Living with others: Mapping the routes to acculturation in a multicultural society

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Abstract

This study investigated attitudes towards multiculturalism and their influence on acculturation strategies of both Anglo-Australians and Asian immigrants residing in the city of Brisbane, the third largest city of Australia. Data was obtained via a survey administered to 133 Asian immigrants and 108 Anglo-Australians, a total of 241 respondents. Results revealed discordance in attitudes towards multiculturalism between Asians and Australians, with Asians rating it higher as a benefit and lower as a threat as compared to Australians. While higher ratings on multiculturalism as a threat tended to be positively related to separation strategy, this linear association did not hold true for the minority group (Asians). For Asian respondents, those who perceived a moderate threat in multiculturalism were more likely supporters for separation. Our findings supported the assumption that multiculturalism is viewed as differentially beneficial for minority and majority groups.

Keywords: Acculturation; Integration; Intergroup relations; Multiculturalism; Separation

1. Introduction

Australia has become one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world. One can hardly walk along a major street of a city for ten minutes without passing a Chinese restaurant, or a Vietnamese groceries store or an Italian deli shop. The most significant contributor to this multicultural environment is the ever increasing levels of immigration...
As Castles (1992) pointed out, nowhere is this more apparent than in a country like Australia where “immigration has always been a central part of nation building” (p. 549). Since the end of World War II, around 6.5 million migrants have come to Australia as settlers (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2007c) and this trend is increasing. In the immediate post-war period only 10% of Australia’s population was born overseas (Marden & Mercer, 1998). Today, nearly 25% of the population is born overseas and approximately 200 languages are spoken in the country (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2007b). With each encounter of alternative food, clothing, architecture, life style, art, language and medicine, we learn some new things outside of our “village” culture. Indeed, living with “others” we are being multiculturalised every day.

However, behind various visible symbols of cultural diversity is a complex concept of multiculturalism (MC). At a descriptive level, MC can be used to characterise a society with diverse cultures; as an attitude, it can refer to a society’s tolerance towards diversity and acceptance of equal societal participation. The question is to what extent can immigrants maintain their access to ethnic language, religion, customs and traditions, and various ethnic organisations without posing a threat to the overall political unity of the host society (Rex, 1995)? In the wake of fully maximising the national benefits of cultural diversity, we are aware of some potential threats to our cultural uniqueness. The host nationals have been expressing concerns over the threat ethnic cultures might pose on the mainstream cultural values, the political and economic power structure and the distribution of employment opportunities (e.g. Berry & Kalin, 1995; Berry, Kalin, & Taylor, 1977; Stephan, Renfro, Esses, Stephan, & Martin, 2005). The migrants, on the other hand, have been forming state and national associations to maintain their ethnic culture heritage and promote the survival of their languages within the mainstream institutions since 1973 (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2007a). The widely reported Cronulla riots between Anglo-Australians and Lebanese in Sydney in 2005 is just one example of the unresolved issue of maintaining cultural identity. Does MC pose a threat to our cultural identity? Do host nationals and immigrants view MC as equally beneficial? What do immigrants believe that they should do to acculturate into the host country? Is this understanding shared by the host nationals? Despite the popularity of the term in the public rhetoric, our understanding of what MC means and how our interpretation subsequently influences our acculturation strategies is still far from complete. Hence, research that enhances a deeper level of understanding of MC has important social and policy implications.

This study investigated attitudes towards MC and their influence on acculturation strategies of Anglo-Australians and Asian immigrants residing in the city of Brisbane, the third largest city of Australia. Urban rather than rural areas were chosen as sampling frame because, in Australia, the majority–minority groups’ tension tends to be in the cities due to the concentration of immigrant stream in the major urban areas (Forrest & Dunn, 2007). “Anglo-Australian” refers to Australians of European descent, who are considered to make up 80% of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003). “Asian immigrant” here refers to immigrants from Northeast Asia (including China, Hong Kong and Taiwan) and Southeast Asian (including Singapore and Malaysia). Although the term “Asian” might be too general to capture the differences in culture uniqueness of the countries, it nevertheless provides a useful referent when drawing differences between

(Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2007a).
Asian and Anglo-Australian groups (Leung, Pe-Pua, & Karnilowicz, 2006). Asian immigrants were selected as the prototype immigrant group because Asian community stands out as an outgroup in relation to people from the mainstream (Anglo-Australians). Cultural distance is related to the level of acceptance or prejudice from members of the cultural majority as experienced by immigrants (Ho, Niles, Penny, & Thomas, 1994). In Australia, for example, it has become an important part of the Asian values debate, particularly in response to the increased Asian immigration and the continuing emphasis placed on Australia’s role in the Asian region as being closely tied to the policy of MC (Marden & Mercer, 1998). Considering Asian immigrants constitute the largest non-English speaking migrant group (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2007c) and the significant contributions they continue to make to Australia’s economy, business and education (DFAT, 2005), promoting harmonious interethnic relations between Asian immigrants and the Anglo-Australians is of strategic importance, culturally, politically and economically.

2. Acculturation, multiculturalism and intergroup relations

The widely applied model of acculturation is developed by John Berry (e.g. Berry, 1980, 1990). According to his model, immigrants are confronted with two basic issues: the maintenance of their heritage culture and maintenance of relationships with the host society. Mapped out on this continuum, their acculturation strategies range from positive/positive (integration), negative/positive (assimilation), positive/negative (separation) to negative/negative (marginalisation). One major conceptual shortcoming of this original model, as identified by scholars including Berry himself, is that it places the emphasis of acculturation on the minority or immigrant groups (Berry et al., 1977; Horenczyk, 1997), assuming immigrants have the freedom to pursue the acculturation strategy they prefer in the host society. However, in reality, acculturation takes place within the context of both intra- and intergroup relations; and host attitudes can exert strong influence on how immigrants experience the process (Bourhis, Moïse, Perreault, & Senécal, 1997; Kosic, Mannetti, & Sam, 2005). Like immigrants, members of a host society also develop acculturation attitudes, which define how this process should take place (Rohmann, Florack, & Piontkowski, 2006). For them, acculturation issues are whether or not they want immigrants to maintain their heritage culture and whether or not they value intergroup contact. Usually, their acculturation attitudes are referred to as integration, assimilation and separation (Bourhis et al., 1997). Results from previous research show that discordance between majority and minority acculturation attitudes could lead to ingroup bias and perceived discrimination (Zagofka & Brown, 2002).

Therefore, to overcome the limitations of the original linear model, Berry (see 2005 for a review) conceptualised acculturation based on the presence of three underlying dimensions: “cultural maintenance, intergroup contact and participation, and the power to decide on how to acculturate” (p. 706). With the White Australia policy abolished and replaced by MC policy in the 1970s (Forrest & Dunn, 2007), immigrants are more welcome to integrate into the host culture while maintaining ties with their own ethnic heritage. The assumption that minority groups and individuals would move from their “traditional” way of living to a way resembling the host society, an assimilation or melting pot conception, has been gradually replaced by this multidimensional view of acculturation. Consistent with findings from studies conducted in other countries (e.g. Rohmann et al.,
research conducted in Australia shows that among immigrants, integration, which promotes cultural diversity and intergroup contact, is the most common acculturation strategy (e.g. Nesdale & Mak, 2003), followed by either assimilation or separation, while marginalisation is usually shown to be the least preferred (e.g. Liu, 2006). Evidence from previous research also indicates that integration strategy is linked with optimal psychological adjustment of immigrants (Pfafferott & Brown, 2006) and with more favourable intergroup attitudes (Zagefka & Brown, 2002).

Nevertheless, national ethnocentrism to which Australianness is tightly linked (Dixson, 1999; Johnson, 2002) is still reflected in the country’s legacy of Anglo-privilege and cultural dominance (Forrest & Dunn, 2006). Hence, there have been repeated discussions in the local media about Australian values and nationalism (e.g. Courier-Mail, September–October 2006) to preserve Anglo-Australianness in the host culture. Previous research in Australia from the immigrant perspective indicates that the level of acceptance by members of the cultural majority decreases with cultural dissimilarity (e.g.; Nesdale, 2002). Evidence from other studies also suggests that physical dissimilarity militates against acceptance (Liebkind & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2000). From the perspective of intergroup relations, people are more attracted to individuals who are similar to themselves than to those who are different (Duck & Barnes, 1992). Therefore, two dominant and competing acculturation strategies seem to exist: integration and separation, on which our present study would focus. Based on the literature of immigrants’ preferred acculturation strategy and the impact of cultural distance, we hypothesise:

**H1.** Asian group’s ratings on integration are higher than that of Anglo-Australian group; but their ratings on separation is lower than that of Anglo-Australian group.

Given that attitude favoured by the mainstreamers may not necessarily be perceived in the same way by members of the minority group, MC, that stresses the importance of recognising cultural diversity within the same political framework as well as equal opportunities (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006), could also lead to group distinctions (Brewer, 1997) and threaten social cohesion (Berry, 2001), if interpreted differently. Berry and Kalin (1995) argue that groups are more in favour of MC when they see advantages for themselves. The ideological asymmetry hypothesis proposed by social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) suggests that hierarchy-attenuating ideologies such as MC appeals more to low status groups than to high status groups because the status hierarchy is differentially beneficial for members of low and high status groups. For minority groups, presumably in the lower social status group, MC offers the possibility of maintaining their own culture and obtaining higher social status in society. The majority group members, on the other hand, may see ethnic minorities and their desire to maintain their own culture as a threat to the mainstream cultural identity and higher status position. Thus, we hypothesise:

**H2.** Asian group’s ratings on MC as a benefit are higher than that of Anglo-Australian group; but their ratings on MC as a threat are lower than that of Anglo-Australian group.

A significant amount of research suggests that perception of threat plays an important role in prejudice towards outgroups in general and immigrants in particular (Berry et al., 1977; Stephan et al., 2005). The integrated threat theory identifies four domains of threat. Realistic threat concerns threat to the political and economic power of the ingroup, as well as threat to the well-being of the ingroup (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1976). Immigrants would
seem likely to evoke such threat as they always need jobs and they may require additional resources from the host society. Symbolic threat concerns group differences in values, beliefs, morals and attitudes. Esses, Haddock, and Zanna (1993) have found that symbolic beliefs are related to Canadians’ prejudice toward different outgroups. Negative stereotypes, as a third domain of threat, serve as a basis for negative expectations concerning the behaviour of members of the stereotyped group. For example, when migrant group (outgroup) members are perceived to be untrustworthy, the mainstreamer group (ingroup) members may feel threatened by interacting with them. The fourth type of threat concerns intergroup anxiety. Several theorists argue that people feel personally threatened in intergroup interactions because they are concerned about negative outcomes for the self, such as being embarrassed, rejected, or ridiculed (Gudykunst, 1995; Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Interacting with immigrants is often difficult for people from the host culture due to differences in language and cultural values, and this adds intergroup anxiety in interaction. Based on the literature, we hypothesise:

H3. The tendency to view MC as a benefit is positively related to integration whereas the tendency to view MC as a threat is positively related to separation; these associations hold true for both Asian and Anglo-Australian groups.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Purposive and snowball sampling technique was employed to obtain respondents. Asian immigrants, primarily from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia, were contacted through Asian community associations, churches and students to obtain initial consent in taking part in the survey. One common characteristic feature among participants from different Asian subgroups was they all had a Chinese origin (e.g. either one or both parents were Chinese). The Anglo-Australians were contacted with the help of colleagues and friends. Approximately 430 questionnaires were distributed and eventually, 241 (133 Asians and 108 Anglo-Australians) respondents from nine suburbs of Brisbane voluntarily participated in the survey, making a response rate of 56%. The pool of respondents consisted of 44% males and 56% females; their age ranged from under 20 to 60 with half of them (51%) falling between 21 and 30; approximately 41% of the respondents received undergraduate education; 54% of the respondents were full-time students and 28% of them were working full time; 61% of the respondents were at the lower end of annual income (at or under A$20,000 per annum) and 9% were at the higher end (at or above A$60,000 per annum); 49% of the participants resided in areas moderately populated by immigrants, the rest were divided between living in suburbs either lightly populated (39%) or densely populated (12%) by immigrants; all Australian respondents were born in Australia whereas only 10% of Asian respondents were born in Australia.

3.2. Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of 37 items categorised into three sections: attitudes toward MC, acculturation strategies, and demographic data. Multicultural attitudes were
measured on two scales: MC as a threat and MC as a benefit. “Threat” consisted of 8 items concerning cultural diversity as a threat to national unity, safety of neighbourhood and host cultural values (e.g. The unity of Australia is weakened by ethnic minorities of different cultural background sticking to their old ways). “Benefit” was measured by 10 items concerning cultural diversity as a benefit to Australian society and the necessity of encouraging cultural awareness in schools, workplace and neighbourhood as well as equal societal participation (e.g. It is good for Australia to have different groups with a distinct cultural background living in this country). Acculturation strategies comprised of two domains: integration and separation. “Integration” consisted of 7 items encouraging intergroup interactions (e.g. Anglo-Australians and ethnic minorities should seek more contact with one another). “Separation” consisted of 5 items expressing reluctance to interact with ethnic minorities at work, in public places or neighbourhood (e.g. I don’t like being in a bus or on a train in which there are ethnic minorities).

The 30 items measuring multicultural attitudes (benefit or threat) and acculturation strategies (integration or separation) were adapted from the Multicultural Attitude Scale (Breugemanns & Van de Vijver, 2004), most of them, however, came from the survey instrument originally developed by Berry et al. (1977). The items were formulated as statements, followed by a 5-point Likert scale with 1 standing for strongly disagree and 5 representing strongly agree (see Appendix for a complete survey questionnaire). The overall alpha coefficients of the four scales ranged from .74 to .83; and the reliability scores across the two groups of participants ranged from .62 to .85, similar to the scores of scales obtained in Leung et al.’s study (2006) examining differences between Anglo-Celtic and three Asian groups on psychological adaptation. One item measuring separation was deleted to achieve better internal scale consistency. The remaining 7 questions in the survey intended to collect demographic data such as gender, place of birth, age, education, employment status, income and residence. Mean scores of each scale (total score divided by the number of items) were calculated and each scale was treated as a variable in subsequent data analysis. Table 1 summarises the reliability scores of the scales.

### 3.3. Procedures

A cover letter that outlined the nature and purpose of the study, information on the responsible researcher/institution and instruction on how to fill out the survey accompanied each questionnaire. Questionnaires were distributed via the researcher, gatekeepers of Asian immigrant associations, research assistants and the mail. In order to protect anonymity of participants, a pre-paid return envelope was attached for each

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Asians ($n = 133$)</th>
<th>Australians ($n = 108$)</th>
<th>Overall ($n = 241$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MC as a threat</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC as benefit</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
respondent to mail the completed questionnaire back to the researcher, regardless of how the questionnaire was distributed to the participant.

4. Results

The mean and standard deviation scores of the two groups of respondents on all four variables/scales are summarised in Table 2.

H1 predicted that Asians rated integration higher but separation lower as compared to Anglo-Australians. Results from independent sample t-test indicated that Asians’ ratings on integration were significantly higher than that of Australians ($t = 6.31, p < .001$). This finding was consistent with results from previous studies that identified integration as the most preferred acculturation strategy by immigrants (e.g. Bourhis et al., 1997; Pfafferott & Brown, 2006). However, the difference between the two groups in their ratings on separation did not reach significance level ($t = 1.70, n.s.$). Hence, H1 was partially confirmed. While the desire to integrate into the host society was stronger in minority groups (Asians), the tendency to separate either by sticking to their ethnic cultural heritage (Asians) or by holding on to their Anglo-Australian values (Australians) was similar in strength in both groups of respondents.

H2 hypothesised that Asian immigrant group’s ratings on MC as a benefit were higher but their ratings on MC as a threat were lower than that of Anglo-Australian group. Results from independent sample t-test supported this hypothesis. Asians tended to view MC more as a benefit ($t = 6.54, p < .001$) but less as a threat ($t = 3.36, p < .01$) as compared to Australians. These findings supported the assumption of the ideological asymmetry hypothesis that proposed MC would appeal more to minority or low status groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). These findings also provided some support for the integrated threat theory that assumes the host society could perceive migrants as a threat to the mainstream culture (e.g. Esses et al., 1993).

H3 predicted that viewing MC as a benefit was positively related to integration whereas viewing MC as a threat was positively related to separation; and these associations would hold true for both Asians and Anglo-Australians. This hypothesis was, again, only partially supported. To test the between group differences (Asians and Australians) on acculturation strategies (integration and separation) at different levels of attitudes towards MC, the original two continuous variables measuring attitudes towards MC (MC as a threat and MC as a benefit) were recoded into 3-level categorical variables (High, Mid and

Table 2
Mean and standard deviation scores of Asian and Anglo-Australian groups on the variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Asians ($n = 133$)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC as a threat</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC as benefit</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Variables are measured on 5 point Likert scale with 1 standing for “strongly disagree” and 5 standing for “strongly agree.”
and used as the first independent variable. Ethnicity was treated as the second independent variable. A $3 \times 2$ ANOVA was performed to examine the main effect of each independent variable as well as the interactions of the two independent variables on the dependent variable (e.g. integration). Similar tests were run with MC as a benefit and separation as acculturation strategy.

The first ANOVA tested the effect of MC as a threat on integration. Levene’s test indicated that the homogeneity of variance assumption was not violated ($p > .05$). Results revealed a significant main effect of MC as a threat on integration, $F(2, 233) = 20.19, p < .001$. This main effect showed that attitudes towards MC significantly influenced acculturation strategies. Post-Hoc Tests (Scheffe) revealed that significant differences existed between people in low and mid threat groups and between people in mid and high threat groups with the tendency of higher scores on MC as a threat leading to lower scores on integration. Ethnicity was also found to have a significant main effect on integration, $F(1, 233) = 15.15, p < .001$, with Asians scoring significantly higher on integration than Australians (see H1). In addition, results also showed a significant interaction between MC as a threat and ethnicity, $F(2, 233) = 3.61, p < .05$. Thus, the influence of viewing MC as a threat on integration depended on the ethnicity of the respondents (see Table 3).

![Fig. 1](image)

Fig. 1 showed that for Australians viewing MC as a threat was more strongly associated with integration as compared to Asians, although the association for both groups was in the negative direction (see Fig. 1).

The second ANOVA tested the effect of MC as a threat on separation. Levene’s test indicated that the homogeneity of variance assumption was not violated ($p > .05$). Results revealed a significant main effect of MC as a threat on separation, $F(2, 237) = 55.98, p < .001$. Post Hoc tests (Scheffe) revealed that significant differences existed between people in low and mid threat groups and between people in mid and high threat groups with the tendency of higher scores on MC as a threat leading to higher scores on separation. Ethnicity was also found to have a significant main effect on separation, $F(1, 237) = 4.09, p < .05$, with Asians in general scoring significantly lower on separation than Australians (see H1). In addition, results also showed a significant interaction between MC as a threat and ethnicity, $F(2, 237) = 8.38, p < .001$. Thus, the influence of viewing MC as a threat on separation depended on the ethnicity of the respondents (see Table 4).

An interesting finding in the Asian group was that respondents in mid threat group scored highest on separation. This result indicated that the link between attitudes towards MC and acculturation strategies was viewed differently by respondents from the host culture and those from the ethnic culture. Post-Hoc multiple comparisons of Australian respondents showed significant differences between low and mid threat group and between

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MC as threat</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Australian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>3.72 (.47)</td>
<td>3.59 (.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>3.55 (.36)</td>
<td>3.08 (.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>3.25 (.91)</td>
<td>2.71 (.56)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Higher scores indicate more in favour of integration.
mid and high threat group, with higher ratings on MC as a threat relating consistently to higher ratings on separation. However, results from multiple comparisons of Asian respondents only revealed mid threat group’s significantly higher ratings on separation as compared to low threat group. No significant difference was found between high and low threat groups, or between high and mid threat groups. Fig. 2 showed a positive linear relationship between viewing MC as a threat and separation for the Australian respondents. However, for Asian respondents, this association tended to be curvilinear (see Fig. 2).

Results from the third and fourth ANOVA revealed a main effect of MC as a benefit on both integration, \( F(2, 234) = 47.13, \ p < .001 \); and on separation, \( F(2, 238) = 39.63, \ p < .001 \). Neither the main effect of ethnicity nor interaction reached significance level. Thus, the influence of MC as a benefit on acculturation strategies did not depend on the ethnicity of the respondents. Post-Hoc multiple comparisons indicated significant differences between high and mid benefit groups and between mid and low benefit groups,

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Table 4
Means (and standard deviations) for separation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MC as threat</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Australian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1.92 (.56)</td>
<td>1.67 (.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>2.64 (.62)</td>
<td>2.50 (.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>2.37 (.43)</td>
<td>3.49 (.60)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Higher scores indicate more in favour of separation.*
with higher ratings of MC as a benefit positively related to integration and negatively related to separation.

5. Discussion and implications

The arrival of immigrants as new settlers may bring various changes to the host cultural environment. As pointed out by Sayegh and Lasry (1993), it is difficult “to imagine a host society which would not be transformed after immigrants have been accepted as full participants into the social and institutional networks of that society” (p. 99). Thus, not only the immigrant group but also the host nationals are undergoing psychological and sociological adjustment as a result of the presence of culturally distinctive “others” (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 2001). Under some circumstances, the psychological adjustment for mainstreamers might seem even more difficult as compared to that experienced by immigrants. The reason is that immigrants in many cases are aware of the need to adjust to their host cultural environment at the time, if not well before, they set their foot in the host country. The mainstreamers, however, might not be equally well-prepared to accept or adjust to various changes in their lives brought about by the immigrant population. Hence, in studying MC and acculturation, it is important to take into consideration both the ethnic minority and the majority group members because a lack of reciprocal attitudes may hamper the realisation of a positively diverse and equal society.

Consistent with findings from previous studies (e.g. Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker, & Obdrzálek, 2000; Rohmann et al., 2006; Zagefka & Brown, 2002), this study has identified integration as the most preferred acculturation strategy by Asian respondents. Integration offers immigrants the opportunity to keep their ethnic cultural practice while maintaining

Fig. 2. Interaction on separation.
a positive relationship with the host society. Integration probably benefits immigrants more as it, among other things, provides them an opportunity to upgrade their group’s lower social status. An important assumption of social identity theory is that membership in a high-status group is desirable because it may contribute to positive social identity (Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993). To maintain a positive self-concept derived from a satisfying social identity, individuals who belong to a group of subordinate status may either strive for a higher status by leaving their low status group or try to upgrade the status position of their group as a whole (Tajfel, 1978). In the case of immigrants, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for them to upgrade the status position of their ethnic group as a whole, as they came to the host country from different walks of life and for various reasons. Therefore, efforts to achieve a positive social identity are focused on integrating into the host group, rather than remaining as a member of the “stranger” (outgroup). Evidence from previous research suggests that integration is associated to positive acculturation outcomes (see Berry, 2005 for a review).

However, the question is whether or not our society has provided immigrants with an environment in which they feel welcome to integrate into their host society. Findings from Nesdale and Mak’s study (2003) on the relative significance of a range of variables in predicting the ethnic identification of immigrants in Australia show that increasing cultural distance encourages immigrants to remain psychologically located within their ethnic groups (e.g. immigrants from Hong Kong as compared to those from New Zealand). Hence, the extent to which the mainstreamers allow members of ethnic groups to maintain their own culture and partake in relationships with the dominant cultural group plays an important role in the construction of a truly multicultural society (Breugemanns & Van de Vijver, 2004). Results from our study have revealed Asian group’s significant higher ratings on integration as compared to that of the Australian group. Hence, promoting intergroup understanding is a major challenge facing both the host nationals and the immigrants as differences in acculturation orientations may result in problematic or conflictual intergroup relations (e.g. Berry, 2006; Bourhis et al., 1997).

Results from this study show that Asian immigrant group tend to view MC more as a benefit as compared to the Australian group that viewed MC more as a threat. This finding provides support for the theoretical assumption that MC is typically seen as having more to offer to minority groups than to the majority group (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). Explained from the perspective of the social dominance theory, MC is differentially beneficial for lower status and higher status groups. For the mainstreamers, MC could pose a threat to their cultural dominance and existing higher social status (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). According to the multicultural hypothesis (Berry et al., 1977), confidence in one’s cultural identity involves a sense of security which is a psychological precondition for the acceptance of those who are culturally different. Conversely, when people feel their cultural identity is threatened, they will reject others. The implication for policy makers is to create a sense of confidence in different cultural groups, including the host nationals so as to reduce discriminatory attitudes (Berry, 2006). The presence of visible multicultural symbols (e.g. ethnic shops) alone is not necessarily an indicator of a true multicultural society unless there are mutual acceptance and equal societal participation of all cultural groups.

An interesting finding in this study is the higher rating on separation strategy by Asian respondents who view MC as a moderate threat. From the perspective of group vitality theory, the stronger the vitality of immigrant groups, the more likely such groups are to
adopt orientations that reflect their own priorities rather than those determined by the host majority (Bourhis et al., 1997; Giles, Bourhis, & Taylor, 1977). Asian immigrant groups are considered as having relatively strong vitality given the size of their community and their significant contribution to Australian economy, education and business sectors. They also stand out as an outgroup due to their recognisable physical appearance as compared to Anglo-Australians. When threat level is perceived as moderate, Asian immigrants are more likely to act as a distinctive and collective entity within the host society, leaning towards a separation orientation. However, when the perceived threat level is low, the need to cling tightly on to their own ethnic group for moral support might not be as strong due to less pressure from the host society. On the other hand, being in a presumably low status group, when the perceived threat level is high, they might try to assimilate to the host society due to more pressure from the host society. Australians, as host nationals in this study, do not necessarily experience similar pressures, as their choice of acculturation strategies is based on the extent to which they would like to accept the minority groups into their society. Thus, for the Australians, the association between attitudes towards MC (threat or a benefit) and acculturation strategies (integrate or separate) seems to be a more linear relationship.

6. Conclusion, limitations and further study

The present study further supports the argument that the processes of immigrants’ adjustment involve adaptation on the part of both the immigrants and the receiving population (e.g. Berry et al., 1977; Rohmann et al., 2006). However, based on our data, we could not draw causal conclusions about whether attitudes towards MC influence acculturation strategies or vice versa. Such causal relationships need to be carefully studied if one is to implement any form of intervention (Kosic et al., 2005). Future research might use probability sampling and a larger sample size that permits more rigorous multivariate analysis to draw conclusions about the causal relations between attitudes toward MC and acculturation strategies. Future study may also take into consideration how the majority acculturation attitudes are perceived by the minority groups and how this perceived attitudes influence minority acculturation orientations.

Our study relied on survey as the source of data. While quantitative data presents a general pattern of the relationship, it does not thoroughly explore the factors underpinning discordance in attitudes and behaviours between Asians and Australians. Further study may investigate the underlying factors of the different attitudes and strategies by conducting in-depth interviews. Survey data combined with findings from interviews would help us to get a more comprehensive understanding of the formation of those attitudes, in addition to the self-reported attitudes and behaviours. In addition, future research could use longitudinal surveys to monitor the change in attitudes and behaviours over time as well as to capture how cultural identities might change in different contexts.

The Asian respondents in this study included people from northeast and southeast Asia such as Hong Kong, mainland China, Singapore, Taiwan and Malaysia. Differences in attitudes towards MC and acculturation strategies may exist across respondents from different countries due to differences in political and social systems. Future study may compare across the different Asian groups to further our understanding of the association between attitudes and strategies. Future study may also take into consideration the
motivation or reason for immigrants to come to the host country, as they are likely to influence the desire to integrate into the host country.

Finally, our data was collected from urban areas. We assume differences would exist between regional and urban areas as geographical locations may affect people's access to information and opportunities to engage in interethnic contact. Future study may use cluster sampling strategy to obtain samples from different cities and regions of Australia and compare people's ratings across geographical locations. Such studies could generate a more comprehensive picture of the public's endorsement of MC and have implications for policy making regarding promoting cultural diversity and interethnic relations.

Appendix. Survey on multiculturalism and acculturation in Australia

Instructions: Please circle the choice that best describes your attitudes. Thank you for your time and participation in the survey!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It is good for Australia to have different groups with a distinct cultural background living in this country.(^a)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I do not like being in a bus or train in which there are ethnic minorities.(^d)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The unity of Australia is weakened by ethnic minorities of different cultural backgrounds sticking to their old ways.(^b)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Districts with many ethnic minorities are less safe.(^b)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Too many ethnic minorities are living in Australia.(^b)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. It is best for Australia that ethnic minorities keep their culture and customs.(^c)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I feel at ease when I am in a district with many ethnic minorities.(^c)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Ethnic minorities are familiar with Australian culture and customs.(^c)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. I feel uneasy when ethnic minorities talk to one another in a language I do not understand.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Ethnic minorities in Australia put sufficient effort into getting a job.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Ethnic minorities are living in suburbs densely populated by immigrants.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Ethnic minorities should learn to speak proper English.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I approve of ethnic minorities wearing their traditional clothes.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I dislike it when an ethnic minority person does not understand me.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. People who come to live in Australia should change their behaviours to be more like Australians.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Ethnic minority parents should encourage their children to retain the culture and traditions of their homeland.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Anglo-Australians should learn more about the culture and customs of difference cultural groups.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I would rather live next to an Anglo-Australian family than next to an ethnic minority family.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Australian companies should put more effort into hiring ethnic minorities.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Australian schools should think more about the cultural background of their pupils.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. Police should patrol more in districts with many ethnic minorities.</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Question</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>22. Anglo-Australians should support ethnic minorities more in the</td>
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<tr>
<td>preservation of their culture and customs in Australia.(^a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Anglo-Australians and ethnic minorities should cooperate more to</td>
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<tr>
<td>solve problems in Australia.(^a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. I do not like being attended to in a shop by an ethnic minority</td>
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<tr>
<td>person.(^d)</td>
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<tr>
<td>25. Anglo-Australians and ethnic minorities should seek more contact</td>
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<td>with one another.(^c)</td>
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<tr>
<td>26. Anglo-Australian children should have both native and ethnic</td>
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<td>minority teachers.(^c)</td>
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<td>27. More ethnic minority people should work in Australian companies.(</td>
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<td>a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>28. Australian children should play more with ethnic minority children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(^c)</td>
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<td>29. I would not like an ethnic minority boss at work.(^d)</td>
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<tr>
<td>30. Anglo-Australians and ethnic minorities should have equal rights.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>(^a)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* \(^a\)MC as benefit; \(^b\)MC as threat; \(^c\)Integration; \(^d\)Separation; \(^e\)Deleted item.

**Please tell us something about yourself:**

**Gender:**
- 1. Male
- 2. Female

**Age:**
- 1. \(<20\)
- 2. 21–30
- 3. 31–40
- 4. 41–50
- 5. 51–60
- 6. \(\geq61\)

**Place of birth:**
- 1. Australia
- 2. Overseas

**Highest formal education completed:**
- 1. High school
- 2. Tertiary college
- 3. Undergraduate
- 4. Postgraduate
Are you currently:

1. Studying full time
2. Studying part time and working part time
3. Working full time
4. Unemployed
5. Other (please specify_______)

Your annual income is:

1. < = A$20,000
2. A$21,000–40,000
3. A$41,000–60,000
4. A$61,000–80,000
5. < = A$81,000

The suburb where you live is:

1. Lightly populated by ethnic minorities
2. Moderately populated by ethnic minorities
3. Densely populated by ethnic minorities

References


