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Which cultural group I love depends on how I feel about my identities: The moderating effect of blendedness on the priming of cultural in-group love in undergraduate Asian-American biculturals

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ABSTRACT

While bicultural research has begun to examine how biculturals identify with different cultures, bicultural identities tend to be organized in a complex manner than influences how they interact with the outside world. In this experimental study we examined whether undergraduate Asian-American biculturals can be primed to identify with Asian or American ethnic-cultural groups as in-groups, measured by in-group favoritism in resource allocation in a variant of a prisoner's dilemma game, and whether this is moderated by the blendedness dimension of bicultural identity integration (BII-Blendedness). Results showed that biculturals can be primed to express in-group favoritism towards different ethnic groups, and that this relationship is moderated by the level of BII-Blendedness in a manner that is consistent with past BII research. These findings provide empirical support for past discussions on how biculturals shift between cultural identities, and highlight that how biculturals feel about their dual identities is an important influencing factor.

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1. Introduction

There has been an increasing number of biculturals in recent decades. There has also been a concurrent increase in research on these individuals who live "at the juncture between two cultures and can lay claim to belonging to both cultures . . ." (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993, p. 396), and represent one method of acculturation in which members of cultural groups maintain their origin culture while interacting with the host culture (Birman, 1994; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007). While an increasing number of scholars are beginning to investigate how biculturals relate to the two cultural groups to which they belong (cf. Badea, Er-rafiy, Chekroun, Légal, & Gosling, 2015; Liu, 2015; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012; Verkuyten & Pouliasi, 2006), much remains to be discovered. With the biculturals' capacities for dual cultural identities, does this also have an influence upon how they see other people around them, identifying one group as the in-group and the other as the out-group, or do they alternate between who they identify as their in-group depending upon the circumstances? This question is made even more complex when considering past research demonstrating how biculturals feel about their dual identities can have an influence on how they respond to cultural stimulus.

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In this study we extend bicultural research by examining whether bicultural preference for different ethnic groups in a prisoner's dilemma game (PDG) can be influenced via cultural priming, and whether this relationship is moderated by how biculturals feel about their dual cultural identities. Although past research has investigated bicultural behavior in PDG games (Wong & Hong, 2005), Wong and Hong investigated bicultural PDG strategies when played against friends or strangers of the same cultural background, while the current study investigates bicultural PDG strategies played against opponents of different cultural groups. We also contribute to the understanding of how biculturals organize their dual identities, or bicultural identity integration (BII), by examining the moderating effects of one the under-explored sub-facets of BII. We will first provide an overview of the relevant bicultural literature, followed by the hypotheses of the current study, then the study design and results, and finally discuss the implications of the findings.

2. Bicultural cultural frame switching and identity integration

Biculturals can be defined as individuals identify with two cultures, gained fluency in the norms of both cultures, and being capable of adjusting his/her behavior in response to the cultural setting and his/her knowledge of the cultural setting (Brannen & Thomas, 2010; Mok, Cheng, & Morris, 2010; Mok, Morris, Benet-Martínez, & Karakitapoglu-Aygun, 2007; Mok & Morris, 2009). Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez (2000) proposed that biculturals possess dual "cultural frames" due to in-depth exposure to two cultures. The dual cultural frames are organized in a loose fashion such that accessing knowledge of one cultural frame does not mean knowledge from the other cultural frame would be accessed, allowing biculturals to shift freely between the two, a phenomenon called *cultural frame switching* (CFS; Hong et al., 2000). When Asian-Americans are exposed to Asian stimulus their Asian cultural frame is activated, and when they are exposed to American stimulus their American cultural frame is activated, leading biculturals to interpret events around them in from an Asian or American point of view (Hong et al., 2000).

However, not all biculturals respond to cultural primes in similar manners. Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris (2002) noted that the CFS phenomenon can be moderated by how biculturals perceive their dual cultural identities, or, the degree of *bicultural identity integration* (BII). Initially conceptualized as a unidimensional concept, results from a series of studies revealed that Asian-American biculturals who viewed their dual cultural identities as being complementary and blended responded to cultural primes in a congruent fashion, while Asian-American biculturals who viewed their dual cultural identities as being conflicting and separate responded to cultural primes in a culturally contrastive fashion (Benet-Martínez et al., 2002). That is, for biculturals who view their cultural identities as being complementary, or those who are High BII, Asian cultural stimulus will activate their Asian cultural frame. For biculturals who view their cultural identities as being contrastive, or those who are Low BII, Asian cultural stimulus will activate their American cultural frame. Mok and Morris (2013) argued that self-protection is one of the primary drivers behind the congruent/contrastive BII moderation effect. Specifically, Low BII individuals are unable to feel belonging to two cultures at the same time, while High BII individuals can (Mok & Morris, 2013). Therefore, when presented with cultural stimulus Low BII individuals perceive the threat of cultural identity loss, e.g., an Asian-American in an American cultural environment would feel the loss of the Asian identity, leading to a self-protective response to protect the Asian identity, e.g., responding contrastively in an Asian manner to the American cultural stimulus. High BII individuals do not perceive cultural identity threat, and therefore respond congruently to cultural stimulus.

The concept of bicultural identity integration (BII) further encompasses two independent sub-facets: cultural blendedness and cultural harmony. Generally, cultural blendedness is the degree of compartmentalization or overlap between a bicultural's two cultural orientation (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007), and is related to performance outcomes (e.g., language use and cultural competence, and cultural identity fusion and alternation, cf. Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Miramontez, Benet-Martínez, & Nguyen, 2008), while cultural harmony is the degree of conflict between a bicultural's two cultural orientation (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007) and is related to affective outcomes among biculturals (e.g., acculturative stress; cf. Miramontez et al., 2008). However, of the two sub-facets cultural harmony has seen more prolific usage in a series of studies demonstrating the moderating effects of BII (cf. Mok & Morris, 2009, 2012b, 2013; Mok et al., 2010), while cultural blendedness has seen comparatively fewer empirical studies to-date (cf. Miramontez et al., 2008). Miramontez et al. (2008) argued that cultural blendedness, rather than cultural harmony, relates more to how biculturals "integrate features of both social groups into their self-concepts" (p. 434). Specifically, cultural harmony is an expression of a bicultural's affective rapport with their two cultural backgrounds, while cultural blendedness is an expression of a bicultural's self concept in relation to their two cultural backgrounds (Miramontez et al., 2008). It is important to recognize this subtle yet important distinction. Cultural harmony relates to how biculturals feel about balancing the demands of two different cultures, while cultural blendedness relates to whether biculturals belong to two different cultures. While cultural harmony relates to *affective* outcomes, cultural blendedness relates to *perceptual* and *behavior* outcomes (Miramontez et al., 2008). Therefore we can expect that in the examination of bicultural social identities and who biculturals identify as in-group members, cultural blendedness will be the primary moderator. In the following section we will discuss the issue of bicultural social identities in further detail.

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