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Ethnic diversity and hybridity in a Faultline Society: the case of Malaysia

Introduction

Understanding and managing diversity has drawn the attention of many scholars in the fields of relational demography, social psychology, sociology, psychology and politics, among others with different foci including race, gender, age, experience, and educational background. A certain strand of research and theory that has had considerable success in explaining and predicting diversity issues is known as social identity approach, which focuses on cognitive processes in individuals that satisfy the needs for an understandable social world and a positive self-esteem. The theoretical foundation of this approach was formed by the social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) and complimented at the individual-level of analysis by the self-categorisation theory (Turner *et al*., 1987). Later, Brewer (1991) introduced optimal distinctiveness theory to help explain the motivational factors involved in the social categorisation process, Hogg and Mullin (Hogg and Mullin, 1999) suggested the role of uncertainty reduction as a function of categorisation and group membership, and Branscombe *et al*. (1999) highlighted the role of social identity threat, in the absence of which social categorisation does not lead to out-group bias.

The activation of a possible social categorisation over another, or its salience, is based on the relative accessibility of that category, its comparative fit, and its normative fit (Turner *et al*., 1987, Turner *et al*., 1994). In other words, a social category should be cognitively available and contextually meaningful for the categorisation to take place. Moreover, Brewer (1991) suggests that two different identifications cannot be salient at the same time. The faultline model posits that if a number of social categories overlap and align together, the result would be increased salience of the resulting categorisation (Lau and Murnighan, 1998). The faultline model, which is supported by a number of theoretical and empirical studies (Thatcher *et al*., 2003, Bezrukova *et al*., 2012, Thatcher and Patel, 2012), has two major implications. Firstly, it points to the importance of considering the collective effects of diversity aspects. Secondly, it highlights the scenarios with a medium level of diversity and a small number of distinct social categories as potentially the most problematic ones.

This leads to the focus of the present study on ethnic diversity as a type of diversity that signifies multiple faultlines under certain conditions. Ethnic diversity, depending on the social context, can range in meaning and importance from a nominal, rudimentary factor to the tip of an iceberg of genetic make-up, cultural heritage, language, religion, socioeconomic status and so on. In the latter case, ethnicity is no longer a nominal factor, but a multi-layered boundary. Therefore, following the logic of the faultline model, it would be a salient aspect of categorisation and a major fissure. Although the majority of available literature have operationalised the concept of faultlines at the meso-level and in a quantitative way, the basic principle of nested differences does not impose such a restriction and can be applied at the macro level of analysis.

Diversity effects in organisations have been extensively researched in the form of organisational demography, with the focus on outcomes such as conflict, cohesion, and performance. This study looks at this issue via the lens of interactional dynamics between individuals of different ethnic background, looking for signs of crossing social and symbolic boundaries central to knowledge sharing and learning processes. The basic proposition is that multifaceted ethnic diversity in faultline societies makes ethnic identities more salient and ethnic boundaries less permeable, reducing the willingness or ability of individuals to towards interactions with ethnic groups other than their own.

The significance of this research lies in its in-depth qualitative, real-world approach that takes the contextual influences into account. Diversity research has been largely dominated by laboratory experiments (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, Tajfel *et al.*, 1971, Turner *et al.*, 1987) Espinoza and Garza (1985) and Hornsey and Hogg (2000), quantitative analyses, (McCormick and Kinloch (1986) by Tsui and O'Riley (1989) Kochan *et al.* (2003), Sacco and Schmitt (2005), and Greer *et al.* (2012) that put certain limitations on the outcomes. An important group of qualitative diversity studies have produced more in-depth analyses (Congalton *et al.* (2013), Warikoo and Deckman (2014), Braunstein *et al.* (2014), and have considered contextual factors including occupational demography, industry settings, and team interdependence (Joshi and Roh, 2009). The impact of the larger societal dynamics, however, has rarely been discussed. This research aims to partially fill this gap by exploring the effects of one such factor, societal faultlines, on group interactional dynamics. It examines ethnic diversity in the workplace in Malaysia – an archetypal example of society characterised by faultine divide.

Concepts and Framework

A social identity approach to ethnic diversity

Diversity has been studied as group-level differences in a wide variety of demographic characteristics such as gender (O'Reilly et al., 1998), race/ethnicity (Riordan and Shore, 1997) and age (Pelled, 1996) as well as non-demographic traits such as affect (Barsade et al., 2000), network ties (Beckman and Haunschild, 2002), and values (Jehn et al., 1999). Diversity can also be viewed as differences in surface-level factors such as age, gender, and race, or deep-level traits such as beliefs, attitudes, and conflict resolution styles (Milliken and Martins, 1996, Shaw and Barrett-Power, 1998). However, certain forms of identification, e.g. ethnicity and gender, sometimes called master statuses, form a more meaningful and entrenched identities that frequently override personal characteristics and role identities (Stryker, 1987). Hence this research takes ethnic diversity as the single independent factor, trying to understand its social contextual meaning together with its inherent connections to other factors.

The view of diversity as beneficial emanates from the research by Hoffman (1959) and Hoffman and Maier (1961) on small group heterogeneity suggesting that groups diverse on personality types have access to a wider range of knowledge and perspectives and found evidence in the form of the ability of the diverse groups to come up with higher quality solutions. Following this research stream, Triandis and colleagues found that dyads with diverging attitudes showed more creativity in problem solving (Triandis et al., 1965). This was the beginning of what Cox, Lobel, and McLeod (1991) call 'value in diversity hypothesis'.

The basic idea that proximity or similarity of attitudes, values and beliefs is related to interpersonal attraction is the main tenet of Newcomb's social attraction theory (Newcomb, 1961) and similarity-attraction paradigm (Byrne's (1971)). Social identity theory Tajfel (1978) extends this by introducing the concept of social identity as 'the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership' (Tajfel, 1972:292) and how, through the process of social categorisation (Turner, 1975), individuals tend to form groups on the basis of some contextually meaningful and salient factor to improve their self-esteem and preserve and reinforce a positive identity.

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The intergroup focus of social identity theory was later extended to intragroup situations by (Turner et al., 1987), explaining how social categorization results in prototype-based depersonalization of group members and thus, acting as a basis of group behaviour cognition, which serves to reduce individuals' uncertainty about the world around them and create a sense of control of their lives (Hogg and Mullin, 1999, Hogg and Terry, 2000). The salience, and activation of social identifications is based on their chronic and situational accessibility and structural and normative fit (Oakes, 1987). At any certain time, the salient identification is the most important one as it is the most likely to drive the individual's behaviour (Hogg and Terry, 2000).

While social identity perspective deals with mostly involuntary, category-based memberships, these are not the only bases of identification. Identity of individuals is also formed in part by the more individualistic spaces one occupies in the society such as one's job as an engineer or one's family relationship as a mother. These are explained under the identity theory (Stryker, 1987) that views self as a social construct of multiple identities that individuals have in relation to the society, and the feedback that they receive for satisfying (or otherwise) of those roles.

 The identity of an individual, therefore, can be said to consist of collective category identification and individual points of reference. However, Brewer (1991) suggests that two different identifications cannot be salient at the same time and therefore proposes concentric circles of social identities around a personal identity, implying the relative salience of social identities in social contexts. Moreover, Hogg et al. (2004), assert that personal attributes have much less influence on group processes than social identities.

 The salience, and activation of social identifications is based on their chronic and situational accessibility and structural and normative fit (Oakes, 1987). At any certain time, the salient identification is the most important one as it is the most likely to drive the individual's behaviour (Hogg and Terry, 2000). Not all identifications have the same chance of becoming salient though. Hale (2004) argues that some identifications become 'thicker' when they affect the individuals' life experiences in more ways, or as he reports from Sacks (1992) when they somewhat determine a person's fate. This describes categories and points of reference that are more frequently and more meaningfully invoked such as gender and ethnicity, also known as master statuses (Stryker, 1987). Even among master statuses, ethnicity (or sometimes race) is thicker than gender as it is also linked to categorical differences in income level, social status and relative number (McPherson et al.,2001); the same is not equally true for gender. Although there is general consensus that ethnicity and gender are more likely to dominate the identification of individuals for being chronically salient and normatively meaningful, identities are malleable to contextual changes, not only in salience, but also in the form they take (Hogg et al., 2004).

Following empirical evidence for both of the abovementioned stances, as well as evidence of lack of any direct relationship between diversity and group outcomes, an increasing number of scholars have suggested contextual dimension to the study of diversity effects (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998, Joshi and Roh, 2007). Branscombe et al. (1999) draw a convincing picture by positing that social identity threat and not social categorisation per se is the reason behind out-group bias and hostility. Although previous research has shown the role of preserving high collective self-esteem in this process, out-group derogation did not take place in the absence of the threat, nor did it enhance collective self-esteem in such conditions (Branscombe et al., 1999). Howard (2000) suggests that as individuals seek positive self-evaluation, they will tend to evaluate their social group positively and so react against groups that pose a threat to it, and not all the different ones.

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Being associated with a stigmatised ethnic group in an ethnically diverse society normally poses a greater threat to the identity of the individual as compared to supporting a third-league football club. The logic is that although individuals might prefer not to reveal a threatened identity of theirs in some situations, to the extent that the relevant characteristics of those identities are immutable, the categorisation and subsequent threat are inevitable. Nonetheless, recent research found out that members of lower status groups tend to justify the status quo if they perceive it as unstable and are heavily invested in their group identities, i.e. when there's hope for a more positive group identity in future (Owuamalam et al., 2017).

Relevant to social identity threat, a study by Phinney, Jacoby, and Silva (2007) based on developmental theory found that among first-year college students, a secure ethnic identity acted as a platform upon which the positive diversity attitudes were developed. Threat to one's social identity is also linked to the concept of ambivalence in the experience of cultural and ethnic diversity. According to van Leeuwen (2008), an initial experience of culturally unknown, breaks down the position of the body of accepted, embodied and unproblematic knowledge which is referred to as common sense (Geertz, 1992, Taylor, 1995), In doing so, it invokes both the feelings of fear and disgust, as well as those of meaning and delight (Van Leeuwen, 2008). After the initial process of familiarisation, these affects mostly settle into indifference. However, the way these feelings are eventually interpreted by the individuals is based on the perception of threat to one's personal or social identity or well-being. Prejudice, according to Allport (1954:281),

> *... (unless deeply rooted in the character structure of the individual) may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports (i.e., by law, custom or local atmosphere), and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups.*

This, known as the contact hypothesis, is the basis for intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew, 1998). While Allport (1954) asserted that the benefit of intergroup contact would incur only under the conditions of equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and structural support, Pettigrew (1998) suggested that these conditions are beneficial, but not necessary. In reality, these conditions are hardly present and as Tajfel and Turner (1986) mentioned, it is often the case in societies that an accepted status hierarchy exists which cannot be easily removed or replaced.

Later research, a meta-analysis of which was carried out by Pettigrew *et al*. (2011) showed that inter-group contact, with the exception of involuntary and threatening contact situations, does result in reduced prejudice, and that this effect often extends to other social out-groups as well. Pettigrew *et al*. (2011) also suggest that sufficient in-group/out-group distinction is imperative to realise the positive effects of intergroup contact. This is in line with the optimal distinctiveness model of social identity (Brewer, 1991) which explains psychological mechanism behind the social categorisation process in the form of two opposing needs of individuals for simultaneous similarity and differentiation (or inclusion and distinctiveness) such that categorisation occurs at the level of a category that is not too large to dilute the sense of inclusion, and not too small to affect the differentiation urge (Leonardelli *et al*., 2010).

 Another more recent view of diversity dynamics appears in the form of the faultlines concept that explores multiple types of diversity from the perspective of their collective rise to salience (Thatcher and Patel, 2012). Introduced by Lau and Murnighan (1998), it suggests that when

multiple diversity dimensions align, they can become more accessible and fit, and develop superimposed effects that are greater than sum of effects of individual characteristics. Moreover, the faultline model suggests an Inverted-U shape effect for diversity and conflict where low and high levels of diversity are potentially less problematic than medium diversity settings as moderate levels of diversity provide the best opportunity of faultline forming. This is conceptually similar to the argument by Deschamps (1977) who found that the opposite pattern, cross-categorisation, weakens the salience of categorisations.

Faultlines has been so far mostly measured by their strength and operationalised at the meso-level (Thatcher and Patel, 2012), but the concept of nested or cross-cut differences does not impose such a restriction. Ethnic diversity, depending on the social context, can range in meaning and importance from a nominal, rudimentary factor to tip of an iceberg of genetic make-up, cultural heritage, language, religion, and socioeconomic status, to name a few possibilities. This research, then, proposes that ethnic diversity in ethnically segregated societies can be seen as representative of multiple divides that form a faultline, making ethnicity chronically salient and the basis of automatic categorisation, the effects of which would trickle down to the organisational units.

The Study Context: Malaysia as a Faultline society

To study the interplay of macro- and micro-level factors in organisational settings, the Malaysian and in particular, Peninsular Malaysian society provides a suitable environment in the way of clear ethnic boundaries and the overlap winth religious, cultural, historical, and socioeconomic ones. Owing to its location at the crossroads of India, Arabia, and the Far East, the region has historically had a diverse population, with the first Chinese settlers going back to the Ming dynasty (Hall, 2006). While the creolised ethnic identities were not uncommon in the Malayan peninsula (Lee, 2013, Ansaldo et al., 2007), the accelerated rate of immigration in colonial times and the segregatory economic, social, political, and educational policies made widescale integration of immigrant impossible (Worden, 2001, Khoo, 2009, Abraham, 2004).

With the emergence of a classic example of a plural society, the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia, Indians, Malays, and the Chinese, lived largely separate lives (Furnivall, 1956). The setting of rural agrarian Malays, plantation Indians, and urban/mining Chinese also led to a level of uneven wealth distribution that not only was not remedied, but even intended in order to blur the class lines in the Malayan society and shift the rifts into ethnic divisions (Abraham, 2004). Later on, although this strategy, according to Nonini (2008), was neatly replicated after independence by the ruling alliance, led to ethnic riots of May 1969 which effectively ended the consociational agreement that brought the federation together as an independent country (Tan, 2001).

This was followed by the New Economic Policy, an affirmative action program aiming to eradicate poverty and to eliminate the association of ethnicity with economic function and status (Sriskandarajah, 2005, Wydick, 2008) which gave preference to Malays (and some other ethnic groups in Malaysia classed as natives) vis-à-vis immigrant communities (mainly the Chinese and Indians) in public finance, education, and employment (Lee, 2012). While this policy and the subsequent National Development Policy and National Vision Policy were immensely successful in reducing poverty and illiteracy in the country (Cheong et al., 2009, Chakravarty and Roslan, 2005), they also meant that the Malaysian state can no longer be seen in Weberian terms: a neutral arbitrator among various (ethnic) groups (Haque, 2003). They

also made ethnicity more meaningful by linking it directly to a person's experiences and opportunities in life, and separating citizens based on their rights and privileges. This way, the majority Malays and the minority Chinese (over 24% of the population) and Indians (over 7% of the population) do not see each other on a neutral and equal basis, leading to low levels of inter-ethnic trust and persistence of negative social stereotypes (Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research, 2011).

Apart from Malaysia, South Africa (Dixon and Durrheim, 2003), Fiji, and India (Eriksen, 2001) can be considered ethnically-segregated faultline societies. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there has not been any in-depth qualitative research in social identity stream published which focus on these societies. With the exception of a number of studies in Turkey, Israel, Taiwan, and China, qualitative diversity research diversity research has been limited to majority-white social settings, mainly in Western European or Northern American contexts which are socially significantly different from Eastern societies. Malaysian context is significant as not only it signifies ethnic faultlines, it also provides a different balance of political and economic power with respect to ethnic groups. Unlike Western societies, political and economic power in Malaysia are not concentrated in the same ethnic group and this has important implications for the identity of these ethnic groups. It's noteworthy, however, the following the May 2018 general election in Malaysia which led to significant shifts voting patterns across ethnic groups and change of the ruling party the author would expect meaningful changes to the ethnic relations in the long run.

The Empirical Study

The data was collected using semi-structured one-to-one interviews with 51 individuals in private healthcare settings in Malaysia and analysed using theory-informed thematic analysis of the scripts. The interviewees included nurses, midwives, unit managers, healthcare assistants, physiotherapists, and the final-year students of nursing/physiotherapy/pharmacy. In line with Phinney's (1992) advise to not mistake ethnic identity for ethnicity, interviewees were asked about their ethnic identifications in the form of an open-ended question, which also included their ethnic lineage, how they felt about it, and what it meant to them. They were also asked about their views and feeling about other ethnic groups, before the interview proceeded to details of the patterns of their interactions will colleagues at work. Included in the background questions were also where they were born/raised and the types of education that they had received, this was linked to the ethnic diversity of the locality based on census data and the type of schooling (national/vernacular) as evidence of early inter-ethnic contact.

The theory-informed thematic analysis of the results revealed the resilience of social categories but not their rigidity. A large number of interviewees expressed hybrid ethnic identities, which is relatively unexpected considering the low levels of inter-ethnic marriage in Malaysia and that any individual is assigned an official ethnicity (and a hybrid ethnicity is not recognised). Considering the social make-up of ethnic identities, a measure of hybridity was constructed as one recognising parents of different backgrounds as well as religious affiliations going beyond the social norms of Muslim Malay/Hindu or Sikh Indian/Buddhist-Taoist Chinese. A certain number of ethnic groups are also considered natives, a status which brings along certain benefits and privileges. In these cases, mentioning a parent or grandparent of non-Malaysian origin also means that the individual does not totally embrace the idea of being native, resulting in a level of identity hybridity.

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Overall, the concept of hybridity in this research seeks to take into account the psychological means that individuals have to help them cross social ethnic boundaries as a result of their ethnic, religious, and lineage backgrounds. To have a manageable and consistent measure of hybridity, this measure is defined as a binary variable here, taking values 'yes' for any clear sign of hybrid identity and 'no' in the absence of one. The prevalence of hybrid identities is partially explained by the extended optimal distinctiveness model that proposes an individual drive for an optimal point between uniqueness and similarity. This effect was seen in the largest ethnic group, Malays, which is not only inherently diverse, but also too big to provide optimal distinctiveness.

The results also led to the emergence of the three categories of individuals characterised by significant differences among their diversity attitudes and behaviours. These categories are 'resistant' which view diversity as a threat, 'tolerant' who display ambivalent orientations, and 'transcendent' who view diversity as an opportunity. The presence of the three categories suggests that social identity and faultline theories on their own are inadequate for explaining the significant variation in the diversity attitudes and behaviours at the individual level. Other theoretical perspectives such as optimal distinctiveness theory, social identity complexity, hybridity and contact theories are needed for understanding the sources of variation and fluidity. It was also found that based on their population proportions and ethnic identity make-up, different ethnic groups may take different routes to each attitudinal category. The numerical representation of the ethnic groups at work units, in turn, influenced the coping mechanisms applied by the individuals. These include sub-grouping based on secondary criteria for the majority ethnic group members, to out-grouping for the relative minority group, and assimilation or withdrawal for the absolute minority ethnic group members.

Resistance and Transcendence

As the two opposite sides of the attitudinal spectrum, the resistant and the transcended individuals showed opposite attitudes towards ethnic groups other than theirs. The resistant category was the smallest of the three categories, comprising 6 individuals out of a total sample size of 51. Resistant individuals exhibited a positive view of their respective ethnic groups, rarely being able to find anything negative about it. However, they did not extend the same feeling to the other ethnic groups. In a narrative that reflected societal stereotypes and social, economic, and historical grievances, they branded other ethnic groups as less capable, less intelligent, less moral, less clean or less entitled, to mention a few. In other words, they exhibited clear outgroup denigration.

The attitude towards diversity in these individuals corresponds to one emanating from viewing diversity as a threat to themselves; be it economic threat, cultural threat, or spiritual threat. They were pragmatic enough to be able to work together, as most Malaysians are perfectly capable of, but consciously kept informal interaction and socialisation to a minimum. For this category, the networks of informal interactional networks were almost uniformly made of individuals from their own ethnic background, although there were a few exceptions to this rule as will be explained. This category was limited to the interviewees from Chinese and Malay ethnic backgrounds, with resistance towards diversity in interactions appearing to have different roots among Malays and Chinese. To the Chinese, it was connected to a feeling of superiority combined with a sense of unfair treatment. To the Malays, it was a result of scarce early inter-ethnic socialisation and worries of crossing religious boundaries.

As there were no individuals of Indian ethnic background in this category, a comparative analysis with that ethnic group is not possible. However, previous research has found that Indian university students have higher degrees of multicultural awareness and flexibility (Tey *et al*., 2009) and also that ethnic Indians exhibited the highest levels of national identity in Malaysia (Brown, 2010). This can be justified both in numerical terms as the possibility of limiting oneself to intra-ethnic relations, and in social psychological terms considering the lower status of Indians in Malaysian society and psychological benefits of embracing the overarching national identity for them. Overall, one can speculate that Malaysian Indians are less likely to experience the set of conditions that could potentially drive individuals to exhibit a resistant orientation and therefore less likely to be resistant.

Interactional orientations of individuals in this category means that presence of their ethnic peers in their work/study unit is of paramount importance to their social lives in the unit. In other words, the chances of socialisation for resistant individuals is determined by the possibility of finding someone of the same ethnic background at the same unit or one nearby.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, the transcendent category of individuals exhibit active inter-ethnic relationships. Some see ethnic differences as opportunities to socialise and learn from each other, others see individuals as individuals and not as representatives of their ethnic groups. In all cases, they have managed to cross, or transcend, the social boundaries prevalent in a plural society. This category of 10 interviewees consists of 5 Malays, 3 Indians, and 2 Chinese. The important factors in transcendent attitudes are directly linked to the factors discussed so far for the other two categories. Moreover, although there are differences in these factors for each ethnic group discussed, the commonalities build a meaningful theme and enable the category to be discussed as one.

Firstly, all but one of the transcendent interviewees are brought up in cities and towns with high levels of ethnic diversity, with calculated diversity indices between 0.649 and 0.823. Moreover, all of them have been to either national type primary and secondary schools, or other types of schools with an ethnically diverse attendance (such as convent schools or Chinese schools in Eastern Malaysia). This has provided them with early chances of interethnic understanding and socialisation that equips these individuals with necessary skills to appreciate differences and celebrate diversity.

Secondly, while the individuals in this group exhibit strong ethnic identities, their personal characteristics seem to moderate and weaken certain parts of those identities that are less compatible with welcoming diversity. Consequently, the patterns of social interactions are qualitatively different for individuals from the transcendent category. Their attitudes towards others are considerably more liberal and the issues that were barriers for others seem to lose their importance.

With a few exceptions, the strategies applied are similar in nature to the ones seen in tolerant cases. It is the ease with which the issues are negotiated that makes a difference. For example, when scanning the interview scripts for the transcendent interviewees, the words 'pork' and 'halal' are much scarcer than the other two categories. These individuals seem to have found ways to turn the burden of commensality into a way of life. These ways range from all the parties involved eating what everyone else can to everyone having what they like and nobody getting offended.

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Hybridity and Tolerance

This is the largest attitudinal category, comprising 35 of 51 interviewees. It also represents the pragmatic middle ground. Not surprisingly, this category is the one with the most variety of individual backgrounds and views. Some tolerated diversity because they had to in order to be able to work in their environment; being pragmatic in other words. Some others were ambivalent about diversity, choosing different company in different activities. Moreover, nearly half of this category were individuals with a degree of hybridity. While most of interviewees in this category found positive and negative aspects to associate with ethnic groups, for the most part they neither resisted nor cherished diversity; they tolerated it.

This is the pragmatic position on which Malaysia was founded and it should come as no surprise that most of the interviewees, especially the senior ones, fell into this category. While compared to the resistant individuals, the tolerant ones generally have more interaction with persons of different ethnic backgrounds, these interactions generally remain at the surface level unless the passage of considerable time manages to forge meaningful relationships. Due to the variety of factors involved in tolerant attitudes, this section is organised into four sub-sections. Firstly, as 16 of 35 individuals in the tolerant category had hybrid ethnic identities, the tolerant attitudes explored in conjunction with the issue of hybridity.

Then the concept of ambivalence as simultaneously preferring an ethnic group for certain reasons and avoiding it for some other reasons is discussed in the context of tolerant attitudes. This is followed by a discussion on the temporal effects on shaping tolerant attitudes as some individuals develop the flexibilities needed for amicable relations in diverse environments or just to get along with others. Finally, the perception of unfair treatment is shown to be related to a kind of tolerant attitude that is based on common grievances among the Chinese and Indians. Perceptions of systemic injustice to 'immigrant' communities help bring them closer while takes them further apart from the Malays.

Summary and Conclusions

This study adopted a theoretical framework based on social identity perspective and the faultlines model to explore the inter-ethnic interactional dynamics in diverse organisational settings. Based on the entrenched nature of ethnic categories and their alignment with language, religion, and socioeconomic status, it was predicted that ethnic categorisations would form ethnic-based sub-groups in the organisational groups and hamper interaction across those sub-groups. The findings on the importance of these elements were mixed. Lingual differences were shown to exist but only as a minor irritation. The element of cultural differences is one that was invoked as the effects of an innocent 'cultural chemistry' on the interactional preferences of individuals. The remaining faultline factors of religion and history, in the form of accepted socioeconomic difference of ethnic groups were found to be the main elements of a comparative definition of ethnicities.

This study showed that even under faultline conditions, ethnic identities do not necessarily follow the dominant social narratives. Hybrid ethnic identities were linked to the tolerant diversity attitudes in what can be seen as permeability of social boundaries. By considering the possibility of ambivalence in diversity views, this study moves the discussion of intergroup attitudes from a binary positive-negative ethnic narrative such as that adopted by Phinney *et al*. (2007) to a spectrum of attitudes with temporal and situational connotations.

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Findings a diverse range of diversity attitudes and hybrid identities where it was not expected also questions efficacy of clear-cut notions of ethnicity and ethnic identity as prevalent in mainstream social identity research and political discourse. In the light of these findings, it seems imperative to examine the possible inclusion of ethnic myths and the related construct in studying ethnic diversity in organisational settings. In conclusion, by taking a faultline view on ethnic diversity in Malaysia, this research offers a different and in-depth, albeit limited look into the identity dynamics of a segregated Asian society. The results propose a more nuanced view on diversity attitudes from positive/negative dichotomy to transcendent/tolerant/resistant spectrum, which allows for neutrality, ambivalence, indifference, and hybridity.

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