Multiculturalism in Australia: A Survey of Attitudes

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The assimilationist approach to Australia's large-scale immigration program since the Second World War has recently been replaced by a policy of multiculturalism. While it is clear that public policy may have accepted multiculturalism as the appropriate philosophy for contemporary Australia, there is evidence to suggest that much of the community has yet to agree. This study has been designed to investigate Australian-born respondents' attitudes toward the policy of multiculturalism. Specifically, the study focuses on two research questions: (1) what is the extent of support for the policy of multiculturalism and its underlying dimensions?, i.e., the belief that such a policy is in line with Australia's national interest, that the policy has benefitted Australian society, that it serves as a social justice strategy by providing a fair share of society's resources to all Australians, and that it will lead to social cohesion, and (2) what are the correlates of these attitudes? A total of 159 Australian-born respondents (89 males, 70 females) were surveyed. The results obtained indicated a discrepancy between support for the dimensions underlying multiculturalism and support for the policy itself. Specifically, the strong support for the underlying dimensions was not reflected in the moderate support for the overall policy. With regard to the correlates of these attitudes, the concept of ethnocentrism was found to be the only significant predictor, while none of the demographic variables (sex, age, education, and SES) was found to be significantly related to any of the multiculturalism variables. The implications of these findings for a policy of multiculturalism in Australia are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Australia's large-scale immigration program since the Second World War has resulted in a highly diverse population in terms of politics, race,
and culture. This high diversity is evident in a population that consists of persons from 140 ethnic backgrounds, speaking 90 languages, and practicing more than 80 religions. Early governmental response to this diversity was the assimilationist approach, which was predicated on the ethnocentric belief that immigrants to this country would readily embrace Australia's dominant Anglo-Celtic values. The policy also served to reassure an ambivalent host society that essential majority values, attributes, and identity would prevail under the onslaught of aliens with new ways of talking, thinking, and behaving (FitzGerald Report on Immigration, 1988). However, by the mid-1960's, there was a growing awareness that assimilationist policies had not succeeded in removing or sublimating the ethnic identity of many of the groups who had arrived as immigrants. Worse, it drove large numbers of immigrants to return to their countries of origin, and those who stayed faced substantial areas of ethnic disadvantage, particularly in the education and employment sectors (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1988). Recognition of assimilation's failure set the stage for a major change in official policies in the sixties and early seventies. By 1973, ideas about human rights and freedom of the individual drove policy makers to the dismantling of the White Australia Policy, and helped shape the passage of official policies through integration toward multiculturalism. This new approach to policy, operating within the theme "unity within diversity," advocates a new multicultural Australian nation with equal rights and opportunity for all regardless of their ethnic origin.

The development of a philosophy of multiculturalism has been guided by the government's recognition that a more dynamic policy is needed to manage an increasingly cosmopolitan and culturally pluralistic Australian society. More specifically, the Commonwealth government's arguments for the current policy rest on four major assumptions of multiculturalism. First, the arguments are based on the belief that multiculturalism, as policy to deal with the country's cultural diversity, is in line with Australia's national interest. This assumption follows from the failure of the assimilationist approach and the recognition that a more practical policy is needed to manage the cosmopolitan nature of Australian society. Second, the arguments for multiculturalism also rest on the assumption that such a policy has benefited Australian society, both culturally and economically. On a cultural level, it has been argued that a multicultural society allows for more cultural and social enrichment, resulting in an exciting and vibrant society. On an economic level, the policy reflects the Government's recognition of the disadvantage suffered by, and the largely untapped potential of the more than 20% of Australians born overseas. Specifically, a multicultural agenda is seen as an effective counter to the waste in human resources. Third, the arguments for multiculturalism rest on the social justice dimension. Social justice
is about achieving a fairer society in which people's life chances are not affected by their ethnicity, race, religion, language, or place of birth. Multiculturalism, in this context, is seen as a social justice strategy to provide a fair share of society's resources to all Australians. The final argument for a policy of multiculturalism appears to lie at the very heart of its existence. Simply, as a policy to manage Australia's cultural diversity its goal is to ensure that the social cohesion of the nation is preserved. The concept of social cohesion rests heavily on the argument that the policy of multiculturalism strongly affirms the importance of an overriding and unifying loyalty to Australia's interests and future. That is, while it accepts diversity, it remains based upon a shared commitment to a common set of institutions, an accepted legal framework, English as the national language, and parliamentary democracy. In short, multiculturalism is seen as the framework within which the goal of "unity within diversity" can be achieved.

While public policy may have accepted multiculturalism as the appropriate philosophy for contemporary Australia, opinions still differ on the likely reception Australians will give to a policy which dictates the preservation and promotion of non-Anglo traditions (Gallois, Callan, & Parslow, 1982). The Review of Post Arrival Services and Programs to Migrants (1978) reported changes toward more positive attitudes and a new phase of community concern for the special needs of immigrants. However, the recently published report by the Office of Multicultural Affairs (1988) demonstrated that there is still widespread hostility toward such a policy. One major criticism relates to the belief that multiculturalism is a policy which champions and entrenches difference in Australian society. That is, it represents a policy of unrestricted cultural autonomy which places loyalty to one's ethnic origin above commitment to Australia. A second major criticism identified in the report relates to the perception that multiculturalism is equated with positively favoring migrants or "ethnics" at the expense of other Australians. Thus, it appears that while some condemn multiculturalism because of its alleged institutionalization of difference, others attack it because they see it as unfairly favoring some Australians over others by devoting specific programs to them. Such criticisms imply that migrants must choose between life style and life chances, and that if they choose to live outside the mainstream, then they abandon the right to an equitable share of resources (Office of Multicultural Affairs, 1988). While the Australian Government has rejected this assertion in both its Aboriginal and multicultural policies, there is no doubt that beliefs in the divisive nature and unfairness of multicultural policies are still strongly held by some sections of the community. This is reflected in the often emotive debate over the recent implementation of a policy of multiculturalism.

While to some extent there will always be differences of opinion in the acceptability of multicultural policies, it is fair to say that the degree of pas-
sion generated has been matched by the inadequacy of the empirical evidence used to sustain the debate. Early evidence points to ambivalent attitudes. In a 1980 survey reported by Goot (1988), 81% of a Newcastle sample agreed that "immigrants should try a lot harder to become absorbed (or assimilated) into the Australian way of life." However, 66% also agreed that "migrants should be allowed to fit into the Australian way of life at their own pace." Most of those interviewed agreed that "the ideal" would be for migrants to mix with those born in Australia while retaining their own culture. However, results from the 1985 Reark research in Sydney and Adelaide point to a recent hardening of attitudes against multiculturalism (Goot, 1988). In that survey, 76% of the Australian-born agreed that "all migrants should accept the Australian way of life and adapt to it." More significantly, the recently published FitzGerald Report on Immigration (1988) articulated widespread community confusion and distrust of multiculturalism, with many people from a variety of occupational backgrounds perceiving it as divisive. Together, the weight of the evidence suggests that there is still a considerable degree of reluctance on the part of many Australians wholeheartedly to embrace multiculturalism. This lack of support for multicultural policies, however, may in part be due to the confusion over the policy of multiculturalism and the specific aims underlying the policy. For example, a major finding of the FitzGerald Report on Immigration (1988) indicated that multiculturalism is linked in the public mind with immigration, rather than as a policy to manage the nation's cultural diversity, and is perceived as sectional and divisive. Such attitudes appear to reflect a lack of understanding and/or lack of acceptance of the major arguments underlying multiculturalism. As discussed earlier, these arguments include (1) the belief that such a policy is in Australia's national interest, (2) the belief that Australian society can benefit from such a policy, (3) that it serves as a social justice strategy, and (4) that it ensures social cohesion. Given that these are the main dimensions underlying the policy of multiculturalism, a more accurate index of the extent of support for multiculturalism should be reflected by the degree of endorsement of these dimensions. The present study has been designed to investigate the extent of support for these underlying dimensions.

A second aim of the present study is to investigate what the factors are that influence Australian-born residents' attitudes toward the policy of multiculturalism. One line of enquiry had focused on the nature of the "we–they" attitude associated with the concept of ethnocentrism. Past research has strongly suggested that this concept is important in ascertaining attitudes toward ethnic groups (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Beswick & Hills, 1969, 1972; Gallois et al., 1982). Ethnocentrism refers to the tendency to evaluate all outgroups negatively, regardless of race, culture, or politics, and it includes a positive component of idealism of the in-
group (Beswick & Hills, 1969). Such evaluations often serve to accentuate the ingroup–outgroup differences encountered in intergroup contact, facilitating the development of ingroup favoritism and outgroup hostility. Given that multiculturalism explicitly advocates the preservation and promotion of the non-Anglo traditions of migrants (the outgroups), it seems logical to suggest that ethnocentrism would significantly impact on attitudes toward such a policy. The present study employed the Australian Ethnocentrism Scale (Beswick & Hills, 1969, 1972) to tap the respondents’ level of ethnocentrism. While similar to the original E-scale (Adorno et al., 1950), the Australian Ethnocentrism Scale was developed specifically for Australian conditions, and assumes that ethnocentrism constitutes a general rejection of all outgroups and an over-evaluation of one’s ingroup. This tendency for ingroup favoritism might be hypothesized to lead high ethnocentrics to reject not only the policy of multiculturalism, but also the specific dimensions underlying the policy.

Another line of enquiry suggests that the individual socio-economic characteristics of people may influence attitudes toward multiculturalism. Although studies of the social and political sources of different attitudes toward outgroups, e.g., migrants, have disagreed as to what variables affect mass opinion, past studies have strongly implicated certain variables as important determinants of ethnic attitudes (Baker, 1970; Bagley, 1970; Butler & Stokes, 1969; Deakin, 1970; Rose, Deakin, Abrams, Jackson, Peston, Vanags, Cohen, Gaitskell, & Ward, 1969; Schaefer, 1974). While the findings differ somewhat from one survey to another, it is generally agreed that social class, age, and education are significant variables in determining the ingroup–outgroup differentiation implicit in the concept of multiculturalism.

The present study has been designed to investigate Australian-born respondents’ attitudes toward the policy of multiculturalism. Specifically, the study focuses on two research questions: (1) what is the extent of support for the policy of multiculturalism and its underlying dimensions? and (2) what are the correlates of these attitudes?

METHOD

Subjects and Procedure

Respondents were volunteers who were recruited from the Darwin metropolitan area in September 1988 by third-year psychology students. The total sample consisted of 159 respondents (89 males, 70 females). All respondents were White, Australian-born, and employed on a full-time basis at
the time of the study. Respondents filled in the questionnaire individually. Prior to filling in the questionnaire, they were informed that any words, phrases, or statements that are unclear would be clarified by the experimenter.

Sample Characteristics

Because the sample is nonprobabilistic, it is important to describe its characteristics and to note how they differ from those of the larger population in the Northern Territory, as revealed by the 1986 Australian census. The sex distribution of the sample consisted of 55.9% male and 44.1% female (compared with 52.8% male and 47.2% female in the Northern Territory). The sample had an age range of 15–66 years and a mean age of 33 years. Comparison with that for the Northern Territory revealed that there was a good fit between the sample and the population distributions in the 15- to 31-year age group, but tended to under-represent people in the 32 or more age group. In terms of educational level, the sample was found to be over-represented in the “tertiary educated” level with 51.2% having achieved a tertiary qualification. In terms of the respondents’ socio-economic status (SES), comparisons with occupational groupings used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed that the sample somewhat over-represented people with professional and managerial occupations, and under-represented people in the trades and labor category. In other categories, there was a good fit between the sample and the population. Together, these characteristics indicate that the sample is somewhat skewed toward those with high education and high SES, which suggests that care should be taken when generalizing the study’s findings to the larger population.

Materials

The questionnaire employed consisted of three sections. Section 1 consisted of four questions designed to elicit information about the respondents’ sex, age, educational level, and current occupation.

Section 2 consisted of 31 items representing the Australian Ethnocentrism Scale (Beswick & Hills, 1969, 1972). The original Australian Ethnocentrism Scale consisted of 32 items; one item (boys who refuse to do National Service should be admired for having the courage of their convictions) was deleted from the scale in the present study, due to its lack of cultural currency. The Australian Ethnocentrism Scale was derived from a pool of items set up to comply with various facets of ethnocentrism as defined by Levinson (Adorno et al., 1950) and illustrated in the California E-scale and the British Ethnocentrism scale. Items in the scale were designed to tap ethnocentrism as a general tendency to discriminate against any possible outgroup,
e.g., it is far better for all concerned to keep Aborigines on reserves and mission stations, it is wrong to say that Asians in general are not to be trusted, and Australians, with their ideals of mateship, are the most friendly and generous people in the world. No questions on the scale measured attitude toward any aspect of multiculturalism. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale with high scores indicating strong agreement with that item. Of the 31 items, 15 were reversed scored.

Section 3 consisted of five items designed to tap the respondents' attitude toward multiculturalism. Four of the five items relate directly to the four dimensions (discussed earlier) underlying the policy of multiculturalism. Thus, these items asked the respondents to indicate how they feel about the statement that (1) Australian society has benefitted from a policy of multiculturalism, (2) multiculturalism, as a policy to deal with cultural diversity, is in line with this country's national interest, (3) multiculturalism has enabled ethnic minorities greater access to power resources like status, wealth, education, government positions, and political office, and (4) whether multiculturalism is more likely to lead to social cohesion or intergroup conflict in Australian society. Respondents were asked to rate responses to the first three statements on a 4-point scale, from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). The statement relating to "social cohesion" was to be rated on a 7-point scale, from social cohesion (1) to intergroup conflict (7). The fifth item was designed to tap the respondents' overall level of support for the policy of multiculturalism, and was to be rated on a 4-point scale: 1 = no support at all, 2 = moderate support, 3 = strong support, and 4 = very strong support.

RESULTS

Table I presents the respondents' mean ratings for the five multiculturalism variables. The results indicated that the respondents are generally in agreement with the specific arguments underlying the policy of multiculturalism. Thus, the majority of the respondents believed that Australian society has benefitted from a policy of multiculturalism (strongly disagree = 3.1%, disagree = 14.4%, agree = 64.4%, strongly agree = 18.1%), that the policy is in line with the country's national interest (strongly disagree = 3.1%, disagree = 14.4%, agree = 69.4%, strongly agree = 13.1%), and that it has provided migrants with greater access to the country's resources (strongly disagree = 1.9%, disagree = 20.6%, agree = 70.3%, strongly agree = 7.2%). With regard to the respondents' perception as to whether multiculturalism is more likely to lead to social cohesion or intergroup conflicts, the results indicated that less than half of the sample (42.3%) believed that the policy will lead to social cohesion (ratings of 1, 2, and 3 on the 7-point
Table I. Mean Ratings for the Policy of Multiculturalism and Its Underlying Dimensions

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Australian society has benefitted from a policy of multiculturalism.</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>0.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Multiculturalism, as a policy to deal with cultural diversity, is in line with this country's national interest.</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Multiculturalism has enabled ethnic minorities greater access to power resources like status, wealth, education, government positions, and political office.</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Extent of support for the policy of multiculturalism.</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Is multiculturalism more likely to lead to social cohesion or intergroup conflict in Australian society?</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
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</table>

scale), while approximately a third of the sample (34.7%) believed that it will lead to intergroup conflict (ratings of 5, 6, and 7 on the 7-point scale). The results also indicated that approximately a quarter of the sample (23.1%) was unsure about the effects of the policy of multiculturalism (a rating of 4 on the 7-point scale). In terms of the overall level of support for the policy of multiculturalism, the results indicated only moderate support for the policy (no support at all = 10.1%, moderate support = 53.2%, strong support = 27.8%, very strong support = 8.9%).

Table II presents the intercorrelations for the four dimensions underlying the policy of multiculturalism, and their relationships with the overall level of support for such a policy. The results indicated that support for a policy of multiculturalism was significantly related to three of the four underlying dimensions. Thus, the stronger the beliefs that Australian society has benefitted from a policy of multiculturalism, that such a policy is in line with the country's national interest, and that multiculturalism leads to social cohesion, the stronger the support for a policy of multiculturalism. The results also indicated that the stronger the belief that Australian society has benefitted from a policy of multiculturalism, the stronger the belief that such a policy is in line with the country's interest, and that it leads to social cohesion. The finding relating to the “national interest” dimension indicated that the stronger the respondents' belief that a policy of multiculturalism is in line with the country's national interest, the stronger is their belief that such a policy will lead to social cohesion. The correlational analysis yielded no significant findings for the “access” dimension. Thus, the belief that multiculturalism has provided migrants with access to the country's resources was found to be unrelated to the other three dimensions, or to the overall level of support for a policy of multiculturalism.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Benefit to Australian society</th>
<th>Benefit to multiculturalism</th>
<th>Support for multiculturalism</th>
<th>Leads to social cohesion</th>
<th>Greater access to power resources</th>
<th>Enabled minorities</th>
<th>In line with national interest</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.80*</td>
<td>-0.57*</td>
<td>-0.54*</td>
<td>0.63*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.48*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table III. Significant Beta Weights ($\beta$) and Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients Between Ethnocentrism, Sex, Age, Education, SES, and Attitudes Toward the Policy of Multiculturalism and Its Underlying Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ethnocentrism</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>SES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Benefitted Australian society&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$\beta = -0.51^d$</td>
<td></td>
<td>$r = -0.55^d$</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>In line with national interest&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$\beta = -0.48^d$</td>
<td></td>
<td>$r = -0.53^d$</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Enabled ethnic minorities greater access to power resources&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$\beta = 0.20^e$</td>
<td></td>
<td>$r = 0.16^f$</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Support for multiculturalism&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$\beta = -0.58^d$</td>
<td></td>
<td>$r = -0.61^d$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Leads to social cohesion or intergroup conflict&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>$\beta = 0.50^d$</td>
<td></td>
<td>$r = 0.50^d$</td>
<td></td>
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<sup>a</sup>High score = agree.  
<sup>b</sup>High score = support.  
<sup>c</sup>High score = intergroup conflict.  
<sup>d</sup>$p < .05$.  
<sup>e</sup>$p < .01$.  
<sup>f</sup>$p < .001$.  

In order to answer the second research question concerning the correlates of these attitudes, the influence of the respondents’ level of ethnocentrism, as well as their demographic characteristics on these attitudes were investigated. Each respondent’s level of ethnocentrism was obtained by summing across the 31 items in the Australian Ethnocentrism Scale, with high scores indicating high ethnocentrism. Preliminary correlational analysis indicated that the ethnocentrism variable was significantly related to the demographic variables of education ($r = -0.33$, $p < .001$) and SES ($r = -0.26$, $p < .01$). Thus, in order to investigate the independent relationship between the respondents’ level of ethnocentrism, their demographic characteristics, and their attitudes toward multiculturalism, multiple regression analysis was employed. Table III presents Pearson’s product-moment correlation coefficients and beta weights between ethnocentrism, sex, age, education, SES, and attitudes toward the policy of multiculturalism and its underlying dimensions. Pearson’s product-moment correlations indicate that level of ethnocentrism is significantly related to all of the study’s dependent multiculturalism variables. Even when the respondents’ demographic characteristics have been controlled for through multiple regression analysis, the relationships are still significant. Thus, the higher the respondents’ level of ethnocentrism, the less they agree with the statements that multiculturalism has benefitted Australian
society, the less they believed that the policy is in line with national interest, the more they believed that the policy has enabled migrants greater access to the country's resources, the more they believed that the policy will lead to intergroup conflict, and the less the overall support given to the policy. None of the demographic variables were found to be significantly related to any of the criterion variables ($P > .05$).

**DISCUSSION**

The results from the present study indicate that there is still considerable confusion over the policy of multiculturalism, as manifested in the discrepancy in favorable attitudes toward the specific dimensions underlying multiculturalism, and the weak overall level of support for such a policy. The finding that the majority of the respondents believe that multiculturalism is in line with the country's national interest, reflects the recognition that such a policy is the most effective means to deal with the reality of Australia's cultural diversity. Simply, there is growing awareness and perhaps, grudging acceptance that Australia's ethnic and cultural diversity is a fact of life, and that the country is now, and will remain a multicultural nation. The failure of the assimilationist approach has clearly demonstrated that enforced conformity does not work, and that a more realistic, more humane, and fairer policy is needed to manage the nation's present and future cultural diversity. The belief that multiculturalism represents such a policy is clearly reflected in the agreement that such a policy is in line with the country's national interest. This belief is further complemented by the finding that the majority of the respondents agreed that such a policy has benefitted Australian society. The proliferation of ethnic shops, restaurants, and markets over the past decade, has provided the impetus for a dynamic interaction of the diversity of traditions that co-exist in Australia today. The end result is the perceived cultural and social enrichment of Australian society, a consequence clearly endorsed by the majority of the respondents in the present study. On an economic level, the results also suggest the realization that the country's economic performance can benefit from multicultural policies, through the removal of many of the cultural and linguistic barriers that have traditionally plagued the nation's labor force and its entrepreneurial capacity.

The effectiveness of multiculturalism as a social justice strategy is also acknowledged by the majority of the respondents. However, this acknowledgment does not necessarily mean approval of the advantages gained by migrants through multicultural policies. Indeed, Australians have shown a great deal of skill in keeping power and decision making out of the hands of migrant communities (Callan, 1986). Within this context, the results ob-
tained may actually reflect disapproval for what is perceived as encroachment into the major institutions of the majority. This interpretation is in line with the finding that this was the only underlying dimension not significantly related to the overall level of support for the policy of multiculturalism.

With regard to the respondents’ perception as to whether multiculturalism is more likely to lead to social cohesion or intergroup conflict, the results indicated that a large section of the community may still perceive the policy as sectional and divisive. Coupled with the finding that almost a quarter of the sample was unsure about the effects of multiculturalism, suggests that the government still has some way to go in convincing the community that multiculturalism does not promote difference, but rather reinforces social harmony through the promotion of the acceptance of difference.

With regard to the question of the correlates of these attitudes toward multiculturalism, the findings indicated that ethnocentrism was the only significant predictor variable. According to this concept, not only does an observer (ethnocentric) interpret an alien custom erroneously, he or she often concludes that it is inferior and therefore unwanted. This tendency for ingroup favoritism and outgroup hostility is clearly reflected in the study’s findings that a high level of ethnocentrism is related to the rejection of the policy of multiculturalism, as well as its underlying dimensions. Specifically, the study’s findings indicated that high ethnocentrics believed that a policy of multiculturalism has benefitted migrant groups but not Australian society, that it is not in the nation’s national interest, and that it is more likely to lead to intergroup conflict.

With regard to the study’s demographic variables, the results indicated that the respondents’ sex, age, education, and SES level were unimportant predictors of their attitudes toward multiculturalism. This is not unexpected given the results from past studies that have directly investigated the effects of such variables on ethnic attitudes (Baker, 1970; Bagley, 1970; Butler & Stokes, 1969; Deakin, 1970; Rose et al., 1969; Schaefer, 1974). While the findings from these studies have generally agreed that social class, age, and education are significant variables in differentiating ingroup–outgroup attitudes, they have also demonstrated that these socio-economic variables do not explain much of the variation in such attitudes. Studlar (1979), in a path-analytic study of racial attitudes in Britain, found that people’s individual attributes, their social contexts, and their political environment together accounted for an unimpressive 6–8% of the variance explained.

Keeping in mind that the nature of the sample employed in the present study may limit the generalizability of the obtained results, the overall findings carry a number of implications for the issues raised in the present debate over multiculturalism. First, the obtained discrepancy between strong support for the specific dimensions underlying multiculturalism and moderate support for the overall policy of multiculturalism, suggests that there is still
a considerable degree of community concern about multiculturalism. This concern relates not only to the unfairness and divisive nature perceived by many Australians to be inherent in multicultural policies, but also to the issue of change, change in their own society and often in their own personal worlds. Continuing change is not easy for a society to accept without continuing national justification, education, and nationally attentive management (FitzGerald Report on Immigration, 1988). Second, the finding that there is only moderate support for multiculturalism suggests that the social and economic aspects of the policy remain poorly comprehended. While some of the misgivings about multiculturalism will always be based on misinformation or racist assumptions, it is incumbent upon the government to ensure that public discussion of multiculturalism is informed and that misapprehension about multicultural policies are dealt with positively. Third, the finding that many respondents still perceive multiculturalism as divisive and fermenting intergroup conflict, suggests that the government still has a long way to go in convincing Australians that unity can be achieved through diversity. Simply, to many Australians, a paradox exists in the proposed national agenda for social cohesion which is based on the promotion of cultural differences. Governmental efforts at amelioration should therefore focus on clarifying the goals of multiculturalism, and emphasize that while the policy encourages all Australians to recognize and accept the country's cultural diversity, it is based on an overriding loyalty to Australia. Specifically, the government must do more to promote the view that difference is not the same as division. Finally, the study's findings relating to ethnocentrism point to the considerable influence of this psychological variable in determining how an individual forms his or her attitudes toward multiculturalism, and strongly suggest that fundamental values inculcated early in life may hold the key to understanding the sources of individual opinions to such a policy. Such a psychological approach to the explanation of attitudes on multiculturalism also allows for the incorporation of social, cultural, and political factors (Studlar, 1979). Once one is able to identify the complexities of how individuals arrive at their attitudes toward outgroups (what beliefs they hold and how they evaluate them) then it should be possible to discover the sources of those beliefs, whether they are learned relatively early in life as has been suggested, or whether they are largely the product of later experiences. The contribution of social, cultural, and political factors to the creation of public attitudes toward the policy of multiculturalism should then become clearer.

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**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

ROBERT HO received a PhD from Waikato University (New Zealand) in 1978. He has taught at the tertiary level for the past 10 years, and is currently a lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the Northern Territory University. Research interests include attribution theory and intergroup conflict.