

# A socio-ecological perspective on psychological well-being in a culturally diverse context: The role of perceived national multicultural norms<sup>☆</sup>

Colleen Ward <sup>a,1</sup>, Jaimee Stuart <sup>b,2,\*</sup>, Johannes A. Karl <sup>c,3</sup>

<sup>a</sup> School of Psychology, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

<sup>b</sup> United Nations University International Institute for Software Technology, Macao Special Administrative Region of China

<sup>c</sup> School of Psychology, Dublin City University, Ireland

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## ABSTRACT

The research examined perceived national norms for multiculturalism, Multicultural Contact (MC), Multicultural Ideology (MI) and Multicultural Policies and Practices (MPP), as associated with well-being in a community sample. One hundred and twenty-five British Indians and 250 British Whites completed an online survey with measures of Normative Multiculturalism, belonging, and psychological well-being (positive affect, flourishing, and life satisfaction). A multi-group mediational model was tested with direct and indirect (via belonging) paths to well-being. Results demonstrated significant direct and indirect associations of MC on well-being for Indians and indirect associations for Whites. MPP produced the same indirect pathways, but only for Indians. MI was not significantly related either to belonging or well-being. The findings are discussed in relation to broader theorizing on multiculturalism and their practical implications in the British socio-political context.

Cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity has been steadily increasing within national borders in settler nations, bringing both prospects and perils for individuals, groups, communities, and societies (Crisp & Turner, 2011; Hofhuis et al., 2015; Kaufman & Goodwin, 2018). There is now a substantial body of research on the impact of diversity on intergroup relations and social cohesion at the national level (e.g., Koopmans & Schaeffer, 2016; Van der Meer and Tolsma (2014)). However, there is also evidence that cultural diversity impacts the subjective well-being of those living within culturally plural contexts. On one hand, interacting with outgroup members can heighten stress and anxiety (Toosi et al., 2012); on the other, increasing contextual diversity can lead to greater subjective well-being with perceptions of group differences diminishing over time (Bai et al., 2020). A socio-ecological approach to subjective well-being provides insights into these processes and outcomes.

Rooted in Bronfenbrenner's (1992) Ecological Systems Theory, the socio-ecological model of health is based on the premise that contextual factors exert significant influences on well-being. Physical, social, economic, cultural, and political factors operate across

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<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [stuart@unu.edu](mailto:stuart@unu.edu) (J. Stuart).

<sup>1</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4010-8932>

<sup>2</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4376-1913>

<sup>3</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5166-0728>

group, institutional, community, and societal levels to interact with personal attributes and predict adaptive outcomes (Helliwell & Putnam, 2013; Richard et al., 2011). Among these factors are diversity climates, policies, and ideologies, which can encourage or discourage the inclusion of diverse peoples and can herald or hinder progress toward minority recognition and subjective well-being (Marks et al., 2018; Vedder et al., 2006). In this paper, we examine multiculturalism as a diversity-receptive contextual influence on psychological well-being.

### Defining multiculturalism and adopting a normative approach

Drawing on theoretically grounded work by Berry (2013), our definition of multiculturalism incorporates socio-demographic, ideological, and policy components. More specifically, multicultural societies are characterized by: 1) intercultural contact amongst culturally diverse communities (Multicultural Contact, MC); 2) a widespread ideology that diversity is valuable and should be accommodated (Multicultural Ideology, MI); and 3) public policies and practices (Multicultural Policies and Practices, MPP) that support diversity and ensure equitable participation for *all* ethnocultural groups (Berry & Ward, 2016; Ward et al., 2018). This tripartite model of multiculturalism may be examined with objective indicators of contact, ideology, and policy, such as information derived from national censuses, international surveys, and policy databases; however, studies that have examined both objective and perceived indicators of multiculturalism have suggested that perceptions exert a more powerful and proximal influence on key social and psychological outcomes (Guimond et al., 2013; Koopmans & Schaeffer, 2016; Van Assche et al., 2016).

Extending the theory and research by Guimond et al., (2013, 2014) on intergroup ideologies, diversity policies, and norms, Stuart and Ward (2019) highlighted the importance of “everyday multiculturalism,” that is, how individuals observe, understand and interpret their mundane intercultural encounters. They introduced the construct of normative multiculturalism, referring to the extent to which individuals perceive interactions among culturally diverse groups, diversity-valuing ideologies, and multicultural policies and practices to be common or normative in their society. Norms, whether “real” or “perceived,” are important because they define accepted standards of behavior and function as a major source of social influence; they act as social guides and provide the context for judging what is commonplace or rare, right or wrong, just or unjust. Moreover, there is ample evidence from experimental and longitudinal research that diversity and inclusion norms have substantive impacts on intercultural experiences and outcomes (Nesdale et al., 2005; Tropp et al., 2016).

### Multicultural norms and subjective well-being

Research examining associations between multicultural norms and well-being in the context of the wider society is sparse; however, there is evidence to suggest that multicultural contact, ideology, and policy can foster positive outcomes for immigrant and minority groups. Multicultural ideologies are associated with lower levels of prejudice and more positive attitudes toward immigrants in the general population (Urbiola et al., 2017) and with greater cultural security (a sense that aspects of one's culture have a secure status in society; Berry, 2017) and lower levels of perceived discrimination in immigrants themselves (Neto & Neto, 2016). Multicultural policies support cultural maintenance for immigrant and minority communities and promote their equitable participation in the wider society. More inclusive and multicultural policies have been linked to positive indicators of well-being in immigrants (Marks et al., 2018; Vedder et al., 2006), including greater life satisfaction (Jackson & Doerschler, 2016). Social, political, and economic participation in culturally plural societies requires exposure to and interaction with diverse groups. If groups lead parallel but separate lives, their society is segregated rather than multicultural, and this can have harmful consequences for subjective well-being (Miller et al., 2009; Tip et al., 2019).

For the most part, studies that have specifically focused on perceived multicultural norms and well-being have been undertaken in educational contexts. As educational institutions reflect the norms and values of the wider society, research in these contexts can offer clues as to how multicultural norms function to foster or hinder psychological well-being more broadly. Along these lines, Le et al. (2009) reported that school multiculturalism, defined in terms of perceived norms for intercultural contact, valuing racial harmony, and implementing inclusive practices in the school setting, is associated with greater subjective happiness in minority students. Relatedly, Schachner et al.'s (2019) research with secondary students in culturally diverse classrooms found that perceived norms for both equality and inclusion (i.e., the promotion of positive intergroup contact) and cultural pluralism (i.e., the endorsement of multicultural ideology and associated practices) lead to an increased sense of belonging in both immigrant and non-immigrant students, and, in turn, to greater life satisfaction.

With this background, Ward et al. (2020) examined the relationship between immigrants' perceptions of normative multiculturalism and their psychological well-being. Surveying first-generation Korean immigrants in New Zealand, they tested a mediational model with direct associations of MC, MI and MPP on psychological well-being and indirect associations through belonging. As expected, both MI and MPP had significant positive direct associations with psychological well-being as well as positive indirect associations via increased belonging. Contrary to their hypothesis, MC was neither related to belonging nor well-being. Based on related studies of New Zealand Koreans, the researchers suggested that the absence of significant MC associations might be attributed to the non-normative and sub-optimal multicultural contact experienced by this group. A further examination of the relationship of MC to belonging and well-being undertaken with different immigrant or minority groups was recommended as well as the extension of the mediational model to other national contexts and the inclusion of majority group members.

## The present research

Following Ward et al.'s (2020) recommendations, the present study tests this mediational model in a sample of British Whites and Indians.

### *Multiculturalism in the British context*

Contemporary multiculturalism in Great Britain has its roots in anti-racist legislation in the 1960s and 1970s in response to the post-war migration of citizens of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. Through the 1980s the state commitment to racial equality was complemented by grassroots initiatives to foster positive self-definitions in ethnic and religious communities along with an evolving ideology of respect for difference (Farrar, 2012; Modood, 2016). Although the term multiculturalism was not widely used at the time, it can be seen that the seeds for a multicultural society were planted through diversity policies and ideologies. Nevertheless, in 2011 Prime Minister David Cameron pronounced multiculturalism a failure as it "encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other, and apart from the mainstream" (Cameron, 2011). Apparently, the third critical component of multiculturalism- multicultural contact- was not originally part of the British vision for managing diversity.

Subsequently, the term multiculturalism fell out of favor with politicians in the United Kingdom though it remained highly contested among social scientists (Uberoi & Modood, 2013). Some described multiculturalism in the UK as "in retreat" (Joppke, 2014). Others argued that multiculturalism was flourishing, but had been "modified" (Farrar, 2012) or "rebalanced" (Meer & Modood, 2009). This adapted form of multiculturalism was argued to have an emphasis on common ground and the unity of diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious groups under the umbrella of Britishness as an inclusive national identity. This proposition appears to have met with success with a very high proportion of South Asian and Afro-Caribbean minority communities identifying as British and reporting that they feel they belong to Britain (Manning, 2011).

Immigrants now make up 14.4% of the UK population with India being the most common country of origin (Vargas-Silva & Rienzo, 2022). Based on the most recently published census data, Indians make up 2.3% of the UK's population (World Atlas, 2019). Indians in the United Kingdom have higher levels of education and better employment outcomes when compared to other ethnic minorities; they also have a high level of social integration and are considered a model minority group (Platt & Nandi, 2020).

### *Hypotheses and research questions*

Consistent with Ward et al.'s (2020) findings, we expect the direct and indirect associations of MI and MPP on well-being to replicate with British Indians. Going beyond the research of Ward and colleagues, however, we also hypothesize that the positive associations of MC on well-being will be partially mediated by belonging. Multicultural contact is known to augment social capital, which extends social networks and fosters well-being (Sirgy, 2021). Moreover, bridging capital, due to its function of creating linkages across social groups, has been associated with increased flourishing and less psychological distress in immigrant and disadvantaged minorities (Ando, 2014; Mitchell & LaGory, 2002). Therefore, we hypothesize that each component of normative multiculturalism will have both direct and indirect associations with psychological well-being for British Indians with the indirect associations mediated by belonging.

Theorizing the relationship between MC, MI, and MPP and subjective well-being among majorities in general, and British Whites in particular, is more difficult due to limited research, conflicting findings in the wider literature, and context-specific influences on social and psychological outcomes. On one hand, research by Schachner et al. (2019) on diversity contexts demonstrated the positive relationships of equality and cultural pluralism on school belonging and well-being for both immigrant and non-immigrant students. This suggests that the positive associations of MC, MI, and MPP with subjective well-being may extend to British Whites. On the other hand, multicultural policies and practices are perceived as threatening, heightening perceived discrimination, and reducing feelings of safety in majority group members, who see the benefits of multiculturalism as relevant only to minority communities (Plaut et al., 2011; Stuart & Ward, 2019; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). The combination of perceived risks, rewards, and relevance suggests that normative multiculturalism may variably have positive, negative, or no associations with subjective well-being in British Whites. Consequently, rather than generating hypotheses about the majority group, we pose the research questions: How does normative MC, MI, and MPP relate to belonging and psychological well-being in British Whites?

## Method

### *Participants and procedure*

The research was approved by (omitted for review) Human Ethics Committee. The participants were drawn from two related data sets. The first was a Crowd Flower recruited multi-ethnic sample of adults living permanently in Great Britain. The second was a purposive sample of British Indians recruited through Qualtrics. The data collection for the first sample occurred in August 2015 and the second sample in December 2015. Merging the two data sets, retaining only participants who identified as White or Indian, and excluding respondents who missed the attention check item resulted in a final sample of 250 British Whites and 125 British Indians.

The average ages were 36.80 ( $SD = 12.20$ ) years for the Indian participants and 40.40 ( $SD = 12.20$ ) years for the Whites. The gender distribution differed somewhat between the groups with 43.20% ( $n = 54$ ) of the Indian and 51.60% ( $n = 121$ ) of the White participants identifying as female. Half of the Indian participants (50.4%,  $n = 63$ ) and nearly all (93.6%,  $n = 234$ ) of the White

participants were born in the UK. For those born overseas, the average amount of time residing in the UK was 13.76 years ( $SD = 13.51$ ).

## Measures

### Normative multiculturalism

The Normative Multiculturalism Scale (NMS; [Stuart & Ward, 2019](#)) was used to assess the perception that ones' social environment is characterized by: Multicultural Contact (MC; four items; e.g., *"It is likely that you will interact with people from many different cultures on any given day"*); Multicultural Policies and Practices (MPP; six items; e.g., *"Institutional practices are often adapted to the specific needs of ethnic minorities"*); and Multicultural Ideology (MI; seven items; e.g., *"Most people think that it is good to have different groups with distinct cultural backgrounds living in the country"*). The items were prefaced with the prompt "In Great Britain" and were accompanied by a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The separate sub-scales each showed acceptable reliability with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  as follows: MC Indian.62, White.70; MPP Indian.70, White.73; and MI Indian.72, White.75.

### Belonging

The 12-item General Belongingness Scale ([Malone et al., 2012](#)) was used to measure a sense of belonging. Participants were prompted with the following statement "Great Britain is composed of people from many different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Think about all people who make up this multicultural nation" and were asked to rate their agreement with each item on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Sample items include "I feel connected with others" and "I feel as if people do not care about me" (reversed item). The measure yielded Cronbach's alphas of .88 for Indians and .96 for Whites.

### Well-being

The latent factor of well-being was comprised of positive affect, flourishing, and satisfaction with life, representing elements of both hedonic and eudemonic well-being. Firstly, positive affect was measured by a 5-item version of the Positive subscale (interested, alert, enthusiastic, active, proud) of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule ([Watson et al., 1988](#)). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt this way during the past four weeks using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always*. The measure yielded Cronbach's alphas of .80 for British Indians and .83 for British Whites. Secondly, the 8-item Flourishing scale by [Diener et al. \(2009\)](#), which assesses eudemonic well-being, was included. Sample items include "In most ways I lead a purposeful and meaningful life," and "I am engaged and interested in my daily activities." The responses are on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* and yielded Cronbach's alphas of .91 for both British Indians and Whites. Lastly, life satisfaction was measured using [Diener et al. \(1985\)](#) 5-item Satisfaction with Life scale (SWLS). Participants responded on a 5-point scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* to items such as "The conditions of my life are excellent." In the current study, the measure yielded Cronbach's alphas of .92 for Indians and .93 for Whites.

## Analytical plan

Data were analyzed in three steps, conducted in SPSS Version 26 and Mplus Version 8 ([Muthén & Muthén, Muthén \(1998–2017\)](#)). Initial analyses were run to examine the equivalence of normative multiculturalism, belonging, and well-being for Indians and Whites. We used the procedures for a Multi-group Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MG-CFA) where nested models are assessed to measure equivalence following procedures of [Milfont and Fischer \(2010\)](#), which takes a bottom-up procedure where the number of constraints is increased and deterioration in model fit is assessed. For model comparisons, the cut-off criteria was that decrease in CFI should not exceed 0.01 at each additional constraint ([Cheung & Rensvold, 2002](#)). Three steps are undertaken starting with an unconstrained multigroup structural equation model allowing factor loadings to vary freely across groups to test configural invariance. Loadings and goodness of fit indicators are then examined to ensure the data adequately fit the model across the groups. A more restrictive model is then compared to the baseline by constraining the factor loadings to be the same across groups, effectively testing for metric equivalence, which is evident if the model does not fit significantly worse as assessed by change in fit indicators. Finally, scalar invariance is tested by constraining the intercepts and again assessing change in model fit. After confirming the equivalence of the measures basic descriptive analyses and correlations were conducted. Finally, a mediation model was developed to test the direct and indirect associations of normative multiculturalism on well-being via feelings of belonging controlling for gender and age. To determine the significance of the indirect pathways, 5000 bootstrapped samples producing 95% confidence intervals of the indirect coefficients were tested ([Hayes, 2009](#)). Model fit was assessed as good according to the following indices and cut-off values: the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) with a value of less than or approaching .06, the comparative fit index (CFI) with a value greater than .95, and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) with a value of less than .10 ([Hu & Bentler, 1999; Weston & Gore, 2006](#)).

## Results

### Preliminary analyses

The equivalence of constructs was measured utilizing nested MG-CFAs. For each of the normative multiculturalism measures, the

models tested all items as loading separately onto each factor in distinct models. For belonging (given the larger number of items) the model was tested with four randomly constructed parcels of three items each, and for well-being a latent construct was assessed with three indicators; life satisfaction, flourishing, and positive affect. All of the constructs had an adequate fit and achieved at least metric equivalence across the groups with results showing the change in CFI was above the threshold for scalar invariance for MI, MPP, and Belonging (see Table 1). However, as the study was designed to examine the relationships between different constructs and compare these across groups, the constructs we considered to exhibit levels of equivalence appropriate for comparison in subsequent analyses. However, caution should be taken in making mean-level comparisons due to scalar equivalence not being met on all variables.

Bivariate correlations were conducted among the variables for the Indian and White groups are presented in Table 2. There were some key similarities across the groups. Specifically, belonging was significantly and positively correlated with all indicators of well-being in both groups. Further, MC and MPP were positively associated with belonging and flourishing for both groups; however, the associations among the NMS subscales as well as with other indicators of well-being (life satisfaction and positive affect) were less consistent.

### Multi-group mediation model

A multigroup mediation model was developed to test the associations of normative multiculturalism on well-being via belonging as well as to examine whether majority/minority group status acted as a moderator of the associations. The multigroup model demonstrated good model fit:  $\chi^2(28) = 67.18, p < .001$ , CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.08 [0.06, 0.11], SRMR = 0.05. Coefficients for direct, indirect, and total associations for both groups are presented in Table 3, with these also visually presented in Fig. 1.

The path model concurrently tested both the direct associations of MI, MPP, and MC on well-being and indirect associations via belonging (see Fig. 1). In terms of the direct pathways, results indicated that greater perceptions of MC were significantly and positively related to well-being for Indians. There were no other significant direct paths found from any of the NMC subscales to well-being across the groups. There was a positive direct path from MC to belonging and a strong and significant positive path from belonging to well-being found for both groups. Additionally, among the Indian group, MPP exhibited a significant, positive association with belonging. Multicultural ideology did not have a significant relationship with belonging in either group.

In terms of indirect pathways across groups, there was a positive indirect relationship of MC on well-being for both groups, whereby perceptions of greater contact between diverse groups were associated with increased personal levels of well-being via greater feelings of belonging. Notably, the indirect pathways for both groups was of comparable strength, but for British Indians, the total association of MC on well-being was much stronger as it was comprised of both the direct and indirect pathways. Additionally, there was evidence of a significant, positive indirect association of MPP on well-being via belonging in the Indian group; however, the total association of MPP on well-being did not reach significance. The opposite was true for Whites with the indirect pathway being non-significant.

### Discussion

The research adopted a socio-ecological approach to examining subjective well-being in majority and minority ethnic groups with an emphasis on the contextual influences of multicultural norms. A mediational model with direct pathways from MC, MI, and MPP to psychological well-being and indirect pathways through belonging was tested with British Indians and Whites. Results pointed to both similarities and differences between the two groups. Perceived normative multicultural contact was associated with a greater sense of belonging among both Indians and Whites, and, in turn, an increase in psychological well-being. For British Indians, MC was also directly associated with well-being. Perceived normative MPP likewise had a significant indirect association with well-being through belonging, but only for Indians. Contrary to our hypotheses, the mediational model failed to demonstrate any significant associations for perceived normative MI. Two aspects of these findings merit particular attention. First, perceived behavioral rather than

**Table 1**  
Fit and equivalence of the measures across British Indian and British White samples.

	Model	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	$\Delta$ CFI
MI	Configural	0.943	0.093[0.051,0.134]	0.052	
	Metric	0.949	0.077[0.036,0.115]	0.056	0.007
	Scalar	0.933	0.081[0.047,0.113]	0.064	-0.016
MPP	Configural	0.910	0.117[0.079,0.156]	0.059	
	Metric	0.909	0.104[0.069,0.139]	0.066	-0.001
	Scalar	0.899	0.099[0.069,0.131]	0.071	-0.011
MC	Configural	0.996	0.037[0.000,0.133]	0.133	
	Metric	1.000	0.000[0.000,0.080]	0.080	0.004
	Scalar	0.994	0.028[0.000,0.091]	0.091	-0.006
Well-being	Configural	0.939	0.061[0.052,0.070]	0.057	
	Metric	0.937	0.060[0.052,0.069]	0.075	0.002
	Scalar	0.930	0.063[0.054,0.071]	0.076	0.007
Belonging	Configural	1.00	0.000 [0.000,0.139]	0.003	
	Metric	0.995	0.009 [0.028,0.154]	0.042	-0.005
	Scalar	0.970	0.177 [0.131,0.217]	0.074	-0.015

Notes. All indicators are estimated using an MLM estimator, reporting the robust variants.

**Table 2**

Descriptive statistics and correlations among variables and covariates.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	British Indian	British White
1. MI	-	-0.02	0.22**	.18*	.06	0.09	0.10	0.05	-0.07	3.38 (.63)	3.09 (.58)
2. MPP	.22*	-	.16*	.17**	.19**	.17**	.02	0.11	-0.08	3.27 (.60)	3.36 (.55)
3. MC	0.23**	.13	-	0.27***	.24***	.11~	.06	-0.02	-0.08	4.11 (.51)	3.90 (.59)
4. Belonging	0.14	0.36***	32***	-	.73***	.58***	.60***	.21**	-.07	4.41 (.90)	4.80 (1.19)
5. Flourishing	0.16	0.19*	.41***	.52***	-	.64***	.68***	.07	0.09	5.58 (.91)	5.13 (.94)
6. Positive Affect	0.15	0.08	0.23**	.48***	55***	-	.51***	.28***	.05	3.64 (.60)	3.39 (.66)
7. Life Satisfaction	0.20*	.19*	.23**	.44***	.74***	.48***	-	.10	0.01	4.66 (1.46)	4.10 (1.40)
8. Age	0.17	-0.18*	-.07	-0.01	0.02	0.15	0.11	-	-0.08	36.81 (11.96)	40.39 (12.13)
9. Gender <sup>a</sup>	.15	-0.07	-0.05	0.08	0.02	0.07	0.02	0.23**	-	-	-

<sup>a</sup> Gender: 0 = Female, 1 = Male. British Indians below the diagonal, British Whites above the diagonal. \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001.

**Table 3**

Bootstrapped standardized direct, indirect, and total coefficients normative multiculturalism on well-being via belonging.

Indian British	Direct		Indirect		Total Well-being
	Belonging	Well-being	On Well-being via Belonging	Well-being	
Multicultural Ideology	-0.03	0.06	-.01		0.05
Multicultural Policies Practices	0.35 * **	-0.01	0.18 * *		0.17~
Multicultural Contact	0.29 * **	0.24 * *	0.15 * *		0.38 * **
Belonging	-	0.50 * **	-		-
Covariates					
Gender	0.11	-0.03			
Age	0.06	0.08			
White British	Direct		Indirect		Total Well-being
	Belonging	Well-being	On Well-being via Belonging	Well-being	
Multicultural Ideology	0.12	-0.05	0.10		0.05
Multicultural Policies Practices	0.12	0.06	0.09~		0.15 *
Multicultural Contact	0.23 * **	0.01	0.19 * *		0.19 * *
Belonging	-	0.82 * **	-		-
Covariates					
Gender	-0.02	0.14 * *			
Age	0.20 * **	-0.04			

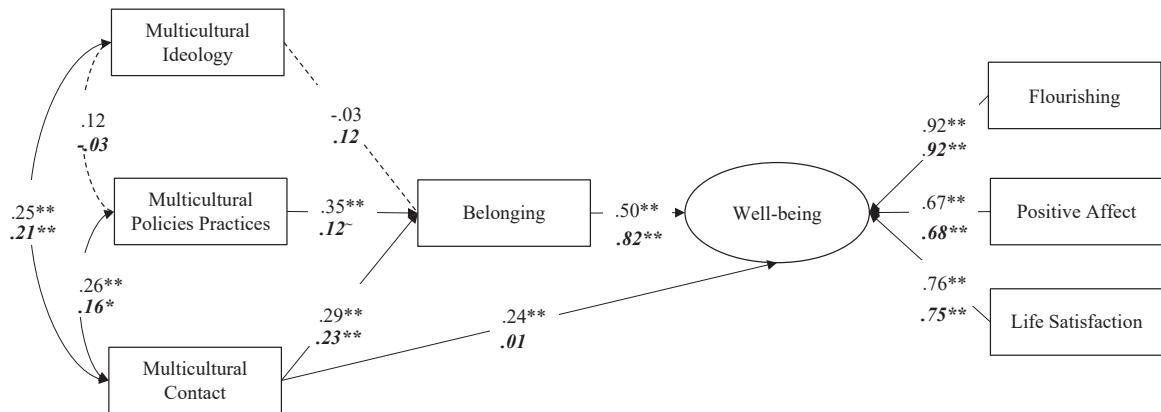
Note. Indian British N = 125. White British N = 250.

\* p < .05. \*\* p < .01. \*\*\* p < .001.

ideological norms affected belonging and well-being. Second, there was no evidence that perceived multicultural norms are detrimental to belonging or well-being in the White majority.

Overall, it appears that perceived norms for multicultural contact exert the most robust associations with psychological well-being. Not only did it produce a direct association with well-being for British Indians, but the positive relationship, mediated by belonging, was found for both Indians and Whites. The direct association of intercultural contact on health and well-being in minority groups has been observed in intergroup research (e.g., Tip et al., 2016); our study replicates this with perceived contact norms. The underlying mechanisms for the linkages between multicultural contact, belonging, and well-being have been primarily interpreted in terms of social capital with the emphasis placed on the importance of intergroup or "bridging" capital for immigrant and minority groups. This is believed to foster a stronger sense of inclusion and offer essential resources for integration. There is no doubt that inclusion, belonging, and connectedness are important for immigrant well-being in the wider community, and studies have shown that bridging capital particularly is associated with more positive outcomes (Ando, 2014; Mitchell & LaGory, 2002). Importantly, our research points to the same process and outcomes for majority group members. These findings align with more recent research that shows social embeddedness is a "key explanatory factor for life satisfaction for both immigrants and natives" (Arpino and de Valk (2018), p. 1163) and with pan-national survey results showing that increasing contact with diverse groups is associated with greater quality of life over time (Ramos et al., 2019).

Replicating Ward et al.'s (2020) research with New Zealand Koreans, perceived normative multicultural policies and practices contributed to favorable outcomes for British Indians. Specifically, MPP predicted greater belonging, and in turn, greater well-being.



**Fig. 1.** Multigroup model testing the role of group status on the relationships between Normative Multiculturalism, Belonging, and Well-being (controlling for covariates). Note. Indian British N = 125, coefficients above the line. White British N = 250, coefficients below the line bolded and italicized. Covariates included as regressed on Well-being were gender and age (not depicted in figure, see Table 3 for details). Dotted lines represent non-significant relationships; solid lines represent significant paths. Direct pathways from normative multiculturalism to well-being not depicted where these were non-significant. Model fit:  $\chi^2$  (28) = 67.18,  $p < .001$ , CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.08 [0.06, 0.11], SRMR = 0.05.

Whether perceived norms or actual practices, there is widespread evidence that multicultural policies are associated with better mental health outcomes (Malmusi et al., 2017; Marks et al., 2018), greater life satisfaction, increased feelings of safety (Jackson & Doerschler, 2016), and social adaptation (Vedder et al., 2006) for immigrants. This is not surprising as multicultural policies and practices prescribe the inclusion and exclusion parameters for immigrants and minorities and provide a pathway to belonging.

Contrary to expectations, perceived normative multicultural ideology did not influence belonging and well-being in British Indians. This is surprising because minority individuals residing in contexts where the diversity climates are positive and multicultural are known to experience a stronger sense of inclusion and report less social bias (Gündemir et al., 2019). Moreover, the British findings diverge from the results of studies by Watters et al. (2020) and Ward et al. (2020), which demonstrated positive impacts of perceived normative multicultural ideology on social and psychological outcomes for minority groups in the United States and New Zealand. Although the reasons for these discrepancies are not clear, one possibility rests on the distinction between abstract and concrete formulations of multiculturalism (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). Considering the abstract-concrete distinction in combination with Dovidio et al. (2010) functional approach to interpreting the impact of diversity ideologies suggests that normative multicultural ideology, as a more abstract formulation of multiculturalism than normative multicultural policies or contact, is not effectively addressing the group-based needs of British Indians. Put in other words, the abstract principle of multiculturalism as an appreciation of and respect for diversity is less impactful than the concrete practice of multicultural contact and the implementation of multicultural policies. As such, British Indians appear less affected by what people think about multiculturalism and more affected by what they do.

With the exception of normative multicultural contact, perceived normative multiculturalism did not affect belonging or well-being for British Whites. It is likely the case that Whites in Great Britain, as Whites in the United States, do not view multiculturalism as including the national majority (Plaut et al., 2011). Rather, the white majority is the implicit, but often unrecognized, yardstick against which other ethnic groups are measured and defined. Indeed, whiteness in Britain has been discussed in terms of invisibility, the “default” and the norm for Britishness (Clarke, 2021) while multiculturalism has been typically portrayed as arising from and characterized by the post-war influx of non-white immigrants (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2018). Although there are studies that Whites view multiculturalism as threatening (Stuart & Ward, 2019; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014), there is also evidence that multiculturalism is not seen as having a significant impact on the daily lives of majority group members (Warikoo, 2020). This is reflected in our findings, which demonstrate limited positive impact but no negative impact of perceived multicultural norms on belonging and well-being for British Whites.

Taken together, the results of the study illustrate the influences of social context on well-being and have implications for multiculturalism in Great Britain. Contrary to Cameron's (2011) conclusion that multiculturalism failed because it encouraged the separation of cultural groups, we argue not only that intergroup contact is a key defining feature of multiculturalism, but also that it has positive implications for well-being in the culturally diverse British population. Multicultural policies also contribute to enhanced belonging and well-being for minority groups without detrimental consequences for the majority. Both contact and policy norms address the goals of contemporary multiculturalism in Britain, which emphasize a shared British identity across diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious groups (Farrar, 2012; Modood, 2016). Multicultural policies ensure cultural maintenance and equitable participation for minorities, and contact can foster the emergence of a superordinate British identity (Gaertner et al., 1993). Therefore, rather than multiculturalism being a “failure” in Great Britain it is suggested that multiculturalism in its depth and complexities has not yet been fully achieved.

## Concluding comments

The research is novel in that it is the first to adopt a socio-ecological approach arising from Stuart and Ward's (2019) normative multiculturalism framework with contact, ideology, and policy as predictors of well-being in minority and majority groups. Its community-based findings have implications not only for theorizing multiculturalism in the social sciences, but also for the practical and effective management of diversity in culturally plural societies. Despite these merits, the study is limited by the same shortcomings found in all cross-sectional surveys, i.e., causal relationships cannot be established, and self-reports can be affected by social desirability. In addition, the pre-Brexit timing of the data collection for this study may limit the generalizability of the research findings, and the sample sizes across the groups were unequal, with fewer minority as compared to majority group participants. More studies are needed to extend the research not only to other ethnocultural groups in Great Britain, but also to minority and majority groups in other countries. Context is clearly important. Countries vary in the degree to which they adopt multicultural strategies for the management of diversity and how these strategies impact the experience of everyday multiculturalism warrants greater attention in future research.

## Declaration of Competing Interest

We have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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