Anglo-Australians' attitudes towards multiculturalism and beliefs about ethnic groups

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Anglo-Australians’ Attitudes towards Multiculturalism and Beliefs about Ethnic Groups

Tina Charles

A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor of Arts Honours, Faculty of Computing, Health and Science

Edith Cowan University

October 2006

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Declaration

I certify that this literature review and research project does not incorporate, without acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.
Acknowledgements

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Attitudes towards Multiculturalism and Beliefs about Minority Ethnic Groups: A Review.

Tina Charles

A Report Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor of Arts Honours, Faculty of Computing, Health and Science

Edith Cowan University

August 2006

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Abstract

Australia has had a policy of multiculturalism since 1978. However, recent events have suggested some public dissent concerning multiculturalism in Australia amongst the dominant Anglo-Australian culture. While there has been little empirical research that has examined majority attitudes within the Australian context, empirical studies in Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands have revealed negative attitudes towards multiculturalism from members of the dominant culture. Recent research has explored the notion of essentialism and examined how essentialist beliefs regarding minority ethnic groups may be associated with attitudes of the dominant culture toward multiculturalism. This review examines the current status of knowledge concerning this issue and concludes that further exploratory research is needed to examine majority attitudes towards multiculturalism and beliefs about ethnic groups in Australia.

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Submitted: August 2006
Attitudes towards Multiculturalism and Beliefs about Minority Ethnic Groups: A Review.

Australia is a nation of people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The 2001 census revealed approximately one-fifth of Australia’s population was born overseas, which is the highest proportion of overseas-born peoples in any country in the western world (Healey, 2005). The largest immigrants groups include those born in UK and Ireland, Europe (excluding UK and Ireland), and Asia, respectively. In recent years there has been much public debate within Australia and in other multicultural nations over the merits of multiculturalism, however there has been little empirical research examining this phenomenon within the Australian context. Moreover, Fowers and Richardson (1996) argued that while multiculturalism is one of the most important psychological constructs of the present, it remains to be one of the most misunderstood. Healey (2000) defines Australian multiculturalism as a summation of the way in which the nation addresses the opportunities and challenges of its cultural diversity (Healey, 2000, p.1). Empirical studies in Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands have revealed negative attitudes towards multiculturalism from members of the dominant culture (Breugelmans & Van de Vijer, 2004; Verkuyten, 2005). The purpose of the review is to elucidate the current status of knowledge and empirical research that has examined this issue.

This review will begin with an analysis of the ideology of multiculturalism as a social and political policy (Berry, 2001; Jayasuriya, 2005). Following this, I will provide a summary and critical evaluation of research that has examined the components and predictors of attitudes and beliefs of members of dominant cultures regarding multiculturalism and the nature of ethnic groups. In particular, I will focus on research by
Verkuylten and Brug (2004), which has suggested that attitudes towards multiculturalism may be related to beliefs about ethnic group essentialism. This review examines the notion of essentialism and explores how it may an influential factor in the formation of beliefs regarding the nature of ethnic groups and attitudes towards multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism

A multicultural policy encourages integration of ethnic groups into society and promotes the rights of everyone to live as culturally different peoples in one society (Berry, 2001). This inclusive ideology sets multiculturalism apart from assimilationism, in which ethnic minorities are encouraged to adopt the cultural practices and beliefs of the dominant culture (the culture of those who were born in the country and who represent a majority) in order to sustain culturally homogenous societies (Berry, 2001). Klein (1997) proclaims the notion of multiculturalism has become, for many of its advocates “a position-taking stance” and is representative of a rejection of assimilation and the melting pot (a process of integration in which all cultures evolve and change to create a new culture) as an imposition of members of the majority culture (Klein, 1997, p.75).

The Australian Government introduced an official policy of multiculturalism in 1978. The Gallop Government of Western Australia proposed its Charter on Multiculturalism in 2004. This Charter proposed a framework for an inclusive multiculturalism conceived around four principles: fairness; civic values; equality; and equitable participation. The Charter was proposed to promote acknowledgement of differences while emphasising a sense of membership and belonging through citizenship. This Charter proposed an inclusionary model of citizenship that Jayasuriya (2005) argued,
promoted multiculturalism within the public sphere. Jayasuriya claimed that this reframing of multiculturalism emphasised that the basis for solidarity within a pluralistic nation relies on a sense of belonging and identification with a political nation rather than a cultural nation that centres around mythical core-cultural values of majority groups. This argument highlights how the ideology of multiculturalism can be examined differentially within the political domain and the social or cultural domain. While multiculturalism within the political domain may offer a sound solution to dealing with diversity within culturally diverse societies, there can be inherent problems when applying this ideology within the social or cultural domain.

The central factor in Jayasuriya’s (2005) argument is that multiculturalism can only succeed if it is primarily a political construct. Jayasuriya argued that the foundation of social cohesion and unity does not lie upon a set of shared values, but rather, a shared identity that is derived from acknowledgement and acceptance of common social and political institutions. Goodhart (2005) proposed a similar argument to Jayasuriya, when he proclaimed that, within a multicultural society, an absence of a reinforcing element such as common citizenship and values, the lifestyle diversity that is created through sustained mass immigration could erode attitudes of mutual obligation.

The inherent problem in Jayasuriya’s (2005) and Goodhart’s (2005) argument is that, in theory it is possible to evaluate the problems inherent in multiculturalism and conclude that the policy needs to be one of a political nature rather than a social or cultural nature, however, in reality these two domains do not neatly separate and they consistently present contradicting concerns. Hans Nichols wrote an article for Insight in 2002,
describing the issues that arose in Germany concerning the 2.5 million ethnic Turks who live and work in Germany as a result of the post-war guest worker program. At the time this article was written, 12 percent of Germany’s population of 82 million were foreign-born, and Turks accounted for approximately 30 percent of Germany immigrants. Nichols (2002) stated that while some German citizens have embraced this multicultural shift in the nation, it has resulted in problems that need to be resolved. Nichols’ article raises the dilemma of the difficulty of implementing successful multiculturalism when the political domain and the social or cultural domain have fundamentally different structures. Nichols quoted an ethnic Turk commenting on the clash of cultural values in a televised forum on immigration:

> It is wrong when the administrative court in Berlin says that a girl from a Muslim family can be exempted from sex-education lessons. That is precisely the wrong signal. It is an achievement of Western civilisation that girls have the same rights as boys to find out about their bodies. And if we start following the view that they are Muslims, so they have the right to stop their children from having to confront that, we can simply dissolve our common society. Everyone has to obey the rules irrespective of whether they are German or not (p. 24).

Souphemmasane (2004) claims that critics of multiculturalism argue that the policy actually encourages forms of cultural separatism, by supporting and encouraging the preservation of particular ethnic cultures. While the merits of multiculturalism as a policy in itself remain to be debated, a crucial element of the success of multiculturalism is how members of a society feel about the ideology itself.
The Australian Context

Australia’s policy of multiculturalism, which was adopted in 1978, attempts to manage the diverse population of the nation by promoting recognition, acceptance, and celebration of this cultural diversity (Healey, 2005). However, recent events such as the racially motivated riots in Cronulla, Sydney in January 2006, have cast Australia’s multiculturalism into the spotlight and raised questions about whether the policy is successful in managing Australia’s diverse population. These events have prompted a necessary evaluation of public attitudes towards this policy.

A national television program in Australia recently conducted a telephone poll that revealed 93% of callers were against Australia’s multiculturalism policy (The West Australian, February 24, 2006). While these data may not necessarily represent a majority view in Australia, it demonstrates that multiculturalism in Australia is a contentious issue at present.

Through further exploration of this issue, research suggests that public dissent from the ideology of multiculturalism has been brewing under the supposedly harmonious surface for some time. Ho’s (1990) study is one of the few comprehensive investigations of Anglo-Australians’ (those born within Australia and of British cultural heritage) attitudes towards multiculturalism. However, Ho’s study examined attitudes at a time when multiculturalism was a newer experience for Anglo-Australians than it is now. Ho’s study specifically focussed on two aspects of Anglo-Australian attitudes towards multiculturalism: the level of support for multiculturalism and its underlying dimensions (i.e., the belief that the policy is in line with the nation’s best interests, that the policy has
benefited Australian society, that it will create social cohesion, and that it serves as a social justice strategy by providing equal resources to all Australians); and correlates of these attitudes.

Ho (1990) surveyed 159 Anglo-Australian respondents, who were volunteers recruited from the Darwin metropolitan area. The results of the survey showed a discrepancy between support for the policy of multiculturalism and support for its underlying dimensions, which Ho argued is indicative of a widespread misunderstanding of the aims of multiculturalism. While Ho found that demographic variables, such as age, sex and education were not significantly related to any of the multiculturalism variables, he did find that the concept of ethnocentrism (the tendency to view one’s own ethnic group and its social standards as superior to others) was a significant predictor of participants’ attitudes (Ho, 1990). The levels of ethnocentrism were measured using the Australian Ethnocentrism Scale (Beswick and Hills, 1969). The results showed that a high level of ethnocentrism was related to low levels of support for the policy of multiculturalism and its underlying dimensions (Ho, 1990).

In an examination of Anglo-Australians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism, it is important to consider possible predictors and components of attitudes within the Australian context. Soutphommasane (2004) argued that there exists a fear among members of the dominant Anglo-Australian culture, that multiculturalism is responsible for an erosion of Australian culture. Birrell and Betts (2001) stated that the results of an opinion poll in 1994 showed that a majority of Australians (51 percent) thought that the level of immigration was too high. Birrell and Betts argued that while there are several factors influencing this
opinion, i.e., doubts about economic benefits and fears about environmental implications, the primary concern stems from worries about how immigration is impacting on Australia’s social make-up and identity. These concerns regarding the ways in which migrants may reshape society and challenge notions of nationalism mirror those of Western European nations, when they took in large numbers of culturally distinct migrants during the “guest worker” era of the 1950’s and 1960’s, as discussed in Nichol’s (2002) article.

While there are parallels between Western Europe and Australia, Birrell and Betts (2001) highlighted the importance of the difference in Governmental support for multiculturalism. In Australia, Government and elite support for multiculturalism has promoted the illegitimacy of blatant hostility towards migrants on racial and cultural grounds (Birrell & Betts, 2001). Nonetheless, despite the fact that most Australians agree that prejudiced behaviour on the basis of religion or ethnic background is wrong, the results of a 1994 survey showed that the majority of Australians believed migrants should live like the majority (Birrell & Betts, 2001). Jayasuriya (2005) argued that the increasing tendency of some cultural groups towards Diaspora nationalism (reverting to cultural practices of the home country), has created suspicion amongst Australian mainstream society and contributed to the emergence of an “us versus them” attitude. Soutphommasane (1994) argued that the primary difficulties with multiculturalism in Australia exist within the domain of beliefs and attitudes, rather than the domain of policy.

Birrell and Betts (2001) argued that while public commentary insists that ethnic diversity is a positive thing, support for this view is limited and a large percentage of Australians fear a policy of multiculturalism is contributing to a demise of social cohesion.
Birrell and Betts found, in a 1994 survey, that participants with a university degree were the only group to show support for what they define as a form of hard multiculturalism (in which ethnic cultural practices are sustained across generations). However, not all the research has reflected a negative disposition towards multiculturalism within Australian society. For example, Birrell and Betts did find that there is broad support amongst Australians for a soft form of multiculturalism (in which migrants are encouraged to integrate into mainstream Australia and not suffer any prejudice based on their cultural backgrounds). Birrell and Betts concluded that while Australians, in general, do not support cultural prejudice or oppression, they do harbour a desire for their national community to be a meaningful unit that is capable of acting on their behalf. A multicultural policy, high migration, and a prescribed celebration of cultural diversity are viewed by many Australians as a threat to a notion of a shared community and common interest. Birrell and Betts proclaimed that hard multiculturalism harbours an implication that Australia is losing its meaning.

Bulbeck (2004) conducted a study of Australian students’ views on issues relating to Aboriginal Australians, immigrants, and multiculturalism. Questionnaires were distributed to a sample including: university students (first year); high school students (who were also provided with a similar questionnaire to take home for their parents to complete); and clients of a youth service. The total data set of Bulbeck’s study consisted of 575 respondents, which predominantly consisted of students under the age of 21 years old. The questionnaires consisted of four statements that the participants were asked to comment on. The first and second related to attitudes and beliefs regarding Aboriginal Australians, while
the third part presented the participants with the statement, “it is good that Australia is a multicultural nation”, and the fourth was, “immigrants should have access to the same welfare benefits as people born in Australia” (Bulbeck, 2004, p. 346).

The results of Bulbeck’s (2004) study demonstrated higher levels of support for multiculturalism, compared to the other three issues. Bulbeck’s study found that the common justification for multiculturalism was “tolerance and celebration of difference or diversity” (Bulbeck, 2004, p. 356). Bulbeck reported that for many participants, multiculturalism was a key part of Australian national identity that contributed to a “unique”, “welcoming, laid back” nation (Bulbeck, 2004, p. 357). Many participants felt that Australia was a good example to other nations, due to the fact that so many different nationalities live in peace within Australia (Bulbeck, 2004). The fact that these findings differ from those of Ho’s (1990) study and contradict the arguments posed by Birrell and Betts (2001) shows evidence that further research is needed to explore attitudes to multiculturalism within Australia in order to gain a fuller understanding of how members of Australian society conceptualise and form opinions regarding this issue.

*Attitudes of the Dominant Culture toward Multiculturalism*

While there has been minimal research examining majority (dominant culture) attitudes within Australia, this area has been researched in other multicultural nations, such as Canada and the Netherlands (Berry and Kalin, 1995; Breugelmans and Van de Vijer, 2004). Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, and Senecal (1997) argued that the attitudes of members of the host majority culture in multicultural societies are important in the construction of a truly multicultural community. Fowers and Richardson (1996) proposed that, while
dialogue between different cultures is central to a multicultural ideology, the interactions that occur between the majority culture and multiculturalism remain primarily a majority monologue. Berry and Kalin (1995) compiled an overview of a survey of multicultural and ethnic attitudes that was carried out in Canada in 1991.

Berry and Kalin (1995) highlighted three key features/conditions that should be met for any multicultural society to operate harmoniously and successfully: first, there needs to be general support for multiculturalism and belief that cultural diversity is of value to the society; second, levels of intolerance and prejudice be should low overall; third, mutual attitudes between the various ethno-cultural groups should be generally positive. Their 1991 survey included a representative sample of 2500 respondents, with oversampling in the cities of Montreal, Vancouver and Toronto, resulting in a total of 3325 participants (Berry & Kalin, 1995). The instrument used in the survey consisted of 130 opinion statements, three ethnic opinion statements and 22 demographic questions. The survey was carried out over the telephone. A proportionate sample of males and females was ensured through the use of a quota system. The response rate was 15.5 percent (this constituted the percentage of participants who completed the survey out of the total number of participants contacted).

The results from Berry and Kalin’s (1995) study showed that Canadians, in general, showed moderate support for cultural diversity. However, Berry and Kalin argued the results did reveal some significant variations that warrant further research into this area. Specifically, the results showed two prominent areas of concern; the first was the variation in the levels of acceptance of European origin migrant groups (i.e., British, French, Italian,
German) versus non-European migrant groups (i.e., Chinese, West Indian Blacks, Arabs, Muslims, Indo-Pakistanis). Berry and Kalin found acceptance for European origin groups was higher. While these two groups differ in several ways (i.e., values, religion, recency of migration), Berry and Kalin stated that the relative contribution of these factors could not be determined from their study. This raises the question of how attitudes and beliefs about minority ethnic groups relate to attitudes to multiculturalism. The second area of concern highlighted by Berry and Kalin stemmed from individual and group difference analyses, which revealed that some participants scored low across several variables including: acceptance of multiculturalism; tolerance of diversity; and tolerance of migrants of non-European origin. Berry and Kalin argued that these variations from the overall outcomes require closer examination.

Breugelmans and Van de Vijver’s (2004) study examined predictors and components of attitudes towards multiculturalism within a sample of 341 native Dutch people. The study examined three specific hypotheses: that attitudes towards multiculturalism have a unidimensional structure; that multiculturalism in the domain of minority acculturation has lower levels of support than multiculturalism in the domain of Dutch society; and that attitudes towards multiculturalism govern the relationship between psychological background characteristics and multicultural behaviour. The instrument used in the study was a questionnaire that consisted of seven scales assessing differing elements of attitudes towards multiculturalism.

Breugelmans and Van de Vijver’s (2004) study found support for the hypothesis that attitudes towards multiculturalism have a unidimensional structure, that is, they found
that support for multiculturalism among the Dutch participants was reported to be a single attitude across all societal domains. These results differ from the attitudes of minority groups that were found in Arends-Toth and Van de Vijver’s (2003) earlier study. Arends-Toth and Van de Vijver found attitudes towards multiculturalism among Turkish minorities in the Netherlands differed between the public and private societal domains. However, although Breugelmans and Van de Vijver’s (2004) study showed attitudes towards multiculturalism among the Dutch participants to have a unidimensional structure, the level of support for multiculturalism varied substantially across the differing societal domains. Breugelmans and Van de Vijver also found support for the hypothesis that multiculturalism in the domain of minority acculturation (whether minorities assimilate or not) has lower levels of support than multiculturalism in the domain of public Dutch society, indicating that the Dutch are more in favour of assimilation of migrants.

Breugelmans and Van de Vijver’s (2004) study found that many of the participants did not view cultural pluralism as a favourable characteristic of their society and felt that minorities were the ones who needed to make an effort in regards to acculturation, in that, they were expected to adapt to the dominant culture. The findings showed the native Dutch did not feel a need to facilitate integration of minorities within society. Arends-Toth and Van de Vijver (2000) argued that, although prejudiced behaviour towards minorities may exist at low levels within Dutch society, a truly multicultural society remains to become a reality for the Netherlands. Breugelmans and Van de Vijver (2004) argued that, due to the research finding on the domain specificity (private versus public) of support for multiculturalism, there is a need for further research to profile attitudes across differing
societal domains, rather than examining an overall classification of majority culture attitudes. Breugelmans and Van de Vijver (2004) also found that personal characteristics did not have a significant effect on levels of support for multiculturalism and only living area and education had a moderate influence. Nonetheless, Breugelmans and Van de Vijver’s study did find that psychological variables were important predictors of attitudes towards multiculturalism, particularly the perceived social norms about multiculturalism as a threat.

The main conclusion Breugelmans and Van de Vijver (2004) drew from their research, was that support for multiculturalism amongst the majority culture is a simple construct, but with a complex manifestation. Breugelmans and Van de Vijver argued that when attitudes towards multiculturalism are assessed, it is important to consider the societal domains covered by the instrument used in the assessment. These authors also proposed that characteristics such as education, living conditions, perceived social norms, and other psychological antecedents, should be considered when examining majority members’ attitudes towards multiculturalism and their relationship with behaviours. From the results of their study, Breugelmans and Van de Vijver concluded that while there is little evidence of any support for social exclusion of minorities, the central component of low levels of support for multiculturalism appears to stem from issues surrounding minorities not adapting to public life within Dutch society and the challenge that this is perceived to pose to the structure of society.

Social Identity Theory and Social Dominance Theory
Majority attitudes towards multiculturalism have been examined through theoretical frameworks such as social identity theory and social dominance theory (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002; Verkuyten & Brug, 2004). By analysing majority attitudes through these frameworks, we edge closer to a more comprehensive explanation as to the components and predictors of majority attitudes. Social identity theory proposes that when examining group attitudes and behaviour, threat to group identity is a crucial element (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to social identity theory, people are motivated to belong to social groups that contribute to a positive self concept, and thus will endeavour to maintain a positive perception of their group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (1999) argued that group response to a perceived threat to group identity is dependant upon the level of group identification. According to social dominance theory, a primary cause of intergroup conflict derives from the human predisposition to form hierarchical, group-based systems of social organization (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Within these frameworks, we can deduce that majority attitudes to multiculturalism may be related to level of group identification and beliefs regarding the social status of that group.

Verkuyten and Thijs’ (2002) study used a Social Identity Theory and two-dimensional acculturation model as theoretical frameworks in examining Dutch and Turkish adolescents’ attitudes. The central question posed by Verkuyten and Thijs’ study was how these two groups differed in the conceptions of multicultural society, specifically in relation to the issues of cultural adaptation and cultural maintenance of minority groups. Verkuyten and Thijs’ study found that Dutch adolescents were less in favour of cultural maintenance (among minority groups) than the Turkish adolescents, and showed a higher
preference for adaptation. The results also showed that for the Dutch adolescents, ethnic identification was negatively related to culture maintenance of minority groups and positively related to adaptation of minority groups.

Verkuyten and Brug (2004) argued, according to social dominance theory, that a policy of multiculturalism is differentially beneficial for members of differing social status. For example, multiculturalism has inherently more to offer minority groups, as it allows them to retain their cultural practices and validates their social identity (Verkuyten & Brug, 2004). In contrast, it is argued that majority groups have less to gain and may view multiculturalism as a threat to their own group identity and social status position (Verkuyten & Brug, 2004).

This argument is supported by Verkuyten’s (2005) study of attitudes towards multiculturalism among a sample of 458 Dutch and Turkish adolescents living in the Netherlands. Results of this study indicated that, in general, ethnic minority members (Turkish) held more positive attitudes towards multiculturalism than the (Dutch) majority group members (Verkuyten, 2005). Verkuyten’s research also found that endorsement of multiculturalism among the Turkish participants was positively correlated with ethnic in-group identification, while endorsement of multiculturalism among the Dutch participants was negatively correlated with in-group identification and negative out-group evaluations. That is, Dutch persons who were in favour of multiculturalism were less likely to identify with their ethnic group and to evaluate out-groups negatively. If these results are applied to Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears and Doosje’s (1999) expansion of social identity theory, which argued that level of group identification influences perceived threat to group identity,
it lends support to Verkuyten and Brug’s (2004) argument that majority groups may perceive multiculturalism as a threat to their group identity and social status position, depending on their level of ethnic identification. Through this analysis, it can be deduced that both social identity theory and social dominance theory provide relevant frameworks through which a clarification of majority attitudes to multiculturalism may be sought.

**Essentialism**

Another element of majority attitudes towards multiculturalism and beliefs regarding the nature of minority ethnic groups that has been examined by recent research is the construct of essentialism (Verkuyten, 2003; Verkuyten and Brug, 2004). The notion of cultural essentialism has been a recurrent theme in anthropological and sociological research, however, recent research has examined essentialist thinking in the area of social psychology, particularly concerning intergroup relations (Verkuyten, 2003). Medin and Ortony (1989) originally coined the term ‘psychological essentialism’ to refer to the belief of laypeople that categories have essences. Haslam, Rothschild, and Ernst (2000) argued the notion of essentialism has two dimensions; the extent to which social categories are seen as natural and inherently different; and the extent to which social categories are perceived to be homogenous and unified.

It has been proposed that multiculturalism assumes a conception of groups as homogeneous and having unique, stable characteristics (Barry, 2001). The ideology of multiculturalism inherently advocates that ethnic groups are to some extent essentialist, as the purpose of a multicultural policy is to promote recognition and tolerance of cultural differences (Turner, 1993). If cultural differences did not exist on some fundamental level,
a policy of multiculturalism would be irrelevant to a culturally diverse society. This phenomenon of cultural essentialism raises questions regarding the role that essentialist beliefs have in the formation of attitudes towards multiculturalism. Considering that social identity theory and social dominance theory have been established to hold considerable influences in the formation of attitudes towards multiculturalism, it could be assumed that beliefs regarding the essentialist nature of ethnic minority groups would have an influence on attitudes towards acculturation strategies of ethnic groups and thus impact on attitudes towards multiculturalism.

In examining how essentialist beliefs may be related to attitudes towards multiculturalism, it is important to consider the structure of essentialist beliefs themselves. Haslam, Rothschild and Ernst’s (2000) study was designed to examine the structure of essentialist beliefs and the extent to which people hold essentialist beliefs about social categories. They hypothesized that essentialist beliefs would be unitary and that they would be associated with category devaluation (negative beliefs regarding the nature of the social category). Haslam, Rothschild and Ernst’s study included a sample of 40 undergraduate students in mid-Western USA (31 women and 9 men). The participants were given a sample of 20 categories (i.e., old people, young people, females, males) to rate on 10 items (i.e., uniformity, stability, exclusivity, naturalness). The results of this study did not show support for the hypothesis that essentialist beliefs would be unitary. Instead, the results reflected that categories are essentialised on two dimensions: the first was the extent to which categories are understood to be natural kinds; and the second was reification (categories are understood as coherent entities with inhering cores). Haslam, Rothschild
and Ernst found that reification was negatively associated with categories’ evaluative status, particularly regarding categories that were believed to be natural kinds. That is, negative attributions made regarding categories in which membership in the category is understood to be natural and immutable (i.e., male, female) is judged to be beyond the personal control of category members. The results of Haslam et al.’s study hold important implications for the potential influence that essentialist beliefs about cultural groups may have on attitudes towards multiculturalism and the way in which cultural groups within society are evaluated, particularly by members of the majority culture. For example, if members of the dominant culture hold a reified essentialist view of racial or ethnic categories that consists of negative attributions, then it may lead to negative attitudes toward a multicultural policy that inherently promotes cultural maintenance of ethnic groups and tolerance and acceptance of all cultures.

Verkuyten’s (2003) qualitative study examined the way in which essentialist notions and beliefs were used by ethnic Dutch and ethnic minority participants. Verkuyten argued that while the notion of cultural essentialism can be politically useful for ethnic minorities (e.g., in gaining support for the legitimacy of claims regarding their ethnicity and cultural rights), essentialist beliefs can also have a negative impact through racism (Verkuyten, 2003). For example, racism presents racial and ethnic categories as natural, inevitable, and unchangeable, which implies individuals can be categorised as being fundamentally a certain type of person based on their racial or ethnic background (Verkuyten, 2003).
Verkuyten’s (2003) study examined how the participants define and use essentialist notions when discussing ethnic groups. His study involved 168 participants, 71 were of ethnic Dutch origin and 97 were ethnic minorities (mostly Turkish, Moroccan, and Hindustani). The participants were separated into 21 focus groups. Verkuyten’s main finding was that essentialist representations can be used in various ways, which denote various ideological effects. For example, essentialist arguments can provide a strong basis for opposition against assimilation. That is, when it is argued that people are completely determined by their culture, the idea of assimilation and adapting to the dominant culture becomes ideologically impossible. On the other hand, de-essentialist arguments that stress the importance of in-group differences can be used to challenge homogeneous and often negative stereotypes regarding the nature of ethnic groups. Verkuyten concluded that essentialism is not inherently oppressive, just as anti-essentialism is not inherently liberating. In regard to multiculturalism, this raises the question whether people use essentialist representations in forming opinions and attitudes towards multiculturalism and whether their subjective use of essentialism is positively or negatively related to their support for multiculturalism.

Verkuyten and Brug’s (2004) study examined the relationship between essentialist beliefs and attitudes towards multiculturalism. This quantitative study was conducted with ethnic minority (Turkish, Moroccan, N = 109) and majority (native Dutch, N = 649) adolescents in the Netherlands, with a mean age of 16.4. The participants completed questionnaires that required them to rate (using a Likert scale) whether they agreed or disagreed with statements relating to the endorsement of multiculturalism, ethnic in-group
identification, perceived group essentialism and protestant ethic ideology. The results showed that members of the majority group were less supportive of multiculturalism than members of the minority group. In regards to the influence of essentialist beliefs, the results showed that, for the majority members, essentialist beliefs about minority ethnic groups were related to negative attitudes towards multiculturalism. (Verkuyten and Brug, 2004). Verkuyten and Brug also found that majority members’ essentialist beliefs about minority ethnic groups were related to negative attitudes towards cultural diversity and minority group rights.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of the ideology of multiculturalism, it is evident that there are inherent problems surrounding this issue within political, social, and cultural context (Goodhart, 2005; Jayasuriya, 2005). Australia adopted an official policy of multiculturalism in 1978. The recent controversy and violence within Australia has suggested some public dissent concerning Australia’s multicultural policy, however, the extent of this dissent is not known. Ho’s (1990) study examined Anglo-Australians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism and found a discrepancy between support for the policy of multiculturalism and support for its underlying dimensions. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this issue, it is imperative to examine how attitudes toward multiculturalism are formulated and the beliefs that Anglo-Australians have regarding the nature of ethnic groups.

Although there has been little empirical research on this issue within Australia, empirical research in Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands has revealed negative
attitudes towards multiculturalism from members of the dominant culture (Breugelmans and Van de Vijver, 2004; Verkuyten, 2003, 2005). Research has shown that attitudes and beliefs of the dominant culture regarding multiculturalism and the nature of minority ethnic groups can be understood within the theoretical frameworks of social identity theory and social dominance theory (Verkuyten and Thijs, 2002; Verkuyten and Brug, 2004). Recent research has explored the notion of essentialism and examined how essentialist beliefs regarding minority ethnic groups may be associated with attitudes of the dominant culture towards multiculturalism (Verkuyten, 2003; Verkuyten and Brug, 2004). Further research is needed to gain a clearer understanding of the nature of essentialist beliefs and how they may influence attitudes towards multiculturalism, particularly attitudes of members of the dominant culture. In considering the Australian context, there is a lack of research concerning how members of the dominant culture feel towards multiculturalism and the beliefs that they hold about the nature of ethnic groups. Further research into this area should adopt an exploratory approach and could examine the phenomenon of essentialist beliefs of members of the dominant Anglo-Australian culture.
References


Anglo-Australians’ Attitudes towards Multiculturalism and Beliefs about Ethnic Minority Groups: A Qualitative Study.

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A Report Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor of Arts Honours, Faculty of Computing, Health and Science

Edith Cowan University

August 2006

I declare that this written assignment is my own work and does not include:

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(ii) material copied from the work of other students.

Signed
Abstract

Australia’s policy of multiculturalism was adopted in 1978. However, recent events in Australia have suggested some public dissent concerning multiculturalism, particularly among members of the dominant Anglo-Australian culture. Previous research in the Netherlands has found that essentialist beliefs about ethnic minority groups are related to negative attitudes towards multiculturalism within the dominant culture. This study was designed to qualitatively explore Anglo-Australians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism and their beliefs about ethnic minority groups. A total of 11 participants were interviewed. Results showed that the participants expressed both positive and negative attitudes towards multiculturalism, and essentialist and non-essentialist beliefs about ethnic groups. The relationship between essentialist beliefs and multiculturalism was found to be complex and not as direct as previous research had indicated.

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Anglo-Australians’ Attitudes towards Multiculturalism and Beliefs about Ethnic Minority Groups: A Qualitative study.

Australia is a nation of people from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Approximately 25% of the population was born overseas, 43% has at least one parent born overseas, and there are over 200 world languages spoken in Australia (Healey, 2005).

Australia’s policy of multiculturalism, which was adopted in 1978, attempts to manage the diverse population of the nation by promoting recognition, acceptance, and celebration of this cultural diversity (Healey, 2005). Recent events within Australia, such as the racially motivated riots in Cronulla, Sydney, in December 2005, have cast multiculturalism into the spotlight and public response has suggested some dissent concerning the policy of multiculturalism, particularly amongst members of the dominant culture. These events suggest a need for an exploration of the Australian dominant culture’s attitudes towards the ideology of multiculturalism. There has been little recent empirical research that has examined these attitudes. Furthermore, the research that has been done has produced contradicting and inconclusive results (Betts, 1991; Foster & Seitz, 1990; McAllister, 1993). Within the present study members of the dominant culture are defined as Anglo-Australian (persons who were born in Australia and are of British heritage). Anglo-Australians make up the dominant group in Australia numerically, socially and politically (Jamrozik, Boland & Urquhart, 1995).

Multiculturalism

A multicultural policy encourages integration of ethnic groups into society and promotes the rights of everyone to live as culturally different peoples in one society (Berry,
This inclusive ideology sets multiculturalism apart from assimilation, in which ethnic minorities are encouraged to adopt the cultural practices and beliefs of the dominant culture (the culture of those who were born in the country and who represent a majority) in order to sustain culturally homogenous societies (Berry, 2001). The Australian Government introduced an official policy of multiculturalism in 1978. The most recent review of Australia’s multicultural policy was issued on 13 May 2003. The policy is underpinned by four core principles, these are: Responsibilities of all, which proposes that all Australians have a civic duty to support the basic structures of Australian society; Respect for each person, all Australians, subject to the law, have the right to express their own culture and beliefs and have an obligation to respect the right of every Australian to do the same; fairness for each person, all Australians are entitled to equality of opportunity and treatment; and benefits for all, which proposes all Australians have the right to benefit from the cultural, social and economic dividends that arise from Australia’s diverse population (Healy, 2005). This last principle is designed to ensure that diversity benefits all members of Australian society (Healey, 2005).

Fowers and Richardson (1996) argued that while multiculturalism is one of the most important psychological constructs of the present time, it remains one of the most misunderstood. Ginges and Cairn (2000) argued that a crucial element to the successful implementation of multiculturalism is public awareness and acceptance of the principles and policies it prescribes. Therefore, before any attempt can be made to examine multiculturalism within Australia, a comprehensive exploration of how people living in

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1 The term ‘ethnic minority’ or ‘ethnic groups’ in the present study refers to peoples who are non-Anglo-Australians who are not indigenous (Zelinka, 1995).
Australia understand multiculturalism, and what their attitudes are towards the policy is needed. There have been few empirical studies that have examined this issue within Australia. In the present study, an attitude is defined as "a person’s evaluation of an object of thought" (Greenwald, 1989, p.247). Based on the findings of previous research and the complexity of the issue of multiculturalism, the concept of ambivalent attitudes (Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995), which describe attitudes that include both positive and negative feelings towards issue, are also considered.

One source of information regarding attitudes to multiculturalism in Australia comes from the data generated by 1988/89 survey of Australian attitudes conducted by the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA, 1989). The survey collected data from face to face interviews with 4,502 participants, 1,552 of whom were born in Australia and of British heritage. The other participants included people born in Australia and of non-English speaking background and some who were born in non-English speaking countries who had arrived in Australia since 1981. The interviews covered issues including education, employment, political and social participation, and attitudes to immigration and multiculturalism.

There have been several researchers that have subsequently examined these data, including McAllister (1993), Betts (1991) and Foster and Seitz (1990). However, these analyses have produced differing and in some cases contradictory interpretations of what the data reflect (Goot, 1993). McAllister (1993) argued that the 1988/89 OMA survey data showed a high level of support for multiculturalism in Australia and that people generally viewed it as a policy conducive to unity as opposed to division. On the contrary, Betts
(1991) argued the data reflect minimal support for the maintenance of cultural pluralism in Australian society. Finally, Foster and Seitz's (1990) interpretation argued that while there is general support for multiculturalism, the data does reflect that the overall aim of having different cultural groups living together harmoniously is not completely accepted or supported by the majority of the participants.

Goot (1993) examined these previous interpretations and provided his own re-analysis of the data. Goot argued that previous interpretations have overlooked or misinterpreted the survey data. He claimed that, while there is a larger percentage of people who are in favour of multiculturalism than those who are against, much of the data reflect that many Australians' attitudes fall somewhere in between, that is, relatively indifferent. Goot found in his analysis that in regards to support for multiculturalism and place of birth, those who are pro-multiculturalism predominantly come from Asia or Europe, while participants who expressed anti-multicultural views were predominantly born in Australia or the UK.

Ho's (1990) study is one of the few comprehensive investigations of Anglo-Australians' attitudes towards multiculturalism. Ho surveyed 159 Anglo-Australian respondents, who were volunteers recruited from the Darwin metropolitan area. Ho's study specifically focused on two aspects of attitudes towards multiculturalism: the level of support amongst Anglo-Australians for the policy of multiculturalism, and the level of support for its underlying dimensions that were promoted by the government at the time the study was conducted. These were: that the policy is in line with the nation's best interests; that the policy has benefited Australian society; that it will create social cohesion; and that
it serves as a social justice strategy by providing equal resources to all Australians. Ho then examined the correlations between attitudes towards these two aspects and investigated the factors that influenced Australian-born attitudes towards multiculturalism.

The results of Ho’s (1990) analysis showed a discrepancy between support for the policy of multiculturalism and support for its underlying dimensions. Specifically, the overall strong level of support for the underlying dimensions of multiculturalism did not translate to an overall support for the policy, which was found to be only moderately supported by the participants (Ho, 1990). Ho argued that this discrepancy is indicative of a widespread misunderstanding of the policy and its specific aims, specifically the aim of creating unity within diversity, as participants’ perceived the policy as divisive and contributing to intergroup conflict. In regards to factors that influenced Anglo-Australians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism, the results showed that demographic variables, such as age, sex and education were not significantly related to any of the attitudes towards multiculturalism or the attitudes towards its underlying dimensions (Ho, 1990). However, it was found that ethnocentrism (the tendency to view one’s own ethnic group and its social standards as superior to others) was a significant predictor of participants’ attitudes (Ho, 1990), such that a high level of ethnocentrism was related to the rejection of the policy of multiculturalism and its underlying dimensions.

It is apparent from the diverse findings within the research into Anglo-Australians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism, that this is a complicated issue. The lack of empirical research within the past decade, particularly qualitative research, combined with the recent events concerning multiculturalism in Australia, suggests an urgent need for research.
within this area. This lack of research has driven the first research question of this study, which examines ‘what are Anglo-Australians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism?’

**Essentialism**

An element that may be related to attitudes towards multiculturalism that has recently been examined is the notion of essentialism. Research in the Netherlands by Verkuyten and Brug (2004) has showed evidence of a relationship between essentialist beliefs about ethnic groups and attitudes towards multiculturalism. Specifically, the results showed that essentialist beliefs about minority ethnic groups were related to negative attitudes amongst the dominant culture towards multiculturalism.

The notion of cultural essentialism has been a recurrent theme in anthropological and sociological research, however, recent research has examined essentialist thinking in the area of social psychology, particularly concerning intergroup relations (Verkuyten & Brug, 2004; Verkuyten, 2005). Medin and Ortony (1989) originally coined the term ‘psychological essentialism’ to refer to the belief of lay people that categories have essences. Haslam, Rothschild, and Ernst (2000) argued that the notion of essentialism has two dimensions: the extent to which social categories are seen as natural and inherently different; and the extent to which social categories are perceived to be homogenous and unified. In examining the construct of essentialism as it applies to beliefs about ethnic identity, ethnic and cultural groups are perceived as ‘social categories’. Within the present study ethnic identity is defined as an aspect of the self that includes a sense of membership in an ethnic group and attitudes and beliefs associated with that membership (Bernal & Knight, 1993). It is recognised that lay people commonly uses the terms ethnic identity,
ethnicity, and cultural identity interchangeably. Thus, in the present study, the term ethnic identity is also used to encompass cultural identity.

The second research question of the present study focuses on the notion of beliefs of Anglo-Australians regarding the nature of ethnic groups living in Australia. The present study aims to explore these beliefs on a qualitative level in an attempt to understand whether the beliefs that Anglo-Australians hold about ethnic groups reflect essentialist notions of ethnic and cultural identity.

**Essentialism and Multiculturalism**

The notion of essentialism is intrinsically related to the ideology of multiculturalism. It has been proposed that multiculturalism assumes a conception of groups as homogenous and having unique, stable characteristics (Barry, 2001). Turner (1993) argued that the ideology of multiculturalism advocates that ethnic groups are to some extent essentialist, because the purpose of a multicultural policy is to promote recognition and tolerance of cultural differences. If cultural differences did not exist on some fundamental or 'essential' level, a policy of multiculturalism would be irrelevant to a culturally diverse society (Turner, 1993).

Verkuyten’s (2003) qualitative study examined the way in which essentialist notions were used by ethnic Dutch and ethnic minority (Turkish) participants. Verkuyten argued that essentialist arguments could provide a strong basis for opposition against assimilation. That is, when ethnic minority members are viewed as homogenous and their ethnic identity is considered a stable and inflexible construct, the idea of assimilating and adapting to the dominant culture becomes ideologically impossible. On the other hand, de-
essentialist arguments that stress the importance of in-group differences can be used to challenge homogenous stereotypes regarding the nature of ethnic groups. Verkuyten concluded that essentialism is not inherently oppressive, just as anti-essentialism is not inherently liberating. For example, essentialist arguments can and have been used to justify resource allocation to ethnic minority groups in culturally diverse societies. In regards to multiculturalism, this raises the question whether beliefs regarding essentialism of ethnic groups are an influential factor in the formation of attitudes towards multiculturalism; and if so, is people's subjective use of essentialism positively or negatively related to their support for multiculturalism.

Verkuyten and Brug's (2004) study examined the nature of the relationship between essentialist beliefs and attitudes towards multiculturalism. This quantitative study was conducted with ethnic minority (Turkish, Moroccan, N=109) and majority (native Dutch, N=649) adolescents in the Netherlands (mean age=16.4 years). The participants completed questionnaires that required them to rate whether they agreed or disagreed with statements relating to the endorsement of multiculturalism, ethnic in-group identification, perceived group essentialism and protestant ethic ideology. The results showed that in general, members of the majority group were less supportive of multiculturalism than members of the minority group. In regards to the relationship between essentialist beliefs and attitudes towards multiculturalism, the results revealed that members of the dominant culture who held essentialist beliefs about minority ethnic groups were more likely to express negative attitudes towards multiculturalism (Verkuyten & Brug, 2004).
The third research question posed by the present study examines how Anglo-Australians' beliefs regarding essentialism of ethnic groups are related to their attitudes towards multiculturalism. Soutphommasane (1994) argued that the primary difficulties with multiculturalism in Australia exist within the domain of beliefs and attitudes rather than the domain of policy. Through exploring this issue on a qualitative level, this study aims to shed light on these beliefs and attitudes. While there are undoubtedly several factors that influence Anglo-Australians' attitudes towards multiculturalism, the present study focuses on the notion of essentialism and the role that essentialist beliefs of the dominant culture have in their attitudes towards multiculturalism.

The present study has three primary research questions:

1. What are Anglo-Australians' attitudes towards multiculturalism?
2. What beliefs do the participants hold about the nature of ethnic groups, and do they hold essentialist beliefs?
3. How do these participants' beliefs regarding essentialism of ethnic groups relate to their attitudes towards multiculturalism?

Method

Rationale and Approach

The present study adopted a phenomenological approach in which the researcher's primary objective was to explore the subjective perceptions of Anglo-Australians concerning multiculturalism and their attitudes and beliefs regarding the nature of ethnic groups.
Study Design

Due to the paucity of research examining Anglo-Australians' attitudes towards multiculturalism, the present study was primarily exploratory and the goal was to obtain a rich and detailed understanding of these attitudes. Thus, a qualitative approach was adopted. Specifically, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews, in order to tap into the participants' experiences and attitudes. Because the topic has received considerable attention in the media in recent months and is quite controversial, individual interviews were conducted in order to reduce social desirability factors that can occur within group discussions.

Materials

The interview schedule was used to guide the interviews in a semi-structured format. A copy of the interview questions is provided in Appendix A. Interviews were recorded using an audio-cassette recorder. An information letter and consent form were presented to each participant prior to the commencement of the interviews (see Appendices B and C).

Participants

In total, 14 participants were interviewed (seven males, seven females), aged between 20-50 years of age (average age = 31 years). A purposive sampling approach was adopted to recruit the participants for the present study in order to explore the attitudes and opinions of members of the dominant Anglo-Australian culture. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling (Lindlof, 1995). Snowball sampling involved the researcher approaching acquaintances and asking if they could suggest any people who would be
interested in participating in the study and then contacting those people and formally asking them if they would like to participate. Those who expressed interest in participating were then asked if they could suggest any people who may be interested in participating in the study. All potential participants were provided with an information letter and were given a brief verbal description of the study by the researcher. Participants were provided with an opportunity to ask questions, prior to completion of the consent form.

Out of the 14 participants interviewed, three participants (two females, one male) did not fit the criteria for the present study because they were not Anglo-Australian (defined as born in Australia and of British ancestry). The data from those three participants were not included, resulting in data from 11 eligible interviews for analysis. These 11 participants were all born in Australia of parents born in Australia. They were all from middle class socio-economic backgrounds. All of the five women, and one of the men, had completed or were completing university level education, the five other men were in full-time employment.

Researcher

The student researcher was a 25-year-old female of Australian nationality and British cultural heritage. The recruitment of participants, the interviews, transcription and data analysis were all carried out by the student researcher.

Ethical Issues

All participants were provided with an information letter informing them of the aims and procedure of the study and what their involvement would entail. Each participant was informed that their identity and the information they provided would be confidential,
would only be heard or seen by the researcher and her supervisor, and that no names would be used in transcripts, reports or publications arising from the study. Participants were informed they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to and they could withdraw their participation at any time. Each participant signed a consent form acknowledging they understood and accepted these conditions.

The tape recordings of the interviews were kept at the researcher’s home and transcription of the data was carried out on the researcher’s personal computer. Any potentially identifying information was not included in the transcriptions or in the current report.

*Interview Procedure*

A face-to-face interview was conducted with each participant at a place nominated by the interviewee (either the participant’s home or workplace). Each interview took place in a private room. The interviews were tape recorded and lasted for approximately 20 - 45 minutes, on average. Each participant was asked every question on the interview schedule. Some participants were prompted or asked additional questions by the researcher in order to clarify what the participant had said or to explore areas that were raised by the participants themselves. At the end of each interview, the participant was offered the opportunity to make comments or ask any questions that they had.

*Transcription of Interviews*

All of the verbal exchanges that were recorded between the researcher and the participants were transcribed verbatim using a simplified version of Jeffersonian transcription (Jefferson, 1984), an orthographic form of transcription.
Data Analysis

The methodological approach adopted by the present study was designed so that the data produced could be analysed using thematic content analysis (Morse & Field, 1995). Once the recorded data from the interviews were transcribed, the researcher read through the transcripts in order to identify common themes within the areas of attitudes to multiculturalism and beliefs about ethnic groups. When common themes were identified, they were labelled and grouped with demonstrative quotes from participant interviews. Once themes within these two areas had been identified and labelled, each participant’s data were examined in regards to how their beliefs about ethnic groups (specifically relating to essentialist notions) were related to their attitudes towards multiculturalism. The process of identifying themes and grouping quotes was iterative and the themes became more refined throughout the process of analysis.

Reliability and Validity

Throughout the analysis process, rigour was maintained in the present study by having the researcher’s supervisor inspect the themes that were identified by the researcher and inspect the associated transcript. Morse and Field (1995) identified internal coherence and presentation of evidence as two important criteria in assessing internal validity of qualitative research. Internal coherence refers to whether arguments presented in a study are supported by the data, while presentation of evidence refers to the inclusion of sufficient quotations from participants’ discourse to enable readers to evaluate the researcher’s interpretations. The present study has addressed these criteria by presenting relevant, direct quotes from participant interviews to support the themes that the researcher
has identified. Member checking was also undertaken with some participants to ensure interpretation of the data was consistent with participants' meaning.

Findings and Interpretations

In order to answer the first two research questions, the data were separated into two sections; data that related to attitudes to multiculturalism and data that related to beliefs regarding the nature of ethnic groups that reflected essentialist notions (whether they were specifically essentialist or non-essentialist). There was some cross over between the two areas, in that some participants used essentialist notions when discussing multiculturalism. The third research question was answered through examining the general themes within these two areas and interpreting connections that participants made between multiculturalism and the nature of ethnic groups.

Attitudes towards multiculturalism

Attitudes to multiculturalism were primarily explored through the first two interview questions. The first question was designed to examine what the participants understood the term multiculturalism to mean and the second question was designed to explore how they felt about multiculturalism in Australia. The last interview question also tapped into attitudes towards multiculturalism, as it was designed to assess attitudes regarding one of the underlying dimensions of multiculturalism that Ho (1990) explored; that multiculturalism will create social cohesion. Previous research has found this aspect of multiculturalism to be a strong influence on attitudes to multiculturalism (Birrell & Betts, 2001; Soutphommasane, 1994).
When the participants were asked what the term multiculturalism meant to them, most participants provided a description of cultural diversity. That is, most generally said that it meant different nationalities, races and cultures living within the one social environment, for example:

\[D\]: I think, different races living in the same area, or same, how do you put it, same social environment.

\[W\]: All different nationalities and that living in one area, I suppose.

However, there was also some expression of a opinion that suggested participants viewed multiculturalism as a 'melting pot', that is, a process of integration in which all cultures evolve and change to create a new culture (Klein, 1997).

\[L\]: Well, it means that there's an assimilation of various cultures within the country...an assimilation of all people from all different countries into the one melting pot, so to speak.

\[H\]: [Multiculturalism means] more than one nationality living in a harmonious environment with parts of their cultures degraded.

When asked how he felt about multiculturalism within Australia, this participant replied:
H: I don’t believe it’s really multicultural. The simple fact of, every city you go to in Australia, there’s a Chinatown. You can’t tell me they’ve integrated into society.

T (Interviewer): Do you think multiculturalism is an integration of cultures?

H: I do believe that’s what the idealic situation is, that’s the whole purpose of it, but it doesn’t translate to that in reality.

This diversity in interpretations of multiculturalism supports arguments presented by Fowers and Richardson (1996) and Ho (1990), that the aims of multiculturalism, i.e., to promote cultural diversity and the rights of people to live as culturally different peoples, are frequently misunderstood. One of the key aims of multiculturalism that Ho (1990) identified was the aim of creating unity through diversity. In order to understand attitudes to multiculturalism in Australia, it is important to understand how people feel about cultural diversity in Australia. Attitudes that participants held regarding the impact and role of cultural differences within Australian society became clearer as the participants discussed how they felt about multiculturalism in Australia. The predominant themes that were identified in regard to this question were, perceived consequences of cultural diversity, and social justice.

Perceived consequences of cultural diversity

Participants identified both positive and negative outcomes of immigration and cultural diversity within Australia. Subthemes that emerged within the positive perceived consequences of cultural diversity were opportunities to learn and experience more and a reduction of intolerance.
Opportunity to learn and experience more.

The results of the present study found many participants expressed positive attitudes towards cultural diversity. When asked how they felt about multiculturalism in Australia, some of the participants’ responses included:

J: I think it’s a good thing.... because we can learn from each other. Definitely.
Every culture brings something different.

W: It’s good, good for the community, good for the country, I reckon,
T: Yep, why do you think it’s good?
W: Because you meet different people from different walks of life, and yeh, their cultures and stuff like that.

S: If you’re all too much the same, then everything would just be boring and it would be bland.

These results differ from previous studies in other multicultural countries, that found negative attitudes towards cultural diversity. For example, Breugelmans and Van de Vijver’s (2004) study in the Netherlands found that many of the native Dutch participants did not view cultural pluralism as a favourable characteristic of their society.
Multiculturalism 46

Reduces Intolerance.

Mc Allister (1993) argued, based on the 1988/89 Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) survey data, that there is a high level of support for multiculturalism within Australia and people see it as a policy that is conducive to unity rather than division. The results of the present study showed some evidence to support this argument, as evident in this participant's answer to whether multiculturalism impacts on the unity of Australia:

S: I think the idea of multiculturalism is good in the way that it'll help expand people's minds and opinions and thoughts and perceptions of others, like, um, hopefully the more they see their Muslim neighbour as friendly, the less they'll see Muslims and Islams on a whole as terrorists and that sort of thing.

While there was evidence for positive attitudes towards cultural diversity in Australia, there was also some expression of perceived negative outcomes of immigration and cultural diversity. Many of the participants who expressed positive attitudes, when asked how they felt about multiculturalism within Australia, also mentioned negative aspects of cultural diversity at some point during their interview. This finding of attitudinal ambivalence is reflected in previous research. For example, in their interpretation of the OMA survey data, Foster and Seitz's (1990) argued that while there is general support among Australians for multiculturalism the overall aim of having different cultural groups living together harmoniously is not completely accepted or supported by the majority of the participants. Goot (1993) argued that most people that participated in the OMA survey did
not hold either distinctly positive or negative attitudes towards multiculturalism, but their opinions and attitudes fell somewhere in between.

Despite the results of the present study being in line with these previous findings, the negative outcomes of cultural diversity that were discussed by the participants in the present study differ from those found in previous studies. Subthemes that emerged reflecting negative outcomes of cultural diversity were religious conflict, intolerance and segregation.

*Religious conflict.*

Some participants raised issues concerning the impact of religious differences within a multicultural society. Some of the participants' attitudes towards this issue are reflected within the following quotes.

*F: I am concerned about the religious impact of [cultural pluralism] and what it's beginning to mean for everyday Australians, um, even at work I have to accommodate different levels of religious beliefs within that [education] system...we even had our government saying we can no longer do Christianity because it didn’t fit in with everybody else, to me that doesn’t seem right.*

*G: I think it bothers me when political correctness goes too far, so, if they start saying, well, we can’t celebrate Christian festivities at primary schools and things like that. I think that’s really tough, because well, I’m not even religious myself, but*
I acknowledge the fact that I’ve grown up in a Christian society, our values are Christian whether you like it or not.

One participant expressed that he felt multiculturalism was a good thing, stating he believed it was a positive experience to meet different people and learn about different cultures. However, when he was asked if he believed that multiculturalism works well in Australia, he also made reference to religious differences:

W: Yeh, in some ways it does and in some ways it doesn’t. Some religions don’t get along, like Muslims and stuff like that, you know, they’re different.

This finding contrasts with previous research, in which religion was not a dominant issue in examining attitudes towards multiculturalism (Ho, 1990). This may be due to the fact that there were media reports concerning the issue of banning Christian festivities around the time that the data were collected (Bendedek, 2006).

Intolerance.

While some participants spoke of intolerance within Australian society, it was mostly expressed as something that may be a result of cultural diversity.

C: I think there seems to be, from watching programs on SBS\(^2\) and stuff and other people that I’ve talked to, there seems to be a bit of a push, a bit of a swing towards

\(^2\) SBS is a television station in Australia that specialises in educational programming.
that side of things where, um, “you can have your culture but in Australia when you go to school you can’t wear Muslim things because we’re Australians, we don’t wear them here, you should adopt our culture in that, you’re coming into our sort of place”.

The participants who raised this issue stated that while there is intolerance within Australian society, they themselves were opposed to it and did not engage in any of the behaviours they described. The results also showed some expression of beliefs that Australian society is tolerant. For example:

\[P: \text{Aussies are just, yeh, they love it. They don’t care who ya are as long as you, you have a good time and be happy.}\]

These results support the findings of Bulbeck’s (2004) study. Bulbeck examined attitudes of Australian students (under the age of 21 years old) on a variety of issues, including multiculturalism. She found that there were high levels of support for multiculturalism among the 575 participants. Bulbeck (2004) also reported that, for many of the participants, multiculturalism was viewed as a key part of Australian national identity that contributed to a “unique”, “welcoming, laid back” nation (Bulbeck, 2004, p. 357).

\textit{Segregation.}

The last interview question was designed to address perceptions concerning social cohesion within Australian society. Participants were asked if they felt that having a policy
of multiculturalism impacts on the unity of Australia. In response to this question, many of the participants discussed the issue of segregation within Australian society. Responses concerning the issue of segregation differed in their attributions as to the cause of segregation. For example, some participants expressed the view that it was the actions of minority groups that lead to segregation.

J: I think it would probably work against [unity] in a way, because you do get certain groups that choose not to be involved or to stay within their own groups, so I don’t think it does benefit, but I don’t think we have the right to tell them that they can’t do that.

L: There are several communities that just don’t want to belong. They’re quite happy to be here and get handouts but they don’t want to mix in and belong.

These results show similarities to the findings of Birrell and Betts’ (2001) study, which showed that a large percentage of Australians fear a policy of multiculturalism is contributing to a demise of social cohesion in Australian society. These results also show support for Breugelmans and Van de Vijver’s (2004) findings from their study in the Netherlands. These authors found that while there was little evidence for social exclusion of ethnic minority groups, the central component of low levels of support for multiculturalism stemmed from issues surrounding minorities not adapting to public life within the Dutch society and the challenge that that is perceived to pose to the structure of society. However,
one participant in the present study did express an attitude that some of the responsibility lies with the dominant culture.

_B_: It would be good to see more of other peoples’ cultures and races, I don’t think we explore it as much as we probably could as Australians and having so many other races in Australia.

The results also showed some attitudes towards segregation within Australian society that did not necessarily view it as being caused by the actions of any particular group, but rather an inevitable outcome of cultural diversity. For example:

_P_: I think it can divide communities a lot.

_L_: Natural human nature means that you sort of go and, you go and hang out with the people who are from similar backgrounds, so then you get your pockets of cultures, or backgrounds and that kind of thing.

In response to the question of whether having a policy of multiculturalism impacts on the unity of Australia, one participant replied:
H: Yeh, it does break the unity because at the end of the day, we don’t all share the same beliefs and we don’t all share the same, the same vision and direction. We’ve all got different agendas.

These findings suggest support for Soutphommasane’s (2004) argument, that the policy of multiculturalism actually encourages forms of cultural separatism by supporting and encouraging the preservation of ethnic cultures.

**Social justice**

A theme that emerged from the data that has not been found in previous qualitative research was social justice. Some participants expressed the view that a policy of multiculturalism is representative of the basic democratic right to hold your own beliefs. These attitudes reflect core principles that the government proposes to underpin the policy of multiculturalism, i.e., respect for each person and fairness for each person (Healey, 2005). An example quote is:

\[ J: \text{I think someone should have a right to express what they believe, who am I to judge?} \]

While some did express an attitude that reflects support for these underlying principles of the policy of multiculturalism, many still expressed that there are inherent problems when the policy is put into practice. For example, when asked how she felt about multiculturalism in Australia, one participant replied:
G: It's morally right, that's the problem, it's morally right to say you can do as you choose. But then we start saying hang on, you're taking away what we really wanted too, so...

These findings are similar to those of Ho's (1990) study. Ho examined Anglo-Australian's level of support for the policy of multiculturalism and their level of support for its underlying dimensions i.e., the belief that the policy is in line with Australia's national interest, that the policy has benefited Australian society, that it serves as a social justice strategy, and that it will lead to social cohesion. The results of Ho's study showed that, while there was strong support for the underlying dimensions, this did not translate to support for the overall policy, which was shown to be only moderately supported. In regards to the present study, it was found that while the participants may view the idea of multiculturalism as morally right in regards to social justice, this did not necessarily translate to positive attitudes towards having a policy of multiculturalism in Australia.

**Beliefs regarding essentialism of ethnic groups**

The results showed that many participants expressed both essentialist and non-essentialist beliefs about ethnic groups. While most agreed that ethnic or cultural identity is a 'real' and important construct, there were differing opinions as to the stability and naturalness of this construct. The results showed three predominant themes within the essentialist beliefs that were expressed by some participants, these were: importance of background; stability; and underlying essence.
Importance of background

One of the two dimensions of essentialism that were proposed by Haslam, Rothschild and Ernst (2000) was the extent to which social categories are seen as natural and inherently different. When the participants were asked if they thought a person’s ethnicity or culture represents a significant part of who they are, several participants expressed the belief that it was definitely a significant part of who they are because it was their background. It was interpreted from these participants’ responses that an individual’s background is a fundamental aspect of their identity. This is illustrated in the following quotations from participants.

F: Their background is there and that’s how they been moulded.

G: Yeh! I don’t know how you could separate it. It’s absolutely why I have my opinions about this question and that someone from a different cultural background would have a completely different set of values, so, yeh, absolutely.

In regards to Haslam, Rothschild and Ernst’s (2000) argument, these beliefs are interpreted as viewing ethnicity or culture as an essentialist social category, as they express the view that belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group is a natural and integral part of an individual’s identity. The second quote in particular demonstrates the belief that cultural groups are inherently different.
Stability

Verkuyten (2003) argued that the first dimension of essentialism that Haslam, Rothschild and Ernst (2000) proposed, combines the ideas of naturalness, immutability of group membership and historical stability. Therefore, it could be argued that if ethnic identity is perceived to be essential, the experience of migration would not change this aspect of an individual’s identity. In the present study, participants were asked, “do you feel the experience of migrating to Australia from another country would affect how a person identifies with their home culture?” Some of the participants’ replies reflect essentialist beliefs regarding the nature of ethnic groups as they suggest that ethnic identity is stable and unchanging, for example:

\[D\]: Nah, I think it’ll still always be in them, doesn’t really matter where you are, you’ve still always got it in ya.

One participant expressed the notion of stability in his response to the question: do you think a person’s ethnicity or culture represents a significant part of who they are?

\[J\]: I think so. It’d have to, you couldn’t assimilate from one day to the next, you wouldn’t, you couldn’t change who ya are.
Underlying essence

The second dimension of essentialism that Haslam, Rothschild and Ernst (2000) proposed was the extent to which social categories are perceived to be homogenous and unified entities or 'real things'. McGarty, Haslam, Hutchinson and Grace (1995) argued that the perception of a social category as a coherent and unified entity is linked to a belief in an underlying essence. Some participants made comments that are interpreted as reflecting a belief in an underlying essence of ethnic group members. These were some of the responses to whether a person's ethnicity or culture represents a significant part of who they are:

W: Yes.

T: In what way?

W: Oh, just in the way they present themselves and everything like that, the way they go about life.

P: Yeh, it definitely makes them who they are, totally. Um, many times I've been on bus stops in Melbourne, or anywhere, and, you know spoken to old wog ladies or, or ah, you know, old German blokes, or just all sorts of old, um, characters I've bumped into along the way and chatted to and ah, yeh, definitely, it's the first impression you get, it's like, ah, nice old wog girl ay.
Non-essentialist beliefs

Although many of the participants expressed opinions that appeared to reflect essentialist beliefs about ethnic groups, many of them also made other comments that reflected non-essentialist beliefs. When the participants were discussing acculturation trends of ethnic groups, they often made comments that could be interpreted as non-essentialist. The results showed three common themes through which non-essentialist beliefs were expressed. They were given titles: generational difference; individual choice; and desire for acculturation of ethnic groups.

Generational difference

Some of the participants spoke about differences between generations of migrants. It was mentioned that the younger generations, because they have been living in Australia longer, would identify less with their ethnic culture. The participants were presented with the statement, “some people believe that ethnic groups stick to their old ways after migrating to Australia” and then they were asked what they thought about that. One participant replied:

G: So they might have these parents putting this [pressure] on, but they have this massive peer pressure put on by others, so they’ll just grow in a different direction.

Another quote related to generational differences was evident in a participant’s response to the question, “do you feel the experience of migrating to Australia would affect how a person identifies with their home culture?”
S: I think a younger person would have, um, would be more likely to adapt. And adapt more happily to a new environment.

These opinions suggest a belief that ethnicity is not necessarily a fixed construct that is historically stable, but rather is flexible and can change over time or in response to context. Therefore, these beliefs could be proposed to constitute a non-essentialist view of ethnic identity. These beliefs relate to Parsons' (1975) argument that the modern world offers individuals a choice between a number of available ethnic identities. Parsons posed the example of children of mixed marriages, who may choose to adopt one ethnicity over the other. Parsons argued that the modern world has presented minority groups with the option to retain their traditional identity or adopt the culture of mainstream society.

One participant did express that a person's ethnicity or culture "definitely makes them who they are". However, in discussing this idea, he also made the following comment:

H: Yeh, it does, it definitely does, but then looking at the younger generation who have actually been born here and grown up here but still has that in them, then it's gonna be a different reflection there isn't it? So, they'll still have their background there, but I suppose they'll be more Australian.
This expression of both essentialist and non-essentialist beliefs was common for many of the participants. While they did express that ethnicity and culture were important and ‘real things’, they also alluded to how these constructs are flexible and subject to change. The belief that ethnic identity is a flexible construct was expressed by some participants as an “Australianisation” of ethnic group members; suggesting that over time ethnic group members adopt the ways of the dominant culture and their ethnic identity transforms. For example:

T: Do you feel the experience of migrating to Australia from another country would affect how a person identifies with their home culture?
L: I think, initially it wouldn’t, but then certainly later on yes, that would have an effect, um, because, as they’ve come here, more, been in Australia a longer time, they become more Australianised a bit.

T: Some people believe that ethnic groups stick to their old ways after migrating to Australia, what do you think about that?
C: I think that um, some people do and some people don’t, like, at [a local school] a lot of them are Vietnamese and so they, they have a lot of culture in their lives and you notice it with like rice in their lunchbox and stuff like that, so they still maintain a lot of their culture, but then I know other people as well that are completely the opposite, like say, brought over from an Asian country, but are completely like, Aussies.
Individual choice

There was some expression of beliefs from participants that emphasised the element of individual choice within the construct of identity. This also constitutes an anti-essentialist belief, as it does not assume that ethnic identity is a natural and stable construct, but one that is open to subjective interpretation and external influence. This element of individual choice is exemplified by the following responses to the question, “do you think a person’s ethnicity or culture represents a significant part of who they are?”

S: Um, I think again it really does depend on the individual, like, um. I guess it really does matter, but sort of – I don’t think about who I am and what I believe in most of the – like I don’t consciously believe in it most of the time.

C: I think everyone’s different and that’s why some people might adopt a more, sort of like, like a – when I say Australian ways, I mean like, generations of Australians, the way, like, we live. Um, I think it’s personal choice and that individual choice about adopting part of your identity and things, I think it’s influenced by your friends as well as family. Like how much of who you are is, um, comes down to culture and cultural ways. Yeh, I think it’s individual choice really.
Desire for acculturation of ethnic groups

There was a strong theme that emerged from the data that reflected the desire for ethnic group to adopt the ways of the dominant Anglo-Australian culture. The following quotes exemplify this view, in response to the question; “some people believe that ethnic groups stick to their old ways after migrating to Australia, what do you think about that?”

P: I suppose all you could say for that is, um, a lot of people are gonna stick to their values which is good because you can’t lose originally like, you know, if they’re coming over to become Australians I don’t expect them to lose their religions or their cultures, or, any of the things they’ve formally believed in or practiced, um, bring it on, no problems, as long as, at the same time they grasp our, our, you know, or respect – not so much respect but grasp our way of life as well and incorporate it.

S: I think it’s good to know your roots and know where you come from, um, but I think it’s a good thing as well to... assimilate’s the wrong word, but maybe adapt slightly to the culture that’s around you, like, I’m not saying reject the values that you once held just because you’re in a place which is different to where you maybe grew up, but, ah, oh, I don’t know. I think you’re allowed to have a little from column A and a little from column B.
The following quote was in response to the question, “do you feel the experience of migrating to Australia from another country would affect how a person identifies with their home culture?”

H: It would dilute it. Um, for the simple fact that they have to come to terms with the fact that they are living in a multicultural society and they have to be a lot more tolerant than they would be at home. They can’t be this, this um, driven in one direction, with the one belief, with the one “that’s how it is”. It’s not like that. They gotta become more, well you’d say Christianised, with the whole...you know.

These attitudes are interpreted as reflecting non-essentialist beliefs, as it is assumed that if people believe that ethnic group members should adopt the ways of the dominant culture and become more “Australian”, then it could be argued that they believe that ethnic group membership is flexible and that ethnic group members are capable of making this transition. Therefore, ethnic identity is not viewed as a stable, inflexible construct, but rather, a construct that can change and adapt to external influences.

How essentialist beliefs about ethnic groups relate to attitudes towards multiculturalism

The results showed a commonality amongst the participants in that most expressed both positive and negative attitudes towards multiculturalism, and essentialist and non-essentialist beliefs. Therefore, a simple direct relationship between essentialist beliefs and attitudes towards multiculturalism cannot be assumed. Similar findings were reported by Verkuyten (2003), who found in his study that ethnic Dutch participants (the dominant
culture) engaged in both essentialist and non-essentialist discourses. Verkuyten concluded that it is important to examine how people use essentialist and non-essentialist beliefs. It was found that participants used both essentialist and non-essentialist beliefs in ways that seemed to support their attitudes towards multiculturalism.

In examining the findings of the present study regarding how beliefs about essentialism of ethnic groups were related to multiculturalism, the nature of the participants’ beliefs regarding essentialism must first be clarified. Most participants did express the belief that ethnic identity is indeed a ‘real’ thing and most expressed the view that this was a significant part of who a person is. This view is interpreted as representing an essentialist view of ethnic identity, in that it assumes ethnic identity is a natural construct and ethnic groups are inherently different. However, essentialist notions have been argued to infer that because ethnic identity is a natural and inherent construct, it is stable and cannot be changed (Verkuyten, 2003). This aspect of essentialism was not found to be supported within the present study. Rather, ethnic identity was viewed by most participants as flexible and susceptible to change.

Jost and Banaji (1994) argued that essentialist beliefs rationalize existing social arrangements and social hierarchies. The themes that emerged within the data that were interpreted as essentialist beliefs of the participants were: importance of background; stability; and underlying essence. Multiculturalism, as a policy, promotes the value of diversity as a core principle (Verkuyten, 2003). Barry (2001) argued that multiculturalism highlights group identity and is based upon a conception of cultural groups as being homogenous and having unique and inherent characteristics. The dominant theme that
emerged within participants’ attitudes to multiculturalism was perceived consequences of cultural diversity. It can be interpreted from these findings, that most participants view ethnic or cultural identity as a ‘real thing’, which justifies the existing social arrangement of multiculturalism within Australia. For example, if participants did not view ethnic or cultural identity as a ‘real’ construct, these themes regarding essentialism would not have emerged and the idea of cultural diversity would be negligible. This finding relates to Yzerbyt, Rocher, and Schadron’s (1997) proposition of a syndrome of essentialist categorisation that serves to rationalize the social order. Fowers and Richardson (1996) stated that multiculturalism emphasises cultural diversity and the maintenance of differing cultural identities within the one society. It could be interpreted that the essentialist beliefs expressed by the participants are an inevitable element of having a multicultural policy in Australia.

One theme that was identified within participants’ attitudes towards multiculturalism was social justice. Specifically, some participants held the opinion that multiculturalism was a morally appropriate policy to manage cultural diversity, as exemplified by the quote:

J: I think someone should have a right to express what they believe, who am I to judge?

This participant expressed essentialist beliefs in this response that he gave when asked if a person’s ethnicity or culture represents a significant part of who they are:
J: Oh, definitely, it's what you know, really isn't it?

However, this participant also expressed non-essentialist beliefs when he commented on acculturation of ethnic minorities:

J: Well, I think it's a choice, because, you know, I know people who have mixed into the Australian way of life, from other cultures and do it quite easily and others choose not to, so yeh, it's definitely a choice.

This finding demonstrates how essentialist beliefs of the participants' about ethnic groups were not specifically related to negative attitudes towards multiculturalism. On the contrary essentialist beliefs can be interpreted as justifications for a multicultural policy as they provide support for the basic underlying principles of the policy, such as the respect for each person and fairness for each person.

Two of the themes that emerged within some participants' views that reflected non-essentialist beliefs were generational difference and individual choice. The theme of generational difference included participants' comments that referred to a transition of ethnic or cultural identity that occurs over time in individuals who have migrated and their children, who are born and grow up in the Australia. One participant commented:
H: Yeh, it does, it definitely does [make them who they are], but then looking at the younger generation who have actually been born here and grown up here but still has that in them, then it’s gonna be a different reflection there isn’t it? So, they still have their background there, but I’ll suppose they’ll be more Australian.

While this view does contain elements of essentialist notions i.e., “still has that in them”, it was interpreted as a non-essentialist view because the participant refers to a change in ethnic identity in the words “they’ll be more Australian”, which implies that ethnicity is not a stable construct, but is flexible. When asked how he felt about multiculturalism in Australia, this participant replied:

H: I have no problems with it. Um, one thing I do, ah, like to sort of see, coming from the other people that come into the country is that they at least try and speak English.

Later he said:

H: They’re becoming Australian so therefore, they should at least try and speak the language.

While this view is not interpreted as expressing specifically negative attitudes towards multiculturalism, it is interpreted as expressing the view that multiculturalism should
involve some effort on the part of ethnic minority members to acculturate to the dominant culture.

This was a strong theme amongst many of the participants. That is, while essentialist beliefs were expressed (in that many participants saw ethnic or cultural identity as a ‘real’ construct and some expressed the view that this was a significant aspect of who a person is), there was little support for the notion of stability and inflexibility of ethnic identity. Rather, many participants expressed that ethnic and cultural identity can be changed or altered, if the individual chooses to make that change. Participants who expressed the belief that ethnic or cultural identity is not necessarily a stable, unchanging and inevitable construct were more likely to hold what Birrell and Betts (2001) defined as a soft form of multiculturalism, in which ethnic groups are encouraged to integrate into mainstream Australia and not suffer any prejudice based on their cultural backgrounds.

Conclusions

The results of the present study suggested that Anglo-Australians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism are not categorically negative or positive. The major themes that were identified within attitudes towards multiculturalism were, perceived consequences of cultural diversity and social justice. While most of the participants mentioned both positive and negative outcomes of cultural diversity, many held the view that multiculturalism is a socially just policy for managing this diversity. However, the view that multiculturalism is socially just was not always associated with positive attitudes towards multiculturalism in Australia.
The results showed that many of the participants expressed both essentialist and non-essentialist beliefs about ethnic minority groups. While the data showed that ethnic identity was perceived to be a 'real' construct and an important aspect of an individual’s identity, it was not believed to be stable and unchanging. The belief that ethnic identity is flexible was reflected through participants’ views that; ethnic and cultural identity can be influenced by individual choice, that there are generational differences (second generation migrants identify less with their ethnic background), and that ethnic minority groups should adopt the ways of the dominant culture.

The finding in the Netherlands of Verkuyten and Brug (2004), that essentialist beliefs of the majority group (ethnic Dutch) were related to lower endorsement of multiculturalism, was not specifically supported within the present study. Rather, the notion of essentialism, as it was used by participants in the present study, was interpreted in some cases, as a justification for multiculturalism, in that cultural differences were seen as a reality that requires acceptance and adequate management. Non-essentialist beliefs were not found to be specifically related to positive or negative attitudes towards multiculturalism, however, they were used to justify a form of soft multiculturalism (Birrell & Betts, 2001), which appeared to be supported by most participants.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of the present study was its exploratory approach. An exploratory, phenomenological design allowed for an exploration of what the participants understood multiculturalism to mean and their attitudes towards the construct. Considering the diversity of the findings, both within attitudes to multiculturalism and beliefs about
essentialism of ethnic groups, the exploratory design proved to be an appropriate and valuable approach in examining these issues. The sample in the present study included male and female participants of a variety of ages (from 18 years to 52 years of age), which contributed to the generalisability of the findings. Data saturation was reached, enhancing the transferability of the research.

One of the limitations of the present study was the interchanging use of the terms ‘ethnic identity’ and ‘cultural identity’. While it is common for lay people to use these terms interchangeably, the interchanging use of the terms within the interview questions may have influenced the participant’s responses. The fact that the participants were not provided with an explicit definition of these terms meant the participants’ subjective interpretation and use of these terms may have impacted on interpretations of the data. However, the exclusion of an explicit definition of the terms was important in order to explore the participants’ subjective attitudes and beliefs, and the analysis process involved member checking with participants in order to minimise any misinterpretation.

Implications and Future Directions

The results of the present study showed that Anglo-Australians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism can not be categorised as specifically positive or negative. Rather, they are complex and are influenced by a variety of issues relating to cultural diversity. The results also showed that, while beliefs regarding essentialism of ethnic groups can be related to Anglo-Australians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism, this relationship is complex and is not as direct as previous research has indicated.
The complexity of the findings of the present study warrants further research into Anglo-Australians’ attitudes towards multiculturalism. The notion of essentialist beliefs also requires further exploration within the Australian context. It may be useful to examine the attitudes and beliefs of Anglo-Australians’ regarding cultural diversity in Australia. This could provide an understanding of essentialist beliefs separate from the policy of multiculturalism, which can be argued to advocate essentialist notions.
References


Appendix A

Interview Schedule

1. What does the term multiculturalism mean to you?

2. How do you feel about multiculturalism in Australia?
   Prompts: Do you think it’s good? Or bad?

3. Some people believe that ethnic groups “stick to their old ways” after migrating to Australia. What do you think about that?
   Prompts: Do you think that is a true statement or not?
   In what ways do you think this is true or not true?

4. Do you think a person’s ethnicity or culture represents a significant part of who they are?
   Prompts: Why/Why not?
   How? In what ways?

5. Do you feel the experience of migrating to Australia from another country would effect how a person identifies with their home country or culture?
   Prompts: Do you think it might strengthen or lessen how much they identify with their home country or culture?

6. Do you feel that having a policy of multiculturalism impacts on the unity of Australia?
   Prompts: Why/Why not?
   (If yes) How does it impact?
Appendix B

Information Letter

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research project that will explore how people feel about multiculturalism and cultural diversity in Australia. This study is being conducted by Tina Charles, as part of her Bachelor of Arts Honours (Psychology) degree and has been approved by the Edith Cowan University Faculty of Community Services, Education, and Social Sciences committee for the Conduct of Ethical Research.

If you choose to participate in this study you will be asked to attend an interview with the researcher. During this interview, you will be presented with questions concerning attitudes and opinions toward multiculturalism and ethnic groups. There are no incorrect responses, the aim of the study is to gather information on the views that people have on these issues. The interview is estimated to take between 30 minutes and one hour (please allow for one hour) and will take place at the student researcher’s home. The interview will be recorded on tape and later transcribed by the researcher.

Please be assured the attitudes and opinions you express will be held in the strictest confidence by the researcher. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime. While the researcher will require your first name for the interview, in the written transcription of the data your name will not be connected with any of your input during the interview (a pseudonym will be used). No names will be included on any reports arising from this study. The data will only be accessible to the student researcher and her Supervisor Dr Justine Dandy and identifying information will be removed from all notes. The recorded tapes will be destroyed when the study is completed.

Any questions concerning this study can be directed to Tina Charles (student researcher) at any time on 0437 483 784 or tiggertina81@hotmail.com or to the Project Supervisor Dr Justine Dandy on 6304 5105 or j.dandy@ecu.edu.au. Should you wish to speak to someone who is independent of the study, you can contact Dr Julie Ann Pooley, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, on 6304 5834 or j.pooley@ecu.edu.au.

Thankyou for participating in this study,

Tina Charles.
INFORMED CONSENT

I (the participant) have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the study, realising that I may withdraw at any time. I understand the interview in which I participate will be recorded on tape, which will be erased when the study is completed. I understand my contributions will remain confidential. I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published, provided I am not identifiable.

______________________  ______________________
Participant               Date

______________________  ______________________
Student Researcher        Date
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