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Introduction

Formulating diversity studies

Steven Vertovec

It is both a stimulating and a challenging time to be engaged in what might be called 'diversity studies'. It is stimulating because there is currently an outpouring of academic work surrounding diversity. Contemporary scholarship on diversity condenses and builds upon decades of significant empirical and theoretical work surrounding key concepts like race, gender and sexuality as well as subjects such as discrimination, social movements and social inequality. Diversity is undoubtedly a hot topic in the social sciences and humanities.

For academics, it is also a challenging time because 'diversity' is, simultaneously, a hot topic in the public sphere too. Within businesses and corporations, state agencies, universities and a variety of public institutions, 'diversity' is an essential reference point within mission statements, strategy frameworks and staffing structures. Indeed 'diversity' is to be found across broad areas of public policy and discourse. Consequently, real challenges arise when academics attempt to probe such a term critically and analytically while public bodies are using it normatively or instrumentally. Confusion and miscommunication are bound to arise.

This introduction commences with an outline of some issues surrounding the idea of 'diversity' in the public sphere. It follows with a discussion of the meanings, potential scope and thought-provoking approaches to the concept of 'diversity' in social science. Thereafter, I propose possible ways of modelling research and theory-building within the field. Given that a broad area of interest and scholarship around social difference – what most mean by 'diversity' – is emerging, it is time to think about what could comprise diversity studies, and how it might be formulated.

Public discourses of 'diversity'

Why is there so much interest in 'diversity' now? There have been many reasons offered (see, for instance, Faist 2009; Salzbrunn 2012; Vertovec 2012). Perhaps the foremost reason is the success, increasingly and cumulatively since the 1960s, of key identity-based public/political campaigns among women's, African American, lesbian and gay, age- and disability-based movements. Their respective calls for an end to discrimination, equality of treatment, more positive images, respect of rights and symbolic recognition have brought about a sea change in laws, policies and attitudes in numerous societies around the world. To be sure, life is not now

entirely rosy for people within these categories – but there is no doubt that the public attention and legislative changes wrought by these movements are monumental (especially considering the state of affairs and levels of discrimination surrounding each category just fifty years ago). While stemming largely from the United States, Europe and other Western countries, such movements for categorical rights and recognition have contributed to numerous parallel movements elsewhere (such as anti-apartheid struggles in South Africa and Adivasi movements in India).

Just how these separate movements became amalgamated as 'diversity' – including not just anti-discrimination measures but also normative and celebratory rhetoric – is another story (see Vertovec 2012). It has often had to do with firms or government departments taking a negative motivation (such as fear of lawsuit) and – cynically or not – turning it into a positive value (promoting a range of attributes for the benefits they might bring). The shift from identity-based politics to an amalgamated 'diversity' agenda has entailed a vast opening-up of categories of 'difference' (often presuming 'difference' from a white, male, middle-aged, able-bodied heterosexual). Drawing from a wide range of sources (campaigns, brochures, websites, job descriptions, etc.) that invoke 'diversity', we can observe that many public or corporate understandings of 'diversity' include categories of difference such as: race, gender, ethnicity, culture, social class, religious belief, sexual orientation, mental ability, physical ability, psychological ability, veteran or military status, marital status, place of residence, nationality, perspectives, insights, background, experience, age, education level, cultural and personal perspectives, viewpoints and opinions (ibid.: 295–6). It is clear: in many people's (and institutions') thinking, 'diversity' and 'difference' can refer to practically anything.

This expansive view of 'difference' has also been reflected in the range of policy types developed in the name of 'diversity'. Elsewhere I have suggested that 'the corpus of "diversity" seems marked by its elusive multivalence (speaking or having meanings to many audiences), if not outright vagueness. This is not only because of uncertainty with regard to its subjects, but also with regard to its purpose' (ibid.: 296–7). Much of this elusiveness stems from the fact that across a range of public institutions the goals of 'diversity' policy are mixed. We can identify at least six facets of 'diversity' discourses, policies and practices derived from a range of programmes, mission statements, campaigns and guidelines within institutions:

> *Redistribution.* This facet includes policies intended to redress historical discrimination against groups, especially 'economic harm'. Here, the purpose of 'diversity' is largely akin to Affirmative Action, with goals toward helping minorities gain better access to scarce economic and societal goods – especially jobs, equitable income, housing and education.
>
> *Recognition.* 'Diversity' policies for recognition are also directed toward a kind of historical redress, but here with respect to 'cultural harms'. Measures here are to foster dignity and esteem among minorities, promote positive images, and facilitate their fuller participation in social interaction and political processes . . .
>
> *Representation.* This facet of 'diversity' can be characterized as a politics of presence. Here the goal is to create an institution – a company workforce, teaching faculty, student body, health service, civil service, military, police, or chamber of political representatives – that looks like the population it serves. This may include the use of monitoring or quotas . . .
>
> *Provision.* Public services today often employ this facet of 'diversity'. It entails identifying, developing skills around, sensitizing staff to, and responding adequately to the specific requirements of customers with reference to their myriad group and individual differences (variously and broadly defined) . . .

Competition. Often known as the 'business case for diversity', this facet takes in strategies to improve a company's marketing and, ultimately, market share. . . . Promotion of 'diversity' and a diverse workforce is to gain a better understanding of customers, spot market opportunities and thereby increase competitiveness, improve product quality, appeal to a wider consumer base and increase sales. . . . The promotion of 'diversity' in a company's public relations is also meant to influence customer perceptions by improving its image (or at least deflecting image damage by not having a visible 'diversity' commitment). It is also, at the same time, a measure to avoid grievances and discrimination lawsuits.

Organization. 'Diversity' management policies, training programmes, structures and staff positions within corporations or other institutions serve the purpose of developing and delivering many of the facets listed above. Additionally, they are undertaken with the aim of maximizing the performance of teams or workforces. . . . The premise, drawing from a large body of management and human relations materials, is that more diverse teams outperform less diverse ones.

(ibid.: 297–9)

In public discourse and policy, then, 'diversity' has no clear content or overall aim (except perhaps to underline the view that 'difference is OK'). Apart from a seemingly benign interpretation, there are some who are strongly critical of the rise of loose talk and normative programmes surrounding 'diversity'. Loïc Wacquant, for example, believes 'the term diversity is very often used to obfuscate marginality' (personal communication). Other critiques of 'diversity' discourse and policy are that:

- It is instrumentalist, conceiving that some people comprise 'the diverse' who are to be managed by someone else.
- It reinforces normativity, with the white, male, able, sexually straight person as the model from which others are different.
- It is patronizing, claiming to function for the benefit of some purported downtrodden group.
- It amounts to social engineering, attempting to artificially create a (normatively conceived) perfect team, company or society.
- It equalizes differences by way of assuming that, in terms of experiences of discrimination (and, following this rationale, measures for anti-discrimination), race is like gender is like disability, and so on.
- It dissipates politics (esp. of group-based movements), carrying a divide-and-rule logic to extremes of individuals and their innumerable attributes.
- It shifts attention from inequality, placing emphasis on esteem and 'feel-good' measures rather than real improvement of structural conditions.
- It is just a 'formality' or façade for companies or other institutions to make it look like they are doing something positive for minorities.
- It is easily cut-off from other programmes within a company or public institution – that is, just something for the minorities rather than for all.
- It is little more than 'counting people who are different', which some – especially those deemed 'different' – might find offensive.

(Vertovec 2012: 300)

From the standpoint of academics, all these meanings and critiques of 'diversity' discourse and policy themselves signify why these should be studied critically, including the structures of

power in which they are embedded, their discursive formation, their outcomes in affecting real social structural change and the ways they reflect (or not) the views and desires of the identity-based movements that have propelled them. To do this, social scientists need to keep a conscious conceptual 'distance' between their uses and those circulating in the public sphere. The latter must not be reified by the former (Wacquant, personal communication). As Rogers Brubaker puts it, 'diversity' is

> ... not only a zeitgeist term, a policy catchphrase, or a corporate tool, though it is indeed all of these. It's important to distinguish between categories of analysis – the categories that social scientists use – and categories of practice that are used in everyday social and political life. And 'diversity' is clearly both a category of analysis and a category of practice. As a category of practice, it's used in the corporate world, in universities, in advertising, in public policy discourse, and so on. So if we are going to use the term in social science, we have to give the term a specific analytical meaning, otherwise we risk simply conflating the analytic category with the practical category.
>
> *(Brubaker 2012)*

How can the social sciences and humanities productively conceive and utilize 'diversity'? Exploring the potential meanings and scope of the concept is an essential start.

Thinking about 'diversity': prospects for social science

Despite its vagueness and other problematic aspects of the term, 'diversity' nevertheless holds potential as an organizing concept in the social sciences and humanities. This potential was clearly expressed in numerous interviews with senior scholars, who were specifically asked about the prospects and pitfalls of the concept of 'diversity' for social scientific research and theory (these interviews are posted in full on the website of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (MPI MMG), www.mmg.mpg.de). Several significant statements from these interviews, provided in the following, help us contemplate the concept of 'diversity' and how it might shape a field of 'diversity studies'.

For many of the interviewed scholars, one advantage of the concept is that 'diversity', at present, 'comes without baggage'. That is, there is to date not much conceptualization, theory-building or methodological reflection surrounding it. It is still to be shaped (particularly, again, if it can be distanced from some of the public and policy uses of the term).

For a start, a sharpened conceptualization of 'diversity' can help break certain assumptions, both in the public mind and in certain social scientific quarters. In this way, Thomas Blom Hansen conjectures,

> maybe diversity opens for the possibility of thinking of any group of human beings as being fundamentally diverse; maybe it opens for thinking about people who are otherwise defined as white or 'non-ethnic' – the supposedly neutral ground on which the nation stands – as actually not homogeneous, as always shot through with differences.... I think diversity can be an advance, especially if used to dissolve or challenge some of the hidden presuppositions about the homogeneity of the native populations in Europe. We need to get beyond the notion that minorities 'have' diversity whilst the natives do not.
>
> *(Blom Hansen 2009)*

It follows that ideas about, and studies focused on, 'diversity' must not start with preconceived notions of difference – or, as Hansen says, of homogeneity. Such advice to break with assumptions was pressed by most of the scholars interviewed.

Another kind of break with assumptions was underscored by Josh DeWind. His opinion reiterates some of those abovementioned caveats about maintaining a distance between social scientific and public discourse categories:

> . . . whether the concept of 'diversity' is useful will depend on how it is used to identify categories of diversity. An issue that has plagued immigration studies, is that most of the social identity categories that are used analytically, are also categories that are used or have their origin in usage by states to manage populations. Many studies are limited to such categories of state censuses, for example, to define racial and ethnic groups that often use more nuanced, overlapping, and contextually distinct categories . . .
>
> Academics then have used state categories to frame studies of immigrant group incorporation and mobility, even if members of the groups define themselves as distinct on the basis of language, religion, class or the like. Measuring the 'mobility' of Latinos, for example, compared to that of 'Asians' is for many members of those groups meaningless, as these categories obscure significant differences between rich and poor, and educated and uneducated members of the groups. . . . What is good for administration may not be good for explanation.
>
> So if studies of 'diversity' begin with given categories, rather than utilizing categories that are directly appropriate to the analysis, then the categories end up being more of a problem than being useful or they get in the way of understanding.
>
> *(DeWind 2009)*

DeWind's views underline the point that academics must not only deconstruct the categories of difference used by minorities or public bodies, but also be aware of how their own categories and presumptions surrounding difference are both informed by, and serve to reproduce or reify, state-based or other types of classification.

The issues encapsulated by 'diversity' are not altogether new to social science. Rather, some of them lay at the core of the social scientific endeavour. As Brubaker suggests, 'in a sense "diversity" is just a more recent term for concepts that have been central to sociology from the very beginning – the idea of differentiation, for example, or the notion of heterogeneity. "Modern" societies have been defined precisely by their heterogeneity, by being "differentiated" societies' (Brubaker 2012). Since at least the time of Durkheim, social science has been addressing the question of how differentiated or complex societies are held together. 'Diversity' can provide a particular kind of entry or perspective on the question. Matthias Koenig importantly reflects upon the relation of 'diversity' to such fundamental sociological concerns:

> The term thus draws attention away, at least initially, from normative controversies and encourages the sustained empirical analysis of the ways in which people from different cultural backgrounds actually live together. Having said this, I would like to stress that the term diversity hasn't yet achieved the degree of technical elaboration as other established concepts in the social sciences. So the danger of conceptual vagueness that you are mentioning does exist. Perhaps we should therefore conceive of diversity as a sensitizing concept rather than as a term which already comes along with an articulated theory. Actually, many of the questions underlying research on diversity relate to old theoretical problems in the social sciences. Think of the following core questions of sociological

> theory: Does social interaction require shared horizons of meaning? Does social integration depend on common value commitments or is a consensus on formal procedures for collective action and conflict-resolution sufficient? What the concept of diversity does is sensitize for a range of new phenomena in contemporary societies, notably the struggles for recognition by various sorts of minorities that might challenge us to rethink some of the received wisdoms on these theoretical problems.
>
> *(Koenig 2009)*

This notion of a 'sensitizing concept' is a key one. In this way, despite certain drawbacks, the concept of 'diversity' can help scholars think about modes of difference, their differentiated qualities, the processes that surround them and the ways that they are negotiated in social practice. Once more, these are core concerns of social science.

Observing how 'diversity' is currently 'in the air', Arjun Appadurai also points to some core theoretical concerns that the concept raises:

> This is a very good moment to have diversity as an organizing topic, and the two main reasons for this are quite different from each other. One is that it is a pressing public policy issue, whether under the rubric of immigration or under the rubric of tolerance or under the rubric of multiculturalism or under the rubric of reconciliation when there has been severe conflict or ethnocidal violence. On the other hand, I also think that diversity remains a basic feature of human societies, and of how human societies organize difference itself. In this sense, I would say that diversity is a lens on the idea of culture itself. So you might say diversity – though it sounds like a very neutral and very innocent term – actually forces us to re-examine older ideas of culture and rethink some of the following questions: how does it work? How is it organized? What is culture as a system? How does its symbolism work? How do people get socialized into it or out of it? These are perennial questions ... So, we have a chance here to examine several interesting and fundamental social science questions.
>
> *(Appadurai 2009)*

Appadurai further thinks that the concept of diversity is also 'a lens and a medium, in which and through which we can approach other forces and processes' (ibid.). This is an important line to bear in mind: that by studying 'diversity' we can both re-examine longstanding sociological questions and look at other broad phenomena and trends with a transformed view. In this way, moreover, significant understandings can arise through comparison and generalization. However, generalization about social differentiation should not be the sole purpose of invoking 'diversity'. 'Clearly,' Brubaker says, '"diversity" is doing more work than simply referring to this extremely general notion of differentiation or heterogeneity. But there are limits to what one can do by talking about diversity in general. Different forms of diversity work in different ways, in everyday interaction and in political life' (Brubaker 2012).

By way of referring to such variable forms and respective mechanisms of difference, Loren Landau also wishes to emphasize both potential drawbacks, as well as advantages, of adopting 'diversity' as a social scientific concept:

> Diversity's strength is the focus on difference – however defined – within a particular space or globally. But that is also one of its greatest weaknesses. Without clarification, we risk speaking past each other when we think we are speaking of the same thing. Take for example, gender diversity which is fundamentally different in many ways from diversity based on class. By lumping these together as a common category or phenomenon, we can hide the

> fact that there are often very different processes that are associated with creating those differences or come into play when they interact.
>
> *(Landau 2011)*

A view that 'diversity' can refer to numerous forms and modes of difference is also highlighted by Andreas Wimmer, who believes the concept is rather worthless if it's too indiscriminate. However, he sees the 'diversity' concept as potentially opening up a methodological terrain. 'Look, it's largely a descriptive term,' Wimmer says,

> that captures different dimensions of social differentiation: ethnic, religious, gender and so on. And, as such, it is useful because it implies multi-perspectivity; it is not focused exclusively on ethnicity or exclusively on gender or exclusively on social class. So, it brings together all of these differentiations, mode of distinctions and categorizations together and forces us to think about the relationship between them. It thus runs against the tendency to see these different modes of differentiation and categorization as separate domains that are unrelated to each other. It forces us to adopt a holistic perspective on social processes looking from different angles. That is the potential, I think, of using 'diversity' as a concept. ... It avoids the overspecialization that comes from looking at gender, or at ethnic differentiations and so on exclusively, and forces you to think about the relationship between the different dimensions of diversity. It has also the advantage of avoiding essentialization, because diversity is a concept that describes a plurality of modes of categorizations and differentiations that are internally complex etc. So, it avoids all of the more problematic and essentialized notions of gender or sexuality or ethnicity.
>
> *(Wimmer 2009)*

Beyond of itself, however, Wimmer notes that 'diversity' 'doesn't offer any analytical leverage to deal with the many questions that this interrelatedness of different dimensions of differentiation and categorization is posing' (ibid.). That work has to be done by careful theory-building.

Nina Glick-Schiller raises another set of cautions that also relate to the problem of essentialization raised by Wimmer. She insists that scholars in this field must recognize, and promote the view, that:

> Every individual has multiple positionings that lead to multiple identities. If you use the word 'diverse' without the concept of multiplicity, it is essentialized difference and it ends up as a naturalizing discourse in the same way that multiculturalist discourses sometimes project fixed difference.... Diversity as fixed difference and diversity as overlapping multiplicities are two very different views of how social life works. So it is an important research strategy to look at the underlying multiplicities, when they are taken for granted and when one aspect of those experiences is made primarily and contrasted to somebody else's experience.
>
> *(Glick-Schiller 2009)*

Again, an advantage of 'diversity' is that it can immediately refer to several, concomitant modes of social differentiation. In this way, the term can also underscore the nested nature, permeability and intersectionality of coexisting categories of difference. This is stressed by Thomas Hylland Eriksen, who observes that 'when you say diversity, you remind yourself that there is diversity within any designated group and that boundaries are not absolute.... Suddenly you discover other distinctions which are just as imperative and situational and

grouplike. . . . Sometimes the groups in question are not ethnic at all. I mean they're gendered or they are based on class or residence or other things' (Eriksen 2009). John Eade also takes this perspective toward the diversity concept, suggesting that 'given the multiplicity of our identities, we are constantly moving across group boundaries and negotiating the competing demands of group identities' (Eade 2009).

Yet another point about multiplicity and permeability is raised by Ulrich Beck, who first takes aim at 'an important prerequisite that is often considered to be obvious when dealing with plurality, with identity, etc. I am referring to the prerequisite that clear boundaries and boxes exist between Us and the Others: one is either this or that' (Beck 2009). Condemning such a view, he proposes that 'the classification according to "either/or" is no longer valid in many cases, but rather, as a result of the successes of modernization, this classification must be expanded by and replaced with a new logic of "not only/but also"' (ibid.).

Following Beck and the other scholars quoted so far, 'diversity' should help break down a sense of rigid categories and groups. This is because, as Melissa Steyn stresses in her chapter in this volume, 'difference is always (inter)relational, inessential, incomplete, fluid and destabilized'. Ash Amin develops this perspective further to suggest that 'diversity' can play a part in shaping a broader, more open approach to contemporary forms of social complexity:

> In the present political moment, which is suspicious of heterogeneity, the word is an invitation to think about the value of living with difference, and more generally, the open society. As publics and politicians deepen their suspicion of the open society, scholarship becomes clearer about the properties – largely positive – of complex open systems. . . . The normative challenge, one that progressives need to shout over the heads of those who fear or vilify pluralism, is to fashion arguments and policies for the society of strangers and cosmopolitan engagement that take us beyond the currently narrow language of multiculturalism versus assimilationism. Diversity, for me, therefore is a way of widening the debate on managing complex and uncertain environments.
>
> The concept of diversity started out as a kind of Zeitgeist term to manage a pluralism considered by some to be a dirty word, something to be avoided. It still retains these qualities for those who wish to make a virtue or necessity out of living with difference. But equally, as I have intimated, the term also signals a particular turning point in social scientific thinking away from the world of specialisms, linear thinking, linear dynamics, towards a sense that we need a new social science that is able to grasp the world in both its complexity and its everyday evolution. In this attempt to renew and rethink the social sciences, I think diversity can play a more interesting role as part of a new social science lexicon.
>
> *(Amin 2010)*

This is a strong call, and hopefully the nascent field of diversity studies can meet the challenge raised by Amin.

Finally, by thinking about 'diversity' in these kinds of ways, significant perspectives might be opened – in the public eye as well as in social scientific approaches to research and theory. Here, Manuel Vásquez ponders that 'if by diversity is meant a systematic effort to really come out of one's own perspective and understand otherness or at least attempt to extend one's hand, to be open to the surprise of the other, then I like that notion of diversity. That would be the notion of diversity I would work towards' (Vásquez 2009). Like many scholars who are unhappy about utilizing the term while it is also employed in public policy, advertising and

corporate development, Vásquez is nevertheless optimistic about the prospects of adopting 'diversity' as a conceptual tool:

> The category of diversity can still be useful provided that we know when we're using it, how we're using it, who is using it; provided that we understand the discursive regime in which the term is being used. And we strategically place ourselves in ways that allow us to maximize this openness to otherness. If we are open to otherness, if we're open to the fact that we're limited, that we are partial, that we're embodied and emplaced beings and recognize that therefore our perspectives are by definition biased and that there are other perspectives, then I think it's a very useful tool.
>
> *(ibid.)*

To summarize, these senior scholars have advocated a number of positive ways of thinking about 'diversity'. To rephrase some of the key points they raise, it is suggested that, via the concept of 'diversity', social science can gain new potential to:

- question notions of homogeneity (Blom Hansen);
- break from, challenge or at least be cognizant of social scientific categories versus public categories (DeWind);
- re-examine core questions in social science, particularly around differentiation and the nature of society (Brubaker and Koenig);
- provide new insights on the social organization of difference (Appadurai);
- provide an alternative lens for looking at a variety of longstanding social and cultural issues (Appadurai);
- examine the discrete workings of different kinds of difference (Brubaker), avoid lumping together dissimilar types of difference (Landau) and instead explore the relations or parallels between them (Wimmer);
- interrogate purported fixed differences and overlapping multiplicities (Glick-Schiller and Beck);
- understand, appreciate and explore the intersectionality, multiplicity and boundary-crossing dynamics of social categories (Eriksen and Eade);
- develop a path-breaking social science of complex open systems (Amin); and
- adopt a perspective on otherness grounded in recognizing the partiality and emplacement of categories (Vásquez).

With such a rich compendium of potentiality surrounding the concept of 'diversity', what might a scholarly field of 'diversity studies' actually entail?

Toward diversity studies

Migration studies, gender studies and sexuality studies are just three academic fields that have been established in order to open up broad yet related areas of interdisciplinary research and theory-building. Surrounding each, there are substantial literatures (including field-specific journals, book series and handbooks). Each field includes work on a variety of connected topics; within each field, these topics are interdependent or bear enough 'family resemblance' to be advantageously combined for new insights on field-specific processes and their outcomes. Along these lines, for instance, by linking sociological, anthropological and geographical analyses within the field of migration studies, we can learn a great deal about migrants' motivations, adaptations,

community dynamics and patterns of transnational linkage; similarly, through a range of works across disciplines within gender studies we can understand more about the social construction of masculinities and femininities, gender roles in relation to biological and cultural traits and the reproduction of patriarchies; and through the interdisciplinary linkage of research in sexuality studies we can gain a better comprehension of historically emergent norms of sexual behaviour and their social control, the social conditioning of desires and intimacies and the relation between sexual preferences and social identity.

Similarly, an emergent field of diversity studies can be seen as such an overarching rubric that enables cross-fertilization of topics and disciplines concerned with the study of social differentiation. This should ideally be done to include the approaches to 'diversity' suggested by the scholars in the preceding section. Moreover, through diversity studies we might analytically distil and comparatively combine theoretical lessons gained from migration studies, gender studies, sexuality studies and other fields that focus on particular modes of differentiation.

Diversity studies should not be about celebrating, empowering, recognizing, promoting self-esteem or valorizing particular modes of difference – or creating some cheery picture of unity-in-difference. It should not represent an exercise in privileging, reifying or validating any particular categories of difference, but rather in social scientifically scrutinizing social categories, processes of differentiation and outcomes in social, political, economic and geographical spheres. This includes the interrogation of presumptions and taken-for-granted categories, units, traits and variables of 'difference'. In addition, it should not be based on a premise contraposing white, male, heterosexual Europeans/Americans to others. Further, a field of diversity studies should underline the importance of including historical and non-Western contexts in order to build better theory concerning contexts, process and consequences of variable modes of social differentiation.

A condensed definition of diversity studies might be the one offered by Vincent J. Roscigno and Jill E. Yavorksy in this volume: they suggest such a field should investigate 'the extent and manner in which categorical distinctions, such as race and sex, are meaningful and enacted within organizational contexts and in the course of everyday interactions'. In his contribution to the *Handbook*, Darius Zifonun echoes such an approach: stressing that 'diversity' implies a multiplicity of different possible units and dimensions of difference, he suggests we should study the 'set of everyday-life typifications that are being used to manage interaction.' Here, 'to manage interaction' could refer to state or corporate attempts to influence social activity, as well as to group- , setting- and individually-centred ways that action and behaviour are guided or conditioned by social categories of difference.

Hence we can conceive of diversity studies as a field of social science concerned with understanding modes, mechanisms and outcomes of social differentiation. The rubric opens up possibilities for compiling, across disciplines, conceptual, methodological and theoretical tools for this purpose. In what follows, I compile a few key concepts and approaches that might help in formulating the emergent field of diversity studies.

With that broad definition in place, I suggest that diversity studies should entail two distinct, but inherently related, topics of investigation. The first topic concerns studies of diversity as *modes of social differentiation*: how categories of difference are constructed, manifested, utilized, internalized, socially reproduced – and what kinds of social, political and other implications and consequences they produce. This approach to diversity – surrounding subjects such as gender, race, disability and sexuality – has received a considerable amount of scholarly attention. The second topic relates to diversity as *complex social environments*: this includes studies of how social relations evolve in a context that comprises multiple classifications across a single mode of difference (e.g. a neighbourhood that is home to numerous ethnicities) or research on how a

"How would you like me to answer that question? As a member of my ethnic group, educational class, income group, or religious category?"

Figure 1.1 Reproduced with the permission of Condé Naste

multiplicity of modes of difference interact to condition social relations in a single site (e.g. class and sexuality, race and gender). In this sphere, there has been far less social scientific inquiry to date.

The study of modes of social differentiation

A classic cartoon in *The New Yorker* (above) conveys the fact that any single individual can be classified in a range of possible ways, each potentially offering a distinct perspective or set of interests surrounding almost any topic. How do such classifications arise? How are they conveyed,

shared (or contested) and reproduced – by individuals and institutions? How do they affect interpersonal interactions – with persons deemed members of the same classification, and with those who are not? How do the perspectives and interests associated with certain classifications combine, and how or when do they conflict? How do certain classifications become embedded in social, economic and political structures?

These are among the key questions asked within the field of diversity studies (see Rosenblum and Travis 2008). Once again, they are by no means new questions. Within a variety of disciplines – sociology, anthropology, social psychology, political science and geography – these questions, and many arising from them, have been engaged through several concepts, methods and theories. These have largely arisen around many of the following key words or phrases (the following list is not intended to be exhaustive, but only suggestive of pertinent ways of thinking about social differentiation generally):

Categorization. Sociological and social psychological works on categorization often concern the ways that certain classifications – otherwise described as modes of difference: race, gender, sexuality, etc. – come to carry with them (pre-) judgments, valuations and perceptions that create or reproduce group belonging and symbolic status (see e.g. Tajfel *et al.* 1971). An accumulated set of status-ranked categories comprises a system of social stratification – which, in turn, tends to have explicit material or political outcomes.

Social inequality. As Thomas Faist describes in his contribution to this volume, 'such categorizations generate unequal access to resources (redistribution), to status (recognition), and to decision-making (power)'. This combination of social categories and orders of stratification – what Charles Tilly (1998) calls 'categorical inequality' – creates remarkably durable systems that are socially and institutionally reproduced across generations. Just how these categories and systems of unequal distribution are created, maintained and manipulated is a question at the heart of much sociological inquiry.

In-group/out-group. These concepts – referring to a group that a subject considers his or her own versus one that is not – have been at the heart of much work in social psychology for generations (see e.g. Tajfel 2010). This includes research about what kind of affinities one has for the former, anxieties about the latter and how these can both be breached.

Self-ascription and ascription by others. Social scientific thought along these lines considers both the subjective view of classification – 'to which group do I belong and what do I share with them?' – and the outsider's view – 'I consider that person to belong to such a group because of these attributes . . .' – as well as the connections and contestations between them (see e.g. Barth 1998). The recognition of 'internal' versus 'external' classification of difference runs through many concepts and approaches across the social sciences.

Group and category. These terms represent two significant modes of collective identification, also resting on the 'internal/external' distinction. A common way of distinguishing group from category is that 'the first exists inasmuch as it is recognized by its members; the second is constituted in its recognition by observers' (Jenkins 2008: 104). Both are prone to give rise to what Rogers Brubaker describes as '*group-ism*', 'the tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis' (Brubaker 2002: 164). Such assumptions also problematically surround ideas about '*community*' (see Amit and Rapport 2002). Related to group-ism, social scientists tend to be wary of any kind of difference *essentialism*, or the presumption that inherent attributes permanently imbue all members of a presumed bounded category or group (see e.g. Sayer 1997).

Symbolic and social boundaries. Work on these topics generally surrounds the ways people enact their differences and similarities. Here, Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár make a conceptual distinction: on the one hand, they consider that 'symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space ... [and] separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership' (Lamont and Molnar 2002: 168); on the other hand, 'social boundaries are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities' (ibid.). For either or both kinds, research has examined the role of cultural or physical markers of boundaries, their purported limits and the enforcement of the kinds of social closure they instill (see Wimmer 2013).

Identity. This is certainly one of the most ubiquitous and slippery terms in social science, which 'tends to mean too much (when understood in a strong sense), too little (when understood in a weak sense), or nothing at all (because of its sheer ambiguity)' (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 1). Despite many problems with the concept, it remains one of critical interest – not least because of its central importance to many ordinary people themselves. Studies in this field include both group and personal meanings of the concept, usually with an emphasis on a subjective sense. Related notions take in multiple and overlapping identities as well as situational identity – adopting one's sense of belonging, or highlighting a particular categorical belonging, by way of particular social circumstances. The latter is related to the idea of instrumentalism, or emphasizing a specific identity according to self-interest. In any case, relevant themes include the distinction between presumed innate, natural or biological determinants and what are assumed to be chosen, acquired or socially constructed characteristics and senses of belonging. In more recent years, much attention has been devoted to the study of hybrid or hyphenated identities, as well as to social identity complexity (how people comprehend and manage their multiple senses of categorical belonging).

Intersectionality. As mentioned repeatedly, individuals can be classified (by themselves and by others) into a number of categories, each with a set of perspectives, interests, affiliations and social rankings. The concept of intersectionality represents the compound effects of categorization and concomitant mechanisms of stratification (especially oppression and discrimination; see Lutz, this volume). Following on from the development of this concept, it is important to examine what Thomas Faist (this volume) describes as '*de-intersectionalization*'; that is, when the variety of possible relevant categories are ignored and people are treated by way of one, usually essentialized, category only.

Recall Brubaker's quote earlier in this introduction: 'different forms of diversity work in different ways, in everyday interaction and in political life' (Brubaker 2012). Each set of difference categorizations (such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality) entails its own modes of definition and expression, processes of affinity or discrimination and outcomes in social, economic and political spheres. Accordingly, these also often require quite different conceptual approaches and research techniques. However, the concepts listed here might be considered as those of a basic theoretical and methodological toolkit for diversity studies. There are certainly many more that can be added, particularly within specific social science disciplines. With some common notions and approaches, social scientists will be in a better position to understand more about just how different forms of diversity work in different – and in similar – ways.

The study of complex social environments

The mechanisms surrounding modes of social differentiation comprise a major field of study. Much has been learned about such mechanisms and modes within specialized subjects and disciplines; much theoretical synthesis remains to be done. However, a noticeably understudied field that can both draw from and add to the study of modes of social differentiation is that of complex social environments.

Mechanisms of classification and processes determining their outcome do not play out in a vacuum. Rather, these are played out within historically produced conditions comprising: social fields, structures of power, discursive idioms, institutional frameworks, systems of access and denial, economic and material inequalities and spatial arrangements. Each of these conditions is inherently – and one could argue, increasingly – marked by multiple modes of difference, i.e. diversity. Just how does such complexity itself affect the ongoing dynamics of different modes of social differentiation? This contextual question has barely been addressed anywhere within the social sciences.

The contextual question immediately raises the issue of scale. Are we examining modes of social differentiation, and the conditioning context of diversity, on the macro-, meso- or micro-scale? National, urban or neighbourhood scale? On each scale, each set of conditions just listed will likely entail their own histories, processes, influences and (linear, path-dependent or chaotic) dynamics. What, thereafter, is the conditioning relationship between scales as they affect social differentiation and its outcomes? Following Appadurai's comments, these questions represent one way in which 'diversity' can provide a lens to look anew at perennial concerns of social science.

The fact that social scientists have not devoted enough attention to complex environments of diversity is noted by Thomas Blom Hansen. Also emphasizing the importance of comparison – and, by implication, the potential it holds for theoretical development – he states,

> I think there would be a lot to be learned from places like India, like South Africa and many other parts of the world that have a very, very long experience in dealing with multiethnic societies and multiracial coexistence. We often tend to focus on conflicts in these societies – that's also been part of my own work – but what is also true is that such societies build on the daily coexistence and interaction between many different groups. We have not really started to record and explore how people live with difference, how people draw many different lines around aspects of their private life, their public life, and how people are able to deal with many different kinds of publics and audiences. These are also multi-lingual societies, which is very often forgotten. The average urban Indian uses at least three languages on a daily basis because one needs that in order to exist in a major Indian city. South Africa is pretty much the same thing certainly for any person of color. Urban dwellers in such spaces have developed a kind of agility and ability to live simultaneously in many different spheres. It doesn't mean that it is always pretty or friendly or that people do harbor hostile feelings vis-à-vis other groups, by no means. There is undoubtedly a capacity and a tolerance for difference that is completely different from a European sensibility.
>
> *(Blom Hansen 2009)*

In order to conduct research, undertake comparison and build theory surrounding modes of social differentiation and their conditioning contexts, it may be useful to employ a conceptual framework that can take into account relations between structural, discursive and social phenomena. The following is offered as one possible model.

Configurations – representations – encounters

Each of the terms, configurations – representations – encounters, can be considered as a discrete analytical domain; however, the three domains should nevertheless be considered together in order to have any explanatory function in addressing modes of social differentiation and their relation to complex social environments. Ideally, the conceptual triad should also facilitate comparison between contexts.

The conceptual framework is derived from J. Clyde Mitchell's and Max Gluckman's methods for situational analysis (Gluckman 1940; Mitchell 1983). Their task was first to abstract conceptually and then to interrelate analytically: a set of events (the actual social encounters which happen); what they called 'the situation' (how the people involved themselves give meaning to what happens); the setting (the structural or institutional environment encompassing what happens) (see Mitchell 1987; Rogers and Vertovec 1995). Through such a technique of analytical interrelation, a rich and more comprehensive set of factors could be accounted for, not least in terms of understanding what influences what (social relations, the individual's classifications and structural conditions) in which way. This pioneering mode of analysis was mainly used for anthropological analysis of general patterns of socio-cultural change in southern Africa – but in one classic study it was indeed applied to the analysis of modes of social differentiation in a complex social environment (namely, Mitchell's (1959) *The Kalela Dance*). Here, I take these three analytical domains and re-interpret them as configurations – representations – encounters.

Configurations. This domain refers to structural conditions within which people carry out their lives. Especially relevant structures include those of an immediate political economy, political and economic geography, institutions of governance (policies, laws and legal structures) and other external arrangements that enable or constrain people's opportunities for action and social or physical mobility. In every society, these structural conditions clearly change through time.

Representations. This domain refers to the conceptual ordering of the social world. It includes social concepts and categories, terminology and discursive frames, cultural idioms, media images, public discourse, ideological regimes and hegemonic narratives, census categories, shared memories, normative schemes and what is often constructed as commonsense knowledge. Foremost, it refers to embedded understandings stemming from and reflecting power relations in a society.

Encounters. This domain refers to actual human interactions. These entail a range of contacts from fleeting to sustained exchanges, relations and communications, social networks, processes of negotiation and varieties of conflict. In this schema, the domain especially concerns the micro-sociological level, but encounters and their effects can of course be accrued into meso- or macro-sociological patterns.

Once more, these domains are for the purpose of methodological abstraction and analytical interrelation. I refer to this schema as a conceptual triad because, particularly in order to investigate phenomena such as mechanisms of social differentiation – through whatever methods – all three domains must be taken into account. Even if a research focus concerns phenomena in just one domain, the conditioning effects of the other two should be taken into account. Accordingly, we can examine how a specific event or set of interactions is conditioned both by the categorical representations the actors carry in their head and by the overarching set of conditions (including legal status, political recognition or representation, access to resources and

socio-economic position) affecting the actors. This type of analysis was what Mitchell and Gluckman intended through situational analysis. But the triad works in other directions too. That is, we can also use it to understand how representations are modified (or reified) through actual social interactions as well as by changes in policy or governance; similarly, the conceptual triad can serve to demonstrate how political and other structures are informed by historically produced representations and by public concerns, claims and activities arising from everyday social phenomena.

Relating the three domains, moreover, we can observe how class stratification emerges from the compound functions of configurations – representations – encounters: this entails the combined workings of a political-economic system characterized by a spectrum of institutional rewards and penalties as well as material outcomes, a classification system that carries symbolic value and a set of social interactions that both draws from and contributes to both the economic system and classification modus. Processes and dynamics of diversity, as multiple modes of social differentiation, operate in the same, mutually reinforcing way.

Political-economic systems, sets of classifications and commonplace social interactions co-evolve. The co-evolution of the three domains is well demonstrated, for instance, in Part II of the *Handbook*. In chapters on historical change within social orders, such as the Roman and Ottoman Empires, Balkan societies, fascist Europe and the recent Middle East, we clearly see the mutually conditioning patterns of change in governance structures, the ways diversity was conceived and the nature of everyday social relations between people (often by way of changing policies and classifications differentially leading to group formation or disbanding, upward or downward social mobility, privilege, persecution or conflict). However, as such studies also show, the co-evolution of phenomena within the three domains is not necessarily an even process: changes in one domain might develop long before transformations are felt in either of the other domains. For instance, policy changes regularly take a considerable period to modify social relations, and shifting social relations might not be reflected in public or political discourse for some time. In such cases we might consider the nature and implications of what can be called 'domain lag'.

For the purposes of theory-building, the necessary interweaving of these analytical domains – the structural, discursive and interactional – has been discussed for some time in various ways within social science. With particular relevance to diversity studies, Brubaker has advocated a corresponding approach to studying categories like ethnicity (what I am calling modes of social differentiation):

> From above, we can focus on the ways in which categories are proposed, propagated, embedded in multifarious forms of 'governmentality' ... From below, we can study the 'micropolitics' of categories, the ways in which the categorized appropriate, internalize, subvert, evade or transform the categories that are imposed on them ... And drawing on advances in cognitive research, ethnomethodology and conversational analysis, we can study the sociocognitive and interactional processes through which categories are used by individuals to make sense of the social world; linked to stereotypical beliefs and expectations about category members; invested with emotional associations and evaluative judgments; deployed as resources in specific interactional contexts; and activated by situational triggers or cues.
>
> *(Brubaker 2002: 170)*

This approach usefully incorporates different scales of analysis, which should characterize the model of configurations – representations – encounters too.

Wimmer also advocates an analogous approach to mutually conditioning factors that can cross or combine scales. He suggests that one needs to adopt

> the adequate theoretical tools that allow you to link macro-level social processes and developments, such as individualization and globalization, with meso-level processes of institutionalization, processes of group formation and political mobilization and so on, with the micro-level aspects of individual practices of classification and categorization, of social networking and distancing, of discriminating against certain kinds of people and favoring others. Then these micro-level processes need to be linked back up to meso-level institutional consequences that they have in the aggregate. So we need a complex theory of social classification and closure that go from the macro-level to the meso- and the micro-level and then back up again to the meso- and macro-level.
>
> *(Wimmer 2009)*

On a similar tack, Matthias Koenig suggests the following approach to the study of diversity:

> Patterns of diversity are here characterized by several properties of boundaries, e.g. their degrees of stability, politicization or cultural differentiation. Explaining these properties requires reconstructing the boundary making strategies of various actors whose action is, in turn, enabled and constrained by situational conditions, institutional frameworks, power relations and the like. A specific challenge in this context is to grasp the situation-specific salience of various cultural distinctions such as ethnicity or religion. When and why are latent differences activated in social interaction and become constitutive of potentially conflicting groups? Or how can manifest differences be de-activated through institutional design and policy-making? Understanding these dynamics of nested diversities is crucial for the more general question that lurks behind most research about diversity, i.e. the question how political communities are formed and how political allegiances are sustained which in liberal democracies by necessity require a minimum degree of commonality.
>
> *(Koenig 2009)*

Hence there are a number of common approaches for analysis and theory-building that, I suggest, can bring together the study of modes of social differentiation and the study of complex social environments. The intellectual model of configurations – representations – encounters represents one way that social scientific research can be organized to facilitate comparative and explanatory analysis, across scales, concerning the entangled or mutually influencing conditions and dynamics that link these domains. The model can perhaps serve as a kind of formula for the development of diversity studies itself.

Outline of the *Handbook*

The *Handbook* contains forty-one articles. This certainly seems a lot, but in each section many more themes, topics and cases could have been included. Therefore, the volume is by no means intended to be comprehensive; it is supposed to be suggestive of the kinds of issues, instances, conditions, outcomes and theoretical matters that can and should be addressed with the field of diversity studies.

In Part 1 – Dimensions of diversity – a sample range of some key modes of social differentiation (including gender, race and ethnicity, age, sexuality, language and more) are discussed by a range of experts. To be sure, a number of other modes could be added, such as

indigeneity, itineracy, nationality, locality, lifestyle and subculture. Moreover, there are modes of difference – namely, class – that, like gender, seem importantly to intersect, run through or add inflection to practically every other mode. The authors here have provided excellent views on their respective modes of difference, with important lessons for understanding the social mechanisms involved in others.

A set of significant case studies are provided in Part 2 – Historical geographies of diversity. Here, especially, we can observe how configurations – representations – encounters have co-evolved over time. This includes looking at how various groups (here, mostly ethnic and religious) have been conceived especially for purposes of governance and maintenance of hierarchy – particularly to maintain the position of the powerful. Most chapters show the extraordinary multiplicity and malleability of policies, categories and practices. The cases also clearly demonstrate how certain categories are not only socially and politically constructed, but also institutionalized with profound effects. In these ways, regimes – and the common people they govern – have undertaken repression and persecution, provided protection and largesse, celebrated, included, excluded or exterminated large parts of the society. And as Keith Lowe powerfully demonstrates in his chapter, there have been times and situations in which people had to choose one from among a variety of possible identifications in order to survive.

Following the section on historical case studies of contestation and institutionalization of difference, Part 3 – Policies and politics of diversity – takes a step back to look at fundamental issues surrounding the public and institutional treatment of difference. Here we have a group of articles probing questions concerning group and individual rights, notions of equality and fairness, recognition and belonging, citizenship, access and participation. Perspectives on the themes are developed through considering philosophy, political theory, law and legal institutions, social policies and corporate strategies.

What kind of themes and concerns arise through the engagements, conflicts and negotiations of interpersonal experiences of difference? Part 4 – Encounters and diversity – addresses this question with articles that examine both processes that shape encounters and the consequences of encounters with difference. Here are works concerning discrimination, prejudice and inequality, so-called social cohesion and conviviality, xenophobia and local identity politics. Again, these selected contributions represent a small set of relevant topics within this theme; however, each provides a critical snapshot of meaningful social mechanisms at work.

Finally, Part 5 – Fusions of diversity – represents a general approach to how we might be able to consider ways in which several processes of social differentiation operate together. This might entail ways of merging categories of difference – as in assimilation and creolization; interconnecting them – as in intersectionality; or thinking critically about their co-presence – as in cultural complexity. These chapters are among the most theoretical and (particularly the final chapter on 'critical diversity literacy') methodologically driven pieces in the *Handbook*. They serve as a fitting conclusion to a volume, which, it is hoped, can serve to amalgamate and develop diversity studies as a field of burgeoning, multidisciplinary scholarly interest.

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