

Which One Functions the Best: the Multiculturalism, Color-blindness, and Assimilation Perspectives in Culture Integration Management

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Key Words: Culture Integration, Multiculturalism, Color-blindness, Assimilation

Abstract: This paper examines the role of interethnic ideology in cultural integration management. The author hypothesized that multiculturalism ideology is more positive related to group performance, relationship with group members, intercultural interactions and group climate than color-blindness and assimilation ideology. The group performance and intercultural interactions hypotheses are supported by the experiment results. The mediation role of attitude toward culture integration was also testified.

1. Introduction

In recent years, as the workgroups in organizations are more and more culturally diversified, the management of cultural integration has become an important issue in organizational research (Howard, 1995; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998; Jackson et al., 2003; Gelfand et al., 2007). There are several reasons contributing to the trend of cultural integration in workgroups. First of all, many companies are seeking business opportunities to grow and prosper in a high competitive market. On one hand, with the spreading adoption of the globalization strategy, companies confront a set of issues related to different geographies and cultures when products, capital and services are flowing among nations, which requires multicultural staffing in their business projects. On the other hand, international business cooperation has increased as the joint ventures, mergers, acquisitions and multinational companies develop all around the world which brings cultural integration into work teams (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007).

How to manage cultural integration poses a major challenge for organizational researchers. Some researchers suggest that poorly designed and executed programs in organizations may be negatively related to the performance of cultural diversified teams (Davidson, 1999; Joplin & Daus, 1997). For example, poorly implemented integration training may unintentionally enlarge the gap between different racial groups, which evokes defensive reactions by whites (Chrobot-Mason, 2003), embarrasses the minorities, or even raise the accusing of race discrimination (James & Wooten, 2006). Cox (1994) also argues that ill-managed integration efforts may result in increasing feelings of isolation, decreasing job satisfaction and the distrust of minority employees toward organizations. These strategies to manage cultural diversified team are all based on the views of administrators and policy makers on cultural integration. In that case, there has been a growing interest in studying factors influencing people's attitudes toward culture integration, in which interethnic ideology is an important predictor.

There are three different interethnic ideologies dealing with culture integration, which are multiculturalism, color-blindness and assimilation. *Multiculturalism* is expected to be a positive perspective to accept and support the cultural heterogeneity in plural societies (Berry & Kalin, 1995). The *Color-blindness* perspective proposes that racial categories should not be considered when making decisions and people should be not treated differently (Richeson, & Nussbaum, 2004). This ideology is widely used in the United States society (Verkuyten, 2005). However, some scholars believe that the *assimilation* ideology, which advocates the assimilation of minority culture and keeps the dominant identity and culture, can be used as an alternative to multiculturalism ideology (Alba & Nee, 1997). The controversy is accompanied with limited number of empirical studies, so more empirical studies are needed to test the functions of these interethnic ideologies, how they impact

people's reaction to culture integration, and how they further influence people's behavior.

The aim of this paper is to examine the impact of three interethnic ideologies on cultural integration. Interethnic ideologies are expected to influence people's attitudes toward culture integration, and through the attitude affect the performance, relationship, interaction, and climate of the cultural diversified workgroup. In the research design of experiment, *multiculturalism*, *color-blindness*, *assimilation* and a control condition are compared to see the positive and negative influence, respectively. The endorsement of these ideologies is hypothesized to predict people's attitude and behavior in different ways. Also, the path through which these ideologies take effects is studied. Finally, the paper ends with some possible directions in future research and implications of the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism and *color-blindness* perspective are usually compared as two fundamental approaches of managing cultural integration. Both perspectives have impacts on interethnic relations and people's judgments about various ethnic groups (Wolsko, et al. 2000). Multiculturalism perspective proposes that cultural differences of group members should not only be acknowledged but also be respected. Extant literatures show that multicultural ideology is expected to have positive effects on ethnic group identification and intergroup relations, and reduce racial bias (Verkuyten, 2005; Richeson, & Nussbaum, 2004). Three demographic variables (level of education, gender, and age) have been found to affect the support level of multiculturalism. In scales measuring multiculturalism, females usually score higher than males, younger people often score slightly higher than old people, and educational level is found positively associated with multiculturalism perspective (Schalk-Soekar, 2007; Van de Vijver et al., 2008).

However, this perspective is criticized for subgroup categorization which may lead to conflict, and harms of social cohesion and culture integration of majority ethnic groups (Brewer, 1997; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006). For minority ethnic groups, multiculturalism offers a positive view of cultural maintenance and respect (Verkuyten, 2005). Therefore, some scholars suggested examining the impact of multiculturalism from the ethnic majority perspective and ethnic minority perspective, respectively (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002; Verkuyten, 2005; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2006).

2.2 Color-blindness

Color-blind ideology ignores racial categories, but emphasizes treating people as an individual (Richeson, & Nussbaum, 2004). This perspective is widely used in school education, where teachers treat students from different ethnic groups equally, and weaken their ethnic identities (Schofield, 2001). However, the ignorance of the culture differences cannot achieve a fair and harmony environment, since people self-category themselves based on the degrees of similarity, according to social category theory (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Consequently, this perspective has been criticized for not reducing racial bias and predicting negative racial attitudes (Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004). Therefore, extant literatures show that the color-blindness ideology is expected to negatively impact racial attitudes, and produce more prejudiced views.

2.3 Assimilation Ideology

In European countries, assimilation is a more prevailing attitude toward culture integration. Minority groups are expected to merge into the mainstream society, and take the way of life of dominant group (Verkuyten, 2005). This perspective is on the behalf of the majority of the society, and its ideal is to achieve a harmony and simple society for different cultural groups. The disadvantages of assimilation ideology are that the minority group's rights and voice are ignored, and the benefits of other cultures are abandoned. Verkuyten (2005) compared the multiculturalism ideology and assimilation ideology on ethnic group identification and group evaluation by Dutch and Turkish participants. He found that the minority group members are more likely to endorse multiculturalism than majority group members. Therefore, it is expected that exposure to assimilation ideology will lead to negative

outcomes for cultural diversified workgroups.

2.4 Cultural Integration

The influence of cultural integration on teamwork consequences in organizations could be positive as well as negative. Some scholars have found that multicultural teams can provide strategic advantages in terms of creativity and solutions in a global market for organizations (Earley & Gibson, 2002; Shapiro et al., 2005; Gelfand et al., 2007). While more negative influences are presented by researchers such as ethnocentrism (Cramton & Hinds, 2005), in-group biases (Salk & Brannon, 2000), workplace aggression caused by racial discrimination (Cortina, 2008), and the interpersonal conflicts from both task and emotion (Von Glinow et al., 2004). In a word, there is a debate along with the research of culture integration. The interethnic ideologies in terms of multiculturalism, color-blindness, and assimilation represent our different views toward culture integration. They are also the attempting strategies to manage culture integration.

3. Model and Hypotheses

3.1 The Model of Cultural Integration with Different Interethnic Ideology Perceptions

The interethnic ideologies (multiculturalism, color-blindness and assimilation) are assumed to influence people’s attitudes toward cultural integration, and further affect people’s behavior for group performance, intragroup relationship, intercultural interactions and intercultural group climate in organizations. Figure 1 shows the model of cultural integration with different interethnic ideology perceptions.

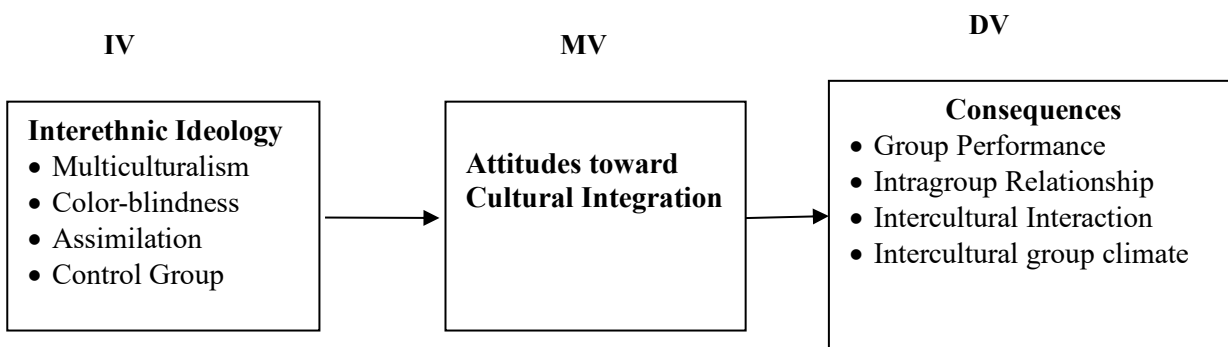


Figure 1. Cultural Integration with Different Interethnic Ideology Perceptions

3.2 Variables and Hypotheses

3.2.1 Attitudes toward Culture Integration

Attitude toward culture integration presents the extent to which team members accept the cultural integration. The effects of attitudes toward integration and beliefs about the value of integration have been examined by some researchers (Hostager & De Meuse, 2002; Strauss et al., 2003). van Knippenberg et al. (2005) firstly raised the concept “diversity mind-sets,” which refers to “people’s understanding of how diversity may affect their work team or organization, their understanding of the appropriate way to deal with diversity, and their associated evaluations of diversity” (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007, p.531), which help us better understand people’s cognitions on integration and make strategies on integration management. Team members with an open attitude and positive evaluations towards integration will favor the progress of cultural integration. In contrast, team members with a closed attitude and negative evaluations may block the progress of integration. Furthermore, if the majority of a diverse team (e.g., male vs. female, Caucasians vs. minority) hold a negative attitude, the integration will be negatively associated with team performance. Consistent with previous research, we predict that

H1: The attitudes toward cultural integration would be more positive for participants’ exposure to multiculturalism ideology than participants’ exposure to color-blindness ideology, and the attitudes toward cultural integration would be more negative for participants’ exposure to assimilation ideology

than participants' exposure to color-blindness ideology. (Multiculturalism > Color-blindness > Assimilation)

3.2.2 Group Performance

Prior research provides inconsistent conclusions on the relationship between cultural integration and team performance. On the one hand, cultural integration may positively influence team performance by enhancing creativity and improving high quality decision. On the other hand, cultural integration will result in difficulty in communication and interpretation. Group members are possible to form subgroups for different cultures and values, which is negatively associated with the group climate. Consistent with previous research, we predict that

H2: Exposure to a multiculturalism ideology leads to a better group performance than adopting either a color-blind ideology or an assimilation ideology.

3.2.3 Evaluations of Intragroup Relationship and Intercultural Group Climate

Intergroup relationship is also an important aspect of group work, which has the instant influence on group climate. A harmony climate in group will benefit not only individual consequences (e.g., job satisfaction, psychological health, and physical health), but also group level consequences (e.g., group performance, and group cohesion). To attain high-level team performance and stability, it is responsible for team leaders to maintain an open and favorable climate in the group (Ayoko et al., 2002). Meanwhile, organizational interventions should be designed to promote the acceptance of racial and cultural integration, for example, leaders participate in cultural integration programs, employees receive favorable attitude-oriented trainings and interpersonal communication skills, supervision could be emphasized on preventing prejudices and discriminations (Cox, 1994; Thomas, 1999). For these two consequences, we predict that

H3: Exposure to a multiculturalism ideology leads to a more positive relationship evaluation in work groups than adopting either a color-blind ideology or an assimilation ideology.

H4: Adopting a multiculturalism ideology leads to a better group climate than adopting either a color-blind ideology or an assimilation ideology.

3.2.4 Intercultural Interaction

Intercultural interaction refers to the interaction between different culture groups, e.g., international students and Chinese students. The communications and interactions among these subgroups are important social networks for all subgroups. Social interactions have been found to relief people's uncertainty feelings at workplace and facilitate their psychological and physical well-being (e.g., James, 2000; Wang & Nayir, 2006). Nonetheless, the ideology and stereotypes one hold toward other ethnic groups may increase the difficulty of interaction between these subgroups. In that case, we predict that

H5: Adopting a multiculturalism ideology helps the group to achieve better intercultural interactions than adopting either a color-blind ideology or an assimilation ideology.

4. Methods

4.1 Participants

Eighty students at the University of Dalian Technology attended in the experiment (N=80). The participants completed the experiment in a laboratory room separately, and the experiment took approximately 10 minutes. The sample consisted of 35 females (43.8%), 45 males (56.2%). The average age of the participants was 20 years old. Over 85% of the respondents were Chinese. The International Students only took a small part of the participants.

4.2 Procedure

Four different versions of questionnaires were handed out randomly to the participants. They are multicultural ideology condition, color-blind ideology condition, assimilation ideology condition and neutral condition (control group). The ideology manipulation was shown at the beginning of the questionnaires by a short introduction. For example, in multicultural ideology condition, the participants were informed:

In culturally diverse countries, the notion of multiculturalism is a significant element of their identity. It is fundamental to their belief that all citizens are equal. Any nation based on immigration has a long history of being culturally diverse. Multiculturalism has been a hot topic of late, that is, cultural differences of group members should not only be acknowledged but also be respected. Multiculturalism ensures that all citizens can keep their identities and have a sense of belonging to the society. This drives citizens of those nations to integrate into their society and take an active part in its social, cultural, economic and political affairs.

Then 8 statements adapted from Berry and Kalin's (1995) Multicultural Ideology Scale were followed to test the effects of the priming work. Sample items are "Cultural habits and traditions are private matters and should be kept out of public life" and "Every ethnic group is entitled to a culture of its own." The scale was testified to have a reliability of .83 in the 1991 Canada national survey towards multiculturalism attitude.

While in color-blind ideology condition, the participants were informed:

In culturally diverse countries, the notion of color-blindness is a significant element of their identity. It is fundamental to their belief that all citizens are equal. Any nation based on immigration has a long history of being culturally diverse. Color-blindness has been a hot topic of late, that is, people are treated equally at school or workplace regardless of their race or culture. Color-blindness ensures that all citizens can keep their identities and have a sense of belonging to the society. This drives citizens of those nations to integrate into their society and take an active part in its social, cultural, economic and political affairs.

The following questionnaire was as the same as the multicultural one.

In assimilation ideology condition, the participants were informed:

In culturally diverse countries, the notion of assimilation is a significant element of their identity. It is fundamental to their belief that all citizens are equal. Any nation based on immigration has a long history of being culturally diverse. Assimilation has been a hot topic of late, that is, ethnic minority group members are expected to adopt the values of the society they choose to live and adopt the dominant group's way of life. Assimilation ensures that all citizens have a sense of belonging to the society. This drives citizens of those nations to integrate into their society and take an active part in its social, cultural, economic and political affairs.

The following questionnaire was as the same as the multicultural one.

In the control group, participants are not given any instructions of ideology orientation, but instead we inform the participants that we are interested in their perceptions of social life and culture. The following questionnaire was as the same as the multicultural one.

After the manipulation section and the assessment of attitude towards culture integration, the participants were asked to assume themselves in a hypothetical situation. In an introductory class, the instructor required the students to do an assignment involving three group discussions and a group report. Each discussion group consisted of 6 students. The participants were asked to evaluate the group performance and the feelings towards their group members. Then the participants were asked if they were in a group including students from different races, how they agree or disagree with the statements of group interaction and group climate evaluation. The whole experiment only adopted the self-report style, not involving any activity. Finally, several demographic questions were included in the questionnaires to acquire students' background information.

4.3 Measurement

Variables in the model were measured by students' responses to various Likert-type Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Questions addressing *Attitudes towards Culture Integration* were developed by Stanley (1996). His Attitudes toward Cultural Integration and Pluralism Scale had 19 items, with a reliability of .91. Sample items are "Students should be taught to respect those who are different from themselves.", and "I am uncomfortable around the students whose ethnic heritage is different from my own."

Group Performance was measured by Jehn et al.'s (1999) 2 items Likert Scale, with a reliability of .93. The questions were presented as "How well do you think your group will perform?", and

“How effective do you think your group will be?”

Intragroup Relationship was measured using a “feeling thermometer”, which measures people’s in-group and out-group attitudes. Participants are asked to rate their work group on a 100-point scale in which 0 means they feel coolly toward the group and 100 means they feel very warmly. This measurement was used by Wolsko et al. (2000) to investigate people’s perceptions towards different ethnic groups and their tendency to divide in-group and out-group members. In this paper, it was adapted to assess the participants’ feelings towards their group members. Following this, various ethnic groups were listed, for example, Chinese, and international students.

Intercultural Interaction was measured by Chen’s (2002) 15 items Likert Scale, with a reliability of .92. Sample items are like “Our conversation will be spontaneous, informal, and relaxed.”, and “We will choose our words carefully to avoid misunderstanding.”

Intercultural Group Climate was measured by Kruthof’s (2001) 6 items Likert Scale, with a reliability of .84. Sample items are like “In our group we understand and accept different cultures.”, and “Differences in cultural backgrounds are discussed openly in our group.”

5. Results

5.1 Group Performance

The group performance was examined as a dependent variable of interethnic ideology using one-way ANOVA. A significant difference of group performance evaluation was found among these four conditions, $F = 2.988$, $p < .05$. Figure 2 shows the mean scores of different ideology conditions. Multiculturalism group had a highest score on the evaluation of group performance ($M = 4.45$, $SD = .58$). Color-blind group ($M = 4.225$, $SD = .61$) also had a higher score than control group ($M = 4.20$, $SD = .52$). Only the score of assimilation group ($M = 3.925$, $SD = .49$) was lower than that of control group. Consequently, these results support the hypothesis that adopting a multiculturalism ideology leads to a better group performance than adopting either a color-blind ideology or an assimilation perspective.

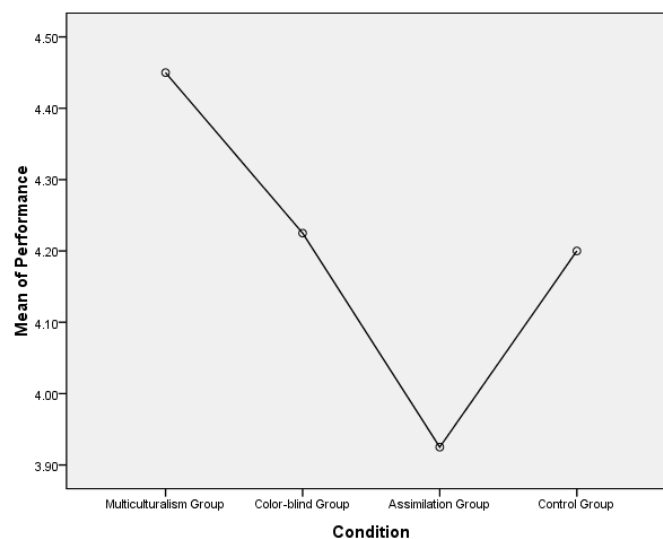


Figure 2. The mean scores of group performance for the four conditions

5.2 Intragroup Relationship

The scores of feeling thermometer were examined as the interpersonal relationship within workgroup for differences among the three ideological conditions. No significant difference was found for participants’ evaluation of relationships with group members. Among the three ideology conditions, the participants showed no tendency of favoring Chinese Students or International Students as their team members.

Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviation of the intragroup relationship evaluations. As can be seen, participants in Multiculturalism, Color-blind, Assimilation, and Control group

showed similar evaluation of ingroup relationship toward different ethnic groups. According to the result of one-way ANOVA, the maximum difference appear in Chinese Students, $F(3, 76) = 1.023, p = .387$. Therefore, the results did not support the hypothesis that exposure to a multiculturalism ideology would lead to a more positive relationship evaluation in work groups.

Table 1. Mean Scores and Standard Deviation of the Intragroup Relationship Evaluation

Condition		Immigrants	International	Chinese	Caucasian	African	Asian	Latino	European
Multiculturalism	Mean	83.25	81.25	89.25	87.00	83.00	82.65	84.25	86.35
	SD	19.753	21.329	13.006	15.424	18.166	19.586	15.241	13.441
Color-blind	Mean	84.75	82.45	87.25	86.10	81.80	82.80	80.55	85.60
	SD	11.751	15.477	12.719	13.139	16.726	18.409	18.303	12.559
Assimilation	Mean	79.10	80.00	81.70	84.00	80.75	83.50	80.25	83.25
	SD	16.933	16.141	16.980	15.270	16.000	15.398	15.345	14.693
Control	Mean	76.95	75.30	83.15	81.25	79.65	78.75	79.75	83.10
	SD	17.267	17.448	18.568	17.462	18.219	19.860	19.227	15.664
Total	Mean	81.01	79.75	85.34	84.59	81.30	81.93	81.20	84.58
	SD	16.662	17.617	15.531	15.268	17.018	18.143	16.888	13.942

Note: Scale is based upon: 1= very cold feeling; 100=very warm feeling.

5.3 Intercultural Interaction

A marginally significant effect was found for group members' interactions within the working group among the four conditions, $F = 2.708, p = .051$. Similar to the results of group performance, multiculturalism group had a highest score on the evaluation of intercultural interaction ($M = 4.05, SD = .63$). Then color-blind group ranked the second ($M = 4.04, SD = .47$), and control group ($M = 3.87, SD = .56$) ranked the third. Assimilation group ($M = 3.67, SD = .49$) had the lowest score of intercultural interaction. Figure 3 shows the mean scores of the four conditions. The results support the hypothesis that adopting a multiculturalism ideology helps the group to achieve better intercultural interactions than adopting either a color-blind ideology or an assimilation perspective.

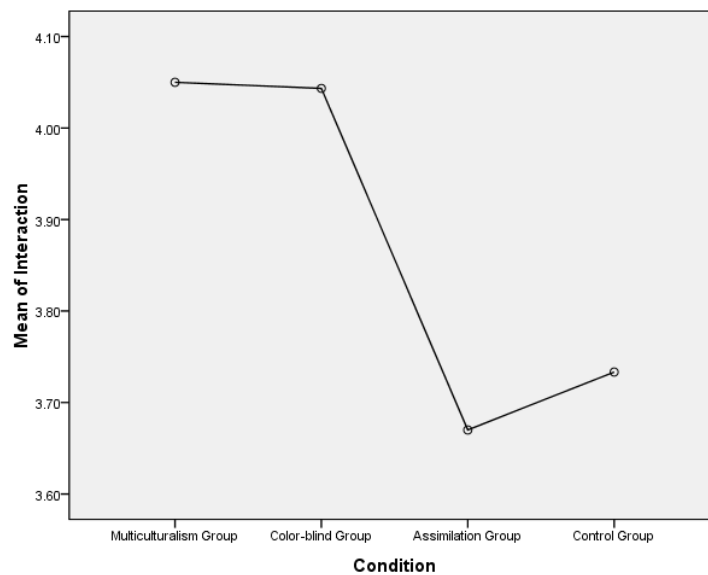


Figure 3. The mean scores of intercultural interaction for the four conditions

5.4 Intercultural Group Climate

The intercultural group climate was examined as a dependent variable of interethnic ideology using one-way ANOVA. No significant difference was found among these four conditions, $F = .756, p = .523$.

Despite multiculturalism condition ($M = 4.21, SD = .58$), all the other three conditions had very close scores on the evaluation of group climate, Color-blind group ($M = 3.97, SD = .61$), control group ($M = 3.93, SD = .67$), and assimilation group ($M = 4.02, SD = .48$). Consequently, the hypothesis that adopting a multiculturalism ideology leads to a better group climate than adopting either a color-blind ideology or an assimilation perspective was not supported.

5.5 The Mediation Effect of Attitudes toward Culture Integration

First, one-way ANOVA was used to examine the effects of three ideologies on participants' attitude toward culture integration. As can be seen from Table 2, participants in all conditions have a positive attitude toward cultural integration (Scale is based on: 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). Although the mean scores decline gradually from multiculturalism (mean = 5.0421), color-blind (mean = 4.8), control condition (mean = 4.7842), and assimilation (mean = 4.6868), no significant difference is found among these conditions, $F = 1.330, p = .271$. Therefore, the hypothesis that exposure to a multiculturalism ideology will lead to a more positive attitude toward culture integration is not supported by these results.

Table 2. Mean Scores and ANOVA Result for Attitudes toward Culture Integration

Condition	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	F	Sig.
Multiculturalism	5.0421	20	.66368	1.330	.271
Color-blind	4.8000	20	.59487		
Assimilation	4.6868	20	.55424		
Control	4.7842	20	.52100		
Total	4.8283	80	.58953		

Also, the attitudes toward culture integration were examined as the mediator of the ideologies and the group consequences. Regression analysis was used to test the mediation effect. The scores of Multicultural Ideology Scale (Berry and Kalin, 1995) were used to measure the degree of multicultural ideology. Sobel's (1982) test for mediation indicated that the mediation effect from *Multiculturalism ideology* to *Attitudes towards cultural integration* and then to *Group performance* ($z = 2.15, p < .05$), *Intercultural interaction* ($z = 2.75, p < .01$), *Intercultural group climate* ($z = 4.068, p < .001$) were all significant. That is, the attitudes toward cultural integration can fully mediate the relationship between interethnic ideologies and group consequences.

6. Discussion

In the present study, we examined the influence of three interethnic ideologies- multiculturalism, color-blindness, and assimilation on attitude towards culture integration and team work consequences such as group performance, intragroup relationship, intercultural interaction, and intercultural group climate. Besides the above ideology conditions, we also designed a control group to assess the effects of different ideologies, making the comparison more convincingly. Consistent with predictions, we found that exposure to a multiculturalism ideology would lead to a better group performance and intercultural interactions than adopting either a color-blind ideology or an assimilation perspective. The hypotheses concerning to intragroup relationship and intercultural group climate were not supported. We also found the mediation effect of people's attitude toward culture integration on the relationship between interethnic ideologies and group consequences. Therefore, the findings consistent with the vast majority research of cultural integration that multiculturalism generate more positive consequences for work groups than color-blindness and assimilation ideology.

However, there are some limitations should be taken into consideration. The first limitation comes from the self-report measurement, which lowers the reliability of the experiment. For example, if we use both activity outcomes and scale items as the measurement of group performance, the result will be added more credits. The second limitation is the use of students sample. Three demographic variables (level of education, gender, and age) have been found to affect the support level of multiculturalism (Van de Vijver et al., 2008). However, the participants' education background and

age are at the same level, so we can not test the differences of the demographic variables. Also, more than 85% of the participants are Chinese, we can not compare the majority group and minority group for difference.

Future study could take other related variables into consideration (e.g., gender, age, nationality), and look into the interaction effect of these variables and interethnic ideology (e.g., gender x ideology ; age x ideology ; ethnic group x ideology ; or even gender x ethnic group x ideology). The next empirical research may involve the variety sample of participants' age, ethnic group, and education background, as they are important factors influencing team integration suggested by literatures.

In conclusion, there is a great need of more research on mechanisms and path of various ideologies functioning regarding culture issue in organizations, and the conditions under which the ideologies impact people's behavior better.

7. Implications

This study contributes to addressing the ambiguity on the role of interethnic ideology on cultural integration, and shed lights on the inconsistent findings in culture integration. This paper argues that cultural integration can work positively on team consequences with multiculturalism ideology well spread.

The present findings also contribute to policy makers and government officials to design training program for companies with a cultural diversified employee profiles, and help to deal with racial, cultural, or ethnic issues of society. We hope that the combination of such research will yield realistic advice concerning to the effective cultural integration management practices in an increasingly diversified society.

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