Immigration from the perspective of hosts and immigrants: 
Roles of psychological essentialism and social identity

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Implicit person theory research can be conceptualized within the framework of psychological essentialism. Essentialist beliefs are associated with entity theories and both predict phenomena such as stereotyping. The present research extended previous work on the links between implicit theories and social identity processes, examining how essentialist beliefs are associated with social identification and processes related to prejudice and intergroup perception. After developing a new measure of essentialist beliefs in Study 1, Study 2 showed that these beliefs were associated with negative bias towards immigrants, particularly when participants were primed with an exclusive social identity. In Study 3, essentialist beliefs among immigrants moderated their adoption of Australian identity as a self-guide during acculturation. Essentialist beliefs therefore play a significant role in the psychology of social identity.

Key words: essentialism, immigration, implicit theories, prejudice, social identity.

Introduction

The idea that lay theories guide and shape people’s social perceptions has received increasing interest in social psychology research (Yzerbyt, Judd, & Corneille, 2004; Levy, Chiu & Hong, 2006). Research on implicit person theories (IPT: Levy, Plaks, Hong, Chiu, & Dweck, 2001) has been especially productive, demonstrating the critical importance of beliefs about the nature of human attributes. Beliefs that person attributes are fixed versus malleable – ‘entity theories’ and ‘incremental theories’, respectively, – have profound implications for social information processing. Research has established that implicit theories about intelligence (Dweck & Leggett, 1998), morality (Chiu, Dweck, Tong, & Fu, 1997a), and personality (Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997b) influence behaviour and motivation.

IPT have recently been applied to group perception (Hong, Levy & Chiu, 2001; Levy et al., 2001), with evidence that entity theories are implicated in stereotyping (Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998; Plaks, Stroessner, Dweck, & Sherman, 2001; Bastian & Haslam, 2006; Bastian & Haslam, 2007). Hong and colleagues have further demonstrated an important role for IPT in moderating how social identity is understood and used. In studies conducted during the Hong Kong 1997 political transition, they sought to integrate the IPT and social identity approach to understand bias in intergroup judgment. They found that entity theorists engaged in trait-based social comparison in order to achieve optimal group distinctiveness more than incremental theorists (Hong, Chiu, Yeung, & Tong, 1999). Building on this work, Hong et al. (2003) found that for entity theorists, social identity was more influential on the structure and content of the self-concept, and inclusive versus exclusive identities were related to integration versus differentiation orientations towards an outgroup. Hong et al. (2004) later found that incremental theorists were less biased against a maligned outgroup than entity theorists, especially when they held an inclusive social identity.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that social identity-related effects vary according to an individual’s IPT. Entity theorists, who view social identities as fixed, also view these identities as capable of guiding self-conception and intergroup orientation. They are less likely to shift to an overarching inclusive identity and are more likely to show prejudice towards an outgroup. A belief in fixed human character orients perceivers to form a rigid, static view of social groups. Alternatively, a person who views human character as malleable is also more likely to view social identities as dynamic self-categorizations and not reified entities. Thus, incremental theorists are less likely to use these identities in guiding self-conception and intergroup orientation. In addition, they allow for cognitive reassignment of individuals from a maligned outgroup to an inclusive ingroup, thus reducing prejudice.

Entity theories and psychological essentialism

Several authors outside the IPT tradition have shared its focus on the perceived fixedness of attributes and groups,
arguing that immutability beliefs play a central role in people’s essentialist understandings of social categories (Rothbart & Taylor, 1992; Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2000; Gelman, 2003). On this view, a belief in the fixedness of human attributes is part of an ensemble of essentialist beliefs. An essentialist understanding of a group implies not only that group membership is immutable, but also that members share an underlying and identity-determining essence or nature. From this perspective, beliefs about the fixedness of attributes arise out of a belief in an underlying essence, and are components of a broader essentialist understanding. Essentialist beliefs have been studied in relation to a wide range of phenomena such as race (Hirschfeld, 1996), ethnicity (Verkuyten, 2003), mental disorder (Haslam & Ernst, 2002), and personality (Haslam, Bastian, & Bissett, 2004).

Research evidence supports the covariation of entity theories with other essentialist beliefs (Haslam et al., 2000; Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2002; Kashima et al., 2005; Haslam & Levy, 2006). For example, Bastian and Haslam (2006) found that Levy et al.’s (1998) entity theory scale correlated with scales assessing other essentialist beliefs, and that all of these scales predicted stereotype endorsement. However, entity theories did not predict stereotype endorsement independently of other essentialist beliefs, consistent with the view that they form just one component of these beliefs. Similarly, measures of essentialist beliefs predict attentional processes thought to underpin stereotyping (Bastian & Haslam, 2007) independent of entity theories, which had previously been shown to predict such preference for stereotype-consistent information (Plaks et al., 2001).

In view of these conceptual links and empirical findings, we propose that essentialism consists of a loosely networked set of beliefs that contribute to a reified view of social groups, and that entity theories are one of these beliefs. Each of the component beliefs may be studied independently, and may be especially significant or applicable in particular domains, but we argue that there are advantages in considering them together. For example, some research findings attributed to one component, such as entity theories, may be explained better by the broader set of which it is a part. Alternatively, the prediction of a phenomenon that is afforded by one component may be supplemented by other components. Thus, one aim of the current series of studies was to demonstrate that some findings previously attributed to entity theories may be better explained by the broader set of essentialist beliefs, or that other essentialist beliefs may offer incremental prediction of phenomena that entity theories have been shown to predict. Our position would be challenged if essentialist beliefs, including entity theories, did not covary with one another, or if they did not add to the prediction of at least some psychological phenomena previously linked to entity theories.

The idea that entity theories may be related to other process-oriented individual differences has been suggested by Dweck, Chiu, and Hong (1995). However, essentialist beliefs have been claimed to have a richer set of implications for social categorization. They may provide explanatory coherence for categories, legitimate social inequalities (Yzerbyt, Rocher, & Schadron, 1997), and serve political purposes (Verkuyten, 2003). There may therefore be theoretical advantages in linking essentialism research with IPT research. An investigation of the role of essentialist beliefs in social identity processes may complement Hong and colleagues’ important work on IPT.

We conducted three studies that aimed to extend Hong and colleagues’ work by investigating the relationships between essentialist beliefs and social identity in the context of the immigration process. First, we developed a general measure of essentialist beliefs, thus extending preliminary work in this area (Bastian & Haslam, 2006; Bastian & Haslam, 2007). Second, we investigated the interactive effects of essentialist beliefs and social identity across two studies. Social identity processes were investigated from the perspectives of members of a host nation and an immigrant group. For members of a host nation, how their national identity is understood and construed (exclusive vs inclusive) was expected to influence their perceptions of an immigrant group (Study 2). From the perspective of the immigrant group, acculturation was expected to predict the adoption of the identity of the host nation as part of the self-concept and, by extension, to influence integration into the new society (Study 3). However, these social identity processes were expected to interact with essentialist beliefs about person attributes. Essentialist beliefs should be associated with greater intergroup bias, for example, especially when social identity is construed in an exclusive manner (Study 2). Furthermore, essentialist beliefs were expected to moderate the extent to which immigrants adopt a new national identity as part of their self-concept (Study 3).

Study 1

Our previous research used new measures of essentialist beliefs about person attributes relating to their biological basis, discreteness, and informativeness (Bastian & Haslam, 2006; Bastian & Haslam, 2007). These scales underwent little preliminary testing and were intended to assess specific beliefs rather than the general tendency to essentialize human attributes. Previous measures of essentialist beliefs have addressed beliefs about specific social categories rather than person attributes (e.g. Haslam et al., 2000, 2002). The current study aimed to develop an improved general measure of essentialist beliefs about
The essentialist belief scales were modelled on the IPT eight-item measure (Bastian & Haslam, 2006). However, to improve the reliability of the discreteness and informativeness scales, additional items had been included (Bastian & Haslam, 2007). The first step in developing a more economical measure of essentialist beliefs was to calculate item-total correlations for the Discreteness and Informativeness scales and the eight items that showed the highest correlations within each scale were retained for further analysis. Item-total correlations were then calculated for these 16 items combined with the eight items from the Biological Basis scale, and the highest-correlating 15 items (6 Discreteness, 5 Informativeness and 4 Biological Basis) were selected. The three new scales independently demonstrated good internal consistency (Discreteness $\alpha = 0.86$, Informativeness $\alpha = 0.78$, Biological Basis $\alpha = 0.83$). A maximum likelihood factor analysis found three correlated factors, according to both the scree-test and Kaiser criteria, corresponding to the three belief scales. Following oblimin rotation, all items loaded substantially on their corresponding factor ($>0.46$; Table 1), and the factors were moderately correlated ($r$ from 0.26 to 0.53; Table 2). The 15 items demonstrated very good internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.86$), and correlated with the IPT measure ($r = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$; $\alpha = 0.85$). There were no gender differences in essentialist beliefs.

In short, this first study generated a short measure of essentialism (the Essentialism Scale: ES) that is reliable and has solid factor analytical support. The scale is original in measuring essentialist beliefs about person attributes. The study also extends on previous research and provides further evidence that essentialist beliefs cohere as a set and are related to entity theories (i.e. immutability beliefs), the focus of IPT research. The new measure can be easily administered in combination with the standard IPT measure, which, in theory, represents an additional component of essentialist beliefs.

**Study 2**

Having developed the ES, we investigated whether essentialist beliefs as a set, like entity theories, might be related to social identity. Hong et al. (2003, 2004) showed that these theories moderate the effects of social identity on self-concept and perceptions of outgroups. In a similar vein, we investigated the interactive effects of essentialist beliefs and social identity on negative bias towards newly arrived Asian immigrants living in Australia. This group was chosen as it represents one of the largest groups of immigrants in Australia over the last 20 years. The intergroup context has been characterized by some experienced threat of being ‘overtaken’ by a group that are stereotypically thought to be more capable, more intelligent and culturally distinct. In this context, essentialist beliefs frame these differences as deep, fixed and categorical and, thus, likely to contribute to greater experienced threat and negative bias. As such, it is the intergroup context that combines with essentialist beliefs to predict negative bias.

The current study differed significantly from the work of Hong and colleagues in that it was situated within the immigration process in Australia. However, the focus on inclusive versus exclusive social identities provided an analogous context for an investigation of the relative effects of essentialist beliefs and IPT. It was predicted that essentialist beliefs would be associated with prejudice towards immigrants; however, this would be accentuated when one’s national identity is construed as more exclusive versus inclusive.

Further, a broader range of measures were used that allowed for an investigation of intergroup attitudes and support for acculturation. Dehumanization research (Haslam, Bain, Douge, Lee & Bastian, 2005) has demonstrated that denial of humanness to other groups (Leyens...
et al., 2000, 2003) is an important component of intergroup bias. Intergroup orientation has been investigated by Hong et al. (2003) as tendencies towards differentiation or integration and was included, as were measures of intergroup affect, perceptions of homogeneity and self-similarity. It was expected that increased bias would be related to all intergroup and acculturation attitude measures.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Participants were 137 undergraduates (104 women, 33 men), mean age 20.4 years, who participated in the study for course credit. Participants indicated their interest to participate on sign-up sheets at least 24 h prior to participating in the study. The sign-up sheets stated that they must be Australian-born citizens to participate in the study. As part of the questionnaire they were asked a number of demographic questions that also included questions about their citizenship status and place of birth to confirm their suitability for the study. No overt reference was made to the participants’ status as Australian-born citizens during the experimental session.

**Materials**

Essentialism Scale. The first questionnaire included the ES combined with Levy et al.’s (1998) IPT scale (ES+), and
Identity manipulation. The second part to the first questionnaire was an essay question adapted from Hong et al. (2004), which was intended to manipulate people’s social identity as an ‘Australian’ to be either more inclusive or more exclusive of other cultures. Participants first read an outline of some problems Australia faces as a nation, mentioning economic, political, terrorism- and drug-related issues. They were then asked to think about actions that could be taken to make Australia a better country and write a short essay about their ideas. In the inclusive condition, participants read the following paragraph before writing their essay:

Australia is a land of immigrants. We have a proud history of welcoming new peoples from different cultures and traditions as neighbours and friends. As a young country the impact of multiculturalism is demonstrated through our unique mix of cuisines and cultures. Our way of life demonstrates the value of cultural integration, leading to shared institutions and commitments, and is a lesson to the rest of the world.

In the exclusive condition, participants read a different description:

Australia is the lucky country. We have a proud history of home-grown traditions and values that have made this country what it is today. As members of an established nation, Australian born citizens come from a heritage of hard working settlers who, through effort and hardship, have fought to forge and defend the Australian way of life. Our way of life demonstrates the value of national traditions and self-sufficiency that is a lesson to the rest of the world.

Each participant was allowed approximately 10–15 min to write the essay. At the conclusion of the session participants were asked to write down key elements of the description. This was used as a check to ensure that the social identity manipulation remained cognitively accessible.

Dehumanization. After writing the essay, participants were asked to compare Asian people living in Australia to the average Australian on 40 personality traits taken from Haslam et al. (2005). Varying factorially on desirability (e.g. analytical vs impatient) and two senses of humanness (i.e. high vs low in human nature, e.g. imaginative vs unemotional; and high vs low uniqueness to humans compared to animals, e.g. ambitious vs curious) the traits were rated on a five-point scale from 1 (Much less than Australians) to 5 (Much more than Australians). Recent work has shown that people attribute greater humanness to their ingroup than to outgroups (Leyens et al., 2000, 2003), and that this may occur along these two humanness dimensions (Haslam et al., 2005). The extent to which Asian immigrants were perceived as more or less desirable and human was calculated by subtracting the summed rating of the 20 traits falling low on each dimension from the summed rating of the 20 traits falling high on it. Split-half reliabilities were calculated for the three measures of desirability ($\alpha = 0.79$), human nature ($\alpha = 0.40$) and uniquely human traits ($\alpha = -0.27$). The internal reliability of the humanness ratings was attenuated by the deliberate selection of high and low valence terms; however, given the lack of reliability of the human nature and uniquely human trait measures these were dropped from further analyses. Once participants had completed the trait-rating task they were provided with a third questionnaire containing the following scales.

Integration versus differentiation. A measure of intergroup orientation, adapted from Hong et al. (2003), asked participants to assess how much they anticipated and preferred intergroup integration versus differentiation of Asian people living in Australia. The Integration subscale included: ‘Asian people who come to live in Australia will eventually become Australian citizens and thus do not need to retain their Asian identities anymore’ and ‘Asian people living in Australia mostly try and learn English so that they can communicate easily with other Australians in their daily life’. The Differentiation subscale included: ‘Asian people are still Asian people, they would not consider other Australians as their ingroup’ and ‘Asian people always remain closely tied to their original cultures, preventing them from ever fully integrating into Australian society’. The participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with each of the items on a six-point scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). The internal reliability of the differentiation scale was acceptable and retained for analysis ($\alpha = 0.65$); however, the integration scale items were negatively although not significantly correlated ($r = -0.163$, $p > 0.05$; $\alpha = -0.38$) and were dropped from further analysis.

Intergroup liking. Participants responded to three semantic-differential scales, adapted from Kruglanski, Shah, Pierro, and Mannetti (2002), to indicate the extent to which they had positive feelings towards the target group. Ratings were recorded on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (hostile, cold, unfavourable) to 5 (friendly, warm, favourable). A measure of liking was constructed by adding the three semantic-differential ratings for each participant ($\alpha = 0.91$).

Perceptions of homogeneity. Participants were asked to rate how similar Asian people living in Australia are to each other on a set of 20-randomly selected characteristics that
had been generated in previous work (Bastian & Haslam, 2006) as common stereotypes of different groups (e.g. efficient, extroverted, moody). Ratings were recorded on a five-point scale from 1 (not at all similar) to 5 (extremely similar). A homogeneity score was calculated by summing these ratings (α = 0.87).

Self-similarity. Participants indicated how similar they were to the typical Asian person living in Australia on a five-point scale from 1 (not at all similar) to 5 (extremely similar).

Integration responsibility. Four questions were constructed to identify participants’ attitudes about cultural integration and intergroup contact. Attitudes towards cultural integration included two questions relating to ‘integration’ attitude (‘As Australians, to what extent should we aim to incorporate Asian cultures into our way of life?’) and ‘assimilation’ attitude (‘To what extent should Asian people living in Australia aim to adopt the Australian way of life?’). Attitudes towards intergroup contact included two questions relating to ‘own responsibility’ attitude (‘As Australians, to what extent should we actively pursue friendships with Asian people living in Australia?’) and ‘other responsibility’ attitude (‘To what extent should Asian people living in Australia actively pursue friendships with Australians?’). These questions were rated on a 10-point scale (0 = not at all to 9 = very much so).

Services to migrants. Participants were asked to rate their approval for the provision of 10 different services to Asian migrants living in Australia. The list of services was adapted from Ho, Niles, Penney, and Thomas (1994) and has been shown to reflect two dimensions: services that aim to perpetuate the minority culture (seven items: e.g. providing information and other services in languages other than English; α = 0.86) and services that aim to integrate into mainstream culture (three items: e.g. providing intensive English courses in cultural centres and at work; α = 0.67). Participants rated their approval for the provision of each service on a four-point scale (1 = strongly approve to 4 = strongly disapprove).

Procedure

Participants completed the questionnaire in settings of 15 or less in a laboratory setting, under the supervision of one of the researchers.

Results

The manipulation check indicated that some participants had not captured any of the key descriptive information from the identity manipulation in their recall of the description of Australia at the end of the session. Two independent judges coded participants’ responses on this basis with 97.6% agreement. Discrepancies were resolved by discussion. Sixteen participants were excluded from further analysis on this basis. Missing data led to the exclusion of a further eight participants: three participants had failed to complete an entire dependent measure, two participants had failed to provide adequate responses required to compute a dependent measure, and three participants had failed to provide responses to one of the items from the Essentialism scale. No missing data were estimated on this basis, leaving 113 participants in total (85 women and 28 men; mean age 20.3 years). Of these participants, the majority identified themselves as primarily White Anglo (86), with others identifying primarily as Italian (10), Australian (6), Greek (4) and five other ethnicities with three or fewer participants (7).

Essentialism Scale

Internal consistency for each of the scales was good (Discreteness α = 0.81, Informativeness α = 0.73, Biological Basis α = 0.87, Immutability α = 0.89) as well as that of the ES (α = 0.85) and ES+ (α = 0.86). To test the threedimensional structure of the essentialism scale obtained in Study 1, the 15 items from the ES were subjected to confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) conducted in AMOS 6. Three different models were tested. Model 1 represented the possibility that all items loaded onto a single latent essentialism factor. Model 2 represented the possibility that the three subscales indicate uncorrelated factors. Model 3 represented the possibility that the subscales reflect three correlated components of essentialism.

Model fit was assessed based on the recommendations of Hu and Bentler (1999), who suggest that RMSEA values of 0.06 and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI; Tucker & Lewis, 1973) of 0.95 or higher represent a saturated model. Chi-squared goodness of fit test failed for all models. A summary of the CFA findings is presented in Table 3, and factor loadings for Model 3 in Table 4. The one-factor model (Model 1) yields a very poor fit to the data. The three-uncorrelated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
<th>Summary of fit statistics for confirmatory factor analysis, Study 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>d.f.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 3</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 3a</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 3b</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; TLI, Tucker-Lewis Index.
factor model (Model 2) produces a substantial improvement in fit, but fit is notably improved when the factors are allowed to correlate (Model 3). The factors were moderately and significantly correlated ($r$s from 0.21 to 0.35), indicating that the belief factors are distinct but related components of essentialism.

To test the four-dimensional model of essentialist beliefs, where the ES and IPT are combined, the full 23 items were subjected to the CFA, adapting Model 3 as described above. This model (3a) provided a satisfactory fit according to the criteria relied on above and all factors were moderately and significantly correlated ($r$s from 0.21 to 0.35). A further model (3b) was constructed where IPT was entered as an uncorrelated factor. The fit was marginally reduced for this model compared to model 3a, providing moderate support to the contention that IPT is a component of essentialist beliefs. In view of this finding, the ES and IPT were combined to provide a broad measure of essentialism that included immutability beliefs (ES+).

Table 4  Confirmatory factor loadings for the essentialism items, Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Discreteness</th>
<th>Informativeness</th>
<th>Biological basis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyone is either a certain type of person or they are not.</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The boundaries that define the differences between people are clear-cut.</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A person either has a certain attribute or they do not.</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are different ‘types’ of people and those ‘types’ can be easily defined and are relatively clear-cut.</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The kind of person someone is, is clearly defined, they either are a certain kind of person or they are not.</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People fall into distinct personality ‘types’.</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally speaking, once you know someone in one or two contexts it is possible to predict how they will behave in most other contexts.</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is possible to know about many aspects of a person once you become familiar with a few of their basic traits.</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When getting to know a person it is possible to get a picture of the kind of person they are very quickly.</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing about a few of the basic traits a person has can lead to accurate predictions of their future behaviour.</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Although a person may have some basic identifiable traits, it is never easy to make accurate judgments about how they will behave in different situations. (Reversed)</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are different types of people and with enough scientific knowledge these different ‘types’ can be traced back to genetic causes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With enough scientific knowledge, the basic qualities that a person has could be traced back to, and explained by, their biological make-up.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The kind of person someone is can be largely attributed to their genetic inheritance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether someone is one kind of person or another is determined by their biological make-up.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of the dependent measures was regressed onto the ES+, the social identity condition (inclusive vs exclusive) and their interaction. The beta weights are reported in Table 5. The overall model was significant for 10 of the 12 measures. Essentialist beliefs were related to viewing Asian immigrants as less desirable than the average Australian. They were also associated with viewing Asian immigrants as more similar to each other and less similar to the self, with more negative feelings expressed towards the group, and with the belief that they would always remain differentiated from other Australians. However, some of these findings were qualified by social identity, such that under the exclusive identity condition this negativity was amplified. The interaction between Essentialist beliefs and the social identity manipulation was significant for desirability (exclusive condition, $r = -0.42$, $p < 0.001$; inclusive condition $r = -0.10$, $p > 0.05$), differentiation orientation (exclusive condition, $r = -0.52$, $p < 0.001$; inclusive condition $r = -0.06$, $p > 0.05$) and self-similarity (exclusive condition, $r = -0.52$, $p < 0.001$; inclusive condition $r = -0.09$, $p > 0.05$). The interaction was marginal for liking of the immigrant group ($\beta = -1.74$, $p = 0.052$) and was non-significant for the measure of homogeneity.

Essentialist beliefs were also related to negative attitudes towards service provision that supported the migrants’ culture, placing the responsibility for integration firmly on
the shoulders of Asian immigrants, believing that immigrants should assimilate to the mainstream, disagreeing that Asian culture should be integrated, and disagreeing that Australians have responsibility for establishing friendships with immigrants. Essentialist beliefs were associated with relatively less supportive acculturation attitudes toward the immigrants, irrespective of whether an inclusive or exclusive social identity was salient.

Given that a major aim of the study was to extend on the previous relationship between IPT and social identification by demonstrating that essentialist beliefs more generally account for the findings, the ES and the IPT measure were entered into separate regression models, the same as outlined above, in order to demonstrate the unique predictive utility of both scales. Beta weights are reported in Table 6. For the analyses using the ES, all models were significant. For the IPT scale, only three of the models were significant. The ES was overall a stronger predictor of intergroup bias, showing significant independent effects for desirability trait ratings, differentiation orientation, homogeneity ratings and self-similarity ratings as well as intergroup liking, with some of these effects qualified by social identity. The ES also significantly predicted all acculturation support measures, including disagreement with the provision of English services as well as culturally relevant services, and disagree-
ment that either Asian immigrants or Australians should pursue friendships with each other. Conversely, entity theories did not significantly predict desirability and only predicted differentiation orientation and liking, with an interaction of entity theories and social identity significant for desirability trait ratings. Entity theories did predict disagreement with the provision of cultural services and integration attitudes and agreement with assimilation attitudes.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the association between essentialist beliefs and social identity in predicting intergroup attitudes and support for acculturation remain when the effects of entity theories are removed, and that entity theories also show an independent contribution. This is consistent with the hypothesis that essentialist beliefs more generally explain the association between entity theories and social identification. Both essentialist beliefs and entity theories predicted bias, but the former did so more strongly and consistently. Furthermore, the new ES scale showed a more consistent interaction effect with social identity in predicting that bias. This is not surprising given that the ES combines the effects of three different essentialist beliefs and supports the utility of a broader survey of essentialist beliefs, suggesting that the inclusion of IPT in the ES (i.e. ES+) should produce the most potent measure of essentialist beliefs.

Discussion

The findings of Study 2 supported all of our hypotheses. Additional factor analytical support was found for the ES, and the correlation with the entity theory measure further supported the notion that immutability beliefs can be placed within the broader framework of psychological essentialism. The small sample size prevents strong conclusions to be drawn, based on the CFA findings and future research could re-examine the structure of the ES+ with a larger population. Individual differences in essentialist beliefs predicted negative bias towards a group of recently arrived immigrants within Australia. Further, essentialist beliefs interacted with social identity in predicting that bias, within the intergroup context of Asian immigrants in Australia.

These findings complement and extend those of Hong et al. (2003, 2004), by addressing a broader range of essentialist beliefs and replicating evidence that entity theories are part of a broader constellation of essentialist beliefs (Bastian & Haslam, 2006; Bastian & Haslam, 2007). In addition, the current study extends previous work by investigating the association of implicit theories and social identity in a different intergroup context, using a broader range of intergroup measures.

In the current study, the manipulation of social identity varied somewhat from that used in past research (Hong et al., 2004). Whereas in that work participants’ frame of reference was manipulated by referring to either more inclusive or exclusive ethnic identities, the current study manipulated participant’s conception of the same national identity using political rhetoric. This was achieved by emphasizing an orientation towards either incorporation of other cultures (cultural integration) or independence from other cultures (national traditions and self-sufficiency) as an important part of the Australian identity. Recent work has achieved similar ends by referring to common goals and varying the social comparison context (Lam, Chiu, Lau, Chan, & Yim, 2006).

Nevertheless, the fact that identity inclusiveness/exclusiveness was not directly manipulated in the study raises a possible limitation. The findings obtained might reflect the consequences of endorsing multicultural versus nativist ideology rather than the consequences of holding more or less inclusive social identity per se. Further research could help to clarify the precise links between different value orientations and changes in how people construct their identity. Whereas the current rhetoric used was unique to the Australian context and implies more inclusive or exclusive understandings of what it means to be truly Australian, this would vary within different contexts.

To summarize, people who believe human attributes to be deeply rooted, fixed, biologically based and informative tend to see an immigrant outgroup as less desirable, more homogeneous and distinct from themselves, and tend to oppose the integration of that group, especially when their national identity is framed in an exclusive way.

Study 3

Study 2 established that essentialist beliefs interact with social identity to predict negative bias towards an immigrant group within Australia. This study was conducted from the perspective of members of a host nation. It is equally interesting to switch perspective and ask how essentialist beliefs and social identity might interact among people who are immigrating or acculturating to a new culture.

Previous work on acculturation by Berry (2001) has shown that cultural identities usually come to the fore when people are in contact with another culture. How one thinks about oneself during the acculturation process is constructed along two dimensions: identification with one’s heritage or ethnic culture and identification with the larger or dominant society. These two aspects of cultural identity have been referred to in various ways, for example ‘ethnic identity’ and ‘civic identity’ (Kalin & Berry, 1995). Using these two identity dimensions, strategies emerge that have clear similarities to four accultura-
tion strategies outlined by Berry (2001). An integration strategy is implied when both identities are asserted, marginalization when the person feels attached to neither identity, and assimilation or separation strategies are implied when one identity is strongly emphasized over the other.

If individual differences in the assertion of cultural identities are related to different acculturation strategies (Berry, 2001), then individual differences in essentialist beliefs may play an important role. As demonstrated above, essentialist beliefs interact with social identity in predicting intergroup bias and differentiation orientations toward an outgroup. Additionally, the work of Hong et al. (1999, 2003, 2004) has demonstrated that essentialist beliefs rely on their social identity to a greater degree in self-conception and social comparison, and are less likely to re-orient to an inclusive social identity. This view of social identity as fixed, with group boundaries perceived to be natural and impermeable, may therefore be related to different acculturation strategies. Immigrants holding essentialist beliefs might be less likely to adopt a new civic identity as an important component of their self-concept.

The current study aimed to investigate the moderating effect of essentialist beliefs on the use of social identity in self-conception during acculturation. It was first hypothesized that acculturation (conceptualized as adoption of the civic identity) would be closely related to time spent in the host country and citizenship status. Second, we predicted that acculturation would predict increasing use of the civic identity and decreasing use of the ethnic identity as self-guide in self-conception. Third, we predicted that essentialist beliefs would moderate the extent to which the new civic identity would be used as a self-guide. Fourth, as in previous studies, we predicted that the moderating effect of essentialist beliefs would not be reducible to entity theories.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Participants were 101 undergraduates (79 women, 22 men), mean age 20.7 years, who participated in the study for course credit. The measures were provided as part of a larger study and participants were selected according to their responses to a range of demographic questions that also asked about their ethnic background. It was stipulated that participants had a cultural heritage other than Australian even if this was not more prominent than their Australian identity. These other identities included Chinese (18), Malaysian (10), British (8), Italian (8), Greek (7), Singaporean (6), Asian (5), Japanese (4), Indian (3), American (3), Indonesian (3), German (3), and 23 others of different ethnicities with two or fewer participants in each ethnic group.

**Materials**

**Essentialism Scale.** Participants were provided with the ES+ (i.e. including entity theory scale items). This was followed by several demographic questions, including time spent in Australia and citizenship status.

**Acculturation.** Participants were then asked to indicate the other cultural identity with which they identified in addition to the Australian identity. They were then instructed to indicate their ‘most significant cultural identity’. A choice of four identities was provided to participants, adapted from Hong et al. (2003), (1) A ___, (2) A ___, only secondarily an Australian, (3) An Australian, only secondarily a ___, and (4) An Australian. Participants were asked to write their other nominated cultural identity in the spaces provided.

This measure of self-selected social identity assessed the tendency to select the civic identity (Australian identity) over the ethnic identity and was used as a proxy for the acculturation process. This measure was not designed to assess the different acculturation strategies as outlined by Berry (2001), but rather to assess the movement in social identification that is an important component of acculturating to a new country.

**Measure of social identity as self-guide.** Participants were then shown a list of important self-aspects and instructed to indicate how much ‘My Australian Identity influences’ various aspects of the self on a five-point scale from (1) ‘Not at all’ to (5) ‘Very Much’. The aspects of self were taken from the Hong et al. (2003) study and included ‘my goals in life’, ‘my ideals’, ‘my beliefs’, ‘my values’, ‘my obligations’, and ‘my lifestyle’. It was stated that even if the participant did not identify with the Australian identity, ‘living in Australia can still mean that the Australian identity is associated with how you understand yourself’. Participants were then asked to rate how much ‘My ___ identity influences’ these same aspects, where they inserted the identity they had listed earlier. Each set of scores was added together to form separate measures of the importance of civic and ethnic identities as self-guides. These measures therefore allowed for the investigation of the independent importance of cultural identities akin to the two independent dimensions of ‘ethnic identity’ and ‘civic identity’ outlined by Kalin and Berry (1995).

**Procedure**

Participants completed the questionnaire in small groups in a laboratory setting, under the supervision of one of the researchers.
Results

Essentialism Scale

Internal consistency for each of the scales was good (Discreteness $\alpha = 0.88$, Informativeness $\alpha = 0.75$, Biological Basis $\alpha = 0.83$, Immutability $\alpha = 0.85$) as well as that of the ES ($\alpha = 0.88$) and ES+ ($\alpha = 0.88$).

Analysis of social identity as self-guide

To ensure that the self-selected social identity measure was indeed related to the acculturation process it was regressed onto the demographic variables of time spent in Australia and citizenship status. As expected, choice of the civic identity as primary was significantly predicted by time spent in the country ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$) and Australian citizenship ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$). Analysis of demographic data indicated that approximately half of the participants had been born in Australia ($N = 48$) and half had not ($N = 53$). Time spent in the country ranged between 1 and 36 years.

Each self-guide measure (civic: $\alpha = 0.86$ vs ethnic: $\alpha = 0.86$) was then regressed onto the ES+, the acculturation scale, and their interaction. For the importance of civic identity as self-guide the model was significant, $F_{3,97} = 6.40$, $p < 0.001$, with acculturation ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$) and the interaction of acculturation and essentialist beliefs ($\beta = -0.20$, $p < 0.05$) having significant effects. Figure 1 shows this interaction following procedures suggested by Aiken and West (1991). For the importance of ethnic identity as self-guide, the overall model was significant, $F_{3,97} = 5.35$, $p < 0.01$, with only acculturation ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < 0.001$) having a significant effect. Simple slope analyses show that acculturation significantly predicts the importance of civic identity for low ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$) but not high ($\beta = 0.13$, $p > 0.05$) essentialist beliefs. These findings indicate that essentialist beliefs moderate the relationship between acculturation and use of civic identity as self-guide, but do not do the same for ethnic identity.

Relative contribution of the belief scales

Again, a major aim of the current study was to test the proposition that essentialist beliefs more generally account for the findings previously related to entity theories alone. As with Study 2, the ES and the IPT measure were separately entered into the same regression model as outlined above. The ES did not show a significant interaction with acculturation for importance of either civic identity ($\beta = -0.12$, ns) or ethnic identity ($\beta = -0.08$, ns) as self-guides. There was a significant interaction of entity theories and acculturation for use of civic identity as self-guide ($\beta = -0.20$, $p < 0.05$), but not for ethnic identity ($\beta = -0.06$, ns). Simple slope analyses show that acculturation significantly predicts the importance of civic identity for low ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$) but not high ($\beta = 0.23$, $p > 0.05$) IPT. The findings indicate that it is beliefs about immutability that appear to be most important in predicting whether a person adopts the civic identity as a self-guide in self-conception during acculturation.

Discussion

The findings of Study 3 supported most of our hypotheses. Findings indicate that the acculturation process is associ-
ated with the adoption of the civic identity as an important self-guide. However, this effect is very weak for people who hold essentialist beliefs: they do not perceive the new identity as an important self-guide despite acculturative experiences. Our last hypothesis was not supported, indicating that the moderating effect of essentialist beliefs was largely reducible to entity theories (immutability beliefs).

A view of social identities as reified and fixed natural entities would appear to preclude an easy transition from using one’s ethnic identity as a self-guide to using the new civic identity of the host country, yet the importance of the ethnic identity is unrelated to essentialist beliefs and appears to diminish regardless. The findings suggest that people who hold essentialist beliefs are less likely to use acculturation strategies that require the assertion of the civic identity (i.e. integration or assimilation). Such people may be more likely to adopt marginalization or separation strategies, depending on the extent to which their ethnic identity is also reduced in importance as a self-guide. Essentialist beliefs may help to clarify psychological variables that underpin the different acculturation strategies outlined by Berry (2001).

Although the current study demonstrates the importance of essentialist beliefs for a wide range of immigrants acculturating to a new country, one limitation is that acculturation experiences may differ for different groups, as a function of their culture and visibility. Further research could contrast and compare how essentialist beliefs interact with particular physical and cultural differences.

Importantly, this finding appears to be largely driven by immutability beliefs: beliefs about whether people can or cannot change. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the context of the study is centred on social identity change, and it supports the claim that essentialist beliefs have distinct but overlapping components with partially specific implications for group and person perception (Haslam, Bastian, Bain, & Kashima, 2006). Although beliefs about change may be particularly important for the current context, it is an essentialist ontology that is guiding and directing people’s understandings of their social identifications.

**General discussion**

Previous research has demonstrated that people hold essentialist beliefs about a wide range of social categories, and that some categories are more prone to essentialistic accounts than others (Haslam et al., 2000). However, no previous work has investigated how essentialist beliefs are related to the ways in which people understand and use these social categories or social identities in the intergroup context. Study 2 demonstrated that essentialist beliefs predict the extent to which nationals are sensitive to the manipulation of their own identity and Study 3 demonstrated that essentialist beliefs predict the extent to which immigrants adopt the identity of their host country as a self-guide. These studies provide evidence that a broad essentialist understanding of person attributes predicts differences in how people make sense of their own group identifications.

The belief that people fall into distinct types that are natural, informative and unchanging can be readily applied to social groups. From this perspective, groups are real entities whose members have essential qualities in common. Group identification thus becomes a centrally defining feature of the individual, influencing how the person conceives of the self as a group member, and what attitudes or biases are held toward members of outgroups. Under these conditions, the perceiver is oriented towards maintaining intergroup distinctiveness and reduced intergroup contact, tends to hold negative attitudes and sentiments towards outgroups, and exaggerates intergroup differences and intragroup similarities.

The current study supports the findings of Hong et al. (1999, 2003, 2004), but suggests that IPT may be better conceptualized in terms of the broader notion of psychological essentialism (Bastian & Haslam, 2006; Haslam et al., 2006). This link between immutability beliefs and essentialism has been suggested in more recent theorizing by researchers in the IPT tradition and, indeed, Hong et al. (2003) argue that entity theorists are more likely to define groups by core essences, and attribute the essential qualities of their ingroup to themselves.

**Essentialism Scale**

Previous measures of psychological essentialism have related to specific social categories (Haslam et al., 2000, 2002), limiting the ability to explore how individual differences in the tendency to essentialize may be related to a broader range of psychological phenomena. The present work contributes to research on psychological essentialism by refining previous measures of essentialist beliefs (Bastian & Haslam, 2006) to provide an economical scale (ES) that can be used in conjunction with the entity theory items (ES+). The result is a generalized individual differences measure.

**Psychological essentialism and social identification**

Social identity and self-categorization theories emphasize the dynamic, flexible and context-dependent nature of the social identification process (Hogg & Turner, 1987). Identification with particular human groupings is determined by the context, and a shift in context should therefore lead to a shift in social identity. Although Turner (1999) admits that
there may be important individual differences in the readiness to self-categorize, reflecting differences in the centrality of group membership in a person’s self-understanding, he stops short of the idea that these differences may be independent of the social meaning of the situation.

In contrast, the current findings support the idea that there are differences in how people understand and use social identities, and that these differences may be relatively domain-general, arising independent of the intergroup context. When people view human attributes as reified and natural, they also see these attributes as arising from particular group memberships, with people falling into distinct types that have a natural and inherent basis. From this perspective, knowing that someone is a member of a particular group is highly informative and group membership is not easily changed. Thus, our studies indicate that it may be fruitful for research on social identity to pay attention to people’s beliefs about the fundamental nature of human attributes, and that these beliefs may moderate social identity-related effects.

Implications for immigration, multiculturalism and integration

Recent world events have drawn attention to the issue of multiculturalism and integration in societies with high levels of immigration. Although the benefits of multiculturalism continue to be recognized, there is a growing realization that this must go hand in hand with successful integration into the host society and culture. While it has long been recognized that the marginalization or separation of immigrant groups leads to increased levels of ethnic conflict (Berry, 2005), poorly integrated immigrants may also be particularly susceptible to extremist ideologies. Second-generation immigrants who are no longer tied to their traditional ethnic identities but who also do not strongly identify with the host culture, are likely to experience uncertainty and alienation that make extremist groups appealing.

The current research suggests that essentialist beliefs enhance a person’s likelihood of marginalization or separation during the acculturation process. Furthermore, essentialist beliefs held by members of the host culture predict the degree of prejudice that immigrants are likely to experience upon arriving, affecting the ease with which they can integrate. This work suggests that targeting essentialist beliefs both within the host nation and within immigrant groups might assist in ensuring better integration of new groups within a host country. Importantly, implicit theories have been manipulated within short experimental sessions (Levy & Dweck, 1999; Levy et al., 2001; Hong et al., 2004), pointing to the malleability of some lay beliefs, although such interventions have not always been lasting. Further research could investigate whether the malleability of IPT also extends to essentialist beliefs more broadly, with a particular emphasis on ways to sustain the effects of interventions.

In summary, the present article provides further evidence that IPT are part of the broader constellation of essentialist beliefs. Furthermore, by bringing these two research fields together in the context of social identification, new and exciting research directions are identified. Whereas social identity and self-categorization theories have viewed social identification as a dynamic process that is equally prevalent for all people, the current research suggests that there may be important individual differences in the ways that social identities are understood and used.

End note

1. Integration here refers to the host nation’s attitude towards integration of the immigrant culture into the host culture and differs from Berry’s (2001) work on acculturation where integration refers to an acculturation strategy used by the immigrant. Both uses do, however, promote the importance of maintaining both the civic and the ethnic cultural identity during immigration.

References


