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## **Evaluations of cultural identity in the personal narratives of a group of Tertiary students of Italian ancestry in Australia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper examines the cultural identity of a group of tertiary students of Italian ancestry in Australia through an analysis of their past personal narratives. It is argued that such narratives are privileged sites for the investigation of cultural identity defined as a form of conscious, reflexive and evaluative self-understanding pertaining to that facet of the self which knowingly commits itself to the shared values and practices of a particular cultural group (Gone, Miller & Rappaport 1999). In their personal narratives, the participants comment on their past and present experiences with respect to their Italian culture maintenance efforts and their attitudes toward Italian cultural values. The study follows in the humanistic sociological tradition, which seeks to understand the relationship between structure and agency through an analysis of both the activation of cultural values and their evaluation by active and reflective social agents. Four cultural identity orientations are proposed resulting from the analysis of the narratives: Secure Bicultural, Ideational Monocultural, Insecure Bicultural and Secure (Assimilated) Monocultural. The cultural evaluations expressed through the narratives point to the unstable and dynamic nature of identity construction and negotiation, which varies over time and place. It is evident that certain themes such as family values, cultural practices, social categorisation, stereotyping of physical characteristics and intergroup rivalry cut across the narratives of all four identity orientations. The differences in self-identification between the sub-groups appear to be the result of the process of subjective interpretation through which individual participants rationalise their life choices. Past personal narratives, more than other forms of data gathering, provide a rich insight into the reflexive and evaluative self-understanding of cultural identity.

### **Introduction**

Early American sociological and social psychological studies focussing on the acculturation of European migrants generally assumed that to deal with bicultural

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pressures, these immigrants either had to reject the dominant culture and adhere to the ethnic culture, or else assimilate into mainstream society and reject their ethnic culture (e.g. Thomas & Znaniecki [1918] 1958; Child 1943). According to Phinney (1997:4), this view was based on a linear or bipolar model, in which the two cultures were seen as occupying positions at opposite ends of a single continuum whereby the more mainstream or acculturated group members were, the less they could retain their ethnic culture, and vice versa.

A second model of cultural identity, as described by Phinney (1990:501), proposes that acculturation is a two-dimensional process, in which both the relationship with the traditional or ethnic culture and the relationship with the dominant culture must be considered. According to this view, minority group members can have either strong or weak identifications with both their own or mainstream cultures. In such cases a strong ethnic identity does not necessarily imply a weak relationship or low involvement with the dominant culture. Indeed, strong identifications with both groups are indicative of integration or biculturalism, whereas identification with neither group suggests marginality. While an exclusive identification with the majority culture indicates assimilation, identification with only the ethnic group indicates separation. Table 1 reports the commonly used terms associated with strong and weak identifications with either majority or ethnic minority cultures (Phinney 1990:501).

**Table 1: Terms Associated with Cultural Identification**

Identification with majority group	Identification with ethnic group	
	Strong	Weak
Strong	Acculturated Integrated Bicultural	Assimilated
Weak	Ethnically identified Ethnically embedded Separated/Dissociated	Marginal

The present study applied the cultural identity framework developed in a previous study (Chiro 2003) by classifying the personal narratives of a group of tertiary students of Italian ancestry in Australia according to a two-dimensional model, which correlates the activation of Italian language and culture by the participants with the personal evaluations they expressed towards such systems. As in other studies, the term *evaluation* is understood to indicate a variety of personal dispositions or attitudes toward specific cultural values. Evaluations can range through personal positive, general positive, indifferent and negative attitudes.<sup>1</sup> A *personal positive* evaluation is discerned among individuals who recognise the importance of a cultural value, such as language, for the continuity of group cultural systems, and make the effort to activate that value in their daily lives. Instead, a *general positive* evaluation is apparent in cases where individuals profess the centrality of a particular cultural value, but are not themselves prepared to activate the value. As shown in Table 2, the two dimensions of activation and evaluation produce

<sup>1</sup> See Chiro 2007; Chiro & Smolicz 1997; Smolicz & Secombe 1989; Smolicz, Hudson & Secombe 1998; Smolicz, Lee, Murugaian & Secombe 1990.

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four cultural identity types: two bicultural (heterogenous) systems and two monocultural (homogenous) systems.

**Table 2: Model of personal cultural identity based on the activation and evaluation of minority cultural values**

Personal cultural identity	Activation	Evaluation
I—Secure Bicultural	+	+
II—Ideational Monocultural	–	+
III—Insecure Bicultural	+	–
IV—Secure (Assimilated) Monocultural	–	–

Participants who activate Italian language and culture systems and express positive ideological attitudes towards them generally identify strongly with their Italian heritage. In the present study they have been defined as *Secure Biculturals* (type I). Conversely, participants who do not activate Italian language and cultural systems to any great extent but express generally positive attitudes towards the maintenance of Italian cultural heritage in Australia have been defined as *Ideational Monoculturals* (type II). Although in the present circumstances this group does not see the advantage of activating Italian cultural systems, their favourable evaluations imply that at some future time ethnic cultural systems may be activated or reactivated. As such, they represent a potential reservoir for the transmission of Italian language and culture.

Participants who are able to activate Italian language and cultural systems but express negative attitudes towards them have been termed *Insecure Biculturals* (type III). This type is considered out of line with core value theory which assumes that individuals who value the culture highly will be more likely to activate ethnic cultural systems (Smolicz & Secombe 1989). This apparently contradictory position might be seen as a transitional phase and such participants may cease to activate Italian language and culture when they no longer feel the need to do so. This occurs either when they move away from their parental home or their parents and older relatives pass away. Lastly, the participants who have not developed Italian language and cultural systems to any great extent and generally do not see any reason to do so have been termed *Secure (Assimilated) Monoculturals* (type IV). Their negative evaluations indicate low levels of identification with their cultural heritage. As such, they would appear to be the least likely to transmit Italian cultural systems to the next generation.

### **Conceptual Framework and Approach**

From the perspective of humanistic sociology the culture of a given group is conceptualised in terms of the shared meanings or *group* systems of cultural values (Znaniecki 1968, 1998; Smolicz & Secombe 1981; Smolicz 1999). A collective identity develops when group members are aware that they share similar attitudes towards certain group cultural values. Such values make up the group's *ideological system*, which regulates the principles of judgment and the ways of acting that group members are supposed to accept and abide by. Group members are able to construct *personal ideological systems* from the attitudes by which they evaluate and assign meaning to new and old cultural and social values. The ideological orientation toward

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group cultural systems, such as language, religion or family, is indicative of the extent to which individuals identify with the group's cultural heritage.

In a culturally plural society such as Australia, two or more corresponding sets of group values for each aspect of culture (language, ideology, religion, family, etc.) are typically available to individuals born into a minority ethnic culture, as well as to those of the dominant or Anglo-Australian cultural group who enter into some form of social relationship with members of other ethnic groups (Smolicz 1999:129). In theory, all individuals regardless of background are able to draw upon a variety of cultural stocks in constructing their personal cultural systems. However, the ideological system of each ethnic group almost invariably includes judgments about the value of its culture as a distinctive entity, and hence about the extent and nature of cultural and social interaction that should take place between itself and various other groups. In some cases such beliefs are elevated to the status of core values and act as symbols of the group identity. Furthermore, most people are restricted in the construction of personal cultural systems by their social position, educational opportunities and the extent and quality of their access to the cultural systems of both minority and majority cultural groups.

A group's resilience in maintaining its unique identity generally depends on the degree to which its heritage interacts with new cultural inputs. Most importantly, the outcome of such interaction often depends on the extent of overlap and mutual compatibility between the cultural values emanating from the minority and majority groups involved (Smolicz 1992). It is generally assumed that group cultural systems contain a hierarchy of values graded by importance within which it is possible to find a nucleus of values that is indispensable to the integrity, authenticity and continuity of the cultural system. These are the *core values* around which the social and identificational systems of the group are organised. Once a cultural value acquires the status of a core, it assumes an ideological significance for group members and acts as an identifying value that is symbolic of the group and its membership (Smolicz 1992:279). It is through core values that social groups come to be identified as distinctive cultural communities (Smolicz 1992, 1993; Smolicz & Secombe 1985, 1986, 1989).

The approach adopted in this paper is based on the principles of humanistic sociology (Znaniecki 1968, 1969; Smolicz & Secombe 1981; Smolicz 1999:283-308), which assumes that cultural and social phenomena can only be fully understood if they are studied from the point of view of the participants. The methodology most conducive to humanistic sociology involves the collection and analysis of memoirs or personal narratives, which allow individuals free expression of their ideas, thoughts, feelings and aspirations, reflecting upon their situation and actions as they perceive them. It is argued that such narratives are privileged sites for the investigation of cultural identity defined as a form of conscious, reflexive and evaluative self-understanding pertaining to that facet of the self which knowingly commits itself to the shared values and practices of a particular cultural group (Gone, Miller & Rappaport 1999).

A total of 195 undergraduate university students of Italian ancestry participated in the study by completing a questionnaire about their activation of Italian language and cultural systems while growing up in Australia. Participants were also asked to write personal narratives about their experiences at home, school and in other social contexts with reference to those aspects of their home culture that they considered indispensable (core) to its continuing vitality in Australia. In particular, they were asked to reflect on their cultural experiences growing up, their activation of

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minority and majority cultural systems (language, family, religion, primary personal relationships) and their cultural identity. A total of 106 written narratives were then classified according to the categories of cultural identity types described above. The personal narratives are reproduced verbatim and feature non-standard English spelling and structures.

### Results

#### Type I – Secure Bicultural Identities

A total of 22 participants were classified *Secure Bicultural Identities*. Structure and agency coincide in this group of participants who are both able to maintain high levels of activation of Italian-Australian cultural systems and also evaluate positively their heritage cultural values. Many participants in this group who identified with both Italian and Australian culture demonstrated that it is possible to achieve a balanced cultural identity and be comfortable alternating between both. Number 74, for example, highlights the reality experienced by many participants of the present study who have grown up in family environments dominated by Italian cultural systems:

I consider myself to be of this cultural identity because I was born in Australia and have so far lived my life in Australia, but I have Italian parents and have been brought up in an Italian atmosphere (environment) – speaking, reading, writing Italian etc. Therefore, I regard myself as being Italian and Australian.

A number of participants reported they were brought up as if they had been living in Italy (“I consider myself Italian because although I live here my parents have brought me up as if I were in Italy”). Others nominated upbringing as key factors in their self identification (“I was born in Australia and Australia will always be my birthplace and home, but I believe myself to be more Italian than Australian. This is due to my upbringing and also due to my own feelings. I am proud to be Italian”). For one *Secure Bicultural* participant being Australian is merely a matter of citizenship:

I consider myself as Italian mainly as it is my cultural background which, no matter how much we would like to change it is part of us, which we may not want to hide. If I say I am an Italo-Australian it is like saying that I do not accept my background and wish to be more Australian. Being Australian is only a matter of citizenship!

In the case of participant no. 50, who “used to be ashamed of her Italian parents”, identification with her Italian cultural background emerged during her visit to Italy:

I used to consider myself to be somewhere between mainly Italian and Italian-Australian, but after a few weeks in Italy, I have no doubt that I am Italian only and much to my delight, people I meet there (in Italy) think the same thing.

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Similarly participant 23 provides an example of the awareness amongst the participants of the importance of either in-group and out-group recognition or categorisation in the shaping of personal cultural identity:

While I am aware of how I have been shaped by both the Australian and Italian cultures, people in Australia are surprised to learn of my Italian background and people in Italy (when I visited Italy) commented on how well I spoke their language, as if I was “one of them”. This illustrates I believe that my cultural identity is best described as Italian-Australian.

Others stressed the importance of physical appearance as a factor influencing their ethnic identification (“If asked my nationality, I immediately say Italian even though I was born here and have never been to Italy. If I said Australian, people wouldn’t believe me because of my features and characteristics”). A number of *Secure Bicultural Identities* also recognise that Australia is their country of birth and suggest that their identification with Italian culture does not diminish their feelings of pride or even patriotism towards Australia:

Having Italian parents and having many friends and relatives in Italy whom I see often, I consider myself to be Italian, although as I have lived in Australia for most of my life, I still feel patriotic towards Australia.

Several *Secure Bicultural Identities* described their cultural identity as a source of conflict, suggesting that their cultural identification is linked, at least in part, to the cultural differences and ethnic rivalry that they experienced growing up in Australia (nos. 5, 69, 96 and 130). One participant claimed she is appreciative “of what Australia has to offer” but cites out-group categorisation as a possible factor in her Italian self-identification. Similarly, participant no. 21 attributes her identification with Italian culture to her experiences of prejudicial treatment:

I believe Australians generally consider me to be Italian only because of my past experiences with Australians. Many Australians are bitter at Italians because they feel we have ‘invaded’ their land. I have also encountered many prejudices.

Participant no. 14 also suggested the source of this conflict stems from prejudiced attitudes within the dominant Anglo-Australian community:

People in Italy think we come from America – they don’t have much concept where Australia is (not all). I think there are a lot of Australians who are still prejudiced and can’t understand that we can have both ‘cultures’!

Number 19 reported that she asserts her Italian identity when she finds herself in the presence of an all Anglo-Australian group (“Aha! This is the identity crisis we suffer. However, personally, I’ve found myself asserting my ‘Italianness’ when in the presence of an all Australian group!”).

## Type II – Ideational Monocultural Identities

The 18 participants classified as *Ideational Monocultural Identities* demonstrated positive ideological orientations toward Italian cultural values even though their levels of activation of Italian cultural systems were lower than their Type I counterparts. One may suppose that structural factors (e.g. distance or death of grandparents of Italian ethnicity, lack of supporting family values, Anglo-centric friendship groups and so on) have intervened to limit the opportunities that this group of participants has to put into practice their positive dispositions to Italian-Australian cultural systems. This was the smallest number of participants assigned to any of the four identity categories. Many participants in this group provided essentially matter-of-fact comments in support of their assessment (“Because my parents are Italian born, people assume I am Italian in that respect, however I hold many beliefs that are Australian also”). As in several Type I narratives, a number of participants (nos. 7, 10, 61, 77, 144, 148 and 170) described the sense of pride in their Italian cultural background (“I feel very strongly about what people think I am because I am proud to be Italian-Australian). Other participants in this group, however, pointed to the importance of both in-group and out-group categorisations and the need to balance the allegiance towards one’s birthplace with one’s origins in determining personal identity (“Difficult – different people see you as different identities. Although I’m Australian, I’m very aware of my Italian heritage”).

Other narratives reflected the fact that categorisations used to identify cultural allegiance can be flexible when applied to individual situations. For example, participants no. 27 and 131 described situations that appear to gravitate towards a greater activation and identification with Italian culture, while nos. 154, 179 and 184 associated more closely with Australian culture. The comment supplied by participant no. 27, who is of ‘mixed’ ethnic ancestry, shows the unpredictability of personal interactions within family units wherein the Anglo-Australian mother has made the effort to adapt to the family’s Italian cultural background (“Although my mother is Australian, I was brought up with Italian ways. I have more Italian relatives which we see all the time. My mother is very ITALIANISED”). Such individualism is also highlighted by participant no. 45 who, having an Italian father and a Polish mother, simply considers herself “European”. Another such case of mixed ancestry was presented by no. 167, who suggested: “I have a strong identity with Ireland and Italy. I don’t consider myself at all Australian (I don’t intend that to be derogatory)”.

## Type III – Insecure Bicultural Identities

A total of 36 participants were classified *Insecure Bicultural Identities* because they evaluated Italian cultural values lower than their *Secure Bicultural* and *Ideational Monocultural* counterparts, even though they compared favourably in terms of the activation of Italian cultural systems. One may suppose that such identity types have not encountered structural impediments to their activation of Italian-Australian cultural systems but rather wish that they were not required to do so. The strength of their negative and at times emotional accounts is indicative of deep-seated concerns with their activation of Italian cultural systems.

The following group of participants expressed a sense of alienation, feeling like ‘outsiders’ within both the Italian and Australian communities. Such an interpretation could well arise from the negative categorisation or lack of recognition

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from either the 'in' cultural group or the 'out' cultural group. Number 16 described herself as belonging to a lost generation:

Until I went to Italy I assumed I was Italian because I had been considered one since I was a child. In Italy I found that I did not fit in and that Australians would 'fit in' better. We are a lost generation. Lost in the past.

Number 17 recalled the stereotypical labels that Italians and Australians typically associate with the Italian-Australian group ("In Italy they refer to me as a kangaroo. Here in Australia sometimes a "wog"."), whereas no. 18 described the "hurt" and no. 28 the sense of being like a "misfit" in both the Australian and Italian groups. Yet others reported feeling conflicted by the interacting systems of cultural values and traditions:

I am still going through an identity crisis and probably never get over it. Australians here call me Italian, and Italians in Italy call me Australian – mainly through their own ignorance – because they are unaware how we have continued the traditions. I consider myself mainly Italian – I speak, think, eat, dress, study, listen, pray Italian – but obviously I also have Australian influences.

Other *Insecure Bicultural Identities* participants stressed the processes of in-group and out-group categorisations that are also described by the Type I group. In Australia, most of these participants perceive that they are considered Italian simply because of general personal attributes which leads to out-group categorisations ("Whether I consider myself to be Italian-Australian, in general, most people still regard you as Italian first."). Other circumstances leading to out-group categorisations included: cohesion of the Italian community ("I believe Australians generally consider me to be mainly Italian (and sometimes Italian only) as many believe the Italian community does not integrate with the Anglo-Australian community (nor other communities) easily") and Italian specific cultural values ("Australians generally think of me as part Australian and part Italian but my friends think of me as the typical Italian girl").

Conversely, the positive reinforcement of cultural identity that Type I participants experienced on visits to Italy was not replicated in the narratives of *Insecure Bicultural Identities*. Indeed, whether seriously or in jest, their Italian friends and relatives indiscriminately labelled them as Americans (nos. 90, 93, 168, 172). Of these, only participant no. 93 describes positive reinforcement of cultural identity on trips to the Veneto region because she is proficient in the Veneto dialect.

A number of participants also proposed various personal attributes as the source of their evaluation of cultural identity. As with previous groups of participants, the present group also cited physical appearance, which can either reinforce social categorisations of "Italianness" ("My physical appearance and attitudes and beliefs reflect (I believe) me to be more of a traditional, old fashioned Italian, unlike my contemporary Italian cousins living in Italy") or attenuate such categorisations ("I don't look like an Italian and I don't really act like the so-called "Italian", therefore many Australians generally consider me to be mainly Australian"). Another participant points to her physical appearance as a source of cultural identity confusion ("Because I inherited my mother's Anglo looks most people do not perceive me as

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being of Italian origin, however they are confused by my last name”). Other personal attributes described by *Insecure Bicultural Identities* include: Italian surname (“My Italian name is a constant link to my cultural proclivity, then it stands that Australians identify me as Italian”); birthplace (“After knowing that I was born in Australia, people would consider me to be Australian (by the way I am an Australian citizen)”); language use (“I look Italian, however, my cultural influence is mainly Australian and I do not speak Italian very well at all”).

The remaining Type III participants underscored the sense of conflict that their dual cultural identity has produced in them. This is well illustrated in the comments of participant no. 3 who described with a mixture of pride and regret the experience of a young person with Italian heritage growing up in Australian society.

Australia is my home, this was where I was born, this has been where I have lived all my life, this is the land I have grown up in and grown to love. But my parents and my Italian heritage (friends, relatives, customs, values, beliefs etc.) have given me something I couldn't find in an Anglo-Australian heritage. But by the same token, I feel I have missed out on a lot of the country I live in by being sheltered from it for too long. There are social practices (eg. pubs, parties, weddings that I still can't fit into. There is a lot about Australians that I don't understand simply because I've never had a lot to do with them (until a few years ago).

Participant no. 31 expressed her indignation both against Australian-born individuals of Italian heritage who describe themselves as Italians and those Italian-Australians who express chauvinistic or even racist attitudes towards the Anglo-Australian majority group.

I'm very critical of people my age who see themselves as “Italian only” when, in fact, they know NOTHING at all about Italy as it is today, language, history, culture. I am proud of my Italian heritage, as it plays an important part of my life and gives me an identity, but I will NOT deny the fact that I'm also Australian, since I was born and grew up here, and also that living in Australia has made me the person I am. I am happy to be both, but its difficult establishing such an identity, since Australians, who have no other background, only see the Italian in me. In Italy, people saw me only as “I' Americana” (despite its Australia not America).

Participant 113 was also critical of Italian-Australians who express racist attitudes towards the Anglo-Australian majority group (“I don't always like to be associated with some Italian groups of people. I find it distressing to see racism against Australians amongst young Italian-Australians and have no tolerance for it”). Both these participants exemplify the troubled if not sometimes traumatic position of members of this group who activate Italian-Australian cultural systems on a daily basis with family and extended family contexts but who have a low opinion of such systems and values. This type appears to contradict core value theory, which assumes that individuals who value the culture highly will be more likely to activate ethnic

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cultural systems (Smolicz & Secombe 1989). At the same time, it may also demonstrate the power of personality and personal experience, which allow certain individuals to sustain ideologically contradictory positions.

### Type IV – Secure (Assimilated) Monocultural Identities

A total of 30 participants were classified *Secure (Assimilated) Monoculturals* (Type IV) on the basis of the low activation of Italian language and cultural systems and their negative or indifferent attitudes toward Italian cultural values. Of this group, four participants (nos. 29, 67, 173 and 186) stressed that they were Australians by birthright (“It would be ridiculous to consider my cultural identity as anything else but Australian, since I was born and brought up in this country”). Participant no. 67 supported this evaluation on the basis that she has an Australian mother and, according to no. 173, this notion holds true even though she declares that she is unwilling to reject her Italian background and enjoys the company of her “Italian” friends. For no. 186, cultural identification follows her association with diverse cultural groups.

Alternatively, some participants (nos. 4, 158, 174 and 175) who consider themselves to have Australian identities also claim that they are proud of their Italian heritage (“While I am very proud of my Italian background, being born in Australia I consider myself Australian – my parents encourage this!”) Participant no. 4 focused on issues typically associated with cultural identification in ethnically plural societies, such as out-group categorisation associated with her Italian surname (“I am Australian! Even though other Australians think I’m Italian because of my surname. It’s wrong. Australians are made up of a lot of cultures. Don’t get me wrong I’m also proud of my Italian heritage”).

A number of other Type IV participants also highlighted attributes associated with their cultural categorisation as a motivating factor in their evaluation of cultural identity. For example, the significance of language as a marker of ethnicity is reinforced in the comments offered by participant no. 111 (“I was in Italy last year and whenever or wherever I opened my mouth they said ‘Americana’ or ‘Australiana’ – NEVER Italiana”). Other participants drew attention to markers such as family (no. 142), ethnic cultural practices (no. 164) and food (no. 180). Several participants (nos. 109, 110, 117, 124, 133 and 180) stressed that out-group categorisation was based principally on an assessment of their physical attributes (“In appearance, I am Italian to Italians. My friends know how I feel about being an Australian first, with an Italian background. Strangers view me at first as a possible Italian and quickly realise I am very proudly Australian”). In the case of one participant, it is her unstereotypically Italian appearance which has determined her evaluation of cultural identity (“As my parents come from the North, I do not look at all Italian, as Australians stereotype Italians as dark-haired and olive-skinned, therefore I feel very Australian and its a shock to them when they find out my parents are Italian, which I think is very funny”).

The complex of socio-psychological processes associated with cultural identification is evident in the comments of participant no. 20 who highlighted with great poignancy the personal dilemma of the individuals of minority ethnic background growing up in Australia.

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From my own experience, I can say that even second generation Italians are categorised as such and differentiated as being “different” or more specifically “Italian”. Many Australians perceive us Italians to lead extremely different, very traditional, basically very “Italian” lives, which is a completely distorted view. They do not seem to understand that yes maybe people like myself, being a second generation Italian, do have different customs, traditions etc. But that we have adapted to the Australian way of life. Just because we look Italian they conjure up these distorted ways Italians act, treating us like aliens, not for what we are. Furthermore, they do not give us the opportunity to prove to them we are ‘normal’ people. The stereotyped Italian image, whatever that may be, is too strongly implanted in their minds. When will they understand that I am not even Italian?

### Discussion

It is clear from the analysis of the narratives that the process of cultural adaptation and identification is complex and multifaceted and especially so among children and young adults growing up within immigrant families in culturally plural societies. The proposed two-dimensional typology of cultural identity based on the activation and evaluation of Italian cultural values proved useful in allowing a more nuanced assessment of the self-identification patterns displayed by the study group. Whilst all four identity groups reported experiences of cultural conflict in their adolescent years, it was the manner in which such issues were addressed that appeared to have the greatest bearing on the cultural identity of the participants. For example, the narratives written by the *Secure Biculturals* (Type I) generally conveyed a sense of resolution of identity issues associated with cultural conflict, which in retrospect had reinforced their minority ethnic identification. Whilst a number of Type I Participants expressed pride in both their Italian heritage and Anglo-Australian culture, they identified most strongly with their home culture and values.

The narratives written by *Ideational Monoculturals* (Type II) and *Secure (Assimilated) Monoculturals* (Type IV) were most similar in terms of themes addressed and their relative sense of security in their stated cultural identification. Both these groups of participants shared a low activation of Italian language and culture systems, but differed in terms of their evaluation of Italian cultural values. *Ideational Monoculturals* expressed generally positive attitudes towards Italian cultural systems and values, though they do not themselves activate Italian language systems to any great extent and usually have fewer friends of Italian ancestry. A number, however, did express pride in their Italian heritage but preferred to identify themselves as Italian-Australians. Like their ideational counterparts, *Secure (Assimilated) Monoculturals* are also secure in their stated cultural self-identification and some also expressed pride in their heritage background. Type IV participants, however, expressed generally negative evaluations in relation to their experiences of cultural conflict, prejudice and social categorisations and identified quite decidedly with Australian or Anglo-Australian culture. One Type IV participant also took issue with allegedly chauvinistic and racist attitudes expressed by members of the Italian-Australian community.

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The most conflicted group in the study proved to be the *Insecure Biculturals* (Type III) who to a greater extent than other participants highlighted their sense of cultural marginalisation. Whilst the participants in this group did not differ greatly from the *Secure Biculturals* in terms of their activation of Italian language and cultural systems, their narratives reflected an unresolved tension in relation to experiences of cultural conflict, prejudice and social categorisations. More than any other group, the *Insecure Biculturals* drew attention to the physical characteristics that distinguish Italian ethnicity in Australia and the differences that they perceived between their home culture and the culture of the dominant Anglo-Australian majority.

Most sociological typologies struggle to fully account for the diversity of social and cultural identities that bicultural individuals construct and negotiate in daily interactions according to their social roles and positions, their access or willingness to access minority and majority cultural values and their biographical experiences. This is supported by Phinney's (1997:29) study of bicultural identification among African American and Mexican American adolescents, which found that most ethnic minority adolescents in her groups combined their sense of being ethnic and American and acknowledged being bicultural, but their sense of being bicultural varied widely, depending on how they perceived the two cultures and the way they identified with each. As Phinney (1997) posits, being bicultural does not require a weakening of identification with one's ethnic culture and there are many ways of being bicultural.

The present study follows in the humanistic sociological tradition, which seeks to understand the relationship between structure and agency, the objective and the subjective, through an analysis of both the activation of cultural values and their evaluation by active and reflective social agents. The four cultural orientations resulting from the correlation of these two dimensions (*Secure Biculturals*, *Ideational Monoculturals*, *Insecure Bicultural* and *Secure (Assimilated) Monocultural*), like any typologies, are oversimplifications that attempt to capture a vastly more complex reality. This is evident where certain themes such as family values, cultural practices, social categorisation, stereotyping of physical characteristics and intergroup rivalry cut across the narratives of all four identity orientations. The differences in self-identification evident between the sub-groups are a result of the process of subjective interpretation or self-reflexivity through which individual participants rationalised their life choices. The past personal narrative, more than other forms of data gathering, provides a rich insight into the reflexive and evaluative self-understanding of cultural identity.

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