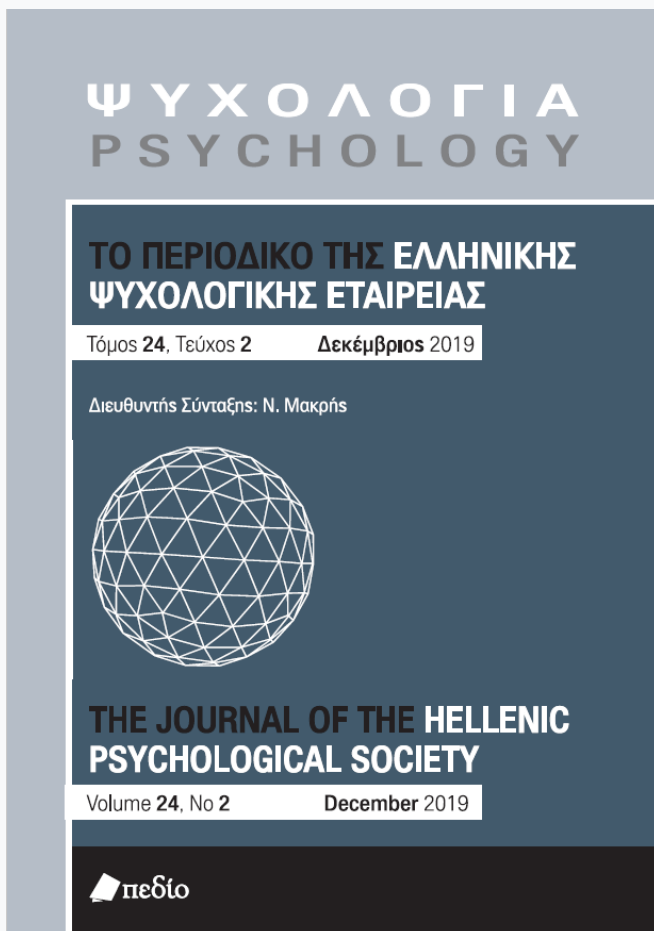


## Psychology: the Journal of the Hellenic Psychological Society

Vol 24, No 2 (2019)

Special section: Political Psychology in an 'anti'-politics era



### Assumptions of individual diversity ideology and controversial effects on acknowledging racism

*Tilemachos Iatridis*

doi: [10.12681/psy\\_hps.24916](https://doi.org/10.12681/psy_hps.24916)

Copyright © 2019, Tilemachos Iatridis



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

#### To cite this article:

Iatridis, T. (2019). Assumptions of individual diversity ideology and controversial effects on acknowledging racism. *Psychology: The Journal of the Hellenic Psychological Society*, 24(2), 36–51. [https://doi.org/10.12681/psy\\_hps.24916](https://doi.org/10.12681/psy_hps.24916)

## Assumptions of individual diversity ideology and controversial effects on acknowledging racism

TILEMACHOS IATRIDIS<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Widespread ideas about diversity are being attacked today by authoritarian neo-conservative political movements on a wide geopolitical scale. This paper focuses on those ideas celebrating individuals' diversity (ID) and extends a previous study in a Greek sample (Iatridis, 2017) which showed that ID ideas paradoxically correlated positively with both acknowledging racism as a major problem worldwide and denying the importance of racism altogether. The present paper proposes that such controversial findings may be due to an inherent ambivalence of ID ideology on the issues of difference and hierarchy. In this vein, lay accounts of social differences and representations of targets of racism were tested as mediators in the controversial relation between ID ideology and acknowledging or denying the importance of racism. In line with expectations, it was found that (a) allegedly nonhierarchical accounts of social difference (pointing to differences in individuals' style, psychological attributes, etc.) related to ID ideology, as well as to both acknowledging and denying the importance of racism; (b) ID ideas and acknowledging the importance of racism related to considering those social groups typically addressed in antiracist rhetoric in Greece (e.g. gays and immigrants), but not other minority groups, to be targets of racist discrimination. Interestingly, ID ideology was particularly sensitive to considering powerful groups (e.g. the rich and Germans) as targets of racism, and this pattern was implicated in both acknowledging and denying the importance of racism. These findings are discussed in the context of charges currently being levelled against the societal relevance of diversity ideas today.

*Keywords:* diversity; ideology; social difference; social inequalities; targets of racism.

*[P]eople have convinced themselves that what matters is psychic self-improvement: getting in touch with their feelings, eating healthy food, taking lessons in ballet or belly-dancing, immersing themselves in the wisdom of the East, jogging, learning how to 'relate', overcoming the 'fear of pleasure'. Harmless in themselves, these pursuits, elevated to a*

*program and wrapped in the rhetoric of authenticity and awareness, signify a retreat from politics.* (Lasch, 1979, p. 4)

A wave of authoritarian political movements has shaken Western liberal democracies over the past few years, reclaiming a conservative value set that selectively emphasises

1. University of Crete

\*Contact: Tilemachos Iatridis, Department of Philosophy & Social Studies, Gallos University Campus, Rethymno 74100, Greece. Email: iatridis@fks.uoc.gr

homogeneity rather than diversity and self-determination. In this context, antidiversity and overtly discriminatory discourses have been circulating and publicly expressed on a scale that was unthinkable before. In Greece, where a government led by the Left has reluctantly affirmed diversity and minority rights on a few highly contested issues (immigrant children, gay rights, and gender identity), anti-diversity rhetoric circulates in the media and political parties in a range well beyond the reach of neo-Nazi radicalism (officially represented in the Greek parliament since 2012). The spread of these messages affects the normative standards as to what behaviours might be tolerated and what would qualify as unacceptable, and research has been quick to report such changes, for instance, a recent study (Crandall, Miller, & White II, 2018) reporting a shift in lay perceptions of social norms towards prejudice in the U.S. after Donald Trump's election. Despite variation across countries, antidiversity rhetorics typically point the finger at the alleged real or symbolic threats from Muslim migrants, as well as to the corrupt cosmopolitanism of the elites, the 'greatest bogeymen of the moment' who perhaps 'come a close second to Muslim migrants' (Tharoor, 2016). Of course, diversity itself means more than one thing (see, for instance, Ramos, Hewstone, Barreto, & Branscombe, 2017), and therefore what facet of diversity those rhetorics actually speak to is somewhat unclear. Research in social psychology, in particular, has focused on ideologies and policies of diversity such as multiculturalism and colour-blindness, in the context of intergroup relations (e.g. Guimond, de la Sablonnière, & Nugier, 2014; Rattan & Ambady, 2013). Other elements of diversity that may be relevant to current public debates are relatively underexplored, as is the case with those ideas emphasising human diversity in the choices, tastes and self-expression of *individuals*, which sustain a very wide array of social practices and legislation today.

Unlike multiculturalism and colour-blind-

ness in particular, these latter ideas about diversity emphasise both difference (like multiculturalism) and similarity (like colour-blindness) simultaneously, as is captured in the slogan 'all different, all equal' (Iatridis, 2019). In this account of diversity, cultural and other highly valued collective identities are assumed as resources for building unique identities and expressing individuality (Bauman, 2001; Giddens, 1991). We may include a great deal of domains and practices today, for instance, TV shows, fashion, advertising and social media, where individuals are invited to formulate and express their individual preferences as to their cultural, sexual and other identities, in the name of diversity. These centring-on-the-individual ideas saturate education, children's literature, self-improvement and other pop-psychology discourse, and have come to be widely seen as an essentially antiracist-antidiscriminatory worldview. In the political field these ideas penetrate very heterogeneous discourses from radical antiracism to mainstream liberalism. Yet some recent evidence suggests that we should not take the antidiscriminatory effect of the above ideas for granted. In a recent experimental study (Iatridis, 2019, Study 1), priming individual diversity (ID) messages led Greek university students to attribute the difficulties of an immigrant child to psychological factors rather than discrimination, compared with a control group. In another recent correlational study (Iatridis, 2017) addressing the lay representations of racist discrimination associated with ID ideology in a Greek community sample, the role of ID was more equivocal. Correlating negatively with social dominance orientation (SDO), as is expected from hierarchy-attenuating ideologies (Levin et al., 2012), a measure of ID ideology was mostly associated with a reductionist understanding of racism which pointed to human psychology rather than societal factors such as power and exploitation. But what is more, ID ideology controversially correlated positively with both acknowledging racism as

a major problem worldwide and downplaying or denying the importance of racism altogether. That study addressed and discussed such contradictions as part and parcel of the 'prejudice problematic' (Wetherell, 2012), and concluded that the resurgence of an individualist perspective on diversity may facilitate reductionist understandings of social inequalities and discrimination which dismiss historical relations of inequality between social groups.

This paper is an extension of the aforementioned correlational study, pointing to the wider ideological assumptions that ID ideology is immersed in. It acknowledges that ID may flexibly be used to serve controversial ends depending on the context (just like any other ideology; Crandall & Eshleman, 2003); however, it posits that the contradictory findings in Iatridis (2017) may be due to an inherent ambivalence of ID as regards two critical interrelated issues, namely *difference* and *hierarchy*. In the first place, as an egalitarian ideology ID portrays people as essentially different and simultaneously as fundamentally similar, that is, equal members of humankind (Boli & Elliott, 2008). This equivocal position on difference makes ID ideology suspicious of any categorisation on the grounds that categories allegedly divide people and thus breed inequality (Taguieff, 2001). As a result, the group membership of people belonging to minority groups may be celebrated (differences must be respected, encouraged and preserved: a plea for recognition) and simultaneously denied (differences do not matter: people should not be seen as group members at the expense of their individuality; Boli & Elliott, 2008).

Secondly and relatedly, being itself a relativist ideology, ID refuses to place any category, taste or self-expression on top of others by rhetorically questioning and negating *any* hierarchy of value. Presumably what a person believes, looks like, prefers or 'is' is worth just what any other person believes, looks like and so forth. Failure to accept and rhetorically waive this tenet in the proper context

may raise suspicions or charges of prejudice. Dumont (1986) takes issue with this particular tenet and considers it a major contradiction in what he calls 'modern ideology' (i.e., individualism), for there may be no appreciation of value within any culture without some sort of hierarchisation that would explain why something (e.g. tolerance in Western liberal societies) is worth more than something else (e.g. intolerance). Today's 'world culture of diversity' (Boli & Elliott, 2008) appears to enthusiastically adopt the relativist assumptions discussed by Dumont and deepen the contradictions they may lead to. This paper argues that the relativism in ID ideology may further have important implications and lead to a failure to make out what is at stake in racist discrimination. When it comes to social categorisations, ID relativist ideas might fuel an obfuscation of the usual asymmetries in group positions and perspectives: Presumably, it may be racist to think ill of others because they are poor, or because they are rich and powerful. It might even seem awkward to draw conclusions from social categorisations and inequalities because, in this view, what are categorisations finally worth? Thus by blurring or downplaying the role of social categorisations this reasoning would fail to make out what discrimination is most often about; it would miss how relevant social categorisations historically emerge (e.g. Reicher & Hopkins, 2001), as well as the role of 'commitment to a relative status positioning of groups in a racialized social order' (Bobo, 1999, p. 447) in racist discrimination.

### Overview of the Present Research

The ideological variables investigated in the present study as relevant to the issues of difference and hierarchy are (a) lay accounts of social differences and (b) representations of targets of racism. The accounts of social differences studied here touch on the values laypeople may draw upon to make sense of social differentiation. In lay discourse people may

differ in several accounts, for instance, wealth, culture or personality constructs: They may be open or closed to 'new experiences' in line with popular wisdom, or may differ in aspirations, taste and many more respects. Such accounts of social differences pertain to the discussion around the ambiguous issues of difference and hierarchy within ID ideology in that they may rank people openly (e.g. economic success, social standing and prestige) or only indirectly, according to Dumont (1986), as is the case with employing moral and aesthetic criteria to differentiate between people (e.g. differences in terms of tolerance, personal style, etc.). Unlike the former, hierarchical approach to social difference, in the latter, 'nonhierarchical' accounts people are presumed to differ only horizontally and differences are presumably phenomenal (e.g. in personal style). Diversity politics is anchored in that latter presumption, according to Cooper (2004). We may expect that ID ideology, with its emphasis on difference and similarity simultaneously ('we are all different, but all differences count the same'), would relate to such allegedly nonhierarchical accounts of social differences rather than to straightforwardly hierarchical views. However, nonhierarchical accounts of social differences may turn equivocal as to whether racism is an important problem indeed: it may well be racist to think ill of others (no matter who they are) but, if categories (and the inequalities they are intertwined with) do not really matter, a problem implying categorical difference and inequality such as racist discrimination may become like a ghost that lies behind everything and, at the same time, is nowhere. It might be a major problem or no problem at all, depending on how one sees it. We may, therefore, expect that 'nonhierarchical' views on social differences would relate to both acknowledging *and* denying the importance of racism.

Lay representations of targets of racism, on the other hand, may directly capture the assumed tension between ID and hierarchy issues. An outstanding question arises: Is

endorsement of ID ideology associated with identifying as targets of discrimination those minorities historically targeted by racist discrimination in the Greek context? Or would ID ideology be associated with identifying indiscriminately *any* group as a target? Levin and colleagues (2012) found an effect of multiculturalism on the reduction of prejudice towards ethnic minority groups typically addressed in multiculturalist rhetoric in the U.S. (African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans), but not towards Arab Americans and U.S. immigrants. We may expect that considering some social groups typically addressed in diversity rhetorics in Greece (such as gays and immigrants) to be targets of racist discrimination would relate to both ID ideology and acknowledging the importance of racism. However, this effect should not necessarily be generalised to other minority groups, as Levin et al. (2012) point out. Based on the reasoning unfolded above about the relativist assumptions of ID, we may expect instead that social groups which have *not* been historical targets of discrimination would relate to ID ideology and acknowledging racism.

The study presented below tested the relations of personal endorsement of ID ideology, accounts of social differences, and representations of targets of racism, with an acknowledgement of the importance of racism, in a community sample used also in Iatridis (2017). Participants' SDO, an individual difference construct measuring attitudes to intergroup (in)equality (e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), and political orientation were also measured as relevant variables.

## Method

### Participants and Data Collection

The data set featured the responses of 375 Greek participants, after the elimination of 15 respondents who were either non-Greek citizens or failed to follow the guidelines when

completing the questionnaire. Age ranged from 18 to 63 years ( $M = 31$ ,  $SD = 12.06$ ), and most respondents (67.4%) were female. Nearly half (45.1%) of the participants were university students. The remaining participants were either university graduates (30.1%), most of them teachers (23.7%), or did not hold higher education degrees and were employed mostly in the private sector (23.2%).

Data were collected from late 2014 to early 2015. The bulk of data collection was carried out by students who passed the questionnaires on to other students and nonstudents for partial course credit. Thirty-seven teachers completed the questionnaires on an electronic platform set up by the secondary-school teachers' union in Rethymnon, Crete.

### Measures

The six measures of interest in this paper are presented below in the order they appeared in questionnaires. Measures (c), (d) and (e) were also reported and analysed in Iatridis (2017). In all measures, except political orientation, response scales ranged from 1 to 7.

**(a) Accounts of social differences.** Fourteen items tapped a diverse set of possible options introduced by the phrase 'People mainly differ in', including overtly hierarchical and allegedly nonhierarchical criteria of classification. PCA with oblimin rotation produced three components (55.1% of variance): one accounting for conservative values and social prestige criteria (*People differ in: How much they love their country; How aware they are of international trends; How successful they are; How moral they are; How much they respect their cultural tradition*); another component accounting for self-oriented, mostly self-expressive values (*People differ in: How complete personalities they are; How open to new ex-*

*perience they are; How tolerant to those who differ; How smart/cool they are; Their cultural background; Their personal style*); and a last component pointing to sociostructural differences (*Their socio-economic level; Their educational level*).<sup>2</sup> Three respective aggregate variables were computed accordingly: *Prestige* ( $\alpha = .84$ ), *Self* ( $\alpha = .73$ ), and *Structure* ( $\alpha = .63$ ). Of these, Prestige and Structure may be seen as hierarchical accounts of social differences, in the sense that they openly rank people on a scale of value, and Self may be seen as an allegedly nonhierarchical account from the point of view discussed above.

**(b) Targets of discrimination.** Participants were presented with a list of 17 groups and were asked to rate how much each of these was a target of discrimination in Greece. Both typical and nontypical targets of discrimination were included in the list, and groups also varied in social status and other respects. PCA (oblimin rotation) yielded four components (58.4% of variance). Factor 1 put together the most targeted social groups, which have often suffered social exclusion: *Muslims, immigrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh, Albanians, Roma, drug-addicts*. Factor 2 mostly accounted for those groups typically addressed in official antiracist rhetoric in Greece: *Gay people, foreign immigrants (of unspecified and thus vague origin<sup>3</sup>) and black people*. Therefore this component was seen as one pointing to the normatively 'proper' targets of discrimination. Factor 3 pulled together groups defined by (low) income and social class, gender, age and ability (*the unemployed, the poor, farmers, women, the elderly and people with special needs*). These groups might perhaps have been seen as high-warmth and low-competence targets of paternalistic prejudice (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008); however, for the purposes of this study,

2. Another item, *How they stay cool with life*, was not represented well by any component.

3. Data were collected before the flows of migrants from Syria and other countries started in 2015.



it was thought that they were most likely seen as less urgent targets of discrimination. Last, Factor 4 accounted for the most powerful groups: *the rich, Americans and Germans*. The respective aggregate variables were: *Excluded* ( $\alpha = .79$ ), *Proper* ( $\alpha = .65$ ), *Non-urgent* ( $\alpha = .81$ ), and *Powerful* ( $\alpha = .72$ ).

**(c) Reported impact of racism.** Two measures for the impact of racism were used in this study: *Impact denied* comprising four items ( $\alpha = .72$ ) that denied or downplayed the importance of racism (*There may be racism in other countries but not in Greece, because racism is alien to the Greek culture; Racism is a fake problem that has been invented in order to distract people from their real problems; If all people stuck to their place and tried to face their own problems, there would be no 'racism'; We need to order our priorities and find solutions to the enormous problems that Greece is faced with, and then deal with other problems such as racism*), and *Impact major* representing two items ( $\alpha = .61$ ) that acknowledged racism as a major problem (*The rise of racism is a major problem that societies are faced with nowadays; Racism is a serious problem that is about integration and the rights of all people in our society*).

**(d) Individual diversity scale.** Here there are five items ( $\alpha = .73$ ): *The most important characteristic of people is their uniqueness; Young people can make their own unique plans that will be different from those of everyone else; Everyone should unfold in life his/her inclinations and unique potential that reside within him/her; Everyone makes his/her own way according to the choices he/she makes in life; Diversity across people is the most charming feature of human-kind*.

**(e) Social dominance orientation.** The four-item short SDO scale (Pratto et al., 2013) was used, though the scale's internal consistency was questionable ( $\alpha = .59$ ). (Sample items: *We should not push for group equality; In setting priorities, we must consider all groups [reversed]*).

**(f) Political orientation.** A single question asked participants to position themselves on a left (= 1) to right (= 10) political continuum.

## Results

The intercorrelations among variables presented in Table 1 offer an overview of the measures employed in this study in terms of their distance from participants' (non)egalitarian intergroup attitudes (SDO) and political self-positioning. Endorsement of ID correlated negatively with SDO but did not correlate significantly with political orientation. The self-centred account of social differences correlated negatively with SDO and therefore would rather pass as an egalitarian view on social difference. On the contrary, the other two accounts did not correlate with SDO, but correlated significantly (particularly the prestige-centred account) with a right-wing political orientation. As regards the targets of racism, considering Excluded and Proper groups to be targets of racism correlated negatively with SDO (suggesting again an egalitarian view), whereas considering Powerful groups to be also targeted by racism correlated positively with SDO. Correlations with the two variables standing for the reported impact of racism draw a perfectly symmetrical pattern, with acknowledging racism relating to egalitarian attitudes (low SDO) and the Left, and denying racism relating to nonegalitarian attitudes (high SDO) and the Right.

Intercorrelations present a more complex picture when one moves beyond the ideological credentials described above. As may be seen in Table 1, ID ideology correlated positively with the self-centred account of social differences (DIFself), as was expected. As might also have been expected, it did not correlate with the account pointing to social structural differences (DIFstructure), but it did correlate positively with the prestige-centred account (DIFprestige), which was an unexpected finding. On the other hand, correlations between

**Table 1**  
**Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations among all variables.**  
**Accounts of social differences (DIF), targets of discrimination (TARG), and reported impact of racism (IMP)**  
**are listed in descending means order.**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. ID ideology	6.04	.81											
2. SDO	2.07	.93	-.30***										
3. Politic	4.27	1.84	.09	.22***									
4. DIFself	5.34	.89	.33***	-.16**	.10								
5. DIFstructure	5.16	1.28	-.01	.04	.11*	.45***							
6. DIFprestige	4.41	1.22	.25***	.06	.36***	.59***	.44***						
7. TARGexcluded	6.15	.85	.09	-.20***	-.08	.09	.11*	-.01					
8. TARGproper	6.10	.84	.12*	-.20***	-.06	.05	-.01	-.01	.50***				
9. TARGnon-urgent	4.05	1.14	.03	-.04	-.03	.12*	.13*	.10	.37***	.41***			
10. TARGpowerful	3.84	1.42	.01	.15**	.09	.15**	.07	.14*	.22***	.12*	.34***		
11. IMPmajor	5.90	.94	.25***	-.34***	-.21***	.17**	-.02	-.01	.25***	.25***	.09	.10	
12. IMPdenied	2.88	1.39	.12*	.40***	.30***	.11*	.15**	.39***	-.08	-.05	.12*	.22***	-.20***

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . For political orientation (Politic), the scale was anchored: 1 = Left, 10 = Right.



ID and targets of racism were weak and largely nonsignificant. Only Proper groups correlated with ID at a significant level. Moving further down, the bottom part in Table 1 captures the ambivalence of ID ideology discussed above: the positive correlations with both acknowledging and denying the importance of racism. Interestingly, the only other variable correlating with acknowledging and denying racism simultaneously was DIFself. DIFprestige, on the contrary, correlated only, and quite strongly, with denying racism, a pattern applying also to the other hierarchical account of difference (i.e. DIFstructure). Inspection of Table 1 further suggests two clear patterns as regards the associations between the reported impact of racism and representations of targets. First, the more participants considered Excluded and Proper groups (i.e. the groups considered to be the targets of racism par excellence as respective means suggest) as targets of racism, the more they acknowledged that racism was a major problem. Second, the more they considered that Non-urgent and Powerful groups were targeted by racism (both seen as less typical targets, according to the means in Table 1), the more they denied that racism was a problem at all.

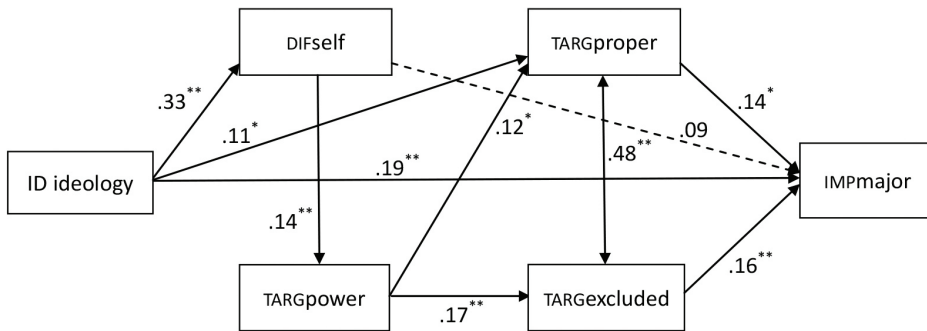
There are more ways than one to unravel the threads in these intercorrelations. However, the self-centred, nonhierarchical account of social differences stands out in the partly overlapping spaces around acknowledging the importance of racism, on the one hand, and denying that racism is a problem, on the other, for two reasons: first, it controversially related to both acknowledging and denying racism (just like ID ideology) and, second, it also related to the less typical targets of racism (Powerful and Non-urgent) rather than to more typical group targets. Powerful groups (considered to be targets of racism) also manifested themselves as a key variable, which is worth investigating further.

Path analyses were conducted to probe the composite interrelations among these

variables further. Informed by the theoretical model proposed by Guimond et al. (2013), which accounts for the relations among shared representations of diversity and personal endorsement of diversity ideologies, several models were tested in which accounts of social differences and targets of racism entered the analysis as mediators between ID ideology and the reported impact of racism. Since DIFstructure did not relate to ID, the only accounts of social differences to enter the analysis were DIFself and DIFprestige. In the models finally adopted for the sake of clarity, these two variables entered the analysis individually (i.e., either DIFself or DIFprestige was included), with all targets-of-racism variables entering the analysis simultaneously. Yet, in most analyses, entering Non-urgent groups complicated the results to the extent that interrelations between the other variables of interest were blurred and uninterpretable, and therefore it was decided to eliminate that variable and focus on the other three targets-of-racism groups. All analyses were run in Amos 23 and used 1,000 bootstrap samples.

### Acknowledging Racism as a Problem

The model presented in Figure 1 had the best fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 2.129$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p = .831$ , CFI = 1.000, RMSEA < .0001) and suggests several associations of varied complexity between the variables in question. The direct path from ID to acknowledging racism remains significant in this model ( $\beta = .187$ ,  $S.E. = .059$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but there are another three more complicated paths to consider. The first is a path from ID to Proper targets of racism ( $\beta = .114$ ,  $S.E. = .053$ ,  $p = .025$ ) and from Proper groups to acknowledging racism ( $\beta = .142$ ,  $S.E. = .062$ ,  $p = .011$ ). The indirect effect of ID (through Proper groups) on acknowledging racism was significant,  $\beta = .026$ , 95% CI [.006, .054],  $p = .015$ , suggesting that Proper targets of racism mediated the relationship be-



**Figure 1.** Path model with the self-centred account of social differences (DIFself) and representations of targets of racism as mediators between ID ideology and acknowledging the importance of racism.

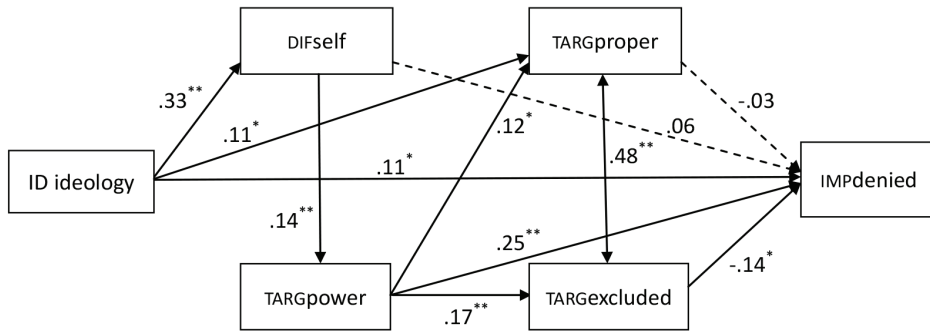
**Note.** \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .005$ . Path coefficients are standardised.

tween the other two variables. The second is a complex path from ID to DIFself ( $\beta = .331$ ,  $S.E. = .053$ ,  $p < .001$ ), from DIFself to Powerful groups ( $\beta = .145$ ,  $S.E. = .082$ ,  $p = .005$ ), and from Powerful to acknowledging racism through Proper targets of racism ( $\beta = .117$ ,  $S.E. = .030$ ,  $p = .022$ ). The indirect effect of ID on acknowledging racism through this path was significant,  $\beta = .001$ , 95% CI [.000, .003],  $p = .030$ . The third is a related path linking ID to Powerful through DIFself, Powerful to Excluded groups ( $\beta = .166$ ,  $S.E. = .027$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and Excluded to acknowledging racism ( $\beta = .157$ ,  $S.E. = .061$ ,  $p = .005$ ), with the indirect effect of ID on acknowledging racism through this path also being significant,  $\beta = .002$ , 95% CI [.000, .006],  $p = .005$ . Importantly, as regards the targets of racism, no other model had a good fit to the data, and therefore the relations between the targets-of-racism variables displayed in these paths, however complex, may not be reliably actualised in any other way. Note also that in this model the association between DIFself and acknowledging racism was weak and non-significant ( $\beta = .086$ ,  $S.E. = .054$ ,  $p = .092$ ;  $\beta = .033$ , 95% CI [-.004, .075] for the indirect effect of ID). As regards more

broadly the impact of the self-centred account of social differences, it had only an indirect effect on acknowledging racism ( $\beta = .008$ , 95% CI [.001, .018],  $p = .006$ ) and, importantly, that effect was contingent upon considering Powerful groups to be targets of racism. Notably, Powerful also had a significant indirect effect on acknowledging racism through the two typical targets-of-racism groups ( $\beta = .051$ , 95% CI [.021, .091],  $p = .002$ ).

### Denying Racism as a Problem

The models presented next shed light on two questions invited by the intercorrelations presented in Table 1: first, how the self-centred account of social differences and representations of targets of racism relate to denying the impact of racism; and, second, how the prestige-centred account of social differences and representations of targets of racism also relate to denying the impact of racism. Figure 2 portrays a model where the self-centred account of social differences mediates the association between ID ideology and Powerful groups, and Powerful has an effect on denying racism either directly or via Excluded groups. This model had an excellent fit to



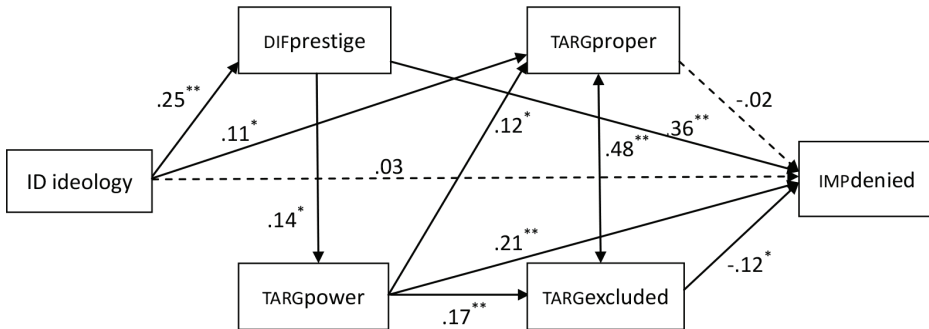
**Figure 2. Path model with the self-centred account of social differences (DIFself) and representations of targets of racism as mediators between ID ideology and denying the importance of racism.**

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .005$ . Path coefficients are standardised.

the data ( $\chi^2 = 1.733$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .785$ ,  $CFI = 1.000$ ,  $RMSEA < .0001$ ) and suggests a significant direct path from ID to denying racism ( $\beta = .107$ ,  $S.E. = .090$ ,  $p = .043$ ), as well as a significant complex path from ID to DIFself ( $\beta = .331$ ,  $S.E. = .053$ ,  $p < .001$ ), from DIFself to Powerful groups ( $\beta = .145$ ,  $S.E. = .082$ ,  $p = .005$ ) and from the Powerful to denying racism ( $\beta = .251$ ,  $S.E. = .050$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with the indirect effect of ID on denying racism through this path being significant,  $\beta = .011$ , 95% CI [.003, .022],  $p = .005$ . Alternatively there was another, even more complex path from ID to DIFself, from DIFself to Powerful, from Powerful to Excluded groups ( $\beta = .166$ ,  $S.E. = .027$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and from Excluded to denying racism ( $\beta = -.141$ ,  $S.E. = .094$ ,  $p = .015$ ), with the indirect effect of ID on denying racism through this path being significant too,  $\beta = -.006$ , 95% CI [-.017, .000],  $p = .047$ . No other model had a good fit to the data as regards the targets of racism. As regards the impact of the self-centred account of social differences, it had only an indirect effect on denying racism ( $\beta = .031$ , 95% CI [.008, .063],  $p = .005$ ) which was again contingent upon Powerful groups. What the present analysis adds is the notice-

ably controversial role of Powerful: On the one hand it was clearly and positively linked to denying racism, and on the other hand its indirect effect on denying racism, through its effect on Excluded, had a negative sign,  $\beta = -.035$ , 95% CI [-.065, -.011],  $p = .004$ . In other words, the more participants thought powerful groups were targeted by racism, the more they denied racism as a problem and, at the same time, indirectly acknowledged the importance of racism: without doubt a controversial pattern.

Figure 3 portrays a model where the prestige-centred account of social differences relates to ID ideology and Powerful groups, and the Powerful has an effect on denying racism, either directly or via Excluded groups. This model also had an excellent fit to the data ( $\chi^2 = 2.613$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = .624$ ,  $CFI = 1.000$ ,  $RMSEA < .0001$ ). However, the direct path from ID to denying racism was non-significant in this model ( $\beta = .033$ ,  $S.E. = .082$ ,  $p = .492$ ), suggesting full mediation by other variables. The analysis suggested a significant path from ID to DIFprestige ( $\beta = .253$ ,  $S.E. = .075$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and from DIFprestige to denying racism ( $\beta = .358$ ,  $S.E. = .055$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\beta =$



**Figure 3.** Path model with the prestige-centred account of social differences (DIFprestige) and representations of targets of racism as mediators between ID ideology and denying the importance of racism.

**Note.** \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .005$ . Path coefficients are standardised.

.099, 95% CI [.050, .158],  $p = .002$ , for the indirect effect of ID); another significant indirect path from ID to DIFprestige, DIFprestige to Powerful groups ( $\beta = .137$ ,  $S.E. = .059$ ,  $p = .007$ ), and Powerful groups to denying racism ( $\beta = .206$ ,  $S.E. = .047$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with the indirect effect of ID on denying racism through this path being significant,  $\beta = .008$ , 95% CI [.001, .019],  $p = .021$ ; and, last, an indirect path from ID to DIFprestige, from DIFprestige to Powerful groups, from Powerful to Excluded ( $\beta = .166$ ,  $S.E. = .027$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and from Excluded to denying racism ( $\beta = -.119$ ,  $S.E. = .088$ ,  $p = .029$ ), with the indirect effect of ID on denying racism through this latter path being marginally significant,  $\beta = -.006$ , 95% CI [-.016, .000],  $p = .051$ . As regards the impact of the prestige-centred account of social differences, it had a significant, relatively strong direct effect on denying racism as mentioned above, as well as an indirect effect through considering Powerful groups to be targets of racism ( $\beta = .024$ , 95% CI [.004, .054],  $p = .022$ ). As in the model presented in Figure 2, in this model, too, Powerful groups were positively linked to denying racism, whereas their indirect effect on denying racism (through

their effect on Excluded) had a negative sign,  $\beta = -.029$ , 95% CI [-.055, -.008],  $p = .005$ .

## Discussion

Widespread ideas about diversity are being challenged today by a flood of authoritarian neoconservative political movements across Europe and the U.S. This paper has focused on a particular facet of diversity ideology which celebrates the uniqueness and absolute value of each individual's difference from other people: a set of ideas that, in a broadly defined antidiscrimination camp, are widely held as essentially egalitarian and antidiscriminatory. However, a recent study (Iatridis, 2017) found that individual diversity (ID) ideas controversially related positively to acknowledging the importance of racism and, at the same time, denying that racism is a serious problem. Extending those controversial findings, the present paper proposes that they might be due to the inherent ambivalence of ID ideology on the issues of difference and hierarchy, which may have important unwanted implications when it comes to racist discrimination for two interrelated reasons: First,

as an egalitarian ideology valuing diversity, ID celebrates difference and, at the same time, may be suspicious towards difference because the latter allegedly divides people and breeds inequality (Boli & Elliott, 2008; Taguieff, 2001). This may mean that differences are simultaneously celebrated and negated: presumably, it may be racist to ignore differences between people, and may also be racist to see differences among them. Second, as a relativist ideology, ID refuses to place any category, taste or self-expression on top of others, and may rhetorically question any hierarchy of value (because all differences presumably count the same). This may result in obscuring the cultural preferences that ID ideology is immersed in (Dumont, 1986) and, moreover, may lead to a failure to make out what is at stake in racist discrimination. ID relativist ideas may blur the asymmetries in group positions and perspectives typically involved in discrimination (e.g. Bobo, 1999), and therefore miss what racist discrimination perhaps is about.

In line with this reasoning, lay accounts of social differences and representations of targets of racism were tested as mediators in the controversial relation between ID ideology and acknowledging or denying the importance of racism. It was expected that allegedly nonhierarchical accounts of social difference – pointing to differences in individuals' style, psychological attributes, etc. – would relate to ID ideology, as well as to both acknowledging and denying the importance of racism. It was also expected that ID ideas and acknowledging the importance of racism would relate to considering those social groups typically addressed in diversity rhetorics in Greece (e.g. gays and immigrants), but not other minority groups, to be targets of racist discrimination. Rather than to other minority groups, ID ideology and acknowledging racism were expected to relate to social groups which have *not* been targets of discrimination historically. Results from path analyses drew a composite

nexus of relations between variables, which partly confirmed these expectations and also point in new directions.

As regards the acknowledgement of racism as an important problem today, the results suggest two ways in which accounts of social differences and targets of racism mediate the relationship between ID ideology and acknowledging the importance of racism. The first way is the expected mediating role of considering those social groups featuring in official antiracist rhetorics to be targets of racism (gay people, foreign immigrants and black people). Importantly, other minority groups which were also considered to be highly targeted by racism (such as Muslims, immigrants from Pakistan and Bangladesh, and Roma) did not mediate the effect of ID on acknowledging racism: a finding that extends past research on the effects of diversity ideologies on prejudices suggesting that those effects would apply only to the groups the ideology in question explicitly refers to (Levin et al., 2012). The second way is more intriguing and less intuitive and brings together the centred-on-the-self, 'nonhierarchical' account of social differences and the idea that powerful groups (the rich, Germans and Americans) may also be targets of racism. Interestingly, the latter worries about powerful groups mediated the expected relation between the self-centred (nonhierarchical) account of social differences and the acknowledgement of racism as a problem. In this respect, the disregard for hierarchies and preferences of any group over any other (an assumed common element in ID ideology and in allegedly nonhierarchical accounts of social differences) paradoxically amounted here to being preferentially sensitive to the treatment of powerful groups in particular. The underlying idea, perhaps, is that any kind of animosity against *any* group is a sign of prejudiced motives and attitudes, and therefore powerful groups which have been chronically (such as the rich) or coincidentally (such as Germans amidst the economic crisis

in Greece) targets of animosity may allegedly also experience racist discrimination just like other, more typical targets. A lingering question would be why *particularly* powerful groups, rather than other minorities that are nontypical targets of discrimination, were selectively adopted in this respect. At any rate, this selectivity may strip conflicts of their historical content and in effect depoliticise racist discrimination, reducing it to decontextualised moral questions.

Considering powerful groups to be targets of discrimination was also, and more directly, a means to *deny* the importance of racism. As the results suggest, saying that powerful groups were also targeted by discrimination (albeit less so than other, more typical targets) served as an excuse for downplaying the importance of racism or eroding the basis of speaking of discrimination altogether. Interestingly, when it comes to predictors of denying the importance of racism, both 'nonhierarchical' (centred on the self) and hierarchical (centred on differences in prestige) accounts of social differences served as links between ID ideology and considering powerful groups to be targets of racism. However, hierarchical prestige-centred beliefs about social differences clearly mediated the effect of ID ideology on denying the importance of racism, whereas, as expected, self-centred accounts played an equivocal role and were implicated in both patterns of acknowledging and patterns of denying the importance of racism. As had been assumed, under the impact of relativist ideas about differences, racism, like a ghost, might be seen as a major problem or no problem at all, depending on one's point of view. A puzzling finding, however, is that ID ideology did correlate positively with the prestige-oriented hierarchical account of social differences. Why would a relativist, egalitarian set of ideas such as ID correlate with a traditionalist, conservative-like account of difference? The results cannot shed light on this, but we can assume that other variables

might have been at work. An alternative interpretation might be that both prestige-centred and self-centred accounts of social difference were anchored in *individual* differences (as opposed to the group-based structure-centred account), and thus an individual versus group-level dimension may have been implicitly active. Another interpretation might point to the diffusion of ID assumptions to such a degree that adherence to these ideas, in the context of a research study on diversity, might have been highly normative even for those respondents adhering to other, more conservative views on social differences. If respondents espoused diversity ideas that strongly, thanks to this particular context, a question would be whether they would also place value on those ideas in less normative contexts.

The study of which this paper is an extension pointed out 'the common paradox that people may adhere to egalitarian postures and beliefs as to intergroup relations and, at the same time, dismiss inequality between groups as the outcome of historical intergroup arrangements and politics'. (Iatridis, 2017, p. 256). At the end of the day, what the present paper adds is the contention and evidence that this paradox may be due to popular assumptions of ID ideology about difference and hierarchy, which result in losing track of the historical power issues and social inequalities behind racism, and equivocally leaning towards concerns about the fate and treatment of powerful groups. It should go without saying that this paradox may have important political implications, in the context of charges against the elitist origins of diversity ideologies such as those being levelled today by right-wing populist and radical movements. Although they are fuelled by political tactics and are often instigated by other political or economic elites, these charges may be accurate to the extent that they identify an elitist element in popular individualistic assumptions related to diversity, as another recent study has shown (Iatridis, 2019, Study 2). This point



is currently being made also by scholars such as Nancy Fraser (2017) who critically question the progressive liberal stances and worldviews of privileged social groups in the face of today's growing social inequalities.

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Limitations as to the design, measures and sample in this survey have been acknowledged by Iatridis (2017). Being largely exploratory and cross-sectional, this research leaves no room for claims of causality, and the sample, which features mostly students and teachers, two groups leaning heavily towards ID ideology, leaves little room for generalisability claims. Last, the impact of SDO and political orientation is definitely worth investigating further, and these variables might next fruitfully be introduced in the path models as control variables.

The composition of the sample issue reaches beyond generalisability and should be systematically addressed in future research. Participants' socioeconomic, educational and ideological backgrounds should be expected to moderate the meanings associated with and the impact exerted by ID ideology, particularly on issues implicating hierarchies and inequality. Diversity ideas are not only forcefully attacked by authoritarian politicians today, but are also being criticised as an ideological lens of intellectuals and the educated middle classes, which may misdirect attention away from current social conflicts and broadening inequalities (e.g. Halimi, 2016). If that is the case, and given that ID ideas largely saturate institutional discourses and are thereby normative in certain contexts, those privileged groups should express and respond to the worldviews associated with ID ideology and messages better than other social groups, as past research on cultural norms and group inequalities would suggest (e.g., Deschamps, Lorenzi-Cioldi, & Meyer, 1982; Lorenzi-Cioldi & Chatard, 2006; Stephens, Markus, &

Townsend, 2007). Participants' political views and orientation, measured better than via the rough measure adopted here, also deserve an important place in a future mapping of the social uses and meanings attached to the individualist ideology of diversity.

### References

- Bauman, Z. (2001). Identity in the globalizing world. *Social Anthropology*, 9(2), 121-129.
- Bobo, L. D. (1999). Prejudice as group position: Microfoundations of a sociological approach to racism and race relations. *Journal of Social Issues*, 55(3), 445-472. doi:10.1111/0022-4537.00127
- Boli, J., & Elliott, M. A. (2008). Façade diversity: The individualization of cultural difference. *International Sociology*, 23(4), 540-560. doi:10.1177/0268580908090727
- Cooper, D. (2004). *Challenging diversity: Rethinking equality and the value of difference*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Crandall, C. S., & Eshleman, A. (2003). A justification-suppression model of the expression and experience of prejudice. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129(3), 414-446. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.129.3.414
- Crandall, C. S., Miller, J. M., & White II, M. H. (2018). Changing norms following the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election: The Trump effect on prejudice. *Social Psychological & Personality Science*, 9, 186-192. doi:10.1177/1948550617750735
- Cuddy, A. J., Fiske, S. T., & Glick, P. (2008). Warmth and competence as universal dimensions of social perception: The stereotype content model and the BIAS map. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 40, 61-149. doi:10.1016/S0065-2601(07)00002-0
- Deschamps, J.-C., Lorenzi-Cioldi, F., & Meyer, G. (1982). *L' échec scolaire: Élève modèle ou modèles d'élève*. Lausanne: Favre.
- Dumont, L. (1986). *Essays on individualism: Modern ideology in anthropological perspective*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Fraser, N. (2017). Progressive neoliberalism versus reactionary populism: A Hobson's choice. In H. Geiselberger (Ed.), *The Great Regression* (pp. 56-64). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

- Halimi, S. (2016, December). Trump, the know-nothing victor. *Le Monde Diplomatique – English edition*. Retrieved from <http://mondediplo.com>
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Guimond, S., Crisp, R. J., De Oliveira, P., Kamiejski, R., Kteily, N., Kuepper, B., ... & Zick, A. (2013). Diversity policy, social dominance, and intergroup relations: Predicting prejudice in changing social and political contexts. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 104(6), 941-958. doi:10.1037/a0032069
- Guimond, S., de la Sablonnière, R., & Nugier, A. (2014). Living in a multicultural world: Intergroup ideologies and the societal context of intergroup relations. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 25(1), 142-188. doi:10.1080/10463283.2014.957578
- Iatridis, T. (2019). The Janus of diversity: May the ideology of individual diversity rationalize social inequalities? *Political Psychology*, 40, 183-201. doi:10.1111/pops.12502
- Iatridis, T. (2017). Individual diversity and lay representations of racism: Persistence of the 'prejudice problematic.' *Hellenic Journal of Psychology*, 14(3), 242-259.
- Lasch, C. (1979). *The culture of narcissism: American life in an age of diminishing expectations*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Levin, S., Matthews, M., Guimond, S., Sidanius, J., Pratto, F., Kteily, N., ... & Dover, T. (2012). Assimilation, multiculturalism, and colorblindness: Mediated and moderated relationships between social dominance orientation and prejudice. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(1), 207-212. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2011.06.019
- Lorenzi-Cioldi, F., & Chatard, A. (2006). The cultural norm of individualism and group status: Implications for social comparisons. In S. Guimond (Ed.), *Social comparison and social psychology: Understanding cognition, intergroup relations, and culture* (pp. 264-282). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Pratto, F., Çıdam, A., Stewart, A. L., Zeineddine, F. B., Aranda, M., Aiello, A., ... & Eicher, V. (2013). Social dominance in context and in individuals: Contextual moderation of robust effects of social dominance orientation in 15 languages and 20 countries. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 4(5), 587-599. doi:10.1177/1948550612473663
- Ramos, M. R., Hewstone, M., Barreto, M., & Branscombe, N. R. (2017). The opportunities and challenges of diversity: Explaining its impact on individuals and groups. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 46(7), 793-806. doi:10.1002/ejsp.2261
- Rattan, A., & Ambady, N. (2013). Diversity ideologies and intergroup relations: An examination of colorblindness and multiculturalism. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 43(1), 12-21. doi:10.1002/ejsp.1892
- Reicher, S., & Hopkins, N. (2001). Psychology and the end of history: A critique and a proposal for the psychology of social categorization. *Political Psychology*, 22(2), 383-407. doi:10.1111/0162-895X.00246
- Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social dominance: An intergroup theory of social hierarchy and oppression*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Stephens, N. M., Markus, H. R., & Townsend, S. S. (2007). Choice as an act of meaning: The case of social class. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93(5), 814-830. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.93.5.814
- Taguieff, P. A. (2001). *The force of prejudice: On racism and its doubles*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tharoor, I. (2016, June 29). Everyone hates the elites. Even the elites. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com>
- Wetherell, M. (2012). The prejudice problematic. In J. Dixon & M. Levine (Eds.), *Beyond prejudice: Extending the social psychology of conflict, inequality and social change* (pp. 158-178). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

## Παραδοχές της Ιδεολογίας της Ατομικής Διαφορετικότητας και Αντιφαστικές Επιδράσεις ως προς την Αναγνώριση Ρατσισμού

ΤΗΛΕΜΑΧΟΣ ΙΑΤΡΙΔΗΣ<sup>1</sup>

### ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Δημοφιλείς και διαδεδομένες ιδέες γύρω από τη 'διαφορετικότητα' δέχονται σήμερα επίθεση από αυταρχικά νεοσυντηρητικά κινήματα σε ευρεία γεωπολιτική κλίμακα. Εστιάζοντας συγκεκριμένα σε ιδέες που εξαιρούν την αξία της διαφορετικότητας κάθε ατόμου, η συμβολή αυτή αποτελεί συνέχεια προηγούμενης μελέτης σε ελληνικό δείγμα (Iatridis, 2017), που έδειξε ότι οι συγκεκριμένες ιδέες είχαν κατά παράδοξο και αντιφαστικό τρόπο θετική συνάφεια τόσο με την αναγνώριση του ρατσισμού ως κορυφαίο πρόβλημα διεθνώς, όσο και με την καθολική άρνηση της ύπαρξης ρατσισμού. Η παρούσα συμβολή υποδεικνύει ότι η αντίφαση αυτή είναι πιθανό να οφείλεται στην εγγενή αμφισημία της ιδεολογίας της διαφορετικότητας απέναντι σε ζητήματα διαφοράς και ιεραρχίας. Υπό το πρίσμα αυτό, η έρευνα που παρουσιάζεται εξετάζει τον ρόλο που παίζουν οι κοινωνικές αναπαραστάσεις για τις κοινωνικές διαφορές γενικότερα, καθώς και για το ποιοι είναι οι στόχοι-θύματα του ρατσισμού, ως διαμεσολαβητικοί παράγοντες μεταξύ της ιδεολογίας της διαφορετικότητας, αφενός, και της αναγνώρισης ή άρνησης της σοβαρότητας του ρατσισμού, αφετέρου. Σε συμφωνία με τις υποθέσεις, τα αποτελέσματα δείχνουν ότι: α) η ιδεολογία της διαφορετικότητας και η αντιφαστική, ταυτόχρονη αναγνώριση και άρνηση του ρατσισμού σχετίζονται με κατά τεκμήριο 'μη-ιεραρχικές' εξηγήσεις των κοινωνικών διαφορών (που παραπέμπουν σε διαφορές των ατόμων ως προς το στυλ, τα ψυχολογικά χαρακτηριστικά τους, κ.α.), β) η ιδεολογία της διαφορετικότητας και η αναγνώριση της σοβαρότητας του ρατσισμού σχετίζονται με τη θεώρηση ως στόχων ρατσισμού κυρίως των κοινωνικών ομάδων που αναδεικνύει η αντιρατσιστική ρητορική (gay και μετανάστες), όχι όμως και άλλων μειονοτικών κοινωνικών ομάδων. Είναι ενδιαφέρον ότι, στα συγκεκριμένα ευρήματα, η ιδεολογία της διαφορετικότητας υπήρξε ιδιαίτερα ευαίσθητη στη θεώρηση ως στόχων ρατσισμού ισχυρών κοινωνικών ομάδων (π.χ. πλούσιοι, Γερμανοί) – μοτίβο που ενέχονταν τόσο στην αναγνώριση, όσο και στην άρνηση ρατσισμού. Τα ευρήματα αυτά συζητούνται σε σχέση με την κριτική που δέχονται σήμερα οι ιδέες γύρω από την διαφορετικότητα, σε ό,τι αφορά τις κοινωνικές τους συνέπειες και προεκτάσεις.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: διαφορετικότητα, ιδεολογία, κοινωνικές ανισότητες, κοινωνικές διαφορές, στόχοι ρατσισμού

1. Πανεπιστήμιο Κρήτης

\*Στοιχεία επικοινωνίας: Τηλέμαχος Ιατρίδης, Τμήμα Φιλοσοφικών και Κοινωνικών Σπουδών, Πανεπιστημιούπολη Γάλλου, Ρέθυμνο 74100 Κρήτη. Email: iatridis@fks.uoc.gr