multiculturalism into a more holistic one. This emotionally attuned perspective provides a deeper, more real understanding of diversity that speaks to the heart and mind, enhancing human interconnectedness.

**Keywords:** Positive Psychotherapy, multiculturalism, diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA), capacity to love and know, cross-cultural counseling

**Introduction**

The view of multiculturalism in the West has been studied and understood through an intellectual lens that has emphasized our capacity to reason, categorize, and conceptualize the complexities of race, identity, culture, and belonging. This approach has contributed to our ability to articulate concepts like Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) in a way that has translated into a robust set of policies and programs in hopes of helping people appreciate diversity and our common humanity. However, the focus on this intellectualization alone has imbalanced how we understand multiculturalism. This lack of balance highlights the need for a more holistic approach.

The more holistic approach involves understanding multiculturalism through the lens of positive psychotherapy. This approach has the potential to reinvigorate how cultures, especially in the West, understand multiculturalism and diversity. Pioneered by Nossrat Peseschkian in the 1970s and 1980s, Positive Psychotherapy aims to identify the sources of psychological disturbances and activate individuals' capacities and potential for self-help. Grounded in reality and facts, Positive Psychotherapy cultivates coping abilities while addressing individual disturbances and conflicts.

Positive psychotherapy provides a distinctive approach that makes a reasonable case to shift the collective comprehension of multiculturalism by emphasizing two essential

capacities crucial to personality development: knowing and loving. The ability to know includes reasoning, learning, and intellectual engagement. The capacity to love cultivates emotional connections, empathy, and unity. Organizations and individuals prioritizing DEIA initiatives that highlight progressive policies, diversity training, and structural reforms often perceive the intellectualization of multiculturalism as a task to be completed rather than an opportunity for personal growth. However, a comprehensive understanding of multiculturalism necessitates an examination of emotional responses, i.e., our capacity to love—which encourages empathy, connection, and the recognition of our shared humanity to differences and the unfamiliar better to understand the humanity at the core of multiculturalism.

## Methodology

This research is based on a literature review of significant books and publications on positive psychotherapy, multicultural counseling, and cultural psychology. The analysis focuses on writings by Nossrat Peseschkian, the originator of positive psychotherapy, which establish the conceptual foundation for comprehending the dual powers of love and knowledge in personality development. Moreover, foundational texts like Edwin J. Nichols and Clemmont Vontress contribute to examining cultural diversity and existential methodologies in therapy.

Academic journal articles examining DEIA programs were studied to situate the current focus on cognitive ability ("knowing") within multicultural frameworks. This work seeks to integrate various sources to provide a balanced viewpoint that connects cognitive and emotional dimensions of personality, promoting a more comprehensive implementation of positive psychotherapy in diverse cultural settings.

### 2.1. *Humanity is the core of Multiculturalism*

Perhaps the biggest issue in how the West understands multiculturalism and diversity is the lack of humanity in its approach. To better understand multiculturalism, the starting point must be the existential reality of being human. At its core, humanity consists of

relational beings who form groups, and these groups, in turn, create and sustain culture (Stetsenko, 2020). Culture provides the framework within which humans navigate their individual experiences and collective existence, shaping responses to life's fundamental challenges. Yet, beneath the layers of cultural complexity lies a shared essence that connects all people—a common humanity grounded in innate capacities to love and to know (Bergin, 1994; Kagawa-Singer, 2011; Peseschkian, 2013), and these capacities are developed within culture.

Central to culture is the fact that every human is born into a culture and derives selfhood from it. Interpersonally, culture provides common ways to find meaning and purpose throughout life and to communicate caring (Kagawa-Singer, 2011). Emanating from these common ways are beliefs, values, and lifestyles to successfully adapt within a biotic and abiotic geographic niche using available technology and economic resources. Despite culture and the differences it establishes among humans, humanity must contend with its common features of existence. Existentialism, a doctrine of human existence, posits that an authentic existence requires confronting the unavoidable and common features of existence, namely, the irrefutable dimensions of the human condition—what Yalom (1980) termed the "givens of existence": meaninglessness, death, isolation, and freedom.

The fundamental aspects of life are truths that everyone must confront, irrespective of their cultural background. Although each culture may have its way of interpreting and dealing with these essential truths, the core experience of existence binds all people together. Death and solitude are examples of experiences that everyone encounters, yet they are perceived and commemorated in various ways across different cultures. In other words, culture shapes the lens through which individuals perceive their lives and the world, but it does not negate the universal confrontation with existential concerns.

The inevitability of existential truths has the potential to unify humanity by highlighting shared experiences. There is existential anxiety that coexists with living, which is common to human experience. Hence, amidst cultural differences, the similarity in human experiences becomes apparent. Positive psychotherapy also recognizes this shared humanity through two

basic capacities: knowing and loving, or the fundamental abilities to understand and care for one another. These innate capacities are essential to human existence and transcend cultural boundaries.

Culture, in this light, is not merely a way of distinguishing one group from another. Instead, it serves as a dynamic framework through which humans fulfill their common needs and aspirations, whether seeking safety, security, belonging, esteem, or actualization (Maslow, 1970) or facing the givens of existence. Early civilizations and modern societies have transmitted culture to future generations through survival, cooperation, and a quest for significance. Culture's resiliency lies in its ability to adapt to globalization, climate change, technological advances, and human understanding while maintaining the salient features of human experiences, such as love, fear, connection, and the desire for meaning.

Therefore, the most prudent approach to any recalibration of how multiculturalism is understood must prioritize the universality of the human condition.

## ***2.2. The Intellectualization of multiculturalism***

The intellectualization of multiculturalism can be understood as the process of multicultural critical analysis through the lens of academic discourse, where the focus is placed on theoretical frameworks, identity politics, and systematic approaches to culture and diversity. This focus often detaches these discussions from the deeper human connections that underlie such issues. In its intellectualized form, multiculturalism becomes primarily an exercise in cognition, with scholars, administrators, educators, and directors debating the philosophical foundations, policy implications, and practical applications of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). While this approach has undoubtedly advanced the understanding of DEIA in the West, it has also created an imbalance, reducing multiculturalism to metrics, policies, and intellectual frameworks rather than fostering human connection.

Consequently, multiculturalism in the West is often framed in purely intellectual terms, conveying a seemingly detached, clinical, and apathetic approach. The capacity for love and empathy is frequently overlooked, rendering

multicultural discussions impersonal and lacking in existential depth.

In the Western context, an emphasis on intellectualism and objective, data-driven knowledge about multiculturalism has led to social backlash, evidenced in arguments and movements about "wokeism" and criticisms of minority citizens as "DEIA hires." The argument that individuals are awarded positions based on identity markers rather than merit is not new. In many ways, DEIA is perceived as a modern extension of Affirmative Action. This perception, however, reflects a misunderstanding—ironically highlighting the consequences of an excessive focus on reason and intellectual constructs without sufficient emphasis on emotional and relational dimensions.

Vontress (1999) emphasized that reducing multiculturalism to abstract ideas neglects the human experience—the essence of what makes multiculturalism meaningful. As posited in positive psychotherapy, the capacity to love involves forming attachments, seeking warmth, and building security in relationships. This humanistic or existential approach to multiculturalism fosters deeper empathy and connection, bridging gaps between diverse communities. It highlights that while understanding and reasoning are important, they are insufficient on their own.

The capacity to love must also be nurtured, as it forms the bonds necessary to create inclusive, equitable, and humane relationships and, by extension, societies. The intellectualization of multiculturalism often misses the point of its intent: not only to understand differences but also to recognize shared humanity—the capacity to love, laugh, cry, hurt, anger, long, and wish. By embracing both capacities—knowing and loving—positive psychotherapy provides a more holistic framework for understanding multiculturalism.

## **Discussion**

### ***3.1. Centering multiculturalism on the capacity to know***

The concept of multiculturalism, especially in Western societies, has often constrained the understanding and engagement with culture in research and daily life (Sue, 2001). Consequently, Western societies have predominantly emphasized a capacity-to-know

approach to multiculturalism, focusing on intellectual engagement with diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) (McAllister & Irvine, 2000). This approach aligns with notions of efficiency and the functional maintenance of society by emphasizing secondary capacities such as orderliness, punctuality, timeliness, and frugality to understand multiculturalism (Bing et al., 1995). However, this paradigm neglects significant aspects of the human experience—the emotional and relational dimensions that are equally fundamental to existence and, by extension, to the understanding of multiculturalism (Berry, 2016; Lee et al., 2012; Craig & Douglas, 2006; Maan, 2005).

The intellectualization of multiculturalism has resulted in a lack of humanity within cross-cultural encounters. The understanding and implementation of diversity often reflect a Western mindset that prioritizes logic, reasoning, and science as the most effective means of knowing. This perspective frequently neglects the human element in the framework of multiculturalism, bypassing the need for introspection, cultural competency evaluation, and personal growth.

This approach notably overlooks an examination of multiculturalism from an emotional perspective. Such neglect arises partly due to the emotional distress and cultural ambivalence inevitably associated with multicultural issues. Cultural ambivalence is marked by complex or contradictory emotions stemming from the interplay of disparate values, norms, traditions, and practices, reflecting a profound human inclination to apprehend the unfamiliar (Liu, 2010). The unfamiliar is perceived as threatening cultural identity and societal norms in severe instances.

For instance, several academics have highlighted that the mere presence of ethnic minorities on predominantly white college campuses does not guarantee inclusion, recognition, or respect for diversity (Bing et al., 1995). The intellectualization of multiculturalism often leaves many fatigued with diversity and progressive issues, leading to the intentional exclusion of multicultural perspectives, particularly those of racial minorities (Bing et al., 1995).

Hence, we approach multiculturalism intellectually, treating it as an intriguing concept rather than a personal, emotional journey of growth and actualization. The risk in this

approach is that it tends to become of fleeting interest over time, something to be checked off a list of responsibilities. When DEIA is approached through the capacity to know, it emphasizes secondary capacities like orderliness, punctuality, frugality, and thrift; the result is a mechanistic understanding of multiculturalism devoid of the emotional engagement needed for genuine transformation.

Individual responsibility, efficiency, and organization in a personal or business setting are important parts of orderliness in the West. Based on individualism and rationalism from the Enlightenment, Western societies often see orderliness as a personal strength linked to productivity, dependability, and self-management. The capacity for orderliness is often demonstrated as making deadlines, reaching goals, and acting professionally. For instance, an organized workspace or a clear plan can be seen as a sign of how orderly and in control someone is.

For people in the West, orderliness may also be tied to mental health and happiness. People believe that having organized spaces and routines can lower stress, increase productivity, and give people a greater control over their lives, all of which can lead to personal success and well-being.

On the other hand, in Asia, orderliness is often seen as a communal and social value. Confucian and collectivist ideas stress peace, respect, and following social roles. Respect for hierarchy, family structure, and social stability can be linked to orderliness. This can help people feel they owe something to others and the group, not just themselves. For instance, keeping shared areas clean and following social rules or schedules could be important for keeping the peace and showing respect for others. In Asia, orderliness is more than just good manners for individuals; it's also a way to honor history, social norms, and family. Moreover, the capacity for orderliness has a spiritual side as well. In Japan, for instance, one's capacity for orderliness is linked to Shinto beliefs, which say that nature and the spiritual world are balanced when things are clean and in order.

In the same way, the capacity of punctuality, another secondary capacity, is often seen as a sign of respect and efficiency in the West. However, it can accidentally be a problem in places where people from different cultures may

have to deal with punctuality more fluidly. Being on time is a very important cultural value, but it can get in the way of interaction's more emotional and human parts. Many academics have pointed out, for example, that simply having ethnic minorities on largely white college campuses does not ensure inclusion, respect for diversity, or acceptance (Bing et al., 1995).

Though its cultural connotations vary by location, it is sometimes seen as a virtue that supports respect for resources, ingenuity, and restraint. In the West, frugality is associated with protestant labor principles of personal responsibility, self-discipline, and financial independence. Based on economic values, the capacity for thriftiness/frugality can mean spending wisely and avoiding extravagance. However, the overemphasizes of frugality in the West often create interpersonal encounters that feel more transactional, prioritizing economic efficiency over emotional or relational dynamics.

In the East, the capacity of frugality is typically seen as a moral and cultural duty, rather than just an individual trait. Thrift is associated with family and societal responsibility in Confucian

culture. It is associated with respect for resources and societal values like humility, loyalty, and long-term planning for the common benefit. Many Asian communities view thriftiness as an intergenerational responsibility, with people adopting restraint for personal gain and family and social stability. In contrast, wastefulness may disrespect one's future, family, and community. When overemphasizes frugality risks limiting people to collective economic contributors and disregarding emotional or independent objectives outside of family and societal standards.

Take a deeper dive into the secondary capacities that emanate from our basic capacity, as shown in Table 1. The table shows a list of secondary capacities identified by Peseschkian (2013). Think for a moment about the intellectualization of multiculturalism. I am arguing that Western cultures tend to process, rationalize, and understand diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility as multiculturalism through the secondary capacities found in Table 1.

**Table 1.**  
**Secondary Capacities**

Capacity to Love	Definition	Possibilities
Punctuality	Being on time, prompt	Reliability, regularity, time management (lateness, tardiness)
Orderliness	the quality or state of being clean, sequential, appropriate, organized	Neatness, tidiness, uniformity, symmetry (disorderliness, messy)
Cleanliness	the quality or state of being clean: the practice of keeping oneself or one's surroundings clean	Sanitary, hygiene, purity (dirtiness)
Justice	the establishment or determination of rights according to the rules of law or equity: the quality of being just, impartial, or fair	Fairness, impartiality, reasonableness, integrity, lawful (unfairness, injustice)
Diligence	steady, earnest, and energetic effort: persevering application; earnest and persistent application of effort, especially as required by law	Assiduousness, industrial, meticulous, attentive, careful (carelessness)
Truth/Honesty	the body of real things, events, and facts, the property (as of a statement) of being in accord with fact or reality, fidelity to an original or a standard	Uprightness, morality, goodness, rectitude, honorable, sincerity, integrity (immorality, insincere)
Reliability	the quality or state of being reliable, dependable, and able to produce the same results	Dependability, consistency, steadfastness, trustworthiness (untrustworthiness)

Thrift	The quality of being frugal, parsimonious, and careful management, especially of money	Frugal, careful, prudent, cautious (extravagance)
Conscious	having mental faculties not dulled by sleep, faintness, or stupor, perceiving, apprehending, or noticing with a degree of controlled thought or observation; capable of or marked by thought, will, design, or perception	Aware, mindful, cognizant, sentient, sensible (unaware, unintentional)
Courtesy	behavior marked by polished manners or respect for others: courteous behavior, consideration, cooperation, and generosity in providing something (such as a gift or privilege)	Politeness, considerate, civil, gallant, gente (rudeness)
Obedience	an act or instance of obeying	Compliant, agreeable, deferential, docile (disobedient)
Fidelity/Faithfulness	steadfast in affection or allegiance, firm in adherence to promises, or observance of duty	Authentic, believable, truthful, devoted, trustworthy (unrealistic, faithless)

Source: Peseschkian (1987); 2011. In Merriam-Webster.com. Retrieved May 8, 2019, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hacker>

What would one's definition of multiculturalism or understanding of DEIA be through the lens of secondary capacities? Particularly when one considers the West's aspiration for a mosaic of diversity but refuses to grapple with its troubling history shaped by race, class, and ethnicity. Understanding multiculturalism in this context is crucial, but it also requires us to consider both emic and etic perspectives on colonialism, race, and morality. DEIA initiatives are valuable because they offer frameworks that promote equality.

However, these frameworks must be applied alongside a deeper recognition that multiculturalism is personal. It touches on what people value: respect, love, and fear—dimensions that must be acknowledged and processed. Multiculturalism must be taught in a way that integrates intellectual and personal elements and addresses human dynamics without alienating or provoking people with different ideas. It's tricky to avoid insulting, shaming, or disrespecting while cultivating empathy.

Multiculturalism's biggest worry and criticism, especially in the context of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility, is this. The rational, cognitive approach—focusing on the "capacity to know"—is systematic and

measurable, but it might miss the emotional, relational, and existential aspects of culture that influence people. Institutions that educate multiculturalism without engaging the heart miss the deeper human qualities illuminated by our intrinsic propensity to love, such as contact, empathy, and closeness, which are crucial for cultural understanding. DEIA programs may look abstract or removed from people's lives without engaging these deeper, more intimate components. These frameworks can seem distant or disconnected from individuals' experiences unless they connect with these deeper, more personal elements. These frameworks might appear overly technical or scholarly to fully encompass cultural identity's emotional and sensory dimensions. They may seem too technical or academic to capture cultural identity's emotional and sensory aspects.

In the age of globalization, where multiculturalism is at the forefront of cultural connections, cultural features spreading across settings challenge true multiculturalism. To understand multiculturalism, variety, equality, and the whole range of human capacities—intellectual and emotional—we must consider all of them. Only by considering the full spectrum of human capacities—both intellectual and

emotional—can we arrive at a deeper understanding of multiculturalism and, by extension, diversity, equality, inclusion, and accessibility, its manifestations in diverse societies.

### 3.2. Centering multiculturalism on the capacity to love

Re-centering multiculturalism on the primary capacities—particularly the capacity to love—

means expanding our understanding of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility beyond the intellectual framework into human connection. As a universal experience, love is an emotional force that transcends cultural boundaries and drives understanding at a deeper, more empathetic level. Table 2 provides a list of primary capacities. Let us consider how viewing multiculturalism through the lens of these capacities can deepen our approach to these critical issues.

**Table 2.**  
**Primary Capacities**

Capacity to Love	Definition	Possibilities
Love	strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties; unselfish, loyal, and benevolent concern for the good of another	Worship, adore, appreciate, fondness, devotion, ardor, tenderness, passion
Modeling	to produce a representation or simulation; to construct or fashion in imitation of a particular model; being a usually miniature representation of something	Demonstrating, sculpting, fashioning, patterning, teaching, learning
Servitude	a condition in which one lacks liberty, primarily to determine one's course of action or way of life	Bondage, serfdom, vassalage, dependency, subordination, subservience
Doubt	to call into question the truth of to be uncertain or in <u>doubt</u> about; to consider unlikely; the uncertainty of belief or opinion that often interferes with decision-making	Hesitation, uncertainty, reservation, distrust, suspicion, skepticism
Trust	<u>assured</u> reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something; to hope or expect confidently	Reliance, expectation, hope, belief, conviction, presume, (despair)
Sexuality	the quality or state of being <u>sexual</u> ; expression of sexual receptivity or interest, especially when excessive	Self-esteem, worth, trust, fidelity, love
Confidence	a feeling or consciousness of one's powers or reliance on one's circumstances; faith or belief that one will act in a right, proper, or effective way	Self-reliance, poise, sureness, buoyancy, faith, assertion, (uncertainty)
Unity	a condition of harmony, the quality or state of being made one	Harmony, agreeable, according, unison (disarray)
Time	a nonspecial continuum that is measured in terms of events that succeed one another from past through present to future	Rhythm, moments, phase, era, tempo, while
Contact	the apparent touching or mutual tangency of the limbs of two celestial bodies or the disk of one body with the shadow of another during an eclipse, transit, or occultation	Connection, interaction, communication,
Patience	The capacity, habit, or fact of enduring, persisting, persevering.	Endurance, Persistence, Perseverance Tolerance, Fortitude, (inpatient, temperamental)

Faith	allegiance to duty or a person, strong belief or trust in someone or something, belief in the existence of God, strong religious feelings or beliefs	Reliance, conviction, belief, fidelity, constancy, allegiance, (Doubt)
Hope	to cherish a desire with anticipation: to want something to happen or be true, to desire with expectation of obtainment or fulfillment	Expectation, aspiration, wish, yearning, optimism, faith, (despair)

Source: Peseschkian (1987); 2011. In Merriam-Webster.com. Retrieved May 8, 2019, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hacker>

What would be one's definition of multiculturalism or understanding of DEIA through the lens of primary capacities? Viewed through the capacity to love, it is the hope that our understanding of multiculturalism shifts from mere tolerance of differences to a deeper, more genuine affection for others. It is important to understand that in the moments when you endure emotional suffering or joy, everyone else does, too. Hence, that difference is significant; it is the difference between seeing a human being as an immigrant and an illegal alien. There is a difference between seeing someone trying to escape to a better life by any means necessary or as a criminal who illegally crossed the southern border. The capacity to love is not limited by race, ethnicity, or culture.

Let us consider other primary capacities that extend from our basic capacity of love, such as unity, time, contact, and trust.

#### **The Capacity for Unity**

The capacity for unity is not simply an intellectual ideal but a central existential need for connection and love. It is a capacity that seems increasingly significant in a world that is increasingly defined by cultural pluralism. It serves as a reminder that the challenges we encounter as a species are the ones and that we all must contend with loneliness, freedom, meaninglessness, death, and other existential realities. Octavio Paz once said, "Life is diversity, death is uniformity" (Marsella, 2009). This sentiment indicates that the capacity of unity and diversity are not mutually exclusive forces but rather fundamental manifestations of the same existential truth (Green, 2018). Hence, our capacity for unity underpins society's momentum towards or away from genuine inclusion.

When people engage their capacity for unity, differences are not simply tolerated but accepted and, sometimes, integrated into new

ways of knowing. Unity, much like an orchestra, integrates and embraces intersectionality. It also serves as a reminder of our common humanity. This approach challenges the tendency to focus excessively on separate identities, proposing that we concentrate on our common need for connection, justice, and meaning.

Therefore, the capacity for unity is more than a theory, principle, or capacity. It should remind humanity, in its vast diversity, that it must confront the existential 'givens'—death, meaninglessness, loneliness, and freedom—of life together. In DEIA work, unity challenges the fragmentation that can come from overemphasizing individual identities, instead inviting us to focus on what brings us together as humans, seeking connection, justice, and equality.

#### **The Capacity of Time**

In the words of N. Peseschkian, "We do not live in years; we live in moments." In addition to being an essential component of the human experience, the capacity for time in all facets—past, present, and future—is intricately connected to our comprehension of multiculturalism and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Time reflects how people and civilizations view and manage life, development, and growth rather than just a series of occurrences (Cappa, 2017). Individuals perceive time as flowing fluidly, with the present turning into the past and the future into the present.

Some cultures perceive time as a fluid progression, where the present evolves into the past, and the future becomes the present. Goncharov (2024) asserts that this flow influences our interactions with the external environment, our allocation of time for others, and the integration of our past, present, and future into a unified narrative. I think the capacity of time has an existential quality in multiculturalism. In certain cultures, time is



perceived as cyclical, where the past exerts influence on both the present and future. Other cultures view experience linearly, highlighting progress and future implications (Yamada & Kato, 2006). These different perceptions of time translate into how individuals within cultures develop their capacity for time. These differences manifest in different approaches to healing, development, and growth, shaping personal experiences (beliefs, practices) and societal structures (policies, laws, institutions). In the context of DEIA, discrepancies in the capacity of time may serve as a basis for conflict. For example, one culture may prioritize the importance of prompt action, whereas another may emphasize patience and reflection.

Recognizing the rhythms that other cultures contribute to the idea of time enables more nuanced cooperation, where advancement is enhanced by the diverse ways that civilizations perceive and interact with time rather than being quantified by a single metric. Our lived experiences are framed by time, much as place. Respecting the many ways that cultures perceive and use time opens doors to a deeper understanding, overcoming differences in identity and belief as well as in how we navigate the world.

#### **The Capacity for Contact**

Contact is the physical and emotional connection established when humans interact. It is beyond a simple transaction; it encompasses the capacity to captivate and sustain attention, concentrate and preserve emotional bonds, and modulate the proximity between ourselves and others (Goncharov, 2024). In a multicultural environment, significant interaction breaks down barriers of ignorance and unfamiliarity, promoting a fundamental human capacity, the willingness to embrace new connections, relationships, and modes of coexistence (Stevenson et al., 2020).

The capacity to contact or to establish connections is essential to our relationships with ourselves, others, and the world. It allows us to form, sustain, and nurture connections, surpassing differences in characteristics, skills, or identities. Interaction with individuals, animals, or the environment forms the essential link to the broader fabric of existence. Interpersonal and Cultural empathy emerges via interpersonal relationships, collective narratives, and authentic interactions (Stevenson et al., 2020). Hence, the capacity for contact within the

paradigm of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility should be considered as central interpersonal quality. Real inclusion occurs when individuals interact, experiencing the tangible realities of connection, communication, and mutual respect (Wong, 2008).

Contact enables individuals to acknowledge their own uniqueness while appreciating the distinctiveness of others, fostering a dynamic process that enhances vital qualities, cultivates dormant ones, and occasionally eliminates those that impede growth. Ahmad et al. (2019); Dunne (2013); Chen and Starosta (1996); Garzotto and Gonella (2011).

#### **The Capacity for Trust**

Trust is a very important capacity because it forms the foundation of relationships, particularly meaningful multicultural relationships. Building trust is crucial for fostering meaningful multicultural relationships and inclusive environments in DEIA initiatives (Schumann et al., 2010; Wilkins, 2018). Trust is our first capacity outside of love that begins to develop in infancy and is often shaped by the nurturing of a caretaker. We learn early on that when we cry, we trust that mother will come to attend to our needs. When she does, love and trust grow.

The capacity to trust allows for vulnerability, the sharing of personal stories, and the formation of bonds across cultural lines. Trust encourages people to be vulnerable, share stories, and build cross-cultural ties despite cultural ambivalence, uncertainty, and distrust (Wilkins, 2018). The capacity of trust conveys that we will be respected and cared for as we try to understand and appreciate others, which stimulates discourse and interaction. Trust can make people feel safe being themselves.

## **Conclusion**

### *Understanding Multiculturalism from the inside and out*

In light of globalization's rapid rise, it is increasingly crucial to foster a deeper understanding of multiculturalism, not only as an external framework but as a multidimensional experience of human existence. Instead of a collection of programs, DEIA becomes an extension of our basic human capacities, such as confidence, time, unity, interaction, and trust. Clemmons Vontress (1999) has long stressed

that true multicultural understanding starts within and spreads—encompassing both the mind's ability to know and the heart's ability to feel. In recent years, diversity, fairness, and inclusion have become priorities for individuals and groups seeking more inclusive and just communities.

However, traditional DEIA has focused on individual efforts or policies rather than a deeper understanding of the human capacities that drive these endeavors. We may deepen discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion by acknowledging "knowing from the outside and loving from the inside" (Blessinger et al., 2018). Instead of a collection of programs, DEIA becomes an extension of our basic human capacities, such as confidence, time, unity, interaction, and trust. Multiculturalism based on love requires us to connect with others as whole people with common feelings, experiences, and goals, not as cultural objects.

This change in perspective allows mental health and DEIA professionals to view DEIA as an extension of fundamental human capacities, including confidence, time, unity, contact, and trust, rather than as a collection of detached programs or tasks. When multiculturalism is balanced on the fundamental capacity of love, it necessitates the establishment of deeper connections with others, recognizing them not as cultural artifacts or means to an end but as complete human beings—ends in themselves—with shared emotions, experiences, and aspirations.

This reframed multiculturalism has profound implications for approaches to diversity and inclusion, fostering more meaningful and human-centered interactions.

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