

# MULTICULTURAL EXPERIENCES: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND NEW THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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As globalization has become a defining issue for business and society, an increasing amount of research has examined how multicultural experiences affect a variety of psychological and organizational outcomes. We define “multicultural experiences” as exposure to or interactions with elements or members of a different culture(s). We then provide a comprehensive review of the literature and detail how multicultural experiences impact intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational outcomes, including creativity, psychological adjustment, intergroup bias, trust, morality, leadership effectiveness, and individual or firm performance, exploring key mechanisms and boundary conditions that have also emerged. We then present a new theoretical framework—the “Structure–Appraisal Model of Multicultural Experiences”—that organizes the overall pattern of findings and provides a roadmap for future research. The *structure* part of our model proposes that deeper multicultural experiences produce integrative processes that transform intrapersonal cognition, whereas broader multicultural experiences activate comparative processes that influence interpersonal attitudes and behaviors. The *appraisal* part of our model suggests that these intrapersonal and interpersonal effects are only likely to occur when appraisals of one’s multicultural experiences are positive rather than negative. We conclude by discussing practical implications for individuals and organizations, as well as future directions for researchers to consider exploring.

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Globalization is perhaps the defining issue for business and society in the 21st century. Technological advances have made it as easy to connect with someone halfway across the world as with someone halfway down the hall. Increasing contact with people from other cultures, and the inherent interdependence of the modern world, means that globalization is transforming how we think about business, society, and even our basic humanity as fellow denizens of a single shared planet. Ongoing global challenges like climate change, international trade wars, race relations, and pandemics highlight the fundamentally interconnected nature of society for individuals, groups, and organizations. Even the various forms of backlash to globalization from politicians and

governments over the past several years have only served to underscore how quickly the world is becoming “flatter” with each passing year (Friedman, 2005).

Luckily, social science research is rising to the challenge of needing to adopt a fundamentally global perspective to understand the growing complexities of the world. In particular, there has been a growing body of research examining the potential effects of multicultural experiences on a variety of individual and organizational outcomes. Spurred on by an introductory paper on the topic published more than a decade ago, one that outlined emerging research showing that multicultural experiences can lead to higher levels of creativity (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008), this fast-growing area of research has now been taken up by scholars across myriad disciplines, including social psychology, industrial–organizational psychology, developmental psychology, management, international business, entrepreneurship, and strategy. No longer focused exclusively on creativity, this research has now explored how multicultural experiences affect innovation and entrepreneurship, psychological adjustment, group and team dynamics, moral decision-making, personality and self-concept change, interpersonal trust, leadership ability, intergroup bias, and multinational firm performance. This range of inquiry across both topics and levels of analysis highlights the increasing importance of multicultural experiences for psychological and organizational researchers.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. First, we examine and update the definition of “multicultural experiences” and explain its relevance for past and future work. Second, we review key empirical findings across intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational outcomes, including critical mediators and moderators. Third, we distill key themes across this growing literature and present a new theoretical model—the Structure–Appraisal Model of Multicultural Experiences—that helps explain whether, when, why, and how multicultural experiences shape individual and organizational outcomes. Finally, we discuss practical implications of existing findings and suggest directions for future research.

### THE INS AND OUTS OF MULTICULTURAL EXPERIENCES: DEFINITIONS, OPERATIONALIZATIONS, AND OUTCOMES

To date, scholars have defined the construct of “multicultural experiences” fairly inclusively.

Even more often, researchers have not chosen to define the construct at all. One reason may be that, given the inchoate nature of the growing literature, different papers have focused on different aspects of multicultural experiences (e.g., living abroad, bicultural identity, cultural diversity of one’s professional network) that were not necessarily conceptualized as part of a larger overarching construct of multicultural experiences. In addition, researchers (including ourselves) may intuitively view the construct quite broadly. At the end of the day, we believe that scholars are interested in any and all ways in which experiences with other cultures can have a reliable impact on important psychological and organizational outcomes. In other words, researchers seem to have implicitly agreed to an approach allowing explorations of whatever aspects of multicultural experiences might be of academic and practical interest—an inductive approach to construct definition that is often found at the beginning stages of research programs (McGuire, 1997).

In their original paper on multicultural experiences, Leung and colleagues (2008: 169) provided an initial definition of the construct of multicultural experiences, which they termed “all direct and indirect experiences of encountering or interacting with the elements or members of foreign cultures.” Similarly, a decade later, Tadmor, Hong, Chao, and Cohen (2018: 398) defined the construct as “experiences in which individuals interact with people and/or elements of foreign cultures,” while Vora, Martin, Fitzsimmons, Pekerti, Lakshman, and Raheem (2019: 500) conceptualized it as “the degree to which someone has knowledge of, identification with, and internalization of more than one societal culture.” Given the scope of the findings that have now emerged, one goal of the present article was to revisit these definitions in light of what we know about the construct looking back over the totality of findings across more than a decade of new research. In particular, we wanted to ensure the current definition of the construct was inclusive of the variety of work done across different disciplines and the myriad empirical instantiations of the construct to date, while also being likely to include relevant future work on the topic as well.

Based on the literature reviewed herein, we define multicultural experiences as *exposure to or interactions with elements or members of a different culture(s)*. This definition is similar to prior definitions, with a few notable differences. First,

and as we elaborate on more toward the end of the paper, we chose the phrase “different cultures” instead of foreign or societal cultures because the relevant culture that makes a given experience “multicultural” could exist both inside and outside national boundaries, and thus need not be conventionally considered “foreign” or need not involve another “societal culture.” Second, we omitted the phrase “direct and indirect” that was used in Leung et al.’s (2008) definition because we are unaware of any extant research that has differentiated multicultural experiences in terms of directness. We also do not include the terms “identification” or “internalization” in our conceptualization as Vora and colleagues (2019) did, because each term could be conceived as either an outcome variable or moderator variable, rather than a defining feature of multicultural experiences. Finally, instead of “knowledge,” used by Vora et al. (2019), we chose the word “exposure” because the multicultural experiences studied to date have involved an individual’s or an organization’s own experiences with different cultures, and it is not yet clear whether secondhand knowledge of another culture is sufficiently meaningful enough to produce meaningful psychological or organizational consequences.

We also took the opportunity to reexamine the term “multicultural experiences” itself. As we began this review, we considered possible alternative terms, including “foreign cultural,” “cross-cultural,” and “culturally diversifying” experiences. We decided to maintain the term “multicultural experiences,” for several reasons. First, the word “multi,” by definition, means more than one (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), and a “multicultural experience” fundamentally involves, at minimum, the interaction of one’s own culture with individuals or elements of a different culture. For example, even a simple experience like an American traveling to India involves the interaction of two different cultures: the traveler’s home culture (the United States), which is the cultural lens through which the experiences is interpreted; and the host culture the traveler is visiting (India), which represents a different cultural environment that is being subjectively experienced. We also chose not to use the term “cross-cultural” because this term is usually used in a comparative fashion and typically involves constructs that differentiate national cultures, such as the different average levels of individualism versus collectivism in different cultures (e.g., Hofstede, 1980). Furthermore, we chose not to use the

term “polycultural” because researchers have typically referred to this construct as an ideological approach to diversity that emphasizes the mixing together or integration of multiple cultures on identity and knowledge (and is contrasted with colorblindness and multiculturalism as other ideological approaches to diversity; Morris, Chiu, & Liu, 2015). In addition, to our knowledge, “polycultural” has not been used to describe specific types of experiences with other cultures.<sup>1</sup> Finally, we did not select the term “foreign culture” because foreign cultures represent only one type of cultural experience, which potentially precludes experiences with different cultures that exist within national boundaries. Importantly, and as we discuss in more detail toward the end of the paper, we believe that some of the outcomes and mechanisms reviewed here may apply across a variety of contexts involving different cultures as well as different ingroups and outgroups, including those involving different races, genders, religions, organizations, as well as different cultural regions within a single country.

We believe that the term “multicultural experiences” also inclusively and accurately captures the range of operationalizations used in the literature to date, including but not limited to the following: (a) speaking two or more languages (e.g., Lambert, Tucker, & d’Anglejan, 1973; Simonton, 2000); (b) psychologically identifying with two or more countries or cultures (e.g., Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, & Lee, 2008; Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013; Tadmor et al., 2012); (c) having various types of experiences in different countries or cultures (e.g., Cao, Galinsky, & Maddux, 2014; de Bloom, Ritter, Kühnel, Reinders, & Geurts, 2014; Godart, Maddux, Shipilov, & Galinsky, 2015; Lu, Quoidbach, Gino, Chakroff, Maddux, & Galinsky, 2017; Lu, Swaab, Galinsky, in press; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009; Yamakawa, Khavul, Peng, & Deeds, 2013); (d) having relationships with individuals (Lu, Hafenbrack, Eastwick, Wang, Maddux, & Galinsky, 2017) or alliance partners (Fernhaber, McDougall-Covin, & Shepherd,

<sup>1</sup> It is important to differentiate the term “multicultural experiences” from “multicultural ideology,” which is a term used in the intergroup relations literature to refer to a mindset of recognizing and appreciating cultural differences across (especially racial) groups (e.g., Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000), usually as opposed to a “colorblind ideology,” which is a strategy of ignoring cultural group differences (especially those involving racial differences).

2009) from foreign countries; (e) being a part of multicultural social or professional networks (Chua, 2018; Shipilov, Godart, & Clement, 2017; Wang, 2015); (f) working in multicultural teams (Jang, 2017; Tadmor, Satterstrom, Jang, & Polzer, 2012); (g) being exposed to contrasting cultural primes (e.g., Chang, Cheng, Wu, Wang, & Hung, 2017; Cheng & Leung, 2013; Cheng, Leung, & Wu, 2011; Leung & Chiu, 2010); (h) being a firm with experience in foreign markets (e.g., Barkema & Shvyrkov, 2007); and (i) the sum of different aspects of multicultural experiences, such as having parents from different cultures and appreciating foreign food or music (Leung & Chiu, 2010; Tadmor et al. 2018; Tadmor, Hong, Chao, Wiruchnipawan, & Wang, 2012).

In terms of the effects of multicultural experiences, the most widely studied outcome continues to be creativity and its conceptual cousins, innovation and entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, scholars have also examined a host of other outcomes, including psychological adjustment (e.g., Demes & Geeraert, 2015; Geeraert & Demoulin, 2013), self-concept clarity (Adam, Obodaru, Lu, Maddux, & Galinsky, 2018a, 2018b), personality change (Greischel, Noack, & Neyer, 2016; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013), moral decision-making (Lu, Quoidbach, et al., 2017), generalized trust (Cao et al., 2014), leadership effectiveness (Lu et al., in press), intergroup bias (Affinito, Maddux, Antoine, & Gray, 2020; Tadmor et al., 2018; Tadmor, Hong, et al., 2012), and firm internationalization (e.g., Fernhaber et al., 2009; Yamakawa et al., 2013).

What is now clear, compared to when this research started in earnest more than a decade ago, is that there are many different types of multicultural experiences that affect a wide range of individual and organizational outcomes. In the next section, we turn our attention to a systematic review of these findings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior to conducting our review, we sought to identify the appropriate collection of articles relevant to understanding the current state of the literature. To do so, we based our review process on existing recommendations for systematic reviews of a particular scholarly literature (Aguinis, Ramani, & Alabduljader, 2018). We started by using Google Scholar to search for articles that contained search terms most related to our main construct of interest: “multicultural experience” OR “foreign

experience” OR “travel experience” OR “cross-cultural experience” OR “intercultural experience” OR “working abroad” OR “living abroad” OR “traveling abroad” OR “studying abroad” OR “intercultural relationship.” This query returned about 20,000 results, with the most relevant article (sorted by Google Scholar) being Leung et al.’s (2008) review.

We then narrowed down the set of articles based on the following criteria. First, we mostly limited our review to articles published since 2008, as it is common practice to bound a review around the publication of a seminal article (e.g., Clough, Fang, Vissa, & Wu, 2019). Second, we targeted our focus on research published in the top journals across a variety of fields, including but not limited to management (e.g., *Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Organization Science*), applied psychology (e.g., *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *Personnel Psychology*), cross-cultural psychology (e.g., *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*), social psychology (e.g., *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*), general psychology (e.g., *Psychological Science*), sociology (e.g., *American Journal of Sociology*), and strategic management (e.g., *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, *Strategic Management Journal*). We also examined highly cited articles within this initial set to ensure that our search had not missed any significant work. Third, we removed most articles that were not empirical and kept only those theoretically relevant to the scope of this review. Fourth, we removed articles that did not actually measure or theorize about multicultural experiences or were not relevant to our proposed review upon closer inspection. Last, we supplemented this initial search process with a periodic Google Scholar search to be able to identify new papers appearing during the drafting of this article. This search left us with 145 articles for formal review.

To provide the clearest possible picture of how multicultural experiences affect different outcomes, we decided to organize outcome variables across three levels of analysis: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational. This structure allowed us to examine emergent empirical and theoretical themes within and across these different outcomes, which was particularly useful in allowing us to construct a novel theoretical model, which we present toward the end of the paper. Table 1 presents a summary of articles included in our review.



**TABLE 1**  
**Summary of Empirical Studies on Multicultural Experiences**

Outcomes	Aspects of Multicultural Experiences	Citation(s)		
Intrapersonal	Creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship	International experiences	Cho & Morris (2015) Fee & Gray (2012) Godart et al. (2015) Maddux, Adam, & Galinsky (2010) Maddux & Galinsky (2009) Tadmor et al. (2012)	
		Multicultural background or identities	Chang, Hsu, Shih, & Chen (2014) Cheng et al. (2008) Mok & Morris (2010b) Puente-Diaz, Toptas, Cavazos-Arroyo, Wimschneider, & Brem (2020) Saad, Damian, Benet-Martínez, Moons, & Robins (2013) Tadmor et al. (2012) Tadmor, Satterstrom, et al. (2012)	
		Multilingualism	Kharkhurin (2010) Krizman, Marian, Shook, Skoe, & Kraus (2012) Lee & Kim (2011) Leikin & Tovli (2014) Onysko (2016)	
		Multicultural relationships and networks	Chua (2013) Chua (2018) Chua & Jin (2020) Lu, Hafenbrack, et al. (2017) Perry-Smith & Shalley (2014) Qin & Estrin (2015) Shipilov et al. (2017)	
		Multicultural groups	Jang (2017) Tadmor, Satterstrom, et al. (2012)	
		Organizational multicultural experiences	Godart et al. (2015) Wrede & Dauth (2020)	
		Psychological adjustment	International experiences	Adam et al. (2018b) Demes & Geeraert (2014, 2015) Firth, Chen, Kirkman, & Kim (2014) Fisher & Hutchings (2013) Geeraert & Demoulin (2013) Geeraert, Li, Ward, Gelfand, & Demes (2019) Greischel, Noack, & Neyer (2019) Hong, Fang, Yang, & Phua (2013) Takeuchi, Wang, Marinova, & Yao (2009)

**TABLE 1**  
**(Continued)**

Outcomes		Aspects of Multicultural Experiences	Citation(s)
Personality, self, and individual performance		Multicultural background or identities	Abe (2018) Ward, Tseung-Wong, Szabo, Qumseya, & Bhowon (2018)
		Multicultural relationships and networks	Repke & Benet-Martínez (2018)
		International experiences	Biemann and Braakmann (2013) Georgakakis, Dauth, & Ruigrok (2016) Greischel et al. (2016) Lüdtke, Roberts, Trautwein, & Nagy (2011) Maddux et al. (2014) Moal-Ulvoas & Taylor (2014) Tadmor et al. (2012) Wolff & Borzikowsky (2018) Zhu, Wanberg, Harrison, & Diehn (2016) Zimmermann & Neyer (2013)
		Multicultural background or identities	Abe (2018) Chen & Bond (2010) Mok & Morris (2009) Mok & Morris (2010a)
		Multilingualism	Gao, Zika, Rogers, & Thierry (2015) Keysar, Hayakawa, & An (2012) Krizman et al. (2012)
		Multicultural groups	Brodbeck, Guillaume, & Lee (2011)
		International experiences	Cao et al. (2014)
		Multicultural background or identities	Chua et al. (2012)
		Multicultural groups	Mortensen & Neeley (2012) Tenzer, Pudelko, & Harzing (2014)
		Communication competence	Multicultural background or identities
Morality		International experiences	Lu, Quoidbach, et al. (2017)
		Multilingualism	Costa et al. (2014) Geipel, Hadjichristidis, & Surian (2015) Geipel, Hadjichristidis, & Surian (2016)
Intergroup bias		International experiences	Affinito et al. (2020) Tadmor et al. (2018) Tadmor, Hong, et al. (2012)
		Multicultural relationships and networks	Barlow et al. (2012)
		Multicultural background or identities	Huff, Lee, & Hong (2017) Saleem, Dubow, Lee, & Huesmann (2018) Tadmor, Berger, Brenick, Abu-Raiya, & Benatov (2017) Tadmor et al. (2018) Tadmor, Hong, et al. (2012)
		Multilingualism	Singh, Quinn, Qian, & Lee (2020)

**TABLE 1**  
**(Continued)**

	Outcomes	Aspects of Multicultural Experiences	Citation(s)
	Leadership	International experiences	Carpenter, Sanders, & Gregersen (2001) Dragoni, Oh, Tesluk, Moore, VanKatwyk, & Hazucha (2014) Lu (2018) Lu et al. (in press) Roth (1995)
Organizational	Internationalization	International experiences	Barkema & Shvyrkov (2007) Bruneel, Yli-Renko, & Clarysse (2010) Fernhaber et al. (2009) Li, Yi, & Cui (2017) Xia, Boal, & Delios (2009) Yamakawa et al. (2013)
	Foreign acquisition or investment	International experiences	García-Canal and Guillén (2008) Matta & Beamish (2008) Zhou & Guillén (2015)
	Performance	International experiences	Godart et al. (2015) Kulchina (2017) Li, Zhang, Li, Zhou, & Zhang (2012) Oldroyd, Morris, & Dotson (2019) Reuber & Fischer (1997) Salomon & Martin (2008) Wrede & Dauth (2020) Yang, Li, & Delios (2015)
		Multicultural groups	Gong (2006) Haas & Nüesch (2012) Kirkman, Cordery, Mathieu, Rosen, & Kukenberger (2013) Kearney, Gebert, & Voelpel (2009) Kilduff, Angelmar, & Mehra (2000) Lo, Wang, & Zhan (2020) Lu et al. (in press) Nielsen & Nielsen (2013) Wrede & Dauth (2020)

### INTRAPERSONAL OUTCOMES

#### The Effects of Multicultural Experiences on Creativity, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship

The research on multicultural experiences was jumpstarted by an introductory article on how multicultural experiences affect creative processes and outputs (Leung et al., 2008). This article was a collaboration between two independent research teams that coincidentally had been examining the same

basic idea at the same time—that a variety of different types of multicultural experiences might stimulate creativity. In retrospect, creativity was an obvious topic of interest given the widespread but empirically untested assumption in a variety of fields—art, education, business—that multicultural experiences were important for various types of skills and abilities. For example, many educational institutions have implemented study-abroad programs for decades; multinational companies

regularly send their employees on international assignments; and artists in many fields implicitly assume that it is necessary to spend a year abroad in Paris or Rome or Buenos Aires or Kyoto to enhance one's creative development in music composition, painting, or writing (Leung et al., 2008; Lu, Martin, Usova, & Galinsky, 2019).

Thus, the Leung et al. (2008) introduction initiated a long-overdue empirical investigation into the underlying assumption behind these claims. To understand how different aspects of multicultural experiences could lead to higher levels of individual creativity, the authors leveraged the "creative cognition approach" (Ward, Finke, & Smith, 1995), a theoretical framework that suggested that creativity could be studied and understood by examining the specific inputs and outputs to the process. After reviewing the literature on creativity, Leung and colleagues (2008) postulated that multicultural experiences might activate a variety of psychological processes that would be important for the creative process, in particular by stimulating a willingness to seek out new ideas, providing exposure to new concepts, inspiring the development of new insights, and encouraging a re-examination of one's own cultural beliefs. With dozens of relevant papers published in the intervening years, these predictions have now generally been supported, and we now have a much deeper understanding about the specific individual and contextual factors that facilitate or hinder creativity during and following different types of multicultural experiences.

***Effects of foreign experiences on creativity.*** "Creativity" is defined as the production of ideas that are novel and useful (Amabile, 1983), and a number of findings now suggest that creativity reliably increases when individuals are exposed to multicultural ideas, people, or environments. One of the first empirical investigations into this possibility involved the development of the Multicultural Experience Survey (Leung & Chiu, 2010), which measures a variety of different aspects of multicultural experiences, including time spent outside one's home country, general level of exposure to foreign cultures, number of foreign languages spoken, parents' birthplaces, and the country of origin of participants' five favorite cuisines, friends, and musicians. To date, multiple studies have shown that individuals who score higher on this scale (or a similar scale; Narvaez, Endicott, & Hill, 2017), exhibit more creativity (Leung & Chiu, 2010; Puente-Diaz et al., 2020; Tadmor, Satterstrom, et al., 2012). Furthermore, researchers have shown that even a relatively brief time contrasting elements from different cultures

can enhance creativity. For example, watching back-to-back slideshows comparing Chinese and American cultures can lead participants to exhibit more creativity than those watching slideshows depicting only one culture (Cheng & Leung, 2013; Cheng et al., 2011; Leung & Chiu, 2010).

Other research has focused on more specific types of multicultural experiences. For example, a variety of studies now shows that creativity increases when individuals live abroad (Fee & Gray, 2012; Maddux et al., 2010; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009), work abroad (Godart et al., 2015), and, in some cases, study abroad (Cho & Morris, 2015) or travel abroad (de Bloom et al., 2014). For example, Maddux and Galinsky (2009) found that the amount of time MBA students lived outside their home country predicted creativity on a variety of tasks assessing insight, divergent thinking, and convergent thinking, and this effect was mediated by the level of cultural adaptation participants engaged in during their time in the host country. Follow-up research by Maddux et al. (2010) found that deep learning about the new culture was also a key driver of increased creativity following living abroad experiences. Longitudinal research subsequently found increases in creativity for expatriate workers following stints working abroad (Fee & Gray, 2012). These effects of living abroad also extend to institutional creativity. For example, in the context of the global fashion industry, Godart and colleagues (2015) found that the more time creative directors—the de facto leaders of the world's top fashion houses—had spent working abroad in their careers, the more creative their companies' fashion collections were rated to be by industry experts.

The evidence for enhanced creativity is more mixed when examining foreign *travel*. For example, Maddux and Galinsky (2009) did not find a significant effect of time traveled abroad on creativity, presumably because higher levels of cultural adaptation and learning about the host culture are more likely to occur during living abroad experiences rather than during foreign travel (Maddux et al., 2010; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009). However, other work has found a positive impact of foreign travel on creativity (de Bloom et al., 2014). As will become clearer when we review mechanisms and boundary conditions below, what appears to be more important than the distinction between whether one is technically living versus traveling abroad is the particular psychological orientation individuals adopt while abroad, and the specific details of the cultural context individuals encounter during their time in another country.



***Effects of multicultural identities on creativity.***

Multicultural experiences tend to have a strong effect on creativity when they lead individuals to incorporate two or more cultural identities into their overall self-concept. Sometimes called “biculturalism” or “multicultural identity integration” (e.g., Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013), this process involves psychologically identifying with both home culture and host cultures, and making explicit connections between those identities. And a variety of work now shows that creativity is enhanced when these different cultural identities are more rather than less psychologically integrated (Saad et al., 2013; Tadmor et al., 2012).

The effects of multicultural identity integration are often most apparent on tasks specifically relevant to cultural identities (Cheng et al., 2008; Mok & Morris, 2010a). For example, when Cheng and colleagues (2008) gave food ingredients to different participants and asked them to come up with creative dishes, Asian American biculturals displayed more creativity on the task, but only when the ingredients were related to Asian and American cultures. The creativity of biculturals may also depend on which particular cultural identity is salient at the time, and whether that cultural identity is associated with higher levels of creativity (Mok & Morris, 2010a).

Other evidence indicates that an integrated bicultural identity—one in which individuals retain strong psychological connections to both home and host cultures—can positively impact creativity in general, rather than being limited to creativity in domains specifically relevant to one’s cultural knowledge. For example, Tadmor et al. (2012) found that MBA students who strongly identified with two different countries showed enhanced creativity on a variety of general creativity tasks that did not depend on specific cultural knowledge—an effect that was mediated by integrative complexity (Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006; Tetlock, 1983). The positive effect on creativity also extends to multiple social identities across a variety of different social groups beyond just national groups (Steffens, Gocłowska, Cruwys, & Galinsky, 2016). Interestingly, some theoretical work has postulated that these effects will occur more strongly when the integrated identities are more inconsistent with one another because integrating those inconsistencies requires more effort and more integrative complexity, leading to more lasting psychological changes (Gocłowska & Crisp, 2014).

Endorsing ideologies that promote identity integration also leads to enhanced creativity. For example,

endorsing “polyculturalism” (the ethos of fostering intercultural interaction; Morris et al., 2015) has been found to promote higher levels of creativity compared to “multiculturalism” (the ethos of preserving separate cultural traditions; Cho, Tadmor, & Morris, 2018).

***Effects of multilingualism on creativity.*** Some of the earliest work on whether multicultural experiences affect creativity involved bilingualism or multilingualism, and a range of findings continues to suggest that speaking two or more languages is associated with creativity (Chang et al., 2014; Kharkhurin, 2010; Lambert et al., 1973; Lee & Kim, 2011; Onysko, 2016; Simonton, 2000). Indeed, the empirical link between multilingualism and creativity was one of the reasons that scholars initially postulated that other types of multicultural experiences might also be important for creativity. Recent work suggests that the creative benefits of speaking multiple languages can be explained by broadly enhanced executive functioning in the brain that has an array of downstream consequences for basic cognitive abilities such as attention, perception, and memory (van Dijk, Kroesbergen, Blom, & Leseman, 2019; cf. Nichols, Wild, Stojanoski, Battista, & Owen, 2020). In addition, bilingualism seems to produce enhanced creativity as soon as early childhood (Leikin & Tovli, 2014), although it may depend on the specific task and cultural context (Kharkhurin, 2010) and the specific type of creative thinking involved. Although findings examining specific types of creativity, such as divergent and convergent creativity, are somewhat mixed across these studies, the overall effect of multilingualism being associated with higher levels of creativity currently appears to be reasonably robust.

***Effects of multicultural relationships and networks on creativity.*** Research has also established that the creative benefits of multicultural experiences extend to close interpersonal relationships, including romantic, platonic, and work relationships with people from other cultures. Using a longitudinal design over a 10-month MBA program, Lu, Hafenbrack, and colleagues (2017) found that MBA students who dated students from other cultures exhibited increased creativity at the end of the program, even after controlling for personality and demographic variables. In another study examining 2,226 professional repatriates who had previously worked in the United States, frequency of contact with American friends following repatriation positively predicted workplace innovations and entrepreneurial entry (Lu, Hafenbrack, et al., 2017).

Individuals embedded in more culturally diverse social networks also tend to be more creative than

those in less diverse networks, although this relationship is stronger in culturally relevant domains than more general domains (Chua, 2018). Network ties outside teams and organizations are also important. In a study of 82 MBA project teams, culturally diverse network ties outside of the team were found to facilitate team-level creativity, presumably because team members were able to draw on more varied ideas and inputs coming from external sources to their team (Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2014). Interestingly, employee attrition can contribute to company creativity if the departing employees relocate to a foreign competitor, presumably because the left-behind employees now have professional networks that are more multicultural (Shipilov et al., 2017).

Conversely, situations involving interpersonal tension or conflict—which some researchers have termed “ambient cultural disharmony” (Chua, 2013)—can have a negative effect on subsequent creativity, an effect that is mediated by the belief that ideas from different cultures are incompatible. Other work has shown that the negative effect of different types of interpersonal conflict on creativity may depend on the particular gender makeup of the interpersonal dyads. One study showed that, whereas relationship conflict negatively affected both male and female intercultural dyads, task conflict increased creativity in female intercultural dyads, but decreased creativity for male intercultural dyads (Chua & Jin, 2020).

**Effects of multicultural experiences on team creativity.** To date, only a limited amount of research has focused on multicultural experiences in team contexts. One study has found that the multicultural experiences of individual members can have a “superadditive effect” on team-level creative output (Tadmor, Satterstrom, et al., 2012). In a study involving Caucasian–Asian dyads, those dyads with high levels of multicultural experience overall (as measured by the Multicultural Experience Survey; Leung & Chiu, 2010) demonstrated higher creativity on a group task. This effect held even when controlling for individual levels of creativity, suggesting an additional effect of having multiple multiculturally experienced individuals interact in teams. The effect of multiculturally experienced individuals within teams may play a facilitative role in enhancing team creativity, especially for larger multicultural teams across longer periods of time. Because individuals with multicultural experiences have more flexible communication skills (Lu et al., in press), they may have enhanced abilities to guide multicultural teams

through their communication deficits across members (Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2010).

**Effects of multicultural experiences on organizational creativity and innovation.** Extant research at the organizational level is also relatively limited, but some work has found that multicultural experiences can increase a firm’s capacity to create and innovate. For example, Barkema and Shvyrkov (2007) analyzed over 30 years of data on 25 Dutch firms and found that a firm’s international experience (as measured by its number of prior foreign expansions) was positively tied to its strategic innovation (as measured by firm investment in novel geographic locations). Similarly, examining a sample of large German stock-listed firms, Wrede and Dauth (2020) showed that firms whose top management teams were more international—in terms of nationality, education, work experience, or board appointments—showed higher levels of firm innovativeness compared to firms with less top management team internationalization. And, as noted above, when creative directors of international fashion houses had more multicultural experiences, their firms produced more creative fashion collections (Godart et al., 2015).

**Moderating variables.** Despite the seemingly robust effects of multicultural experiences on creativity, multicultural experiences do not lead to increased creativity in all instances, and researchers have identified a number of moderating variables that determine whether and how multicultural experiences will affect creativity. Perhaps not surprisingly, given its robust relationship to the creative process in general, openness to experience (e.g., McCrae, 1987) is a key moderator for the link between multicultural experiences and creativity (Chen, Leung, Yang, Chiu, Li, & Cheng, 2016; Cho & Morris, 2015; Leung & Chiu, 2008). For example, Leung and Chiu (2008) found that the strongest link between multicultural experiences and creativity occurred for individuals high in openness to experience. Similarly, Chen and colleagues (2016) found that individuals low in openness performed significantly worse on creative tasks in situations involving cultural threat. Likewise, Cho and Morris (2015) found the most positive effects of study abroad on creativity for individuals high in openness to experience and when freedom of choice was high.

Cultural metacognition also seems to play an important role in moderating the effects of multicultural experiences, and higher levels of the metacognitive component of the cultural intelligence scale (Earley & Ang, 2003) have been shown to lead to greater idea

sharing and creative performance in multicultural teams (Chua, Morris, & Mor, 2012). For example, in one study involving creative collaborations of food recipes, Chua and colleagues (2012) found that, when at least one member of a two-person team had relatively high levels of cultural metacognition, this predicted overall team-level creativity, an effect mediated by higher levels of affect-based trust. By contrast, the “need for cognitive closure” (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), which involves a strong cognitive preference for stability and certainty, weakens the link between multicultural experiences and creativity (Leung & Chiu, 2010). In a similar vein, some studies have found that individuals high in need for cognitive closure feel less favorably toward products involving cultural fusion (De keersmaecker, Van Assche, & Roets, 2016).

Research also shows that the specific aspects of the particular environment in which the multicultural experience takes place are important in determining whether creative benefits eventually accrue. For example, multicultural experiences do not increase creativity when they involve time in a foreign culture that is either overly similar to, or very different from, one’s home culture (Cheng & Leung, 2013; Godart et al., 2015), when the experience is interpreted as threatening to one’s own culture (Chen et al., 2016), or when it is associated with conflict-oriented relationships or environments (Chua, 2013; cf. Cheng et al., 2011). In addition, individuals from tight cultures (Gelfand et al., 2011) have been found to be less likely to engage in or succeed at foreign creativity tasks—an effect that increases when the cultural distance between countries increases (Chua, Roth, & Lemoine, 2015).

The specific type of international work experience may also matter. For example, one study (Godart et al., 2015) showed that the relationship between a firm’s creative director’s multicultural experiences and the firm’s creative innovations (i.e., its publicly displayed fashion collections) showed (a) an inverted-U relationship with the number of foreign countries the fashion house executive had previously worked in (i.e., “breadth of experience”), and (b) an inverted-U relationship with the cultural distance between home and host countries. By contrast, time worked abroad (i.e., “depth of experience”) was found to have a linear effect on creativity, though with some diminishing returns observed. Moreover, there was a three-way interaction among breadth, depth, and cultural distance, such that creative directors low on depth benefited from extra breadth or greater cultural distance, but creative directors with particularly

deep experiences abroad did not (Godart et al., 2015). Thus, “depth” (the amount of time worked outside directors’ home countries) had the strongest impact on creativity, whereas “breadth” (the number of countries worked in) and cultural distance were somewhat less important, although both could act as substitutes for boosting creativity in the absence of high levels of depth.

### **The Effects of Multicultural Experiences on Psychological Adjustment**

Although the primary focus of multicultural experience research has been on creativity, multicultural experiences have been found to have other important effects as well. Probably the next most common area of investigation has involved effects on “psychological adjustment,” a general term used to describe a host of interrelated outcomes including individuals’ levels of stress, well-being, positive affect and health, life satisfaction, and resilience (e.g., Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013; Ward & Kennedy, 1994). Although the results are not entirely consistent across studies, several papers have demonstrated positive effects of multicultural experiences on psychological adjustment, both during and following experiences abroad. These positive effects occur despite the “culture shock” of being in a different culture, which has the potential to increase rather than reduce stress (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

For example, a recent meta-analysis revealed that, compared to monocultural individuals, bicultural individuals demonstrate better psychological adjustment to life experiences in general, not just experiences abroad (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). In addition, some research finds that “third-culture” children and adults—biculturals who grow up or live in a third, non-parental culture—demonstrate better well-being, are more resilient, and are more adaptive both cognitively and affectively than non-third-culture individuals (Abe, 2018; Brimm, 2010). Such positive effects may apply to recent immigrants as well, particularly when they blend their multiple identities (e.g., Ward et al., 2018). For example, Berry and colleagues (2006) found that immigrant adolescents had an advantage in psychological adjustment and school performance compared to non-immigrants. Moreover, culturally diverse personal and social networks have also been shown to promote bicultural identity integration and psychological adjustment (Repke & Benet-Martínez, 2018).

A study by Geeraert and Demoulin (2013) is particularly illustrative of the effect of multicultural



experiences on psychological adjustment. These researchers followed 162 Belgian adolescents during a one-year cultural exchange program and 182 control participants who did not go abroad. Subsequent analyses revealed that those who had studied abroad showed increased levels of self-esteem and lower levels of stress when measured during the trip as well as a year after their return, suggesting that multicultural experiences can have a lasting effect on different aspects of personal growth. Similarly, Zhu and colleagues (2016) found that employees on expatriate assignments demonstrated an increase in adjustment over the first nine months of their international work assignments, with a steady increase in adjustment appearing for the first six months and a gradual leveling off afterward. These results contrast to the U-shaped results postulated by earlier work in this area (e.g., Sussman, 2000) and suggest a more gradual and stable pattern of adjustment rather than a more varied experience (i.e., an initial “honeymoon” period, followed by a subsequent period of stress, followed by a final period of adjustment and stress relief).

**Moderating variables.** Not everyone adjusts to multicultural experiences in the same manner. For example, multicultural experiences lead to higher levels of psychological adjustment when individuals are higher in cultural intelligence and when the perceived diversity climate in the host country is high (Volpone, Marquardt, Casper, & Avery, 2018), and these effects appear to be stronger for individuals who are considered minorities in their home country. Moreover, other research shows that coming from a tighter as opposed to looser home country leads to better adaptation to a host country, an effect that is further moderated by individuals’ agreeableness and honesty–humility (Geeraert et al., 2019).

Contextual factors are also important moderating variables on psychological adjustment. Consistent with individual-level creativity findings demonstrating the importance of adapting to one’s host country (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009), higher levels of social support from host country individuals and higher levels of cultural adaptation are strongly associated with lower stress and better adjustment (Demes & Geeraert, 2014, 2015). For those employees on international assignments, higher levels of cross-cultural motivation, empowerment, challenge stressors, and affective commitment are all positive predictors of adjustment to foreign cultures (Firth et al., 2014; Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999; Takeuchi et al., 2009). Similarly, subjectively perceiving organizational or family support during these assignments leads to higher levels of adjustment (Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1998;

Takeuchi et al., 2009), which can lead to increased expatriate job satisfaction (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005) and job performance (Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001). Finally, and similar to the aforementioned research on creativity, higher levels of cultural distance between home culture and destination culture have been found to be associated with lower levels of psychological adjustment, especially in situations involving chronically high levels of stress and uncertainty, such as the military in wartime (Fisher & Hutchings, 2013).

### **The Effects of Multicultural Experiences on Personality, Cognition, and Individual Performance**

Research has found that personality traits are not static throughout the lifespan (McAdams & Olson, 2010) but instead can be affected and changed by significant life events (e.g., Boyce, Wood, Daly, & Sedikides, 2015). Research now shows that multicultural experiences can be one such life experience factor that affects personality traits as well. While extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness predict whether people decide to undertake a study-abroad experience, the experience of studying abroad also leads individuals to become higher on openness to experience and agreeableness and lower on neuroticism following the experience (Greischel et al., 2016; Lüdtke et al., 2011; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). Mirroring the findings on creativity and psychological adjustment, foreign culture adaptation (measured through increases in international relationships and social support) accounts for these personality changes (Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013).

Personality changes may be facilitated by multicultural experiences because they have the potential to change aspects of the self-concept in ways that are psychologically beneficial. For example, time spent living abroad can enhance individuals’ self-concept clarity (Adam et al., 2018a, 2018b), which further leads to two important organizational outcomes: it positively predicts career decision-making clarity, and it increases alignment with 360-degree feedback received from peers (Adam et al., 2018a, 2018b), effects that are mediated by higher levels of self-discerning reflections. In other words, multiculturally experienced participants have been found to be more likely to think about how their identity truly defines who they are as individuals (Adam et al., 2018a, 2018b).

Bicultural identity may also drive changes to individuals’ cognitive orientations and how they respond to the different ways in which information is

presented. Some evidence suggests that biculturals with integrated identities show assimilative tendencies when exposed to cultural primes or personality inventories with various cultural elements (Chen & Bond, 2010; Mok & Morris, 2009) whereas biculturals with low identity integration show cultural contrast effects (Mok & Morris, 2009). Lower identity integration may have benefits in group settings as well, with some evidence showing that low-identity-integrated biculturals are better able to resist group-think than high-identity-integrated biculturals (Mok & Morris, 2010b). Moreover, biculturalism has been found to be associated with a more global rather than local cognitive processing style (Mok & Morris, 2012).

Bilingualism also seems to produce lasting cognitive changes by altering overall executive functioning in the brain, affecting various cognitive skills including enhanced attentional control, working memory, metalinguistic awareness and abstract and symbolic representation skills, as well as being associated with slower cognitive declines as a result of aging (Adegoke, Lavin, Thompson, & Ungerleider, 2010; Baumgart & Billick, 2018; Bialystok, Craik, & Luk, 2012). Multilingualism is also associated with the ability to distinguish between a variety of physical sounds, including those involving music (Krizman et al., 2012). Interestingly, the use of a foreign language seems to actually change our psychological perceptions of the world overall by providing social and emotional distance from certain decisions and decision-frames (Hayakawa, Costa, Foucart, & Keysar, 2016; Pavlenko, 2017). As a result, foreign language use reduces susceptibility to certain types of cognitive biases, such as framing decisions as gains versus losses (Keysar et al., 2012) and susceptibility to the “hot hand fallacy” (Gao et al., 2015).

Finally, multicultural experiences may provide benefits for various aspects of individual performance. For example, individuals who spend time working abroad have been shown to have higher salaries than those who do not (Biemann & Braakmann, 2013). In addition, MBA students with higher multicultural engagement (i.e., adaptation plus learning of the host culture) had more success in job interviews at the end of their 10-month program (Maddux et al., 2014). Higher levels of cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003) have been shown to lead to higher joint gain in negotiation contexts, ostensibly because high cultural intelligence negotiators are better able to recognize value trade-offs in integrative negotiations (Imai & Gelfand, 2010). Similarly, Israeli Americans working in the technology industry in Silicon Valley

who had the highest levels of bicultural identity integration were found to have the best professional reputations in their fields, and were promoted at faster rates compared to Israeli Americans with less integrated bicultural identities (Tadmor et al., 2012, Study 3).

### Conclusions on Intrapersonal Effects

Overall, it is clear that multicultural experiences affect important intrapersonal variables, including creativity, psychological adjustment, various aspects of the self-concept, and individual skills and performance. Importantly, a review of the findings across outcome variables has shown that many of these effects are driven by increases in different types of cognitive and behavioral flexibility, such as increased learning and adaptation, higher levels of integrative complexity, and enhanced executive functioning. Indeed, some research has demonstrated that diversifying experiences in general, such as being exposed to unusual events or schema violations (such as completing a mundane topic in an unusual way), increase general cognitive flexibility (Lu, Akinola, & Mason, 2017; Ritter et al., 2012). However, there are also important individual and contextual elements of these experiences that seem to determine whether and to what extent changes emerge. When multicultural experiences facilitate openness, adaptation, learning, and cognitive complexity, they lead to higher levels of creativity, psychological adjustment, and general performance. Conversely, situations involving threat, close-mindedness, and conflict seem to prevent such effects from occurring.

### INTERPERSONAL OUTCOMES

Humans are fundamentally social in nature, and we derive much of our self-worth from the quality of our interactions with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Our species evolved in small- to moderately-sized group environments, and we continue to spend much of our lives in the modern world surrounded by other people, both at home and at work. As a result, our relationships with friends, romantic partners, and colleagues dominate a large part of our waking hours and the majority of our topics of conversation (Dunbar, 2004). Given the importance of sociality for the human experience, the effect of multicultural experiences on various interpersonal outcomes has also received substantial attention from researchers. In this section, we turn our attention to these interpersonal effects.



### The Effects of Multicultural Experiences on Trust

One of the main psychological constructs that allows groups, organizations, and societies to function effectively is trust (Cao & Galinsky, 2020). Mutually beneficial interactions and transactions can only occur when individuals believe other people are more likely to help rather than hurt them. Importantly, one distinct interpersonal benefit of multicultural experiences is increased generalized trust, which is the belief in the benevolence of human nature (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). Across five studies involving both correlational and experimental designs, Cao and colleagues (2014) demonstrated that foreign travel in a larger number of countries led to higher levels of generalized trust. These effects occurred in longitudinal studies assessing travelers' generalized trust levels before and after trips abroad, and also in experimental trust games following the priming of international travel experiences (Cao et al., 2014). Similarly, in a sample of older adults, foreign travel was demonstrated to be a means by which travelers could better understand and relate to others (Moal-Ulvoas & Taylor, 2014).

Trust can be especially difficult to create in multicultural teams. In particular, language barriers can inhibit trust formation in international top management teams (Stahl et al., 2010; Tenzer et al., 2014), and many multinational teams are geographically dispersed, thereby precluding relationships from developing in the same way as would be possible for individuals when they are co-located. Despite this, multicultural teams can develop higher levels of trust by using site visits (Mortensen & Neeley, 2012). Site visits facilitate trust in geographically dispersed teams because of increased direct knowledge of these foreign sites and the individuals working there, but also via "reflected knowledge" of how employees understand their own work roles and their interactions with their foreign colleagues following foreign trips (Mortensen & Neeley, 2012). In addition, individuals high in cultural metacognition (the ability to think about one's cultural assumptions) have been shown to be more likely to develop affect-based (vs. cognitive-based) trust in their relationships with people from other cultures (Chua et al., 2012), which is an important method of facilitating beneficial interpersonal connections.

### The Effects of Multicultural Experiences on Communication Abilities

Beyond differences in the ability to speak different languages effectively, research suggests that multiculturally experienced individuals may have

better communication abilities in general than those without such experiences. For example, Jang (2017) found that multiculturally experienced individuals act as "cultural brokers" to facilitate information sharing and communication patterns across team members from different cultures. Team members whose cultural experiences overlapped with those of other team members were more likely to integrate information from different cultures, whereas team members whose cultural experiences did not overlap were more likely to elicit specific knowledge from other teammates. Importantly, both integrating and eliciting information strategies helped facilitate higher levels of team creativity (Jang, 2017). Similarly, a recent study found that biculturals engage in more "cultural gap-bridging" behaviors in multicultural teams compared to monoculturals; this bridging not only facilitates communication but also helps biculturals be more empathetic and sensitive toward team members (Backmann et al., 2020).

Bilingual children also show enhanced communication abilities in interpersonal situations. Interestingly, even children who are simply exposed to a second language, but are not necessarily fluent in two languages, showed enhanced communication abilities compared to monolinguals (Fan, Liberman, Keysar, & Kinzler, 2015; Liberman, Woodward, Keysar, & Kinzler, 2017). Moreover, bilingual adults have also been shown to be better at cognitive conflict resolution than monolinguals (Costa, Hernández, & Sebastián-Gallés, 2008).

### The Effects of Multicultural Experiences on Morality<sup>2</sup>

Multicultural experiences may also affect morality and morally relevant decision-making. Because experiences across many different countries can expose individuals to a variety of different moral codes, this can lead people to see the concept of morality as flexible rather than absolute (Lu, Quoidbach, et al., 2017; cf. Narvaez & Hill, 2010). That is,

<sup>2</sup> Although moral decisions are sometimes performed in isolation, researchers have argued that morality is inherently interpersonal in nature, and that even acts that are performed alone are considered (im)moral to the extent that interpersonal harm to another victim is implied. In this dyadic model of morality, harm to a victim is a necessary and automatic component of evaluating an action as fundamentally (im)moral or not (Gray, Schein, & Ward, 2014; Gray, Young, & Waytz, 2012; Schein & Gray, 2018).

multicultural experiences foster not only cognitive flexibility, but also moral flexibility. Indeed, those with experiences across a broad array of foreign countries have been shown to engage in a variety of more unethical decision-making practices, such as questionable negotiation tactics as well as different types of cheating behaviors—effects that were mediated by increased moral relativism (Lu, Quoidbach, et al., 2017).

In a similar vein, using a foreign language can affect moral choices. When using a non-native language, people are more likely to make utilitarian choices regarding others (Costa et al., 2014), focus more on others' outcomes rather than intentions (Geipel et al., 2016), and are less condemning of social or moral taboos when committed by others (Geipel et al., 2015). These results suggest that foreign language use offers people a substantially different psychological lens through which to view moral decision-making.

### The Effects of Multicultural Experiences on Intergroup Bias

Another major area of focus for researchers is how multicultural experiences impact different instantiations of intergroup bias. Taking a cue from classic research on the effect of contact with individuals from other racial groups (e.g., Allport, 1979), scholars have been increasingly interested in how experiences in different cultures can reduce biases toward different cultural groups, including stereotyping (negative beliefs), prejudice (negative attitudes), and discrimination (negative behaviors) toward cultural outgroup members (Fiske, 2010).<sup>3</sup>

For example, Tadmor and colleagues have found that those with extensive multicultural experiences showed lower levels of outgroup bias compared to those with less multicultural experience—an effect that held not only toward individuals from the particular cultures they had experience with, but also toward a variety of other outgroup targets (Tadmor et al., 2018; Tadmor, Hong, et al., 2012). The authors argued that this effect was driven by enhanced elaboration of unexpected information

regarding outgroups—what the authors term “epistemic unfreezing.” In support of their arguments, Tadmor and colleagues found their effects were mediated by need for cognitive closure and moderated by whether individuals had the requisite cognitive resources to overcome outgroup biases (Tadmor et al., 2018; Tadmor, Hong, et al., 2012). Moreover, higher levels of bicultural identity integration have been shown to positively predict higher levels of tolerance for dissimilar individuals (Huff et al., 2017). Similarly, bilingual children show fewer implicit and explicit racial biases compared to monolingual children (Singh et al., 2020), suggesting that the positive role of multicultural experiences in reducing outgroup bias is developmental in nature and can begin early in childhood.

In addition, diversity ideologies seem to play a role in intergroup bias as well. In particular, endorsing a polycultural ideology has been associated with stronger preferences for culturally mixed experiences (Cho, Morris, Slepian, & Tadmor, 2017). However, after exposure to multiple cultures, focusing on cultural differences may actually lead to increased stereotyping and, though somewhat paradoxically, more positive responses to culturally mixed products (Peng & Xie, 2016).

Theoretical work in this space has postulated that positive psychological and organizational outcomes will accrue primarily when previously held negative intergroup biases are fundamentally challenged or called into question, which leads to further elaboration and alteration of preexisting thoughts and beliefs (Crisp & Turner, 2011). Thus, although positive experiences that are counter-stereotypical may serve to reduce intergroup bias, experiences that are negative or consistent with existing negative beliefs may actually serve to reinforce or exacerbate existing biases. Indeed, recent work has begun to examine the particular valence of multicultural experiences as a potential moderating condition, given that some research shows that explicitly negative interactions can lead to *increased* prejudice, even more so than positive interactions decrease prejudice (Barlow et al., 2012). Following up on this work, Affinito and colleagues (2020) recently showed across multiple studies—one done with working adults recalling past multicultural experiences in Mexico, and another using a virtual reality simulation with undergraduate students experiencing the same negative experience at a market in Brazil—making distinctly negative experiences salient

<sup>3</sup> Although there is a large body of research focusing on intergroup bias with regard to race, gender, and other demographic groups, this broad literature is beyond the scope of this particular review. Thus, we limit our focus to how multicultural experiences in particular affect intergroup biases.

in multicultural environments led to increased stereotyping and prejudice not only toward outgroup targets from the specific country of experience, but also toward a variety of other national and ethnic outgroups, compared to participants who recalled or experienced positive multicultural events.

### **The Effects of Multicultural Experiences on Leadership**

Research has also found a connection between multicultural experiences and leadership abilities. For example, some work suggests that multinational organizations perform better when their CEOs have previous international assignment experience (Carpenter et al., 2001). More recently, Lu and colleagues (in press) found that leaders who had lived in many different countries produced higher-performing teams across a variety of samples, including real-world corporations, professional soccer teams, and hackathon teams. Similarly, Reuber and Fischer (1997) found that firms with CEOs who had more international experience were more likely to develop foreign strategic partners and undertake internationalization. Roth (1995) also found that, among medium-sized firms in global industries, CEO international experience was positively related to income growth in companies with activities in multiple countries.

The particular characteristics of a leader matter for team performance as well. For example, whereas self-managing (i.e., leaderless) teams that are more multicultural may actually perform worse than monocultural teams (Cheng, Chua, Morris, & Lee, 2012), multinational teams may perform better when they have leaders with broad multicultural experiences (Lu et al., in press). In one set of studies, the multicultural experiences of leaders were associated with more effective team outcomes for both multicultural soccer teams and multicultural hackathon teams, an effect that was particularly strong when leading teams that were more (vs. less) multicultural. These effects were further demonstrated to be mediated by higher levels of communication competence for multiculturally experienced leaders (Lu et al., in press).

Paradoxically, however, other research has shown that individuals with more multicultural experiences may be perceived as less similar by their cultural ingroup members, and thus selected less often as leaders (Lu, 2018). In other words, the same multicultural experiences that develop individuals

to become “global leaders” may also render them “cultural outsiders” in the eyes of their cultural ingroup.

### **Conclusions on Interpersonal Effects**

Multicultural experiences clearly have a variety of important interpersonal effects. Individuals show increased levels of trust, moral flexibility, communication competence, and leadership effectiveness when they have experiences in multicultural environments; they also show decreased intergroup bias in certain circumstances. However, other types of multicultural experiences that are explicitly perceived as negative seem to have the potential to exacerbate intergroup bias. This latter effect suggests the subjective interpretation of the multicultural situation may be critical in determining the ultimate outcomes of multicultural experiences, a point we elaborate on when discussing our theoretical model later in this paper.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES**

At the organizational level, scholars have operationalized multicultural experiences based on both characteristics of a firm as well as features of its top management team or founder. For example, firms can differ in their number of prior foreign expansions, their number of international joint ventures previously undertaken, or the set of countries previously operated in (e.g., Barkema, Bell, & Pennings, 1996; Barkema, Shenkar, Vermeulen, & Bell, 1997; Zhou & Guillén, 2015), whereas influential actors within a firm can vary in the amount of time they spent studying, working, or living abroad (e.g., Godart et al., 2015). For the purposes of this review, and in line with the perspective that features how those in the upper echelons of a firm influence organizational outcomes (Hambrick & Mason, 1984), we do not differentiate between outcomes that derive from a firm being influenced by firm-level multicultural experiences versus a firm being influenced by founder or top management team-level multicultural experiences. Furthermore, rather than investigating how a firm from one country performs in the market of another country (see a discussion of the “liability of foreignness” [Zaheer, 1995]), we specifically discuss how prior multicultural experiences of firms influence future firm outcomes.

Research in this area so far has looked at how firms’ multicultural experiences influence firm behaviors in international markets, with a particular

focus on firm internationalization, or the extent to which a firm increases its involvement in international markets, foreign acquisitions, or market entry. Extant research suggests that firms with founders who were educated abroad or worked abroad are more likely to try to internationalize or start entrepreneurial ventures abroad as well (Marquis & Qiao, 2020, Table A3; Yamakawa et al., 2013), as are firms with a prior history of engaging in international investment activity (e.g., Bruneel, Yli-Renko, & Clarysse, 2010; Xia et al., 2009). In addition, top management teams that have international work experience (vs. those that do not), those backed by venture capital investment firms with prior international investment experience, or those with prior international alliance partners demonstrate higher levels of new venture internationalization (Fernhaber et al., 2009). Internationalization also has additional relevant consequences, as firms with higher degrees of internationalization are more likely to engage in international acquisitions (Matta & Beamish, 2008).

Nevertheless, multicultural experiences do not unequivocally increase firm internationalization or foreign acquisition. For example, cross-border acquisitions and foreign direct investment are more likely to occur in international markets that are viewed as more “culturally attractive,” or those that possess qualities or engage in practices that are desirable to the investing firm (Li, Brodbeck, Shenkar, Ponzi, & Fisch, 2017). Furthermore, research suggests these experiences are often used by firms and founders as learning opportunities that guide future behavior. For example, García-Canal and Guillén (2008) demonstrated that prior experience investing in foreign countries decreases the extent to which firms try to enter politically unstable markets—suggesting that multicultural experiences can help firms avoid mistakes in international arenas. Relatedly, firms with less prior experience operating in foreign markets are more likely to reap the benefits of their founder’s prior international experience (Bruneel et al., 2010).

Besides affecting type of entry and acquisition decisions, prior work suggests that multicultural experiences can also affect overall firm performance. Managers’ experience in a foreign country has been positively linked to their ability to leverage organizational knowledge critical to performance (Oldroyd et al., 2019), especially when the experience either occurs in or directly relates to the relevant country (Salomon & Martin, 2008) or if the venture is older or not subject to

government control (Li et al., 2012). Other research has shown that managers with prior international entrepreneurial experience tend to decrease their firms’ operating costs (Kulchina, 2017). One study suggests that prior experience with ventures failing in a foreign country helps firms learn and survive in foreign markets in general (Yang et al., 2015). A related effect was also found by Nielsen and Nielsen (2013), who identified that firms having higher levels of national diversity exhibit better performance, particularly in highly internationalized firms, though top management teams’ international experience was only shown to be directly related to performance in highly internationalized firms. Finally, interorganizational knowledge transfer may also benefit from multicultural experiences. In a sample of J-1 visa holders, both home and host country network embeddedness increased knowledge flow for migrants returning to their home country, although this effect was moderated by levels of xenophobia in migrants’ home country (Wang, 2015).

As with work undertaken at other levels of analysis, research at the organizational level shows varied outcomes depending on the specific context. For example, Ma and Khanna (2016) found that firm directors with more foreign experience are actually less likely to dissent during board meetings. In addition, Rickley (2019) found that, even though organizations hire managers with specific multicultural experiences, they often fail to strategically assign them to roles in which they could leverage these experiences to manage cross-cultural differences. And research on organizational teams shows quite varied effects. Whereas multiple papers show positive effects of organizational performance when top management teams are high in national diversity (Gong, 2006; Lo et al., 2020; Wrede & Dauth, 2020), other studies show a more mixed (i.e., curvilinear, U-shaped) effect for global organizational “communities of practice” within certain companies (Kirkman et al., 2013). Still other studies show a negative effect on team performance for more multinational teams in a sports context (Haas & Nüesch, 2012), suggesting that more complex organizational contexts will likely lead to more varied effects of different types of multicultural experiences.

## Conclusions on Organizational Outcomes

Multicultural experiences have clear effects on variables at the organization or firm level, many of



which are analogous to those at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. For example, firms with more multicultural experiences to draw on—whether in terms of prior international ventures, prior experiences in international markets, or more international alliance partners—are more likely to engage in future international ventures. Multicultural experiences of influential members within a firm (e.g., founders or directors) are also conducive to enhancing firm performance, since multiculturally experienced individuals are likely to be better equipped to handle the specific details of operating a firm in a different cultural environment—for example, by decreasing operating costs or increasing a firm’s creative output. However, the presence of many contextual moderators suggests that the specific multicultural experience or environment plays an important role in determining the exact manifestation of ultimate organizational outcomes.

#### THE STRUCTURE–APPRAISAL MODEL OF MULTICULTURAL EXPERIENCES

One of the main goals of the current review was to summarize the fast-growing literature on multicultural experiences and explore the effects of such experiences on important psychological and organizational phenomena. An additional goal was to attempt to develop a new theoretical framework that would be able to integrate existing findings, parsimoniously capture emerging patterns, and lay out a path for future research. Such a model did indeed come into focus during our review of the literature. In particular, certain distinctions and patterns began to emerge both within and across outcome variables and levels of analysis. These themes suggested a multistage, multipath model of how multicultural experiences could potentially capture the range of extant effects in the current literature.

The first theme we detected was that different types of outcomes tended to follow from different aspects of multicultural experiences. In particular, we noticed a particular set of outcomes occurred when multicultural experiences were *deeper* in nature, whereas a different set of outcomes occurred when multicultural experiences were *broad*er in nature. When multicultural experiences were operationalized or experienced in terms of *depth*, factors like the amount of time spent living or working abroad (vs. traveling abroad), having more intimate relationships like romantic encounters or close friendships

(vs. more superficial friendships), or having multiple cultural identities that were more psychologically integrated (vs. less integrated), these deeper experiences tended to shape *intrapersonal* outcomes like creativity, psychological adjustment, self-concept clarity, and various types of individual performance (e.g., Adam et al., 2018a, 2018b; Godart et al., 2015; Lu, Hafenbrack, et al., 2017; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009; Tadmor et al., 2012). On the other hand, *broad*er multicultural experiences—operationalized as the range of experiences across different cultural environments (e.g., the number of foreign countries worked in or traveled in)—seem to affect psychological processes that are more *interpersonal* in nature, such as levels of generalized trust, morality, communication competence, and leadership effectiveness (Cao et al., 2014; Lu, Quoidbach, et al., 2017; Lu et al., in press).<sup>4</sup>

Second, we observed another factor—whether multicultural experiences were subjectively appraised as positive or negative—that seemed to determine whether the consequences of multicultural experiences manifested themselves in the first place. Indeed, most of the moderators we identified that reduced or prevented the effects of multicultural experiences from materializing had to do with related factors such as anxiety, threat, and close-mindedness. These findings suggest that perceiving a multicultural experience in a negative manner may prevent substantive changes from occurring, or may actually produce negative outcomes.

Thus, two factors—(1) the *structure* of multicultural experiences (deep vs. broad), and (2) the *appraisal* of multicultural experiences (positive vs. negative)—appear to be critical in determining whether, when, why, and how multicultural experiences result in important individual and organizational outcomes. These factors are captured in our newly developed “Structure–Appraisal Model of Multicultural Experiences,” which we present in more detail below.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, in most cases in the real world, deep and broad multicultural experiences are inherently correlated and likely to occur simultaneously or sequentially. Thus, one precondition of our model is that it is the relative salience of broad versus deep aspects of the multicultural experience, either temporarily or chronically, that will drive subsequent psychological and organizational effects.



### Structure of Multicultural Experiences: Depth versus Breadth

The first factor of our model concerns the structure of multicultural experiences—in particular, the depth versus the breadth of those experiences. “Depth of multicultural experiences” refers to factors that involve a longer period of time or more extensive exposure to different cultures (e.g., Adam et al., 2018b; Lu, Quoidbach, et al., 2017). As noted above, across various findings in the literature, the depth of multicultural experiences exerted a particularly strong effect on different intrapersonal outcomes. Furthermore, the depth of multicultural experiences affected these outcomes in ways that suggest deeper multicultural experiences produce fundamental and transformative changes to individual cognition, behavior, general abilities, and performance. As a result, we postulate that deeper multicultural experiences activate *integrative* processes, increasing one’s ability to bring variegated pieces of information together and integrate them in a coherent manner.

These integrative processes subsequently alter how the mind fundamentally thinks about and perceives the world around it. For example, deeper multicultural experiences facilitate abilities that involve making sense of different inputs and applying solutions that may be relevant across myriad contexts, such as general levels of creativity (Tadmor et al., 2012) and better psychological adjustment across life domains, even those unrelated to a particular cultural experience (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). And although research has yet to investigate this possibility, it follows that deeper multicultural experiences may affect overall executive functioning as well, similar to the effects of bilingualism on a host of general cognitive abilities like memory and attention. Overall, then, deeper and more immersive multicultural experiences seem to spark transformative changes that affect basic psychological processes across a broad array of cognitive functioning and psychological abilities.

The idea that the depth of multicultural experiences produces integrative processes is better understood when examining the critical mechanisms underlying these effects. For effects on creativity, the more individuals psychologically adapt to (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009), learn deeply about (Maddux et al., 2010), or fully integrate multiple cultures into their self-concepts (Tadmor et al., 2012), the more creativity is facilitated. The

more individuals adapt to and interact with host country individuals, the better their psychological adjustment process (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). The closer one’s relationships are with people from different countries, the more likely creative benefits will accrue (Lu, Hafenbrack, et al., 2017). In addition, one of the main overarching mechanisms uncovered in previous work is that of “integrative complexity” (e.g., Maddux et al., 2014; Tadmor et al., 2012), which is the cognitive capacity to consider and integrate alternative viewpoints on different issues (Tetlock, 1983). Indeed, some scholars have argued that integrative complexity appears to act as an overarching mechanism for multicultural experiences that subsumes other important mechanisms like cultural adaptation and learning (Maddux, 2011). And, because higher levels of metacognition have been found to drive more accurate foreign culture learning (Morris, Savani, & Fincher, 2019), and cultural learning often occurs more implicitly (like learning to ride a bicycle through associational learning) than explicitly (like learning rules of a game; Savani, Morris, Fincher, Lu, & Kaufman, 2021), deeper and more immersive multicultural experiences may produce fundamental psychological changes that are fairly implicit in nature. Overall, then, deep multicultural experiences appear to lead to integrative processes that tend to transform a variety of intrapersonal outcomes.

On the other hand, “broad multicultural experiences”—those that represent a range of experiences across different cultures—appear to affect a different set of outcomes, those that are more interpersonal in nature. In particular, broad multicultural experiences appear to activate *comparative* processes, providing an increased tendency or ability to compare and contrast similar situations across different cultures, make relative judgments, and understand situations that involve interactions between two or more people. For example, increased generalized trust results from experiences across more (vs. fewer) foreign countries, presumably because exposure to a larger range of human behavior highlights how people from very different parts of the world actually share a common humanity (Cao & Galinsky, 2020; Cao et al., 2014). Broader experiences also seem to drive better communication competence and leadership effectiveness, perhaps because individuals with broad experiences develop and understand a larger behavioral repertoire (e.g., Lu et al., in press). Conversely, broad

experiences also increase moral relativism and morally flexible behavior (Lu, Quoidbach, et al., 2017), likely because broader experiences expose individuals to a larger range of possible behavioral options that make their decision-making more relative and contextually dependent (Rai & Holyoak, 2013). Thus, broader multicultural experiences seem to have the parallel tendencies to highlight both behavioral *differences* across cultural contexts, while at the same time bringing into focus fundamental *commonalities* among people, regardless of geography, language, and skin color.<sup>5</sup>

Taken together, our model suggests that, when broad multicultural experiences predominate, comparative processes are activated, and interpersonal outcomes are more reliably affected. On the other hand, when deeper multicultural experiences predominate, a set of integrative processes impacts individuals' underlying cognitive or psychological abilities. These abilities can change, at a basic and perhaps even an implicit level, how individuals cognitively perceive and respond to the world around them, and how individuals perceive themselves as well (see Figure 1).

### Appraisal of Multicultural Experiences: Positive or Negative

A second theme that emerged from our review is that substantive changes do not follow from all multicultural experiences, nor do they occur for all people. For example, cultural threat (Chen et al., 2016), interpersonal conflict (Chua, 2013), rigid cultural norms (Chua et al., 2015), and close-mindedness (Leung & Chiu, 2008, 2010; Tadmor et al., 2012) have all been found to decrease or eliminate the effects of multicultural experiences on creativity and psychological adjustment. Other work suggests that, when individuals perceive multicultural experiences as explicitly negative, bicultural identity integration actually decreases (Cheng & Lee, 2013; Lilgendahl et al., 2018), and general forms of intergroup bias may instead increase (Affinito et al., 2020).

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<sup>5</sup> Although researchers have not yet delineated between breadth and depth when examining the effects of multicultural experiences on phenomena like intergroup bias, this process may also be fairly comparative in nature. This is because reduced intergroup bias often occurs when individuals recognize underlying commonalities among people from different cultures more clearly, and increasingly see themselves as similar ingroup members, thereby reducing stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination (Brewer, 2000).

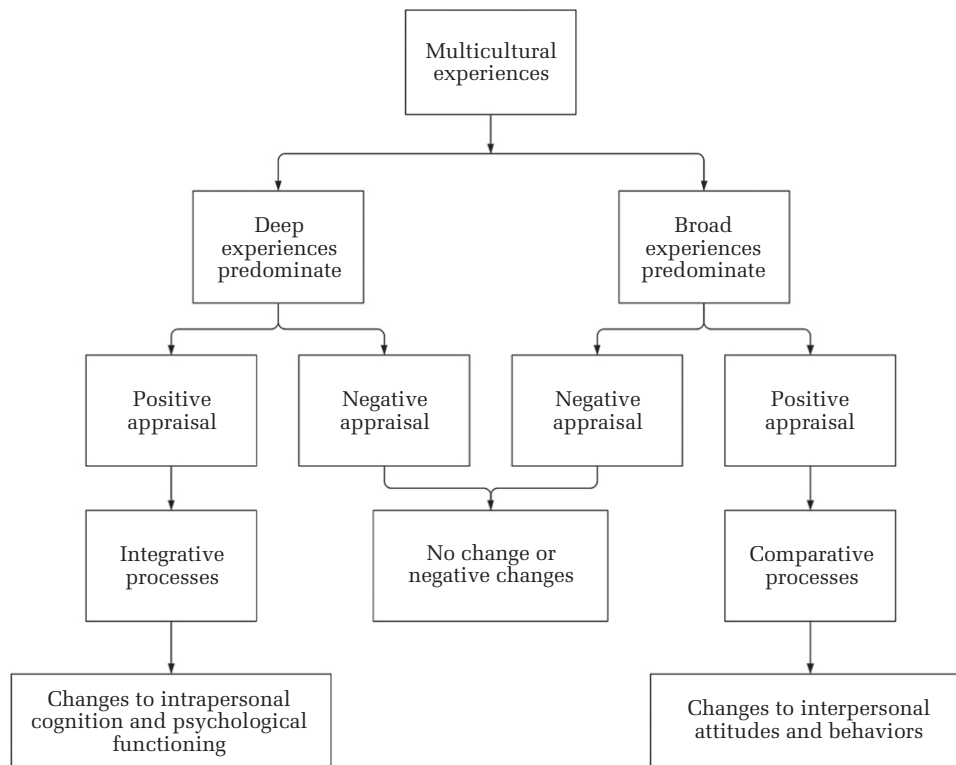
These findings suggest that the valence of how individuals interpret their particular multicultural experiences determines the effects of those experiences. Thus, a second factor in our model involves the *psychological appraisal* of the situation as positive or negative. This factor determines whether multicultural experiences—regardless of whether they are broader or deeper in nature—will produce any psychological and organizational changes, or may even lead to a reversal of the typical effects found in the literature.

The term “appraisal” has a long history in the psychological literature, and generally refers to an individual's subjective perception or evaluation of a particular situation (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003). Appraisal theories have typically been used to explain how people differentially cope with stress (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, & Salomon, 1999; Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986) or why individuals have different emotional responses to the same situation, or even the exact same physiological stimulus (Latané & Wheeler, 1966; Roseman, Spindel, & Jose, 1990; Schachter & Singer, 1962; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). With regard to both the coping and emotions literatures, a focus on psychological appraisals emphasizes the fundamentally subjective nature of one's psychological experience of the world, and that this inherently subjective perception subsequently determines how individuals ultimately respond to their environments, even at a basic, physiological level (Blascovich et al., 1999). Indeed, this idea is akin to Hamlet's famous comment that “there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” (Shakespeare & Watts, c.1601/1992, 2.2.244–245).

We believe the construct of psychological appraisals is also useful for understanding whether multicultural experiences are likely to produce substantive changes (e.g., creativity) as well as the direction of those changes (e.g., increased vs. decreased intergroup bias). Importantly, these appraisals can occur before the multicultural experience, during the experience itself, or following the experience as one undergoes the sensemaking process (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005).

In particular, we propose that, when the multicultural experience is appraised as positive, individuals are likely to bring an increased psychological readiness to the situation, perceiving the context as an opportunity for learning and adaptation (Maddux et al., 2010; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009). This enhanced receptiveness likely facilitates the emergence of subsequent effects on creativity, adjustment, trust, and bias. When a positive appraisal of

**FIGURE 1**  
**The Structure–Appraisal Model of Multicultural Experiences**



*Notes:* The Structure–Appraisal Model first differentiates multicultural experiences by their structure—that is, their depth and breadth. Although these two structural components are positively correlated, the model considers the effects of multicultural experiences where either depth or breadth predominates. The model predicts that predominantly deeper (i.e., longer or more substantial or intensive) multicultural experiences activate integrative processes, whereas predominantly broader (i.e., more varied) multicultural experiences activate more comparative processes. The model then differentiates multicultural experiences by their situational appraisals, with benefits occurring when multicultural experiences are appraised positively rather than negatively.

the situation predominates, people are likely to bring an open and curious mindset to encountering cultural differences as well as a willingness to adapt to, learn about, psychologically integrate, and embrace those differences. Similar to how positive emotions and situations that invoke safety and security tend to drive explorative and novel behaviors in general (Fredrickson, 2001), a positive appraisal of a multicultural experience may be an important factor that activates the necessary psychological readiness to produce subsequent productive changes.

However, multicultural experiences may also be appraised negatively. Because multicultural experiences involve contact with those who think, speak, and act differently than oneself, they can also be appraised as a threat rather than an opportunity. For some individuals or in certain contexts, encountering cultural differences may be uncomfortable. For example, learning about another culture's values

may threaten one's own worldview (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997) and intergroup threat can lead to the denigration of outgroup members rather than a willingness to embrace differences (Fein & Spencer, 1997), which can exacerbate the difficulty in managing cultural diversity in certain organizational situations (Phillips & Loyd, 2006). When a multicultural experience is appraised as potentially threatening, then, the metaphorical window of opportunity for psychological learning and growth is likely to be narrower, if not shut altogether. As a result, people may avoid, resist, or reject opportunities to learn about or adapt to other cultures. Instead, levels of bias toward different others may not change, or may actually increase. Indeed, research on the general process of attitude formation suggests that learning opportunities are strongly affected by one's subjective expectations about encountering novel stimuli: negative attitudes can be

formed solely based on one's expectations, even in the absence of direct experience with the attitude object (Fazio, Eiser, & Shook, 2004).

Taken together, then, we believe that the overall appraisal of a multicultural experience as positive or negative is a critical determinant of whether individuals perceive such situations as a valuable opportunity for learning and discovery, or as a circumstance more likely to lead to difficulty and frustration.

## DISCUSSION

Our review of the multicultural experience literature has documented a wide range of effects across intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational outcomes. In the process of our review, we uncovered clear themes that led us to develop a novel theoretical framework to explain the existing set of findings: the Structure–Appraisal Model of Multicultural Experiences. This model identifies two key factors that help determine the outcomes of multicultural experiences: (1) the *structure* of these experiences (breadth vs. depth), which determines which types of outcomes (intrapersonal vs. interpersonal) are most likely to be affected; and (2) the *appraisal* of the multicultural experiences as positive or negative, which determines whether and how the typical outcomes of multicultural experiences occur. We believe that our model captures some of the critical themes that are now emerging in the literature on multicultural experiences, and we hope that it will serve as a useful framework to guide future research.

### Directions for Future Research

Despite the growing amount of research on multicultural experiences over the past decade, there are still many unknowns. First, the lion's share of the literature still focuses on a handful of outcome variables, such as creativity and psychological adjustment, while other topics such as decision-making, leadership ability, group and team dynamics, and negotiations continue to be relatively understudied.

Second, we currently know little about the role of different cultural dimensions in determining the effects of multicultural experiences. Cultures differ on a variety of different dimensions (e.g., Hofstede, 1980), and the degree to which norms for those different cultural dimensions are enforced (Gelfand et al., 2011; Gelfand, 2012). Although some evidence suggests that cultural tightness–looseness acts as a reliable moderator of the effects of multicultural

experiences, especially with regard to how multicultural experiences affect creativity within multicultural teams (Chua et al., 2015), little work has explored the potential moderating effects of multicultural experiences in cultures that are independent versus interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), high versus low in power distance (Hofstede, 1980), or those that have predominantly high versus low context communication norms (Hall, 1976), for example. Since current evidence suggests that moderate amounts of cultural distance may be most effective for creativity (Chua et al., 2015; Godart et al., 2015), there is likely much more to learn about optimal levels of cultural distance on these various cultural dimensions.

Although our review suggests that deeper multicultural experiences have particularly noticeable intrapersonal effects, it also remains unclear what the threshold is for exactly how long or how deep a given multicultural experience needs to be to result in meaningful changes. Moreover, we do not have a good understanding of exactly when the effects begin to emerge, how long the effects last for, or whether individuals need to re-experience or be reminded of aspects of these experiences to produce those outcomes. It seems logical to assume that, for example, the effects of the first year of an expatriate assignment may look very different for an executive compared to the tenth year after one's eventual repatriation. Thus, similar to booster shots for vaccines, additional trips abroad may be needed to re-fresh or reactivate the psychological gains of an initial experience.

In addition, multicultural experiences may also have different impacts at different stages of one's life. Given the neural plasticity in the brain is greater for those younger in age (e.g., Doidge, 2007), multicultural experiences may be more impactful at younger ages. Indeed, recent evidence suggests that culturally immersive experiences are impactful early in life, at least in terms of the culture an individual identifies with (Martin & Shao, 2016; Martin, Shao, & Thomas, 2019), but longitudinal trends remain largely untested.

It is important to point out that our review has mostly focused on foreign culture experiences in particular, and we purposely avoided focusing on other ingroup–outgroup distinctions, such as those in the voluminous literatures on intergroup relations and organizational diversity, which were well beyond the scope of this paper. However, we believe that the findings reviewed herein, and our Structure–Appraisal Model in particular, may have



important conceptual connections with other types of intergroup experiences as well. As we noted at the outset of the paper when choosing and defining the term “multicultural experiences,” foreign cultures are only one type of group boundary, and we believe the processes we have identified here have the potential to manifest themselves when experiencing different organizational cultures (Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990) or even different regional cultures (e.g., North–South, rural–urban) of the same country, given that regional cultures can vary widely, even within a single national border (Kitayama, Ishii, Imada, Takemura, & Ramaswamy, 2006; Talhelm et al., 2014; Vandello & Cohen, 1999). In addition, because cultures are simply the norms and values that different groups agree to prioritize and abide by (Chiu & Hong, 2013), and foreign cultures in particular are only one type of ingroup–outgroup distinction, other intergroup situations, such as those involving experiences or interactions across race, gender, or political or sexual orientations might be affected in similar ways as those reviewed herein. Importantly, our Structure–Appraisal Model of Multicultural Experiences suggests two key factors in how such encounters may play out. Deeper experiences across different group boundaries may lead to intrapersonal changes via integrative processes, whereas broader experiences may produce interpersonal changes via comparative processes. In addition, the subjective appraisal of the cross-group situation as positive or negative may determine whether learning and psychological growth are likely to be enhanced or precluded.

### Practical Implications

The findings from the current review have clear practical implications for multinational organizational and educational institutions alike. In particular, the current literature shows that the particular psychological approach individuals bring to bear during their multicultural experiences, as well as specific aspects of the experience itself, are critical in determining whether and to what extent different outcomes occur.

These findings have clear implications for companies’ international assignments and universities’ study-abroad programs. Overall, the research suggests that the specific aspects of companies’ expatriate assignments, such as the extent to which employees are encouraged to interact with locals, learn the host country’s language, integrate aspects of the host culture into their identity, or feel

embedded in the local community will determine the extent to which these experiences benefit individuals, and how much payoff an organization gains from sending its employees abroad in terms of enhanced creativity or better leadership ability (e.g., Shaffer et al., 1999; Takeuchi, 2010; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). Our review of the literature suggests that companies should structure jobs to ensure that expatriates work closely with host country employees within contexts that provide substantial learning opportunities, and encourage expats to adjust and adapt to elements of the host culture. Study-abroad programs should also be structured to maximize the opportunity for students to fully experience the new country; for example, by making sure that students attend local schools or live with host families, or live in dorms that are diverse in nationality, rather than keeping the foreign environment at arms length.

The specific aspects of the context of the multicultural environment are important as well. Work situations that promote positive appraisals of situations are likely to be more conducive to creativity, adjustment, and reduced intergroup bias, compared to contexts that are threatening or difficult for one to learn about or adapt to. For both students and employees, pre-departure training and perhaps also mid-trip reminders could highlight the learning opportunities to be gained to facilitate learning and adaptation. Overall, what seems critical is not the amount of time spent abroad, or whether one lives, travels, works, or studies there, but rather, the particular psychological mindset that people bring to bear on such experiences that will make the experience(s) valuable or not.

Similar recommendations hold for individuals looking to gain unique life experiences by going to foreign countries on their own, whether to stimulate their own individual creativity, or simply to have an experience that positively changes the way they perceive the world or themselves. The typical advice by famed travel writer Rick Steves seems to be well borne out by empirical research—as much as possible, live like a local!

### CONCLUSION

The research on multicultural experiences is becoming a fascinating and increasingly relevant area of study for psychologists and organizational scholars. Notably, the main draft of this article was written during a worldwide pandemic, the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) that spread rapidly around the globe in early 2020, with economic and



societal consequences unprecedented in the authors' lifetimes. In the same period, widespread protests against police brutality and racial bias started in the Midwestern United States and spread around the entire globe within days of precipitating events. As scholars working at the intersection of psychology and organizational behavior, reviewing the current literature on multicultural experiences within the current maelstrom of modern life has highlighted the critical importance of understanding the fundamentally global world that we currently live in.

After over a decade of research on multicultural experiences, there is much we now know about the psychological and organizational effects of these experiences. However, there is also much more work for researchers to do in the future. In light of the ongoing challenges of globalization, we believe that multicultural experiences will become even more important to understand in the years and decades to come. A more recently penned sentiment from the journalist and author Thomas Friedman again seems particularly apt: "As the world gets more deeply intertwined, everyone's behavior—the values that each of us bring to this interdependent world—matters more than ever" (Friedman, 2020). We hope that the current review, and our Structure–Appraisal Model of Multicultural Experiences, will not only help researchers and practitioners understand the current state of this important and growing literature, but will also stimulate future work on how multicultural experiences affect individuals' brains, groups' behaviors, and organizations' balance sheets.

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