

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

International Journal of Intercultural Relations

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijintrel

Review

The intercultural competence of second-generation individuals: knowledge gaps and steps forward

Annavittoria Sarli^{*}, Jenny Phillimore

University of Birmingham, Muirhead Tower, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK



ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Second generation individuals
Intercultural competence
Multicultural identity
Cultural diversity
Othering dynamics
Potentials

ABSTRACT

Second generation individuals (SGIs) represent an increasingly important share of the growing European population. Most literature focuses on the difficulties experienced by SGIs, risking reinforcing popular constructions of SGIs as a problematic group. Examining the potentials of SGIs may help to create a more balanced representation of their social reality and highlight opportunities inherent in multi-ethnic societies. In this paper we suggest that SGIs upbringing amongst multiple cultures may, under certain conditions, favour their developing strong intercultural competence (IC), a vital resource in contemporary, highly diverse societies. Following a literature review, we highlight that the IC of SGIs remains largely unexplored and there is a need for further research to investigate its features and the factors fostering and hindering its development. We begin by defining IC and the approach we adopt to view the construct, and by characterizing SGIs and the main critical implications and potentials of their growing up within multiple cultural environments. Subsequently we unite the contributions of migration studies and the body of work on IC in order to explain the processes by which SGIs likely develop IC. We propose the need for investigation of the IC of SGIs, making the case that research on IC should acknowledge the distinctiveness of SGIs experience and therefore utilize specific conceptual and methodological tools to explore the features and development processes of their IC. The paper ends with a discussion of the remaining knowledge gaps and by setting out an agenda for future research on the IC of SGIs.

Introduction

In this paper we make the case that second generation individuals (SGIs), born and raised at the crossroads between different socio-cultural groups (Tajfel, 1982), may develop strong intercultural competence (IC). We argue that the IC of SGIs remains under-investigated and set out a research agenda to fill existing gaps in knowledge. The dynamics of cultural diversification following globalization have intensified (Phillimore, Grzymala-Kazlowska, & Cheung, 2017). In European societies, with increased scale and complexity of migration flows, the proportion of people with a migration background, which includes large ethnic minorities augmented now by smaller, diverse ethnic groups is increasing (Faist, 2009). Immigrants from different origins often cohabit with people with no migration background in superdiverse neighbourhoods (Vertovec, 2007). In such areas, everyday interactions inevitably unfold across cultural boundaries (Wise, 2009). Simultaneously, with developments in transportation and communication technologies, the world is increasingly interdependent and people living in distant places can easily meet - virtually or physically - and

^{*} Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: a.sarli@bham.ac.uk (A. Sarli), j.a.phillimore@bham.ac.uk (J. Phillimore).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2022.03.004>

Received 31 August 2021; Received in revised form 14 March 2022; Accepted 17 March 2022

Available online 26 March 2022

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interact (Moore & Barker, 2012; Hermans & Kempen, 1998). As Bauman states: “We have become nomad, but always in touch with one another” (Bauman, 1998 p 90, Authors translation). In such a diverse, mobile and interconnected context, contact between people from different cultural groups is inevitable, sometimes causing cross-cultural discomfort, and other times producing practices of “everyday multiculturalism”, especially when interaction involves people with strong IC (Wise, 2009).

Now more than ever, with cultural diversity tending to become the norm (Vertovec, 2007), IC is vital to enable interaction (Faist, 2009; Bennett, 2009). IC can be defined as a set of values, knowledge, attitudes, and skills that favour effective and appropriate interaction within intercultural contexts (Barrett, 2018; Bennett, 2009, Deardorff, 2006). This paper focuses specifically around the IC of SGIs, who we refer to as the children of immigrants born in a different country to their parents. Research on the social networks of SGIs shows their friendship networks are more mixed than those of the general population, including people from different ethnic minorities and with no migration background (Crul & Schneider, 2012). Scholarship highlights that SGIs from childhood are usually confronted with cultural diversity. Throughout their developmental years they usually establish multiple cultural belongings, experience context-related cultural norms, and learn to adapt their communication styles to the demands of different cultural environments (Granata, 2012) From an early age they may act as intercultural mediators between their families and wider society (Padilla, 2006). It is reasonable then to hypothesize that such experiences may help SGIs develop heightened IC. Yet, neither migration studies nor IC scholarship have investigated in depth the extent to which SGIs develop IC, how such development occurs, and the specific facets of SGIs’ competence.

This paper makes the case that studies on IC should recognize the uniqueness of SGIs’ experience, and therefore utilize tailored conceptual and methodological tools to explore the features of their IC and the factors shaping its development. In so doing, they should consider the internal diversity of SGIs’ social reality, that may bring about different patterns in IC development. We also propose that migration studies look at SGIs from a novel observation angle - that of their IC - that may allow for the capturing of the possible advantages connected to their upbringing. Research has mainly focused on the challenging aspects of social processes revolving around SGIs (Thomassen, 2010). Such work has been important for policy and practice in addressing claims about dysfunctional social dynamics, but risks contributing to the construction of SGIs as problematic. Observing SGIs from the lens of potential offers new insights into their social reality, whilst offering a counter-narrative outlining the opportunities they bring in multi-ethnic societies.

Our arguments are based on a review of the literature, that considers contributions from across disciplines. This paper is not intended to present a systematic literature review, but to set an agenda for future research on the IC of SGIs. In the first section of this paper, we define the nature and main features of IC, and we characterize SGIs and the main social dynamics that emerge from growing up with multiple cultures. In the second section we look at the literature on IC and migration studies, to analyze the state of knowledge about the IC of SGIs. After identifying gaps in knowledge, we conclude by setting out an agenda for future research.

Section 1. Some background

Second generation individuals: focusing on potentials

In this paper we focus on the intercultural competence (IC) of second generation individuals (SGIs). We interrogate the relevant literature to investigate: what conditions favour SGIs’ development of IC; what are SGIs’ main strengths and weaknesses in intercultural interactions; and what processes underlay the development of these strengths and weaknesses. We argue that much research is still needed.

In contemporary, European societies the share of SGIs is increasing. Albeit with variations across the EU, in 2014, 6.1% of the EU population aged 15–64 (18.4 million individuals) was composed of people with at least one foreign-born parent, who were born in their parents’ country of current residence (Eurostat, 2016). Further, the demographic weight of SGIs is increasing, due to low birth rates of autochthonous populations (Faist, 2009).

Migration studies have engaged with the social processes that revolve around SGIs with the main focus on social disadvantage, with findings supporting the design of policies focusing on enhancing their social inclusion. Such attempts risk reinforcing the representation of SGIs as problematic (Thomassen, 2010). Policy and media discourse often emphasize SGIs’ social exclusion and link this to urban dysfunction or radicalization (Amin, 2002). This narrative, often expressed in simplistic terms, tends to feed negative, stereotyped perceptions of the social dynamics involving SGIs. In fact, their social realities are much more complex (Grillo, 2011). For instance, a survey in nine European cities observed that, while in popular discourse SGIs were associated with spatial segregation (Schneider *et al.* 2012), within the context of highly diverse urban spaces, they tended to be better integrated than their peers from a native background, who were less likely to reside in diverse neighbourhoods, and tended to socialize with their own ethnic group. SGIs tend to frequent diverse places and have ethnically mixed networks, and express contentment living in culturally diverse cities (Neal, Bennett, Cochrane, & Mohan, 2013). Yet SGIs have seldom been studied as potential agents of everyday multiculturalism (Wise, 2009).

Contemporary European societies, where cultural diversification has gained momentum, are often described as ethnically segregated, but they also feature quotidian convivial multicultural interactions that tend to glue, rather than divide, diverse societies (Wise & Noble, 2016; Neal *et al.* 2013). Studies suggest that SGIs may play a role in supporting such cohesion, but this has rarely been investigated (Grillo, 2011). Examination of SGIs’ potential as navigators of cultural plurality (Ballard & Banks, 1994) may help develop understanding of how we can more effectively live together in diversity, and enhance the opportunities inherent in multiethnic societies. Far from invoking an aprioristic, celebratory stance on SGIs as “cosmopolitan creoles” (Thomassen, 2010 p41), we intend to encourage rigorous research able to grasp and explore the potentialities of SGIs. Investigating the specific features and development of the IC of SGIs is important theoretically as it can enrich the debate around the conceptualisation of IC. On a practical level it can offer

insight about the dynamics favouring social cohesion. This paper will review existing knowledge, identify gaps, and set an agenda for future research on SGIs' IC. To lay the basis of our reasoning, we now define IC.

Intercultural competence: definition and approach

Scholars have developed a number of definitions and frameworks to analytically describe IC and its components, with the debate ongoing (Chen & Feng, 2017; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). In this paper IC is defined as a set of values, knowledge, attitudes, and skills that favour an effective and appropriate interaction within intercultural contexts (Barrett, 2018; Bennett, 2009; Deardorff, 2006). Such a definition mirrors the key dimensions of human competence: cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions, as well as context (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). It also includes values, considered by some scholars as a further dimension of IC (Barrett, 2018). The expression "IC" refers not only to the ability to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds, but also to understand the relationships between different cultures and to position oneself between them, potentially becoming a mediator (Byram, 2012). IC may also favour virtual intercultural encounters occurring through media, for instance when reading a text about, or viewing an image of people from different cultural backgrounds. It helps avoid misleading intercultural judgements, especially if cultural stereotypes have been employed for rhetorical or propagandist aims (Méndez-García & Cores-Bilbao, 2021). We use "IC" in the singular, as, in line with other scholars, we conceive it as a cluster of psychological resources that allow people to respond adaptively to intercultural situations (Baiutti, 2016). The term "competence" indicates the dynamic process through which these psychological resources are selected, activated, and harmonized, then deployed through behaviour (Barrett, 2016). Evidence shows that IC can be developed through lived experience (Perry & Southwell, 2011). Although not necessarily sufficient, prolonged and meaningful exposure to cultural diversity is deemed to be a powerful trigger for sharpening IC (Holmes and O'neill, 2012; Chen, 2010; Deardorff, 2009; Gudykunst & Kim, 2003; Bennett, 1986). Some researchers emphasize the link between IC and multicultural identity development and the role of stress in such dynamics (Kim, 2015a; Granata, 2011; Manço, 2002). Scholars underline that the development of IC is a lifelong process that is not linear and comprises possible stasis or regressions (Fantini, 2009).

We view culture as a fluid, internally heterogeneous compound of material, social and subjective resources potentially available to the members of a given group (Barrett, 2018). The boundaries of cultural groups are porous and individuals are conceived as having manifold and dynamic cultural affiliations whose salience fluctuates across social contexts (Barrett, 2018). A context is deemed to be intercultural when it is socially constructed as such: when the people involved perceive themselves as having different cultural backgrounds and when this perception affects interaction (Baiutti, 2016; Barrett, 2016). Many theorists conceive IC in culture-specific terms: as a cluster of resources that favour encounters with people belonging to a given, different cultural environment. When framed in such fashion, IC tends to offer an essentialist view of culture (Kim, 2009). In contrast, when conceived in culture-general terms the phrase "IC" denotes a set of values, knowledge, attitudes and skills that favour intercultural encounters, regardless of the cultural backgrounds at play (Marek, 2019; Byram, 2012; Surian, 2008; UNESCO, 2013).

Since its beginning, research on IC has been mainly conducted in situations where an individual (or minority group) face the challenge of communicating with a new, relatively homogeneous cultural environment. Researchers have rarely analyzed IC within the frame of multiethnic contexts, where several culturally different individuals have to interact in an inherently diverse environment (Surian, 2008). Most literature focuses on individual performance. However since the 1980 s communication has been conceived as an interactive process of co-construction of meaning influenced by context, and several scholars have highlighted that IC is an inter-subjective and contextual process (Borghetti, 2017; Kim, 2017; Collier, 2015; Anolli, 2012; Di Mauro, 2010; UNESCO, 2013; Galimberti, 1994). In multiethnic societies, intergroup relations may have a strong impact on intercultural communication.

To exist as such, a competence needs to be socially recognized. The same performance can be more or less competent according to the shared assessment criteria that have been set in the social context where it takes place (Lodigiani & Sarli, 2017). Especially in a multi-ethnic context, the definition of assessment criteria implies subtle power dynamics and calls into question the issue of who can decide which kind of performances are interculturally competent (Bonvin & Farvaque, 2005). Having defined IC, we now draw on migration studies to characterise SGIs and the consequences of their being raised within multiple cultural systems.

Growing up as second generation individuals: possible influences on development of identifications and competence

Migration scholars often adopt the expression "second generation immigrants" to refer to the children of immigrants, born in their parents' emigration country or who experienced migration at a very young age. The term is contentious with some arguing it favours the naturalization of an imagined category and risks reinforcing social perceptions that the children of immigrants do not fully belong to the society where they grew up. At the same time, the term "second generation" makes it possible to draw attention to a particular experience with social and cultural implications (Chimienti, Bloch, & Ossipow, 2019). In this paper we use the expression "second generation" as a descriptive tool preferring, like many scholars, to talk about second generation "individuals" (SGIs) (as most have not migrated or do not remember). Rumbaut (1994) classifies SGIs as the children of immigrants born in their parents' emigration country and "generation 1.75" as those who migrated pre-school age (Granata & Pischetola, 2010). The two groups are considered indistinguishable from a behavioural standpoint, in terms of education outcomes, linguistic competences and level of internalization of local cultural systems (Christmas, 2010, Padilla, 2006, Rumbaut, 1994). We consider SGIs to include both second generation and generation 1.75.

Through their early interactions, for instance with parents, teachers and classmates, and through exposure to media, individuals progressively adjust to the cultural forces active in their settings and learn to interact with other members of their cultural groups (Kim, 2001). During childhood SGIs' undergo a process of multiple cultural transmissions: they are socialised within their heritage cultures at

home, and local cultures at school, from their peers and teachers (Stroink & Lalonde, 2009). Early studies on SGIs described them as growing up between two cultures but more recently scholars have recognized their involvement with a multiplicity of cultural groups (Grillo, 2011). As previously stated, everyone has multiple cultural affiliations and, in their everyday interactions with different groups and social institutions, experience crossing cultural boundaries. What characterizes the experiences of SGIs, however, is that the cultural boundaries they cross from an early age tend to be constructed by essentialist discourses as borderlines dividing “us” and “them” (Holliday, 2010). For instance, SGIs tend to be socialized across different ethnic and national groups (Barrett, 2013). Such experiences may have a particular impact on development of their identity and competence.

Migration studies highlight how SG children are confronted with cultural diversity as an inherent feature of their daily life (Thomas, Brannen, & Garcia, 2010). Every time they enter their homes, they experience that cultural frames vary by context and adjust their behaviour to the expectations of different cultural systems (Granata & Pischetola, 2010). SG children usually learn and internalize their heritage and local cultures easily (Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009). Mastering both their heritage and local languages they often act as interpreters and intercultural brokers between their families and micropublics (Orellana, 2009). Such roles can lead to acquisition of new skills, but may represent a heavy responsibility (Padilla, 2006).

Two views exist regarding the consequences of multiple cultural transmissions, one negative and the other positive, often two sides of the same coin (Padilla, 2006; Vivero & Jenkins, 1999; Lafromboise et al., 1993). We now describe some negative aspects, with a view to illustrate how they can turn into potentialities. The different sources that feed the socialization into SGIs’ multiple cultures may be demarcated by stark dividing lines with life at home and outside conveying different, possibly incompatible worldviews and cultural demands. With everyday experience featuring continuous adjustment to different cultural expectations, SGIs may find it hard to develop a coherent identity, especially when they receive from meaningful others divergent messages on “who they should be” (Padilla, 2006). Confusion or inner conflict may intensify in adolescence: when questions of identity often tend to be pressing (Szabó and Ward, 2020). Combining conflicting cultural orientations may cause stress, but can also lead to the development of adaptive outcomes that may become important assets (Granata & Pischetola, 2010). To resolve such issues of identity, SGIs must conduct a continual inner dialogue and translating of meanings, which may be conducive to developing high levels of cognitive flexibility and ability to understand other points of view (Zapata-Barrero, 2018; Granata, 2012; Vivero & Jenkins, 1999).

The difficult, but potentially enriching process of cultural negotiation underpinning identity development is influenced by social factors, such as intergroup relations and power dynamics (Padilla, 2006). SGIs, from ethnic minorities, are often subject to dynamics of othering or racialization: they may be constructed as others to the hegemonic norm, often on the basis of their ethnicity, race, and/or religion (Baak, 2019; Scarabello and Witte, 2019). Such dynamics can cause marginalization or exclusion (Jenson, 2010). Identity is an interactive process, in that individuals’ self-image depends on how others perceive them (Chimienti et al., 2019). The identity development of SGIs may be influenced by experiences of exclusion, discrimination or racism (Padilla, 2006). Realizing that you are not fully accepted by mainstream society can undermine belonging with possible repercussions for cultural affiliations (Chimienti et al., 2019). Growing up as an SGI is a unique experience with distinctive aspects, but SGIs’ social reality is internally varied. Their experience is molded by the interplay of multiple axes of differentiation, such as ethnicity, race, religion, class, and gender, that intersect in a given social context (Farris & De Jong, 2014). Such intersections and contexts shape cultural identifications and identity negotiation strategies, with potentially varying outcomes in terms of IC development.

Early in their lives, many SGIs discover that their phenotype, religious symbols or cultural practices can cause exclusion (Granata, 2012). Such discoveries often occur through boundary events (Twine, 1996): episodes in which the behaviour of others leads SGIs to understand they are perceived as different (Granata, 2012). Feelings of estrangement may feature both within their parents’ ethno-national communities and in wider society, because in both they are perceived as different (Granata, 2012). SGIs can feel they do not belong anywhere (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999).

As SGIs become increasingly aware of the implications of their ethnic markers, they may encounter heavy psychological costs, such as lowered levels of self-esteem and a negative self-image (Padilla, 2006). Migration studies have explored different responses to these discoveries. One possible reaction is denial of their cultural origins: by trying to think and behave like the perceived norm and striving to be accepted as fully-fledged members of mainstream society. The outcome is often unsatisfactory; some ethnic markers cannot be hidden and signal otherness and simultaneously SGIs lose their bonds with their parents’ communities (Ellemers, 2012). Another reaction may be rejection of mainstream cultures and embracing their heritage ethnic identities (Granata, 2012). A third way: often, after years of identity dilemmas, young people find mechanisms to maintain strong ties with their heritage cultures and fully belong to the mainstream (Granata, 2012).

Thus, many SGIs develop a multicultural identity attached to different cultural groups internalizing different cultural frames and codes (Brannen, Garcia, & Thomas, 2009). Cultural frame and code switching is the process through which multicultural individuals swing from one cultural scheme and code to another, in response to stimuli from different cultural environments (Toomey, Dorjee, & Ting-Toomey, 2013). As a consequence, they communicate easily with people from different cultural settings (Moore & Barker, 2012). Building a multicultural identity is seen as the most adaptive strategy of identity development for SGIs (Padilla, 2006; Rumbaut, 2001). It allows for an alliance between immigrant parents and second generation children, it is an effective strategy to cope with experiences of discrimination, and it favours positive life paths while developing multiple belongings in mainstream society (Padilla, 2006; Rumbaut, 2001).

However, combining different cultural orientations is not easy and multicultural identity development is a complex process that may produce more or less adaptive outcomes. SGIs’ multicultural identities can take different shapes, along a continuum unfolding between fractured or alternating identities with contradictory meanings of home, and blended or fused identities that harmonize multiple cultures of reference (Granata, 2012; Chimienti et al., 2019). Stroink & Lalonde (2009) highlight that an intergroup context where given cultures are constructed in contrast to one another tends to favour the development of conflicting multicultural identities.

By contrast, the most adaptive identification strategy – being able to protect psychological wellbeing and allow upward social mobility - appears to be synthesising, through inward negotiation with all cultures of reference, developing a hybrid identity that is more than the sum of its parts (Mila-Schaaf & Robinson, 2010). Having explained what we mean by IC and SGIs and summarized the main critical implications, and related potentials, of SGIs' growing up with multiple cultures, we now examine the ways in which knowledge from the literature on IC and migration studies can help shed light on SGIs' IC.

Section 2. Contributions from literature on intercultural competence and from migration studies

Immigrants, second generation and third culture individuals: some relevant differences

Research addressing the intercultural competence (IC) of second generation individuals (SGIs) is scant. Thus our review also considers work concerning the IC of multicultural and third culture individuals. Multicultural individuals are people who have internalized and express loyalty towards different cultural norms, values and groups, and are able to interact with all of them (Toomey et al., 2013; Moore & Barker, 2012; Brannen et al., 2009). Third culture individuals are described as people who, in childhood, accompanied their high-achieving parents in their long-term work stays abroad (Tarique & Weisbord, 2013; Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009). Third culture individuals may live for years in various different countries, but eventually tend to return to their home country (Moore, 2011). Studies on these two groups can offer some insight for furthering research on SGIs' IC, but with some caution.

We have argued that some SGIs develop a multicultural identity, but most research on the IC of multicultural individuals focuses on first generation immigrants (Kim, 2015b, 2001; Korne, Byram, & Fleming, 2007; Lafromboise et al., 1993). For instance Kim (2015a) describes how immigrants, through the stress deriving from their adaptation to a new socio-cultural environment, evolve from a mono-cultural to an intercultural identity, developing a self-other orientation characterized by individuation and universalisation. Individuation entails a sharpened self-awareness and a more distinct perception of others as unique persons instead of as members of an ethnic group (Kim, 2015a). Universalisation is the process by which individuals become aware that cultural groups may differ significantly from one another in their beliefs and behaviors, but at the same time, observe profound similarities in the human condition (Kim, 2015a). Through individuation and universalisation, people become prone to integrate, rather than separate, cultural differences (Christmas, 2010).

Most works on multicultural individuals describe their IC as an outcome of acculturation (Christmas, 2010; Van Oudenhoven & Hofstra, 2006). "Acculturation" can be used to mean either the process of second culture acquisition (Lafromboise et al., 1993; Kim, 2001), or the multi-dimensional process of adjustment that involves individuals exposure to a new culture (Berry & Sabatier, 2010; Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006). In both cases, the little attention is given to the unique acculturation experience of SGIs (Tonsing, 2014; Field, 2004; Abouguendia & Noels, 2001). Unlike most first generation immigrants, who are exposed to a new cultural environment after having consolidated their original identification and belonging, SGIs tend to experience acculturation during early socialization, when they undergo multiple cultural transmissions (Lyttle, Barker, & Cornwell, 2011). Growing up into diversity may have distinct impacts on acculturation outcomes, suffice it to say that age, rather than length, of exposure to a new culture is deemed to have a greater influence on cultural identity development (Moore & Barker, 2012; Rajiva, 2006). Additionally, SGIs' socio-cultural adjustment may follow different paths than immigrants, who often keep their community of origin as one of their terms of social comparison. Conversely SGIs tend to have their society of residence as their main term of social comparison, which often implies higher expectations of inclusion, different psychological responses to ingroup and outgroup conflicts and to discrimination, and, in general, distinct reactions in the relationship with their social environment (Hurtado, Gurin, & Peng, 1994; Thomassen, 2010). If IC development is to be studied as an outcome of acculturation, investigating SGIs IC requires taking into account the distinctiveness of their acculturation experience. Thus, studies on the IC of multicultural immigrants provide useful indications, but further research is needed to understand the IC of SGIs.

Studies on third culture individuals describe how their mobile childhood lifestyle leads them to combine different cultures in a third, unique cultural identity, and to develop relationships with all cultural groups of reference without fully belonging to any (Moore & Barker, 2012; Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009). They are said to feel fully understood only among other third culture individuals, who share common experiences, cultural uniqueness and perceptions of multiple belonging (Moore & Barker, 2012; Vivero & Jenkins, 1999).

In some respects, third culture individuals and SGIs experience similar conditions, in that both spend part of their developmental years outside their parents' home country, engage in intercultural communication since childhood, and live within different cultural systems in their early life (Moore & Barker, 2012; Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009). Third culture individuals are often described as cultural chameleons, able to switch from one communication style to another depending on cultural expectations (Christmas, 2010; Moore & Barker, 2012). They are said to be competent intercultural communicators from a culture-general standpoint, thanks to their high flexibility, strong adaptation skills and acute interpersonal sensitivity (Moore & Barker, 2012). Additionally, they often develop an expanded worldview, aware that it is possible to interpret reality in different ways (Pollock, Van Reken, & Pollock, 2010).

One may be tempted to equate such findings to SGIs but differences between third culture individuals and SGIs require elucidation. Third culture individuals tend to belong to higher social strata, experiencing more favourable socio-economic conditions. They are less likely to experience prejudice, racism and discrimination, as phenotype, class and habitus influence the way individuals are perceived and treated (Song, 2020). Additionally, most third culture individuals remain abroad transitorily, moving between countries and maintaining some detachment from the places where they live. By contrast, most SGIs are in permanent residence, with their communities of residence their main groups of reference (Hurtado et al., 1994). Thus there are differences between third culture individual

and SGI experiences but studies on third culture individuals offer some directions for research on the IC of SGIs.

Specific studies on the intercultural competence of second generation individuals

There are few studies tackling the IC of SGIs with the only English language contribution a quantitative work by [Christmas \(2010\)](#), comparing levels of IC between first and second generation immigrants. Drawing from Kim's theory ([Kim, 2015a; Kim, 2001](#)), positing that IC develops as a result of acculturative stress, Christmas postulates that smooth internalization of mainstream cultures would prevent SGIs from heightening their IC. Findings show that SGIs develop higher cognitive flexibility and intercultural sensitivity than first generation immigrants, both of which are attributes of IC. However, the reasons underpinning the development of heightened levels of IC among SGIs remain unclear. Insightful contributions on SGIs' IC can be found outside the dominant English language literature where they have had little impact on scientific debate.

[Manço \(2002\)](#) defines IC as the set of inner resources that help people face situations featuring multiple cultural references in non-equalitarian contexts. Through empathy, listening skills and the ability to use different languages and communication styles, competent intercultural communicators are able to value both their interlocutors, the groups they belong to, and cultural diversity itself ([Manço, 2002](#)). Manço's work highlights nuances not evident in other more widespread definitions and suggests that focusing on SGIs can enrich the debate on conceptualisations of IC.

[Manço \(2002\)](#) foregrounds a tight connection between identity development strategies and IC. He argues SGIs develop IC precisely through the inner negotiation between their different cultural orientations. This internal dialogue is the training ground enabling their capacity to manage intercultural relations ([Manço, 2002; Granata, 2011](#)). To a certain extent, SGIs experience what happens to all people in their relationship with "cultural others". Interactions with those whom we perceive as different generates an internal negotiation between our different selves, compelling us to see those parts of ourselves we would like to suppress, and threatening our coherent sense of identity. SGIs must deal with this stressful exercise from childhood, learning to turn it into an asset ([Manço, 2002; Granata, 2012](#)). When SGIs learn that their cultural selves can coexist in constant dialogue, they progress their ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultures ([Manço, 2002](#)). The causal nexus between multicultural identity and IC development is bidirectional: by developing positive relationships with others, SGIs reinforce their sense of identity and enhance their capability to manage internal differences and contradictions ([Manço 2002](#)). [Manço \(2002\)](#) also emphasizes the relevance of contextual factors. A social context that does not recognize the value of cultural diversity is often conducive to the insurgence of defensive identity reactions ([Ellemers, 2012](#)), such as denial of some of one's identity components, and, subsequently, may inhibit the development of SGIs' IC.

By the same token, through qualitative research, [Granata \(2011\)](#) finds that the development of IC in SGIs is triggered by boundary events and the subsequent realisation of partial estrangement from their reference social context. Such a discovery can be traumatic but may spur a process of growth enabling them to cope with feelings of partial estrangement. Thus SGIs discover the positive value of all their identity components, develop empathy towards other minorities, and learn how to contrast others' and one's own prejudices ([Granata, 2011](#)). Work on post-traumatic growth, that examines the positive psychological change stemming from the struggle experienced in the aftermath of traumatic events, provides useful conceptual tools for further investigating the how boundary events may spark IC development ([Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004](#)).

[Granata \(2011\)](#) describes SGIs' IC through the idea of the "tightrope walker", evoking SGIs' ability to move with agility along cultural borderlines and to manage their liminal position. She creates an analytical framework that focuses on the behavioural facet of SGIs' IC and describes it as composed from two interwoven dimensions: comprehension and freedom. Comprehension grows out of the interplay between abilities to transfer contents and meanings from one linguistic universe to another, to relate the values and norms acquired from parents' and mainstream society, to put oneself into other's shoes, and to remember one's parents cultural background and pass it on to the next generations ([Granata, 2011](#)). Freedom derives from the intermingling of the ability to communicate the experience of one's family and minority community, to form and articulate opinions on topics linked to one's experience as a SGI, and to look at one's cultures of belonging through a critical lens while contemplating life with novel eyes, questioning the commonplace and interpreting reality with humour ([Granata, 2011](#)).

[Granata \(2012; 2011\)](#) highlights how unity and diversity are inextricably intertwined in SGIs' everyday relationships. From a young age they experience simultaneously sharing common ground with, and difference from, the people they interact with. In a way, for SGIs all encounters are intercultural, even though they generally perceive much in common with their interlocutors. Throughout life, most SGIs learn to lever commonalities with their interlocutor as the starting point for a dialogue where cultural differences can then be called into question. Through such dialogue it is possible to generate a shared culture wherein the possibility of being simultaneously similar and different is recognized and positively valued. Thus [Granata \(2012; 2011\)](#) argues SGIs are potential catalysts of an intercultural mindset.

Multicultural identity negotiation styles and the emergence of intercultural competence

The work by [Manço \(2002\)](#) and [Granata \(2012; 2011\)](#) indicates that furthering knowledge on the IC of SGIs requires the investigation of the identity building mechanisms of multicultural SGIs and of the interplay of such dynamics with IC development. Literature on multicultural individuals, and in particular on cultural frame switching, offers useful conceptual tools for exploring identity development in multicultural SGIs. Key in the study of cultural frame switching is the construct of multicultural identity integration, introduced by [Benet-Martínez, Lee, & Morris \(2002\)](#) to describe how multicultural individuals negotiate and organize their different cultural orientations. Multicultural people are said to exhibit different degrees of multicultural identity integration, that is, different levels of perceived compatibility or conflict and of fusion or compartmentalization between their different cultural

identities (Cheng, Lee, & Benet-Martínez, 2006). Levels of multicultural identity integration vary from individual to individual, and in the same individual over time and social contexts (Cheng et al., 2006).

Researchers have investigated the personality and contextual factors that foster or hinder multicultural identity integration (Haritatos and Benet-Martínez, 2002). Personal traits such as neuroticism or closed-mindedness can be the antecedents of perceptions of cultural conflict and distance, whereas higher degrees of multicultural identity integration are correlated with agreeableness and extraversion. Such findings are relevant to SGIs. Conversely, the contextual factors identified as drivers of different levels of multicultural identity integration are defined as positive or negative perceptions throughout acculturation, but most research on multicultural identity integration focus on first generation immigrants or mixed samples of immigrants and subsequent generations (Miramontez et al., 2008; Cheng et al., 2006; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2002). As such, they risk not grasping the distinctiveness of SGIs' acculturation experience. For instance, they investigate the effect of given acculturative struggles on multicultural identity integration, but, as mentioned, research shows that acculturation stressors may have different psychological impacts on immigrants and SGIs (Tonsing, 2014; Abouguendia and Noels, 2001). Additionally, such studies do not consider factors that are particularly relevant in SGIs' acculturation, such as parents' acculturation orientations and parenting styles (Berry and Sabatier, 2010; Abouguendia and Noels, 2001). Thus, little is known about the specific contextual factors that influence different levels of multicultural identity integration in SGIs.

Research on multicultural individuals finds that cultural frame switching is moderated by variation in multicultural identity integration. In particular, people with high multicultural identity integration respond in culturally congruent ways when exposed to cultural cues linked to one of their cultural backgrounds, while people with low multicultural identity integration, when primed with the same cues, respond in culturally incongruent ways (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Haritatos and Benet-Martínez, 2002). Thus, the structure of multicultural identity –i.e., its degree of perceived compatibility and fusion - is linked to multicultural individuals' ability to communicate within their cultures of belonging. In other words, a correlation exists between levels of multicultural identity integration and culture-specific IC. Research is needed to unravel the linkage between multicultural identity building and culture-general IC (Toomey et al., 2013).

A quantitative study by Thomas, et al. (2010) shows that multiculturals have higher intercultural effectiveness than monoculturals, and that such characteristics are pronounced among multiculturals who experience conflict in their identity building. Thus, individuals with low multicultural identity integration may develop higher culture-general IC. Thomas et al. (2010) posits that experiences of inner conflict and difficulties in negotiating different cultural orientations may drive such development but calls for further research.

Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009 work on third culture individuals shows that early exposure to different cultures may have a negative effect on their identity and emotional stability. The need to adjust to different cultural demands in identity development may cause confusion, conflict, or disruption in their sense of self. They find that third culture individuals' emotional instability is associated with heightened cultural empathy and open-mindedness, which are considered attributes of culture-general IC. Such findings suggest that, like inner conflict for multicultural individuals (Thomas et al., 2010), suffering may have a function in the development of IC among third culture individuals.

Developing intercultural competence through exposure to diversity

Manço (2002) argues that the development of IC among SGIs stems from the negotiation of a multicultural identity. Literature on third culture individuals suggests a different pathway for IC development among people exposed to cultural diversity since childhood. Tarique & Weisbord, (2013) posit that the development of third culture individuals' IC could be explained through the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977 in Tarique & Weisbord, 2013). Therein human learning takes place through an interplay of environmental and cognitive factors, via a process in which individuals observe the behaviours of others and the consequences of their own behaviours in a certain environment (attention); they memorize what they observed (retention); and then adopt or readdress a certain behaviour in response to attention and retention (reproduction). Through reproduction, individuals assess the consequences of the new behaviour adopted (attention). The repeated positive outcome of a behaviour causes it to be stored in long-term memory so that it can be utilized in future, analogous situations (Bandura, 1977 in Tarique and Weisbord, 2013). The development of IC among third culture individuals may result from early exposure to cultural diversity, that allows them to experience the consequences of their behaviours when interacting with people from unfamiliar cultures (Tarique & Weisbord, 2013). Such a learning process could involve not only multicultural, but also mono-cultural individuals. Having examined the state of knowledge on the IC of SGIs, we now highlight some insights from migration studies wherein some works, although not specifically focused on IC, offer some insight relevant to our topic of interest.

Choices on the possible use of intercultural competence

(Morando, 2016) shows how in some contexts multilingualism represents an important opportunity for occupational mobility of SGIs, who are often employed to mediate between different social and cultural groups (eg. clients and employees). Multilingualism, as well as the ability to bridge cultural differences, can be considered as a form of "SGI advantage" (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2009 p342). However, playing an intermediary role between different cultural groups implies a liminal position that may be psychologically difficult (Vallejo, 2009). Mediating between groups entangled in power relations with different concerns and interests may be stressful (Morando, 2016). Indeed, it is not to be assumed that SGIs endowed of IC will be willing to use it.] For instance Sadjed, Sprung, & Kukovetz (2015) find that SGIs tend to hide competences linked to their migration background at work, as they perceive them as ethnic markers with potential to undermine their career. It is unclear whether (Morando, 2016) and Sadjed et al.

(2015) are talking about culture-specific or culture-general IC (probably a mix of both) but Mantel's (2020) work clearly refers to culture-general IC. It notes that SG teachers were divided between others' expectations and their own wish to engage in management of intercultural issues, and the perceived risk that this would highlight their ascribed, often stigmatized differences and mask their overall human capital. However, the nexus between contextual factors - such as stigmatising intergroup relations - and the choices of SGIs cannot be conceived in deterministic terms. SGIs are agents in dialectic interaction with their context and may choose either to hide or reveal their migration background and related competences as an active strategy to pursue their goals, which may include challenging intergroup power relations (Zanoni and Janssens, 2007).].

Section 3. Moving ahead: an agenda for research on the intercultural competence of second-generation individuals

Knowledge gaps

We have argued that second generation individuals (SGIs), thanks to their upbringing within multiple cultural environments, may develop heightened intercultural competence (IC). Having examined how literature on IC and migration studies contribute to the knowledge on SGIs' IC, we now argue that targeted research is needed to bring further insight.

We have shown that some studies indicate that early exposure to cultural diversity may be conducive to the development of special assets, most of which fall within the realm of IC (Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock et al., 2010; Manco, 2002). Christmas (2010) finds that levels of IC tend to be higher among SGIs than first generation immigrants, but to the best of our knowledge no other work provides empirical insight into the extent of IC among SGIs, compared to other social categories. Additionally, with a view to give a systematic account of the facets composing SGIs' IC, Granata (2011) creates a model that analytically describes the interrelated behavioural components of such competence. Further research is needed to delve into value-related, cognitive, and affective dimensions, their mutual interplay and their interaction with the contexts where IC is deployed. Additionally, little is known about the different patterns of IC potentially developed by distinct subgroups of SGIs who, for instance, feature different ascribed characteristics or live in different contexts.

Much is still to be understood about the processes by which SGIs develop IC and the nature of the relationship between identification with multiple groups and the emergence of IC. Previous work indicates some promising lines of enquiry. Tarique & Weisbord (2013) posit that individuals who have early and meaningful experiences of intercultural communication learn, through observation, retention and reproduction, which interaction styles are effective and appropriate in contexts marked by cultural diversity. Accordingly, IC can be developed by both mono-cultural and multicultural SGIs. By contrast, other contributions spotlight the link between multicultural identity construction and the development of IC (Granata, 2011; Thomas et al., 2010; Dewaele & Van Oudenhoven, 2009; Manco, 2002). Further investigation is needed to examine the experiences, mechanisms and processes by which SGIs develop IC.

Scholars suggest that culture-specific IC tends to be associated with integrated multicultural identities (Mila-Schaaf & Robinson, 2010; Thomas et al., 2010; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2002) but there is scant knowledge on the correlation between identity negotiation styles and the development of culture-general IC. Two different perspectives can be identified but more evidence is needed. Some works on multicultural and third culture individuals stress the function of pain and conflict in heightening culture-general IC: finding that IC tends to be associated with emotional instability and conflicting multicultural identities (Thomas et al., 2010, Dewaele and Van Oudenhoven, 2009). Similarly, some scholars maintain that the difficult negotiation between different cultural orientations is at the heart of IC development. However, these authors argue that individuals who manage to build a coherent multicultural identity develop strengthened IC (Manco, 2002; Granata, 2011). Granata (2011), Granata (2012) underlines that the traumas caused by boundary events have a key role in triggering the development of a coherent identity, yet, the experiences, personality or contextual factors which are able to enhance or inhibit the overcoming of trauma, inner conflict and sense of estrangement have not been investigated in depth.

Another area deserving of further attention is the choices made by SGIs concerning the use of their IC. Migration studies show that in some cases engaging in intercultural communication is distressing for SGIs, who may be particularly sensitive to intergroup tensions and feel uncomfortable in situations highlighting existing ethnic boundaries (Sadjed et al., 2015). Thus, SGIs may prefer not to foreground their IC at work, fearing that this might undermine their professional mobility (Mantel, 2020; Sadjed et al., 2015). At the same time, research adopting the perspective of agency shows how members of ethnic minorities may play strategically with the way they are constructed in society – including negative representations -, with a view to achieving their own goals or challenging ethnic boundaries (Jensen, 2011; Zanoni & Janssens, 2007). Investigating when and how SGIs use their IC calls into question both intergroup power relations and SGIs' personal experiences, goals, and creativity, and could help assessing the actual potential of SGIs' IC for society.

Steps forward

We argue that a comprehensive research agenda for advancing knowledge on SGIs' IC should adopt an interdisciplinary approach and proceed to outline the main research pathways that might be undertaken to address the knowledge gaps identified herein.

Firstly, systematic investigation should be conducted to formulate an analytical framework of SGIs' IC, able to describe its value-related, cognitive, affective, and behavioural attributes, as well as their interrelations. As has been seen, certain shared criteria are needed to assess whether a performance is competent, which raises the issue of who has the capability for voice in defining IC (Bonvin & Farvaque, 2005). This is why, especially given the intergroup power relations that feature multiethnic contexts, we suggest researchers should explore SGIs' own perceptions and descriptions of their IC. The exploration of SGIs' perceptions may offer novel

reflections and feed the scholarly debate on how to conceptualize IC. In addition, SGIs' perceptions should be elicited in association with their perceptions of the context where such competence is manifested. Such interrelation is of great relevance for the investigation of IC, given its relational and contextual nature. It is important to examine how SGIs perceive their potential as catalyzer of an intercultural mindset, in relation to different contexts (Granata, 2011). Furthermore it might be interesting to observe whether differences among SGIs, for instance in terms of gender, ethnic background, or intersections of these variables, influence their description of their IC.

Secondly, comparing SGIs with other groups in terms of their levels of IC may help to understand the extent to which the specific experiences characterizing SGIs upbringing favour IC development. However, IC assessment entails relevant theoretical and methodological criticalities (Borghetti, 2017). First of all, the individual's competence can only be assessed through his/her performance, that is influenced by contingent personal, relational and contextual factors (Portera, 2014). Furthermore, if the external factors of IC such as certain behavioural components are easier to observe and measure, it is much more problematic to detect and assess internal factors, such as values, knowledge, and attitudes (Borghetti, 2017; Holmes, 2014). Moreover, the assessment of IC has some controversial ethical implications, in that it implies issues of power, for instance in the definition of the meaning of appropriateness and effectiveness (Borghetti, 2017). The limitations linked to such aporias and the ethical risks intrinsic to IC assessment must be taken into consideration when comparing the levels of SGIs IC with those of other social categories.

Thirdly, the development processes through which SGIs strengthen their IC represent an interesting, largely unexplored terrain for investigation. Also in this concern, the exploration of SGIs ideas and perceptions may be intriguing. It can be observed whether such perceptions and ideas confirm the hypothesis put forward by Tarique & Weisbord (2013), indicate a strong link between multicultural identity and intercultural development, or suggest different development trajectories. Investigation should involve SGIs perceiving themselves both as mono-cultural and as multicultural, so that it can be analyzed whether different development pathways emerge in the two categories. When evidence indicates a relation between IC development and multicultural identifications, it is important to understand the type of nexus existing between these processes, that is, the way they influence one another.

Much remains to be known about the connection between SGIs multicultural identity construction and development of IC. The construct of multicultural identity integration offers a useful guidance for analysis on this topic. For instance, it might be enlightening to investigate whether the development of IC by multicultural SGIs is nurtured by the difficult management of conflicting or dissociated identities or, rather, by the inward dialogue that underlies coherent and integrated selves. Additionally, it is important to examine personal experiences and the personality and contextual factors that shape SGIs' overcoming of traumatic boundary events, experiences of exclusion and inner conflict, and the development of a coherent multicultural identity (Manco, 2002; Granata, 2011). Differences linked to gender or cultural background may be detected. Literature on post-traumatic growth could provide insightful suggestions for such investigation (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Finally, to understand how European societies can benefit from SGIs IC, we might investigate when and how SGIs choose to use their IC. As already mentioned, for the competence to exist, it must be socially recognized, that is, it must meet certain shared criteria. Thus, it is important to analyze if the potentialities developed by SGIs are recognized by other social actors. Investigating whether and how SGIs intend to use their IC in the labour market and whether and why employers consider SGIs IC as an asset for their organization would bring useful insight.

We have set out a number of useful suggestions to advance research on SGIs IC, but such a field of investigation, still largely unexplored, undoubtedly offers further possibilities for inquiry. Further research on SGIs IC is to be encouraged, as it offers the potential to provide evidence for policy and practice on how to make the most of existing opportunities for supporting social cohesion in diversifying societies. Additionally, it is promising from a heuristic standpoint. On the one hand, observing SGIs from the lens of their potentialities rather than their social disadvantages enables the enhancement of knowledge about social inclusion. At the same time, investigating IC from the perspective of SGIs may shed new light on the nature of IC and contribute to the debate on its conceptualisation.

Funding Source

This work was supported by the European Commission, Horizon 2020 program, Marie Skłodowska-Curie IF funding scheme. Research Project; Migrant descendants' intercultural competence and their recognition in the English and Italian labour market, grant number 841716 and grant number 874979 (special needs support grant).

Declarations of Competing Interest

None.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our grateful thanks to Michael Byram, Alessio Surian, Matteo Rinaldini, and the anonymous reviewers, whose insightful suggestions meaningfully improved the quality of this work. We are also thankful to Natasha Nicholls for proof-reading and editing the paper.

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