Delineating Groups for Cultural Comparisons in a Multicultural Setting: Not All Westerners Should Be Put Into the Same Melting Pot

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When conducting cross-cultural studies, researchers often rely on generalised categorisations (e.g., East–West), frequently assuming homogeneity within each of the cultural groups being compared. We argue that such broad categorisations may be misleading and that careful demarcation of cultural groups that takes into consideration their specific sociohistorical realities is necessary to produce knowledge that is both meaningful and realistic. We illustrate this contention by examining preferred mate attributes among four different cultural groups in Canada. In line with predictions, we found that Italians, who are ordinarily considered Western European, demonstrated preferences for status and traditional characteristics in a mate that differed from those preferred by the rest of the Western Europeans (not including Italians). Instead, Italians were similar to the more "Eastern" South Asians and Chinese in their preferences for status traits and to South Asians in their preferences for traditional traits. Importantly, the pattern of cultural differences changed when Italians were included in the Western European category. Lastly, we showed that the influence of culture on preferences for traditional and status traits was differentially transmitted through family connectedness and identification with mainstream Canadian culture. Implications for cross-cultural research are discussed.

Keywords: cultural groups, mate characteristics, cultural identification, family connectedness, cross-cultural research

When it comes to making cultural comparisons regarding human behaviours, researchers are often guided not only by theory but also by certain comparative heuristics. One is an ethnocentric heuristic in which the principal investigators compare other cultures to their own (e.g., American vs. French). Another is a racial heuristic in which individuals are categorised into groups on the basis of the phenotypic characteristic of skin colour (e.g., Asians, Blacks, and Whites). A more recent comparative heuristic for grouping individuals uses an Eastern–Western distinction that is typically linked to collectivistic (e.g., Japanese) and individualistic (e.g., Canadian) cultures, respectively. The categories associated with these different heuristics carry considerable cultural meaning and can lead to interesting and important research, but they can also lead to problematic comparisons that may obfuscate meaningful cultural differences.

When making cultural comparisons in a multicultural context, similar comparative heuristics are often applied. Individuals from recent immigrant groups, often having an Eastern cultural background, are compared with a default comparison group that is typically a pan-cultural Western group (e.g., European Canadians). As recent research has started to form less inclusive categories of some groups (e.g., Chinese rather than Asian), the "Western" cultural group remains intact despite possible within-group differences. But who comprises this group and how should it be defined? Should all individuals of European ancestry be included in this default comparison group? The answer lies in a close examination of the sociohistorical context of the research setting as well as the behaviour under scrutiny.

The purpose of this article is to provide a demonstration of how and why cross-cultural comparisons should be tied to a local sociohistorical context. The multicultural Canadian city of Toronto is the context for the current study. Four groups of participants are compared. Two of the groups represent relatively recent Canadian groups having an Eastern cultural background (Chinese and South Asians). The other two groups have longer histories in Canada; one is the typical default comparison group made up of individuals having a Western European cultural heritage. The fourth group of participants, Italian Canadians, also has a European background, but we argue that this group should be looked at separately from other Canadians of Western European heritage. The behaviour under investigation is preferences for different mate characteristics in long-term relationship partners. A brief description of the sociocultural context of the study will be offered before turning to the cross-cultural study of intimate relationships.

Understanding Culture in Its Local–Historical Context

A strategy for identifying the cultural underpinnings of a particular society is to examine its history and the culture and language of its social institutions. In the Canadian context, the first waves of immigration to English Canada (i.e., excluding French Canada) originated from the British Isles. The first social institu-

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tions (e.g., schools, hospitals, newspapers), therefore, were established and populated by English-speaking people who shared common cultural traditions and norms. Given that these early colonizers shaped the basic social institutions that exist today, their language and cultural traditions form the bedrock on which rests "mainstream" English Canadian culture. When immigrants arrive in English Canada and learn "Canadian" norms and values, they are acquiring Western and individualistic ideas that have been shaped by these early British traditions.

Canadian immigration patterns, however, began to culturally diversify during the early part of the 20th century and changed quite rapidly after World War II. Immigrants were still coming primarily from Europe, but they now brought with them new languages and cultural traditions (e.g., German, Greek, Ukrainian). Italian immigration, in particular, was quite substantial; Italy was second only to Great Britain as a source of Canadian immigration from 1948 to 1972 (Ramirez, 1989). The majority of these Italians were peasants from Southern Italy who placed a high value on the nuclear family as well as on the extended *familiari* and their native villages (Iacovetta, 1992). Such a focus on family and kin can also be tied to the stronger ethnolinguistic vitality Italian Canadians have compared with other Western European Canadian groups (e.g., Dutch, Germans, Finns). Ethnolinguistic vitality is a marker of ethnic identity defined by Giles, Bourhis, and Taylor (1977) as "that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity" (p. 306). This vitality is evidenced in the spatial concentration of its population (e.g., Woodbridge), an active media presence (e.g., *Corriere Canadese*), institutional support (e.g., numerous community organisations), and a continued use of the Italian language for young Italian Canadians negotiating their social identities (Bourhis & Sachdev, 1984; Giampapa, 2001).

Although Europeans dominated postwar immigration to Canada, this pattern started shifting in the 1970s, and by the 1990s, the majority of immigrants to Canada were coming from Asia (Jansen & Lam, 2003). For the most part, these Asian immigrants were of Chinese and South Asian heritage, which are currently the two largest visible minority groups in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006a). Despite a more recent immigration history, these two groups are similar to the Italians in that they also have a number of features indicating strong ethnolinguistic vitality. For example, the top three mother tongues (after English) in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) are Chinese, Italian, and Punjabi (Statistics Canada, 2006b). In addition, individuals of Chinese and South Asian descent tend to live in ethnic enclaves, surrounded by others who are from their own ethnic group (Walks & Bourne, 2006). Chinese Canadians in the GTA are often found in particular suburbs (e.g., Markham), have dedicated media outlets (e.g., *Ming Pao Daily News*), and have ample opportunities to converse in Cantonese or Mandarin. South Asian Canadians are also concentrated in particular areas (e.g., Brampton), have dedicated media outlets (e.g., *South Asian Observer*), and ample opportunities to converse in languages such as Punjabi, Urdu, and Hindi. Given the size and demographic concentrations of these groups, Chinese and South Asian Canadians can be characterised as having strong ethnolinguistic vitality in the Canadian context and particularly in the Toronto area. As Italians, Chinese, and South Asians all have strong cultural vitality and strong ties of the self to the family, they were chosen to be used in our example of cultural comparisons with respect to intimate relationships.

Cross-Cultural Differences in Intimate Relationships

Humans place a high value on intimate long-term relationships and have clear ideas about which attributes are important in a potential mate or marriage partner. Marriage is a reflection of cultural ideals regarding lifelong intimate relationships and its meaning varies considerably across cultures. In many Western cultures, marriage is often seen as the union of two individuals who are in love and who want to increase their personal fulfillment and happiness. In many Eastern cultures, on the other hand, marriage is often used to promote the maintenance, continuity, and well-being of two families (Dion & Dion, 1996). In some Eastern cultures, marriage and choosing a spouse is arranged by the parents because fulfilling obligations and showing respect for familial expectations is more important than the personal preferences of the two marrying individuals (Buunk, Park, & Duncan, 2010).

Cultural expectations for marriage are reflected in the preferences that individuals from different groups will hold regarding the qualities they look for in a mate. The first study examining preferred mate characteristics using a cross-cultural framework was conducted by Buss and colleagues (1990), who were coming from an evolutionary perspective on human mating. They found a greater pattern of similarity than of difference across 37 cultures (see also Hatfield & Sprecher, 1995), and the only clear cultural difference to emerge was that India and China were quite distinct from other cultures on a dimension that included chastity as a central element. Buss et al. (1990) labelled this dimension traditional versus modern industrial values. Among the mate characteristics that were presented to the Buss et al. respondents, however, no reference was made to familial considerations (e.g., parental approval). Buunk et al. (2010) observed that the assumption made by Buss and colleagues was that individuals freely choose their mates without familial considerations. Subsequent research by Lalonde, Hynie, Pannu, and Tatla (2004) also examined mate preferences among individuals from different cultural backgrounds, but these researchers included additional mate attributes that were reflective of familial considerations (e.g., family reputation, parental approval). Their results showed that South Asian Canadians were more likely than European Canadians to prefer traditional attributes that reflected familial considerations in a mate.

In summary, when it comes to intimate relationships, the cultural context will buttress certain expectations regarding the attributes that are important to look for in a potential mate. In cultures that highly value group solidarity and loyalty to one's family, such as those who endorse Eastern ideals of marriage, certain traditional attributes will be important in mate selection (e.g., parental approval of the mate). In cultures that emphasise independence and autonomy, such traditional attributes should be of lesser importance.

Potential Mechanisms Underlying Cultural Differences in a Multicultural Setting

Within the North American context, children from immigrant families are often described as bicultural because they have likely been socialized to acquire norms from their heritage culture as well

as the mainstream culture (Giguère, Lalonde, & Lou, 2010). Biculturalism is evidenced in domains such as language (i.e., bilingualism), eating practices, and personal views regarding dating and marriage. The broader social context (e.g., schools, media) provides multiple opportunities for mainstream cultural learning, whereas the family is the primary source of heritage culture learning (Phinney, 1990). Thus, adherence to heritage culture norms should vary according to the extent to which an individual's self-concept is tied to his or her family. Lay et al. (1998) refer to this level of self-construal as *family allocentrism*, or collectivism at the family level. Family allocentrism reflects one's personal sense of connectedness to the family.

Various researchers have suggested that family allocentrism is generally stronger in individuals from Eastern cultural backgrounds compared with individuals from Western cultural backgrounds and that it facilitates the maintenance of heritage values in immigrants and their children (see Giguère et al., 2010). Hynie, Lalonde, and Lee (2006), for example, asked Chinese immigrant adult children and their parents to rate different traditional mate characteristics (e.g., family reputation, similar culture) that would be desired in a spouse for the child. Child and parent preferences for such attributes were positively correlated and this relationship was mediated by the child's level of family allocentrism. Thus, family allocentrism facilitated the intergenerational transmission of traditional values in the context of preferred mate attributes.

In another study, Lalonde, Hynie, et al. (2004) found that for South Asian Canadians, family allocentrism better accounted for preferences for traditional attributes in a mate compared with a more generalised interdependent self-construal (i.e., collectivistic view of the self). In their earlier cross-national study, Buss et al. (1990) believed that the individualism–collectivism distinction could be used to explain national differences in preference for traditional mate attributes. We agree with Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier's (2002) critique of using this broad cultural dimension as an explanatory construct, especially when it is applied to explanations of specific phenomena. As suggested by Lalonde, Hynie, et al., (2004), family allocentrism may be a better mechanism for explaining cultural differences within the area of mate selection, particularly for bicultural individuals in the Canadian context.

The importance of family in regulating behaviour can also be linked to differences that have been observed between certain Western European nations. There is research suggesting that Italians, who are often categorised as Western European, manifest behaviours and beliefs that are quite characteristic of more collectivistic cultures (e.g., South Asian). For example, like collectivistic cultures, who value interdependence, Italians place heavy cultural emphasis on filial piety and family connectedness. One example of this tendency is that Italians have been found to have more frequent contact with their aging parents compared with people from other Western European nations, namely, Great Britain and Finland (Tomassini et al., 2004). Older parents in Italy are also more likely to reside with a child compared with the elderly parents from Austria, Germany, France, and Switzerland (Hank, 2007).

As indicated earlier, whereas heritage norms and values are socialized by the family, the children of immigrants are also inevitably immersed in the norms of the mainstream culture in which they live. Despite there being many avenues for accessing the mainstream culture's norms (e.g., peers, media, schools), the learning and socialization of these norms may vary from one bicultural to another. One factor that should influence biculturals' endorsement of mainstream values and norms (including those having to do with mate characteristics) is the extent to which they identify with the mainstream culture (i.e., being Canadian). Uskul and her colleagues, for example, have found that, compared with heritage culture identity, Canadian identity is a better predictor of openness to interethnic intimate relationships in samples of Chinese Canadians (Uskul, Lalonde, & Cheng, 2007) and South Asian Canadians (Uskul, Lalonde, & Konanur, 2011). The assumption in their research was that Canadian identity reflects a value of multiculturalism that embraces close ties across ethnic lines and freedom of choice in relationships.

Thus, both family allocentrism and Canadian identity are proposed to be key explanatory variables of cultural differences in mate preferences. Recently, Lou, Lalonde, and Giguère (2012) found that these two cultural variables mediated cultural differences found between Asian Canadians (both Chinese and South Asian) and European Canadians in their motivation to move out of the family home. This motivation also reflects a tension between the traditional value of maintaining close ties to the family and the autonomous value of going it alone. It is expected that these two mediators represent important cultural influences coming from the heritage and mainstream cultures that should affect a number of behaviours with sociocultural significance.

Overview of the Current Study

The overarching aim of the study was to demonstrate that the generalised social groupings commonly used to make cultural group distinctions (i.e., Eastern–Western cultures) may obfuscate important cultural differences that can be tied to the local histories of certain groups. Specifically, it was expected that a European heritage group, Italian Canadians, can be quite similar to Eastern cultural groups, in that they place a strong emphasis on family ties. In order to achieve this aim, we focused on the mediational influences of family allocentrism and mainstream cultural identification in the prediction of cultural differences in preferred mate characteristics. Our study examined these preferences using samples of young bicultural Canadians from Chinese, South Asian, Italian, and Western European backgrounds. Given that some mate characteristics have been considered more important for women than for men regardless of culture (e.g., Buss et al., 1990; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1995), gender effects were also considered.

There were two general hypotheses in this study. First, it was predicted that there would be cultural group differences in mate preferences as well as the level of family allocentrism and endorsement of Canadian identity. It was expected that Chinese and South Asian Canadians would have higher preference for traditional mate characteristics compared with Western European Canadians. Italian Canadians, although of Western European descent, were expected to be more similar to Chinese and South Asian Canadians, given their strong emphasis on family and Italian community cultural vitality, which help buttress traditional cultural norms. Second, it was hypothesised that cultural differences in family allocentrism and Canadian identification would mediate the relation between culture and any observed differences in mate characteristic preferences.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 414 students at a multicultural university in Toronto: 120 South Asian Canadians (82 women), 95 Chinese Canadians (63 women), 92 Italian Canadians (68 women), and 107 Western European Canadians (70 women). Mean age was 20.63 years (SD = 2.44). Although all participants are Canadian, these groups will be referred to as South Asian, Chinese, Italian, and Western European, respectively, for the sake of simplicity.

Of the South Asian group, 35 were first-generation Canadians born outside of Canada (e.g., India, Pakistan) and 85 were second-generation Canadians. The arrival age of the foreign-born South Asians ranged from 1 to 13 years (M = 6.50, SD = 3.91). Of the Chinese group, 31 were first-generation Canadians born outside of Canada (e.g., Hong Kong, China, Taiwan) and 59 were second-generation Canadians (5 did not report). The arrival age of the foreign-born Chinese ranged from 1 to 14 years (M = 7.44, SD = 4.05). Given the relatively young age at which most of the South Asians and Chinese arrived in Canada, it is reasonable to assume that they have had enough experience with Canadian society to have acquired knowledge of its norms (Cheung, Chudek, & Heine, 2011). All of the Italian participants were also born in Canada, except one who was born in the U.S.[1] All Western Europeans self-identified as White and were born in Canada.[2]

After providing demographic information (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity), participants were asked to complete an online questionnaire consisting of the measures described in the next section. All of these measures have proven to be suitable for use with a variety of ethnic groups at the national level (e.g., Lou et al., 2012). Reliabilities for all measures were satisfactory for all four samples, and the overall Cronbach's alpha, along with its confidence intervals, are indicated at the end of each measure description.

Measures

Family allocentrism. The 21-item Family Allocentrism Scale (Lay et al., 1998) measures the degree of connectedness to one's family, or collectivism at the family level (e.g., "I think it is important to get along with my family at all costs"). Items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), in which higher average scores indicated more connectedness to family (α = .84, 95% CI [.81, .86]).

Canadian identity. Cameron's (2004) 12-item measure of social identity was used to assess identification with Canadian culture (e.g., "I often think about the fact that I am Canadian"). Participants rated each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), in which higher average scores indicated stronger Canadian identity (α = .78, 95% CI [.74, .81]).

Mate characteristics. Participants were presented with a list of 30 mate attributes (see Hynie et al., 2006; Lalonde, Hynie, et al., 2004) and asked to rate the extent to which each would be important in someone they would want to marry. Responses were given on a 7-point scale ranging from 0 (*irrelevant or unimportant*) to 6 (*required or indispensable*). A Scree plot associated with a principle axis factor analysis of the trait ratings with direct oblimin rotation suggested that three factors should be retained. An oblimin rotation was used because we cannot assume that clusters of preferred mate attributes are orthogonal to each other. Items that had factor loadings over .40 on their respective factors were averaged to create three types of mate characteristics. The first is described as a Congeniality factor and was related to 10 items: kind/understanding, physically attractive, dependable character, exciting personality, intelligent, pleasing disposition, ambitious, emotional stability/maturity, mutual attraction/love, and sociability (α = .77, 95% CI [.73, .80]). The second factor, labelled Tradition, was defined by four items: similar religious background, strong cultural ties, similar cultural background, and my parents' approval (α = .84, 95% CI [.81, .86]). The third factor captured a Status dimension and included eight items: social class, favourable social status, family reputation, dowry, caste, good heredity, good financial prospect, and good cook/housekeeper (α = .84, 95% CI [.82, .87]). The three dimensions were positively correlated with each other, with the strongest relationship between Tradition and Status, r = .48, p < .001, followed by Congeniality and Status, r = .27, p < .001, and then Congeniality and Tradition, r = .16, p = .001. Higher average scores on each of the dimensions was denotative of a stronger endorsement of the desirability of those particular attributes in a mate.

Results

The pattern of results when controlling for and not controlling for the effects of generational status were the same. Thus, the results without controlling for generational status are reported.

Cultural Differences

To test the first hypothesis that there would be cultural group differences, separate Culture × Gender ANOVAs were conducted for each of the primary variables: family allocentrism, Canadian identification, and the three types of mate characteristics. Each test

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[1] Knight and Nisbett (2007) describe how Italy's North has been historically more developed, richer, and better educated compared with the Southern areas. The authors demonstrated that Southerners tend to reason in a more holistic fashion, whereas individuals from the North tend to reason in a more analytic fashion when performing a cognitive task. Other research has shown that Southern Italians tend to use collective insults (i.e., insults directed at the target's family) more frequently than Northern Italians (Semin & Rubini, 1990). Consequently, Italian Canadians, most of whom trace their origins to Southern Italy, might not fit into the typical Western European image, and, in fact, might display behaviours that are more characteristic of a typical collectivistic culture. Consequently, those self-identified Italian Canadians who traced their origin to Northern Italy were excluded from the analysis.

[2] There seems to be a general consensus among researchers on the existence of various East/Central–West European differences. For instance, Hofstede (1980) demonstrated that Central and Eastern European countries score higher on collectivism compared with Western countries. Later, Schwartz and Bardi (1997) showed that Central and Eastern Europeans score higher on hierarchy and lower on autonomy compared with Western Europeans. More recently, Varnum, Grossmann, Katunar, Nisbett, and Kitayama (2008) have also shown that Central and East Europeans reason in a holistic fashion compared with Western Europeans and Americans. Given the body of research suggesting that Central and Eastern Europeans are indeed different from their Western European (and American) counterparts, as well as Southern Europeans (see text), participants from countries such as Poland, Portugal, and the Ukraine were excluded from this study.

was assessed against a Bonferroni-corrected alpha level of .05/5 = .01. Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Cultural influences. As predicted, the level of family allocentrism differed across cultural groups, $F(3, 406) = 8.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. Planned post hoc tests using a Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level for multiple tests of means showed that Western European participants had lower family allocentrism than South Asian, Italian, and Chinese participants, $ps < .01$, who did not differ from each other, $ps > .74$. Cultural groups also differed in the degree to which they identified with being Canadian, $F(3, 405) = 6.91$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Western Europeans had stronger Canadian identification than the other three cultural groups, $ps < .01$, who did not differ from each other, $ps > .77$. Gender effects as well as Culture $\times$ Gender interactions were nonsignificant for both family allocentrism and Canadian identification, $Fs < 2.82$, $ps > .04$, $\eta_p^2 s < .02$.[3]

Mate characteristics. All cultural groups rated congeniality traits as the most important characteristic in a marriage partner, traditional traits as being the next most important, and status traits as having the least relative importance. The relative importance of these mate attributes, however, differed as a function of culture (see Table 1). Specifically, cultural groups varied in their desirability ratings of tradition, $F(3, 406) = 40.72$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .23$, and status, $F(3, 406) = 10.05$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, but not congeniality, $F(3, 406) = 0.61$, $p = .61$, $\eta_p^2 = .004$. Planned post hoc tests showed that the four cultural groups differed significantly from each other in their desirability to have traditional characteristics in a mate, $ps < .01$, except for the South Asians and Italians, $p = .52$. South Asians and Italians gave the highest importance ratings to tradition, followed by the Chinese group, and then the Western European group. In terms of status, the Western European group rated status characteristics as being less important relative to the other three cultural groups, $ps < .01$, who did not differ from each other, $ps > .583$. No significant gender effects or Gender by Culture interactions were found for any of the mate characteristics ratings, $Fs < 3.43$, $ps > .06$, $\eta_p^2 s < .02$.

It is important to note that if the Italian group had been collapsed with the Western European group, a different picture would have emerged. A cultural group effect still emerged for tradition, $F(2, 408) = 28.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$, but showed a different pattern of mean differences. Whereas South Asians still rated the importance of traditional traits higher relative to the Chinese and the merged European group ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.62$), $ps < .001$, the latter two groups no longer differed significantly from each other. Moreover, the cultural group effect for status was weaker, $F(2, 408) = 3.16$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, and nonsignificant when the Bonferroni correction was applied, and no differences were found between any of the groups with the merged European group ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.09$), $ps > .18$.

The Mediating Role of Family Allocentrism and Canadian Identity

Hypothesis 2 was that family allocentrism and Canadian identity (which were not significantly correlated, $r = .004$, $p = .94$) would account for any observed cultural differences in ratings of mate characteristics and thus be mediators of the relationship. A first requirement for mediation is that the potential mediators be related to the outcome variables explored. Family allocentrism was pos-

itively correlated, whereas Canadian identity was negatively correlated with the desirability ratings of tradition and status mate characteristics (see Table 2). They were not significantly associated with ratings of congeniality; therefore, the mediation hypothesis was not examined with regards to this dimension.

To test for mediation, a coding scheme was implemented for cultural groups. As it was the Western European group that consistently differed from the other three cultural groups, Europeans were set as the reference group for each of the other three groups. Dummy variables were created to account for cultural group membership, with the European group coded as 0, and the South Asian (or Italian or Chinese) group coded as 1. An SPSS macro procedure provided by Preacher and Hayes (2008) was adopted in order to estimate indirect effects with multiple mediators using a bootstrapping technique. Bootstrapping is a nonparametric resampling procedure that involves repeatedly sampling the data set and estimating the indirect effect using the resampled data. This technique does not impose distributional assumptions (e.g., multivariate normality) and avoids issues of power, offering a much better alternative to traditional tests of mediation (see MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The bootstrapping procedure was repeated 5,000 times to generate an empirical approximation of the sampling distribution of the indirect effects of family allocentrism and Canadian identity and used to generate 95% confidence intervals (CIs). CIs that do not include zero are reflective of statistical significance at the .05 level.[4] The procedure was repeated separately for ratings of tradition and status and for each cultural comparison of South Asian, Italian, or Chinese Canadians with European Canadians.

As shown in Table 3, family allocentrism significantly mediated the relation between cultural background and the degree to which tradition and status characteristics were rated as important. The estimated paths between culture, mediators, and mate attributes are presented in Figures 1 and 2. Being South Asian, Italian, or Chinese (as opposed to Western European) was associated with higher endorsement of family allocentrism, which was associated with higher importance ratings of mate attributes reflecting tradition (see Figure 1) and status (see Figure 2). Compared with the European group, each of the non-European groups also reported having lower Canadian identification, which was associated with higher importance ratings of tradition for all three groups and higher importance ratings of status for the South Asian and Chinese groups. In general, the direct relations between culture and mate attributes were reduced in magnitude after including family

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[3] Each of the five Culture $\times$ Gender factorial ANOVAs was tested against a Bonferroni-corrected alpha level of .05/5 = .01 in order to avoid inflating the Type I error rate and to keep the familywise error rate at $\alpha < .05$. Without a Bonferroni correction, the Culture $\times$ Gender interaction for family allocentrism would have been significant at the $\alpha < .05$ level, $F(3, 406) = 2.82$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. European men were lower on family allocentrism compared with European women, whereas men in the other three cultural groups were higher on family allocentrism than their female counterparts. European women still had the lowest family allocentrism mean among *all* of the groups (except European men).

[4] Because it is based on an empirical estimation rather than a normality assumption, the percentile bootstrap CIs can be asymmetrical in form (i.e., skewed) and result in problems with Type I error and power (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993). Percentile bootstrap CIs can be improved by adjusting the percentile values that determine the bounds of the CI, giving the bias-corrected intervals (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993) reported in our results.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Primary Measures by Cultural Group

Variable	South Asian M (SD)	Italian M (SD)	Chinese M (SD)	European M (SD)
Family allocentrism	4.46[a] (0.71)	4.56[a] (0.64)	4.46[a] (0.64)	4.15[b] (0.70)
Canadian identity	5.25[a] (0.68)	5.34[a] (0.76)	5.24[a] (0.82)	5.68[b] (0.65)
Mate characteristics				
Congeniality	4.87[a] (0.69)	4.93[a] (0.64)	4.91[a] (0.65)	4.75[a] (0.58)
Tradition	4.03[a] (1.42)	3.76[a] (1.55)	2.81[b] (1.42)	2.12[c] (1.25)
Status	2.60[a] (1.17)	2.79[a] (1.04)	2.59[a] (0.99)	2.00[b] (1.01)

Note. Means in the same row that do not share a common superscript differ, according to multiple comparison tests with Bonferroni correction.

allocentrism and Canadian identity in the model, but the direct paths remained statistically significant, suggesting the occurrence of partial mediation. There was evidence of full mediation, however, when comparing ratings of tradition attributes between Chinese and European Canadians; the direct effect between culture and tradition ratings was no longer significant, $p = .08$, when accounting for the indirect effects of culture on tradition ratings through family allocentrism and Canadian identity.

A contrast analysis was also conducted to see whether the specific indirect effects of family allocentrism and Canadian identity differed from each other *within* each cultural group (South Asian, Italian, Chinese) relative to European Canadians; that is, whether one mediator was better than the other mediator at explaining cultural differences in the outcome variable. Results of this contrast analysis (labelled "Contrast" in Table 3) indicated that when comparing Italians to Western Europeans, family allocentrism was a stronger mediator than Canadian identification of the relation between culture and preference for both traditional and status mate characteristics (as indicated by confidence intervals that do not contain zero). Although a similar directional pattern emerged, the specific indirect effects through the two mediators did not differ for tradition and status characteristics ratings among South Asians and Chinese relative to the Western European group.

Discussion

The present study tested and found support for two hypotheses. First, young Canadians from South Asian, Italian, Chinese, and Western European cultural backgrounds varied in their views regarding the importance of certain attributes in a potential life mate. Based on this sample, there were three types of attributes that young adults look for in a potential mate: congeniality traits, which have to do with personality and character; status traits,

which have to do with social and financial status; and tradition traits, which have to do with cultural and religious background as well as familial considerations. All participants, regardless of cultural background, agreed that congeniality was the most important trait in a potential spouse, but they disagreed on the importance ratings of status and tradition traits. More specifically, Western European participants rated tradition and status traits as relatively unimportant and undesirable compared with South Asian, Italian, and Chinese participants. Chinese participants, though not to the same extent as Western Europeans, also felt that traditional characteristics were less important relative to the South Asian and Italian participants.

Our pattern of results is concordant with some previously observed differences in preference for traditional mate attributes between South Asian and Western European Canadian youth living in the multicultural city of Toronto (Lalonde, Hynie, et al., 2004). Replicating past research results is always of great importance (Amir & Sharon, 1990) and much in need in the social sciences. Importantly, providing support for the central thesis that cross-cultural comparisons should be tied to a local sociohistorical context, the results suggest that Italians, although of European background, indicated different preferences for tradition and status

Table 2

Zero-Order Correlations Between Primary Measures

Variable	Canadian identity	Congeniality	Tradition	Status
Family allocentrism	.004	.08	.48**	.26**
Canadian identity		.07	−.19**	−.16*
Congeniality			.17*	.28**
Tradition				.48**
Status				

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

Table 3

Indirect Effects of Culture on Preferences for Mate Characteristics Through Family Allocentrism and Canadian Identity

	Tradition 95% CI		Status 95% CI	
	LL	UL	LL	UL
South Asian				
Family allocentrism	**.123**	**.489**	**.051**	**.247**
Canadian identity	**.061**	**.306**	**.039**	**.247**
Contrast	−.091	.367	−.145	.135
Italian				
Family allocentrism	**.231**	**.611**	**.064**	**.260**
Canadian identity	.039	.291	−.056	.083
Contrast	**.039**	**.503**	**.019**	**.260**
Chinese				
Family allocentrism	**.095**	**.432**	**.012**	**.193**
Canadian identity	**.029**	**.284**	**.018**	**.216**
Contrast	−.105	.336	−.142	.098

Note. CIs have been bias corrected; 5,000 bootstrap samples. The European group was used as the cultural reference group. Effects significant at $\alpha < .05$ are in boldface. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit.
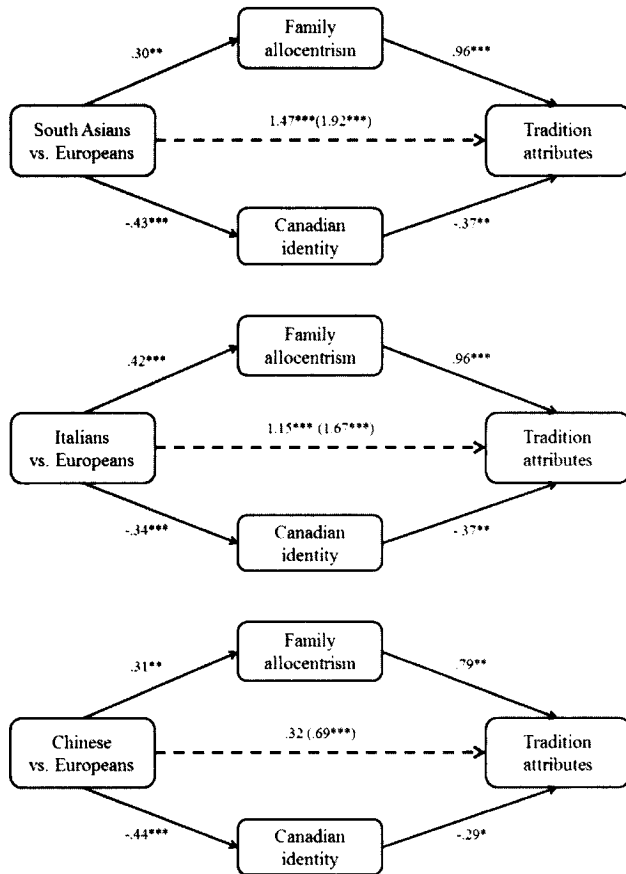
Figure 1. Path coefficients for multiple mediation models testing the effects of culture on preference for tradition mate characteristics. *Note.* Unstandardized coefficients are presented. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

traits compared with other Western Europeans. Overall, the results suggest that in terms of a preference for traditional traits in a mate, South Asians (Asia) and Italians (Europe) had more in common with each other than with Western Europeans (Europe) and Chinese (Asia).

In support of the second hypothesis, preferred mate characteristics in terms of tradition and status were explained by how connected individuals felt to their families and how strongly they identified with Canadian culture. South Asian, Italian, and Chinese participants were significantly higher on family allocentrism and lower in Canadian identification than Western Europeans; higher family allocentrism and lower Canadian identification, in turn, were associated with greater importance of traditional and status characteristics in a future partner. Especially for Italian participants, family allocentrism played an important role in explaining how their mate preferences differed from those of their Western European counterparts, more so than Canadian identity. Thus, defining oneself in terms of family connections or identifying with mainstream Western culture were key psychological mechanisms that help explain why young Canadian biculturals with South Asian, Italian, and Chinese backgrounds value certain mate characteristics more so than their Western European peers. These results reveal that considering the local context to determine the

cultural vitality of particular groups in a multicultural context is a first and necessary step in the research process, and that this can be further enhanced by pursuing the psychological mechanisms assumed to underlie the culturally based differences between groups.

It should be noted that the current study did not directly measure objective (see Giles et al., 1977) or subjective (see Allard & Landry, 1986) markers of ethnolinguistic vitality, and future research studies involving cultural comparisons in a multicultural setting would benefit from their inclusion. This issue becomes particularly important when conducting cross-cultural studies within the Canadian context, given the intranational diversity of cultural experiences among various ethnic groups in Canada. For example, although we would expect that our results for Chinese and South Asian Canadians may generalise to members of those groups in metropolitan Vancouver, the same results may not be found for samples in Saskatoon or St John's. Similarly, the pattern of our results for Italian Canadians may generalise to Italians in Montreal or Hamilton, but not necessarily to Italians in Sudbury or Halifax.

Of particular interest was the finding that Italians, although of European background, were more similar to South Asians in their mate attribute preferences than they were to other Western Europeans. One explanation for this result may lie in the mediating role of family allocentrism. As noted earlier, Italian Canadians in our
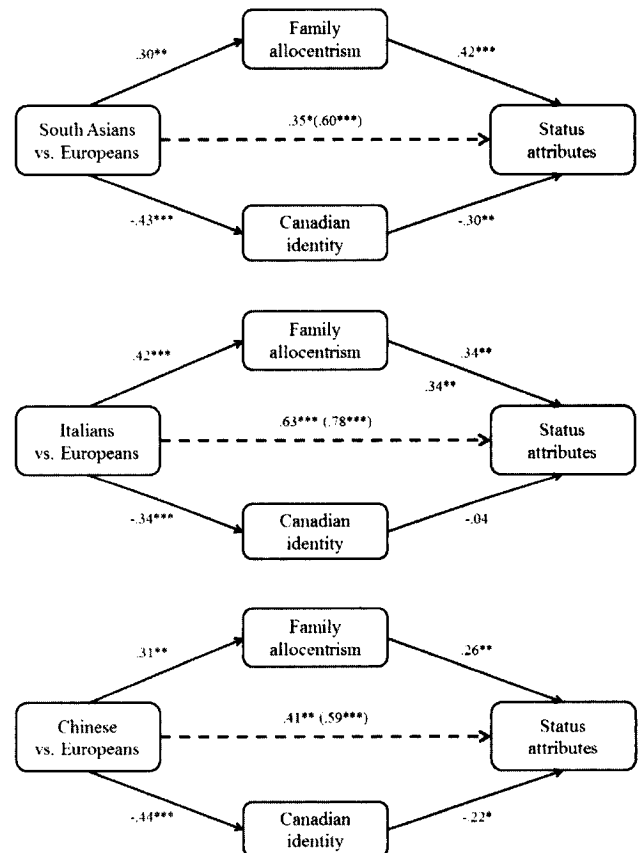

Figure 2. Path coefficients for multiple mediation models testing the effects of culture on preference for status mate characteristics. *Note.* Unstandardized coefficients are presented. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

study were relatively high on family allocentrism. For these individuals, family played a bigger role in affecting their preference for traditional and status attributes in a potential mate than Canadian identification. This finding carries important implications for researchers working in multicultural contexts, who may lump all individuals of Western European background into the same group, especially when making East–West type comparisons. Given the traditional importance of family for Italian Canadians, who originated primarily from Southern Italy and who have a vibrant cultural community in Canada (particularly within the GTA in which the current study was conducted), it is not surprising to find that certain aspects of their heritage culture will shape their views on long-term relationships.

It is possible that such cultural influences may also be found for other European heritage communities. We suspect that Portuguese Canadians, for example, would show a pattern of responses in mate preferences similar to those provided by Italian Canadians. The Portuguese, like the Italians, are from Southern Europe, of Catholic ancestry, and have a tradition of emphasising strong family ties (Wall, Aboim, Cunha, & Vasconcelos, 2001). Moreover, they also have strong markers of ethnolinguistic vitality in the Toronto area in terms of language usage (Statistics Canada, 2006b) and community resources (Almeida, 2009).

Within the realm of intimate relationships, the attributes that individuals prefer in a mate (a psychological variable) contribute to their choice of marriage partner (a behavioural outcome). For example, the importance of maintaining traditional culture for Italian Canadians is reflected in a study reporting a higher rate of endogamy (in-group marrying) for this group compared with other Canadians of Northern or Eastern European backgrounds (Reitz, 1980). Similarly, Chinese and South Asian Canadians have the highest rates of endogamy among all visible minority groups in Canada (Milan, Maheux, & Chui, 2010). Thus, even for Eastern biculturals who grow up in Western regions, such as Canada, and who have access to mainstream Western norms, heritage norms remain central when making major life decisions, such as choosing a spouse. More specifically, familial influence is likely to play a role in one's choice of a marriage partner (Buunk et al., 2010).

It should be noted that the culturally defined groups in this study are not homogeneous groups. For example, our South Asians come from different countries of origin (e.g., India, Pakistan) and different religious backgrounds (e.g., Hindi, Muslim). Despite the heterogeneity of the samples, however, statistically significant patterns of results were observed. There is also an important caveat that should be added to the present observations. Strong ethnocultural vitality does not mean that all of their cultural traditions are maintained to the same extent. Italian Canadians, for example, have maintained traditional mate preferences that focus on family, but the idea of chastity as an important mate attribute is no longer as important as it once was (Lalonde, Giguère, & Venkatesh, 2004). Such difference may be better understood with continued refinement in cultural group distinctions and in the examination of the psychological mechanisms that underlie cultural differences.

Conclusions

Most cross-cultural researchers working in multicultural settings have witnessed in their research participants a need to spontaneously clarify their ethnic background and to sometimes express concern about being grouped within broad social categories. The process of understanding culture and immigration from an empirical perspective often binds us to these categories, and we must be mindful of their limitations. Examining cultural influences at the individual level, such as family allocentrism and cultural identity, will help researchers understand why differences in traditional values and norms continue to be important in the lives of bicultural individuals and how they affect their thoughts and behaviours.

Résumé

Pour réaliser des études interculturelles, les chercheurs se servent souvent de catégorisations généralisées (par ex., Est-Ouest), assumant ainsi l'homogénéité des individus au sein des groupes culturels comparés. Nous arguons que de telles vastes catégorisations peuvent être trompeuses et qu'il faut procéder à une soigneuse démarcation des groupes culturels qui tient compte de leurs réalités sociohistoriques si l'on veut obtenir des connaissances à la fois significatives et réalistes. Nous illustrons cet argument au moyen de l'examen des attributs préférés chez les conjoints parmi quatre groupes culturels au Canada. Conformément à nos attentes, les Italiens, habituellement considérés comme étant des Européens de l'Ouest, ont témoigné des préférences à l'égard du statut et des caractéristiques traditionnelles chez un conjoint qui différaient de celles des autres groupes d'Europe de l'Ouest. En effet, leurs préférences s'apparentaient à celles des cultures orientales, à savoir aux préférences des Asiatiques du Sud et des Chinois, en ce qui a trait au statut, et aux Asiatiques du Sud, en ce qui a trait aux caractéristiques traditionnelles. De plus, la tendance dans les différences culturelles changeaient lorsque les Italiens étaient inclus dans la catégorie de l'Europe de l'Ouest. En dernier lieu, nous avons montré que l'influence de la culture sur les préférences quant aux caractéristiques traditionnelles et au statut était transmise différemment selon les liens familiaux et l'identification à la culture canadienne dominante. Les répercussions de ces résultats sur la recherche interculturelle sont présentées.

Mots-clés : groupes culturels, caractéristiques du conjoint, identification culturelle, liens familiaux, recherche interculturelle.

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