Essentialism affects the perceived compatibility of minority culture maintenance and majority culture adoption preferences

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This paper presents two cross-sectional survey studies, both conducted in Britain, which focus on how different cultural identities are managed in multicultural settings. Specifically, the studies explored the extent to which essentialism moderates the perceived compatibility of acculturation orientations, heritage culture maintenance and majority culture adoption. In study 1, participants \(N = 198\) were Somali minority members living in the UK. It was found when minority members essentialized Britishness themselves, and when they perceived that British people essentialized Britishness, they saw a desire to maintain the culture of origin and a desire adopt the majority culture as conflicting with each other. In study 2, participants \(N = 200\) were white British majority members living in the UK. Findings showed that when white British majority members essentialized Britishness, they too perceived the two acculturation preferences as being incompatible with each other. Taken together, these studies show that essentializing British identity can lead to a view that the majority and minority cultures are mutually exclusive. Implications for intergroup relations and integration into British society are discussed.

Like many other societies around the word, British society is now multicultural and diverse (Office for National Statistics, 2020). This raises questions of how members of different groups adapt to this diversity. Issues relating to immigration, integration and multiculturalism prominently feature in politics, media and public discourse in the UK (Shabi, 2019). This paper presents two studies exploring how people’s perceptions of British identity may impact their preferences for identity management of ethnic minorities within wider society. In particular, we will test whether minority and majority members’ essentialist perceptions of British identity moderates the relationship between preferences for minority heritage culture maintenance and majority culture adoption.

Acculturation preferences and the perceived (in)compatibility of culture maintenance and culture adoption

People who migrate to another country undergo a process of change and adaptation to the majority society, whilst members of the majority society also adapt to the changes in

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society as a result of migration (Redfield et al., 1936). According to the acculturation model devised by Berry (2001), two dimensions underlie four potential acculturation preferences that minority members might adopt. The two dimensions are as follows: the extent to which one desires heritage culture maintenance and the extent to which one desires to adopt the mainstream culture. Generally, a preference for integration, where preferences for both culture maintenance and adoption are high, has been shown to have the most positive outcomes for minority groups (Berry, 1974, 2001; Berry et al., 2006).

Majority members may also show particular preferences when it comes to how minority members should adapt to the majority culture (Berry, 2001; Bourhis et al., 1997). Acculturation preferences for both minority and majority groups are influenced by factors such as prejudice, ingroup bias, permeability of group boundaries and intergroup similarity (Piontkowski et al., 2000; Zick et al., 2001). Majority and minority acculturation preferences also influence each other (Brown & Zagefka, 2011; Kosic et al., 2005; Van Acker & Vanbeselaere, 2011; Zagefka et al., 2007; Zagefka et al., 2011). Moreover, how well they fit together has consequences for intergroup relations (Bourhis et al., 1997). For instance, studies have shown that discordance of acculturation attitudes can lead to perceived intergroup threat (Rohmann et al., 2008). This is important to consider, especially considering some majority groups may show misconceptions of minority members' acculturation preferences (Van Oudenhoven et al., 1998).

A host of studies have supported the idea that minority members often prefer integration into new societies, where they maintain aspects of their heritage culture whilst simultaneously adopting to the customs and traditions of mainstream society (Berry et al., 2006; Roblain et al., 2017; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Clearly, it is possible for minority members to identify with both their ethnic group and their national group (Nesdale & Mak, 2000; Phinney, 1990), and it is possible for minority members to support multiculturalism whilst identifying highly with their own ethnic group (Verkuyten, 2005). This suggests that often minority members see a compatibility between their heritage culture and the mainstream culture and may show a preference for combining both.

While minority members often prefer integration, majority members generally expect from them more mainstream culture adoption than heritage culture maintenance, and majority members may evaluate minority members less positively when perceiving that they wish to maintain their heritage culture (Van Acker & Vanbeselaere, 2011; Van Oudenhoven & Eisses, 1998; Tip et al., 2012). As well as this, research by Verkuyten (2005) in the Netherlands has shown that majority members tend to show less support for multiculturalism and more support for culture adoption (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Such findings suggest that majority members may often see the two orientations as mutually exclusive and find a combination of them unfeasible.

Despite these general patterns, minority and majority acculturation preferences vary considerably between different national contexts and ethnic groups (Brown et al., 2016). For some minority members, there is evidence that separation, that is choosing to maintain your own culture and not adopt the majority culture, is the most desired acculturation preference (Robinson, 2009). For majority members, there is some evidence that integration, indicating a preference for both culture maintenance and culture adoption, is sometimes preferred to assimilation (Maisonneuve & Teste, 2007; Zagefka et al., 2007). As well as this, research into the Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) construct, which was devised as a framework to understand variations and individual differences in the experience of biculturalism, also suggests that there are variations in the extent to which bicultural individuals perceive their mainstream and ethnic cultural identities as compatible or not (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002). Such a variation in how
people view acculturation preferences may be due to state policies, or particular ideologies that are prominent in a given society, for example assimilation in France and Germany (Brubaker, 2001), or due to the influence of particular intergroup variables, which differ across contexts and cultural groups, for example perceived discrimination (Neto, 2002). Therefore, the extent to which individuals perceive minority and mainstream cultures as compatible or not, and the factors that may influence this, warrants further investigation.

When investigating how compatible two cultures are perceived to be, one can adopt different approaches. Studies have focussed on simultaneous identification with ethnic and national groups (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2016; Nesdale & Mak, 2000), support for multiculturalism (Verkuyten, 2005) and on overall preference for integration (Van Oudenhoven & Eisses, 1998). Here, we focus on the association between the underlying acculturation dimensions, culture maintenance and culture adoption. Measuring each dimension separately and exploring their relationship is advantageous as it avoids past issues with double-barrelled items, and low internal reliability of scales (Brown & Zagefka, 2011). In addition, it allows for insight into how each dimension individually relate to, and are impacted by, other intergroup variables as well as each other.

To be clear, when studying the associations between culture maintenance and culture adoption preferences, a negative association between the two means that endorsing one implies rejecting the other, that is this speaks to a perceived incompatibility. A zero or even positive association implies that endorsing one culture does not mean that the other will be rejected. This speaks to perceived compatibility. This, then, is what we mean by studying when culture maintenance and culture adoption are seen as compatible.

Previous research suggests that culture maintenance preferences and culture adoption preferences sometimes seem to be independent of (i.e. not associated with) each other, and sometimes they seem to be negatively associated, meaning that endorsing one implies rejecting the other (see e.g. Hillekens et al., 2019; Mesquita et al., 2017; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). This variation in the relationship between preferences for minority heritage culture maintenance and majority culture adoption suggests that it may be moderated by a third variable. Here, we test the moderating effects of essentialism.

**Essentialism as a moderator of the perceived compatibility between culture maintenance and culture adoption preferences**

Essentialism has been defined as the belief that social categories are fixed and unchanging (Haslam et al., 2000; Yzerbyt et al., 1997). Holding an essentialist view of ethnic categories means buying into primordial conceptions of ethnicity as a fixed characteristic. For example, ethnic group membership has been defined by natural connections through blood ties (Geertz, 1973). Such a perspective suggests that one’s identity is an inherent, biological trait which cannot be changed. Essentialist views can be applied to cultural and ethnic groups, but also to national groups. ‘Ethnic nationalism’ posits national identity as immutable and based on shared ancestral origins, with reference to shared ‘blood’ (Connor, 1994; Smith, 1991; Zagefka, 2009). Essentializing ethnic and national categories has been linked to increased prejudice (Bastian & Haslam, 2008; Meeus et al., 2010; Pehrson, Brown & Zagefka, 2009; Pehrson, Vignoles & Brown, 2009).

Research on essentialism in the context of acculturation attitudes remains limited. However, some studies have highlighted that when majority members essentialize British identity, they are more likely to perceive threat from minority groups, and therefore seek mainstream culture adoption from minority members (Zagefka et al., 2013). Verkuyten
and Brug (2004) showed that majority members with an essentialist view of identity were less likely to support multiculturalism. On the basis of these findings, we expected that for majority members, the two cultures would be seen as incompatible if essentialism is high. Thus, we expected a preference for heritage culture maintenance to be negatively associated with a preference for majority culture adoption only if essentialism is high, but not if essentialism is low.

Furthermore, we know that minority members’ acculturation preferences are not independent of the majority society’s views (Brown & Zagefka, 2011). An interesting question relates to how minority members’ own perceptions of British identity may impact their own acculturation preferences. If minority members perceive that majority members hold an essentialist conceptualization of British identity, or if minority members themselves essentialize Britishness, this can be assumed to impact on the perceived possibility of integrating into British society. Minority members should only strive for both culture maintenance and culture adoption simultaneously if they do not hold lay beliefs that suggest that ethnic and cultural categories are mutually exclusive. Further, because minority members’ preferences are limited by what the more dominant group will condone (Zagefka et al., 2011), minority members should only strive for both culture maintenance and culture adoption if they do not believe that majority members consider these categories as mutually exclusive. Therefore, we expected that for minority members too, the perceived compatibility between the two cultures would be moderated by levels of essentialism, and this time we studied the effects of both own subscription to essentialist beliefs about British identity, and the perceived essentialist beliefs of British majority members. We expected a preference for heritage culture maintenance to be negatively associated with a preference for majority culture adoption only if essentialism is high, but not if essentialism is low.

Our study presents a unique contribution to the existing literature, as it is the first study to directly address the associations between acculturation preferences regarding both cultures for both minority and majority groups and explore how this is impacted by essentialist definitions of British identity. We follow research by Pehrson, Brown and Zagefka (2009) and Zagefka et al. (2013) by exploring the biological element of essentialism (Keller, 2005), where group membership is defined by biological ties. This form of essentialism was chosen for this study as it relates closely to ethnic nationalism, and following previous studies was judged as the most theoretically appropriate measure when considering essentialist definitions of the national group.

The present studies
Expressed at a high level of abstraction, for both studies and for both minority and majority groups, we expected that a preference for maintaining/adopting one culture would be perceived to be incompatible with, and therefore negatively associated with, maintenance/adoptions of the other culture only if essentialism is high. Under conditions of low essentialism, we expected a non-significant relationship between the two acculturation dimensions (implying orthogonality, independence and potential compatibility of the two dimensions).

The first study explores the associations between heritage culture maintenance preference and majority culture adoption preference in Somali minority members in the UK. We hypothesize that the association between majority culture adoption and heritage culture maintenance will be negative (implying perceived incompatibility) when minority members show high levels of own British essentialism, but non-significant (implying
orthogonality) when essentialism is low (H1). Further, we predict that the association between majority culture adoption and heritage culture maintenance will be negative when minority members believe that majority members essentialize Britishness (labelled ‘perceived British essentialism’), but non-significant when perceived British essentialism is low (H2).

The second study focusses on British majority members in the UK and explores their acculturation preferences for minority members living in the UK (i.e. what majority members want minority members to do). We hypothesize that majority members who strongly essentialize Britishness will also see culture maintenance and culture adoption as incompatible, resulting in a negative association between the two acculturation dimensions. In contrast, the two dimensions should appear compatible if essentialist beliefs are not endorsed, and no negative association between the two dimensions should be evident for participants who do not essentialize British identity (H3).

Because people overall care most about their own group, we wanted to study the effects of acculturation preferences towards the group’s own culture on preferences regarding the respective outgroup’s culture for both the minority and the majority group. Therefore, to hold this focus constant across both groups, for the minority group, culture maintenance preference was the predictor variable, and for the majority group, culture adoption preference was the predictor variable.

The data for both studies presented in this paper are available on the OSF platform with this link: https://osf.io/473fu/?view_only=ba80ce5f285b409196f8407908ca5ab0

STUDY 1

Participants
Participants were 91 males and 99 females (N = 198; 8 participants did not report their gender) who all self-reported as being ethnic Somalis. Participants were aged between 16 and 36 (\(M = 21.32, SD = 4.52\)). Almost half the participants (47%) were born in Somalia, and the other participants reported either being born in the UK (27%) or somewhere else (22%). Across all participants, the average length of time living in the UK was 12 years. Also, with the exception of 21 participants who did not report a religion, all participants reported being Muslim (89% of total sample).

This present study presents a secondary data analysis of data collected by Zagefka et al. (2016). Although the sample is identical to one of the studies reported in the previous paper, that previous publication did not focus on research questions related to essentialism, and the present research question is unique to this present paper.

Design and materials
This study was a cross-sectional survey design. The participants were recruited in public places by a Somali researcher, and they were asked to fill in a questionnaire. There was one version of the questionnaire, which was written in English, but most participants reported speaking English well (18%) or very well (70%) in the questionnaire. All items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 – strongly/totally disagree to 5 – strongly/totally agree). Participants did not receive any financial incentive for taking part, but were fully debriefed after their participation, and all aspects of this and the subsequent study
were in line with BPS and APA ethics guidelines. The following measures were used in this study.

**Culture maintenance preference**

Culture maintenance was measured using two items based on items from Zagefka and Brown (2002). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following two statements: ‘I would like Somalis in Britain to maintain their own culture’, ‘I would like Somalis in Britain to maintain their own religion, language and clothing,’ $\alpha = .81$.

**Culture adoption preference**

Culture adoption was measured in the same way, but here the statements were as follows: ‘I would like Somalis in Britain to take on the British culture’ and ‘I would like Somalis in Britain to take on the British religion, language and clothing’, $\alpha = .60$.

**Own and perceived British essentialism**

Essentialism was measured using six items (three for own, and three for perceived). Items were based on previous research by Pehrson, Brown and Zagefka (2009) which focussed on biological essentialism and ethnic nationalism. Participants indicated for each statement the extent to which they agree/disagree, and the extent to which they think white British people agree/disagree. The following statements were used: ‘whether someone is British is determined by their biological and genetic ancestry’, ‘whether someone is British is determined by their blood ties and descent’, ‘a person cannot be truly British if their parents came from another country’; for own British essentialism, $\alpha = .82$, and for perceived British essentialism, $\alpha = .75$.

Some demographic information was also collected from the participants, including age, gender, ethnic group, place of birth, education level, years spent living in the UK and how well they reported speaking English.

**Results**

Means, standard deviations and correlations of all variables are presented in Table 1. Two separate models were tested with culture adoption preference as the outcome variable and culture maintenance preference as the predictor variable in both models. In Model A, own British essentialism was tested as a moderator variable, and in Model B, perceived British essentialism was tested as a moderator. To analyse these models, the PROCESS macro developed by Hayes (2017) was used on SPSS. Model 1 from this macro was

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1. An exploratory factor analysis was initially conducted to explore how the items used in the survey loaded together. Four factors emerged from the analysis. All items from the culture maintenance preference (loadings ranged from .88 to .90), culture adoption preference (loadings ranged from .75 to .90), own British essentialism (loadings ranged from .83 to .85) and perceived British essentialism (loadings ranged from .72 to .84) measures, respectively, loaded onto their own separate factors, with no substantial cross-loadings.

2. In study 1, age did not correlate with any of the variables, and of all variables included, gender only correlated with own British essentialism ($r = .20, p = .007$), where males were associated with a higher tendency to essentialise British identity than females.

3. The findings reported here did not change when controlling for whether participants were born in the UK, and length of time spent in the UK.
adopted in this study, which analyses the relationship between one predictor variable and one outcome variable, with a single moderator variable; 5000 bootstrap samples were selected, and all continuous variables were mean-centred.

Model A, with own British essentialism as a moderator, was significant overall, \( F(3, 194) = 8.05, R^2 = .33, p < .001 \). Culture maintenance preference was a significant negative predictor of culture adoption preference (\( \beta = -.38, t = -4.51, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.65, -0.19] \)), own British essentialism was not a significant predictor of culture adoption preference (\( \beta = .07, t = 1.33, p = .18, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.03, 0.18] \)), but the interaction between culture maintenance preference and own British essentialism was significant (\( \beta = -.23, t = -3.30, p = .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.44, -0.08] \)), which means that a significant moderation effect was apparent. To interpret this effect, simple slope analysis of the moderator was undertaken (Aiken & West, 1991). We follow a recommendation by Hayes (2017), who argues that when a moderator is skewed, the mean may not actually be a sensible measure of the centre, and therefore picking values at one standard deviation above or below the mean may lead to the value falling outside the scale of measurement. To avoid this, it is recommended to use the median as a more sensible measure of the centre, and the 16th and 84th percentiles as low and high values, respectively – since they will always fall within the scale (Hayes, 2017). At lower levels of own British essentialism, preference for culture maintenance did not predict a preference for culture adoption (\( \beta = -.11, t = -1.07, p = .29 \)), but at the mid-level (\( \beta = -.40, t = -4.25, p < .001 \)), and high levels of own British essentialism (\( \beta = -.62, t = -4.05, p < .001 \)), culture maintenance preference negatively predicted culture adoption preference (see Figure 1).

Model B, with perceived British essentialism as a moderator, was also significant overall, \( F(3, 193) = 6.41, R^2 = .30, p < .001 \). Culture maintenance preference was a significant negative predictor of culture adoption preference (\( \beta = -.37, t = -4.15, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.56, -0.17] \)), perceived British essentialism was not a significant predictor of culture adoption preference (\( \beta = .02, t = 0.25, p = .81, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.11, 0.13] \)), but the interaction between culture maintenance preference and perceived British essentialism was significant (\( \beta = -.22, t = -2.69, p = .008, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.38, -0.04] \)). To interpret this effect, simple slope analysis was again undertaken at the 16th, 50th and 84th percentiles. At lower levels of perceived British essentialism, preference for culture maintenance did not predict a preference for culture adoption (\( \beta = -.11, t = -1.07, p = .29 \)), but at the mid-level (\( \beta = -.40, t = -4.25, p < .001 \)), and high levels of perceived British essentialism (\( \beta = -.62, t = -4.05, p < .001 \)), culture maintenance preference negatively predicted culture adoption preference (see Figure 2).

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**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations across variables for study 1

|                  | Mean | SD  | Culture maintenance preference | Culture adoption preference | Own British essentialism | Perceived British essentialism |
|------------------|------|-----|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Culture maintenance preference | 4.48 | 0.84 | -                              | 4.48                       | 2.91                    | 3.52                         |
| Culture adoption preference | 1.90 | 0.96 | -24**                         | 1.90                       | 1.32                   | 1.07                         |
| Own British essentialism | 2.91 | 1.32 | .19**                         | .19**                      | .01                    | .40**                        |
| Perceived British essentialism | 3.52 | 1.07 | .22**                         | -.06                       | -.06                   | -                            |

**p < .01.**
A post-hoc power analysis was conducted to ascertain that the sample size was adequate. Using G*Power (Faul et al., 2009), a post-hoc power analysis was conducted for both models with the $R^2$ values entered as the effect size, and statistical power was shown to be at the .99 level for both models.

**Discussion**

This study explored the nature of the relationship between heritage culture maintenance preference and majority culture adoption preference among Somali minority members in the UK, and whether this relationship is affected by both minority members’ own essentialist beliefs about British identity and their perceptions of majority members’ essentializing of Britishness. Consistent with $H_1$, we found that when minority members...
themselves had a relatively stronger essentialist perception of British identity, culture maintenance preference and culture adoption preference were incompatible, as they were negatively associated with each other, but they were not correlated when essentialist perceptions were comparatively low. Further and in line with H2, when minority members perceive that majority members have an essentialist definition of British identity, they were also more likely to see the two preferences as conflicting and negatively associated, but the two preferences were not related to each other when perceived British essentialism was low. These findings show that when minority members perceive high levels of majority essentialism from a biological perspective, there is in fact a perception of incompatibility between the heritage culture and majority culture.

Interestingly, we found that when not considering essentialism at all and looking at it in terms of main effects, there was a negative association between the dimensions. This suggests by default Somali minority members believe, to some extent, that there is an inherent incompatibility between their heritage culture and British culture, although they might still fall into the ‘integration’ category if acculturation orientations are measured in categorical terms (Berry et al., 2006; Nesdale & Mak, 2000; Roblain et al., 2017; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002). Because a large proportion of the sample in study 1 identified as Muslim, this finding is maybe not surprising. As we know from a social identity perspective, one would expect groups who are subjected to greater rejection and greater levels of discrimination to adopt particular strategies to protect their identities (Branscombe et al., 1999), such as increased ethnic group identification and reduced national group identification (Robinson, 2009). Therefore, taking into account the current UK context with its pronounced levels of Islamophobia (Abbas, 2007; Home Office, 2019), increasingly negative media representations of Islam after 9/11 (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010), and the tendency for majority members in the UK to perceive Muslims as a threatening group (Croucher, 2013), it is reasonable to assume that baseline levels of perceived discrimination are quite high for Muslims, and that they might therefore feel that they have to choose between the two groups, and cannot easily belong to both.

Having found support for the hypotheses that own and perceived British essentialism moderate the relationship between heritage culture maintenance and majority culture adoption for minority members in the UK, a second study was conducted to investigate whether essentialism would also moderate this relationship among white British majority members.

**STUDY 2**

**Participants**
The sample consisted of 49 males and 151 females (N = 200), aged from 18 to 63 (M = 34.90, SD = 10.90), who were recruited from online platform Prolific.ac. The number of participants was determined using G*Power (Faul et al., 2009). Based on small to medium effect sizes usually found in the acculturation literature (Tip et al., 2012; Zagefka et al., 2014), we expected a minimum effect size of $R^2 = .1$ and aiming for a power of .8, 200 participants were selected.

Pre-screening was used to ensure that only participants who self-reported as white British were selected to take part in this study. In total, 6 participants were excluded from the final data set, as they were either timed out from the study on Prolific, returned incomplete data for some of the key variables or failed the attention check measure in the survey.
Design and materials
This study was a cross-sectional survey study. All items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 – strongly/totally disagree to 5 – strongly/totally agree). The following measures were used in this study⁴.

Culture maintenance preference
Culture maintenance was measured using three items based on Zagefka et al. (2014). In an attempt to improve the measure, double-barrelled items from study 1 were removed. Participants were asked to what extent they agree/disagree with the following statements, ‘I think that ethnic minority members should speak original language often’, ‘I think that ethnic minority members should keep as much as possible their culture of origin’, and ‘I think that ethnic minority members should maintain their own traditions’, \( \alpha = .84 \).

Culture adoption preference
Culture adoption was measured in the same way as culture maintenance, but this time the statements were ‘speak English often’, ‘take on as much as possible the British culture’ and ‘adopt British traditions’, \( \alpha = .80 \).

Own British essentialism
Essentialism was measured using eight items. Participants were asked to what extent they agreed/disagreed with items which were again all based on ‘biological essentialism’ as conceptualized in previous research by Pehrson, Brown and Zagefka (2009). In this study, we used a slightly longer scale to measure essentialism with items that have previously been found to be reliable, to ensure that we properly capture this complex construct. Example statements include ‘it is the British blood that makes British people who they are’, ‘genetic factors largely determine the British character’ and ‘one’s ancestry is what makes a person British’, \( \alpha = .91 \).

Some demographic information was also obtained from the participants at the end of the survey, including age, gender and educational level. As well as this, an attention check was included.

Results
Means, standard deviations and correlations of all variables are presented in Table 2⁵. To test the hypothesis in this study, model 1 from Hayes (2017) was adopted again, like study 1 the variables were mean-centred, and 5000 bootstrap samples were used. In this study, culture maintenance and culture adoption were swapped as independent and dependent variables compared to study 1, and own British essentialism was again entered as the moderator variable.

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⁴ Similar to study 1, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted on items used in the survey. As expected, three factors emerged from the analysis. Items from culture maintenance preference (loadings ranged from .81 to .89), culture adoption preference (loadings ranged from .72 to .87) and own British essentialism (loadings ranged from .52 to .73) all loaded onto their separate respective factors, with no substantial cross-loadings.

⁵ In study 2, age and gender did not correlate with any of the variables included in the model.
The overall model was significant, $F(3, 196) = 22.77$, $R^2 = .26$, $p < .001$. Culture adoption preference was a significant negative predictor of culture maintenance preference ($\beta = -.35$, $t = -4.39$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [$-0.50$, $-0.19$]), own British essentialism was also a significant negative predictor of culture maintenance preference ($\beta = -.22$, $t = -3.07$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [$-0.36$, $-0.08$]), and the interaction between culture adoption preference and own British essentialism was also significant ($\beta = -.18$, $t = -2.40$, $p = .018$, 95% CI [$-0.33$, $-0.03$]), indicating a moderation effect. To interpret this effect, simple slope analysis was undertaken using the 16th, 50th and 84th percentiles. At low levels of own British essentialism, culture adoption did not predict culture maintenance ($\beta = -.18$, $t = -1.82$, $p = .07$), but at mid-levels ($\beta = -.34$, $t = -4.28$, $p < .001$), and high levels of own British essentialism ($\beta = -.52$, $t = -4.45$, $p < .001$), culture adoption preference negatively predicted culture maintenance preference (see Figure 3).

It is important to note that this study originally included an experimental manipulation to test an alternative research question to the one described in this present study. Participants were provided with one of four fictional news articles describing how minority members choose to acculturate in the UK, in an attempt to manipulate perceptions of minority member acculturation preferences. There were four experimental conditions: integration, assimilation, separation and a control group where no article
was provided. We found that the manipulation did not have a significant effect on the manipulation check measure or any of the variables featured in this manuscript. Given that the variable the manipulation was designed to tap into was different from the variables featured as independent, dependent or moderating variables in this paper, it seemed feasible to analyse the variables in correlational terms. We conducted some exploratory analysis and confirmed that the manipulation had no effect on the models used in this present study, first when considered as a covariate, and also when checking for multiple moderation.

**Discussion**

Findings from the second study using British majority members supported H3. When majority members were essentialist in their thinking about British identity (at median or high levels), they were more likely to see the two dimensions as conflicting, leading to a negative association between them. Here, a greater preference for culture adoption by majority members was associated with less culture maintenance preference. However, at low levels of essentialism, there was no significant correlation between the two dimensions.

This study asked white British majority members about ethnic minorities in general, rather than specifying a particular group, and it is worth reflecting on the implications of this. In the past, it has been shown that particular ethnic or religious groups are more discriminated than others (Ford, 2011). Research has previously also shown that the ways outgroups are thought about depends on the abstractness of the level in which they are represented (Watt *et al*., 2007). Nonetheless, some studies looking into majority members’ acculturation preferences and attitudes to multiculturalism have shown that the same patterns emerge independent of whether the focus is on specific minority groups, or whether minority members are categorized more generally as ‘ethnic minorities’ (Tip *et al*., 2012; Verkuyten, 2009). Therefore, this suggests a degree of generalization in such attitudes to ‘ethnic minorities’ in general. Our findings also support this by showing that majority members who are high in essentialism see adopting British culture as generally incompatible with minority culture maintenance, without specifying any particular minority group. Although previous findings by Tip *et al*. (2012) suggest that this pattern should also hold for specific minority groups (e.g. if participants were asked to think about people from Pakistan), this would need to be tested further to be certain.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

We show in this paper that the compatibility of the two acculturation dimensions of culture maintenance preference and culture adoption preference does depend on the extent to which essentialist beliefs are endorsed or – for minority members – imputed into the outgroup. For both minority and majority members, whether they perceive the acculturation preferences as conflicting or not depends on whether they essentialize British identity or not. When minority members themselves essentialize British identity, they are less likely to believe that wanting to maintain their own culture is compatible with wanting to adopt the British culture. Moreover, when minority members believe that white British people essentialize Britishness, those minority members are also less likely to believe that wanting to maintain their own culture is compatible with wanting to adopt the British culture. In an essentialist climate or in situations where society favours an
ethnic definition of nationhood, minority members will see the minority and majority cultures as mutually exclusive – keeping one culture means you cannot adopt the other. Similarly, for majority members who see British identity in essentialist terms, the more they prefer British culture adoption the less they support minority culture maintenance. This suggests that when majority members essentialize Britishness, they see minority members adopting the British culture as incompatible with maintaining their heritage culture.

There are some key limitations and discussion points from the two studies presented in this paper that need highlighting. First, the sample used in study 2 was obtained online, using the platform Prolific.ac. There have been concerns in the past regarding such online crowdsourcing platforms (Chmielewski & Kucker, 2019). However, more generally, some studies have argued that Prolific.ac may in fact be superior to other online platforms in terms of data quality and diversity of participants (Palan & Schitter, 2018; Peer et al., 2017). Nonetheless, the lack of control over the sample obtained in study 2 may raise issues related to generalizability, and this should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

A second limitation of this paper concerns the acculturation items utilized in both studies. In study 1, we acknowledge that one of the items used to measure acculturation preferences was double-barrelled, and combined the religion, language and clothing domains. In addition, while we were trying to tap into the extent to which individuals maintain or adopt particular traditions and customs associated with the given culture, we acknowledge that the wording of this measure can be considered problematic, for example confusion around the meaning of ‘taking on’ a religion or aspects of a religion (e.g. Christmas trees in Muslim households), and therefore, we replaced this item in study 2, where we refer specifically to traditions and customs instead. In addition, in Study 2 the statements used for the acculturation items began with ‘ethnic minorities should’, rather than ‘I would like’ (as used in study 1). We would expect this change to potentially affect mean level endorsement, but not the association between variables. Nonetheless, previous studies vary widely in terms of such subtle wording differences (see e.g. Van Acker & Vanbeselaere, 2011; Zagefka et al., 2011), and the consequences of the precise wording of acculturation measures have not been explored systematically. This would be an interesting avenue for future research.

Moreover, there are a number of issues relating to the conceptualization of essentialism in this paper that should also be addressed. First, as mentioned, this study focussed on biological essentialism, because ideas were based on previous research studying this kind of essentialism in psychology (e.g. Keller, 2005) and the notion of ethnic nationalism. However, it would be interesting to explore essentialism more broadly, or focus on various other conceptualizations of essentialism, for example cultural essentialism.

In addition, in this paper perceived British essentialism was considered only for minority groups. We did not have any particular predictions about majority members’ perceptions of British essentialism among minority members. Essentialist discourses of British identity are often utilized by dominant members in society to justify particular attitudes towards immigration and multiculturalism (Modood, 2015), and because minorities as the less powerful group are constrained in their choices by majority preferences, we hypothesized that perceived essentialism would be important for minority participants in particular. However, future research could consider majority members’ perceptions of ethnic nationalism among minority members, and how this affects their acculturation preferences.
As well as this, it would be interesting to explore further intergroup and individual difference variables as moderators of the compatibility of the acculturation dimensions for both majority and minority members, such as bicultural identity integration (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005), or social identity complexity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Moreover, clearly essentialism is not the only factor that might moderate the relationship between the two dimensions. Other factors, such as perceive rejection or discrimination from the majority society, could be explored (Neto, 2002; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002).

Finally, we acknowledge that this paper consisted of two cross-sectional survey studies, and therefore, we cannot infer any causation from the findings discussed. Future experimental or longitudinal would represent a significant advancement. For example, comparing how acculturation orientations change over time among minority members who have more essentialist beliefs about identity and those with less essentialist beliefs, would provide further support for the importance of essentialism in the acculturation process.

The studies presented in this paper have some applied implications. Since essentialist perceptions appear to impact whether one sees heritage culture maintenance and majority culture adoption as conflicting or not, we argue that in societies where essentialist discourse is salient, a view of incompatibility may be encouraged or amplified. Often, rather than just existing in individuals’ minds intergroup ideologies are often institutionalized as policies (Guimond et al., 2014). Of course, this has implications for the integration of minority members, and subsequently minority-majority group relations. The present findings suggest that alternative ‘civic’ representations of identity are important to avoid a sense of incompatibility between majority and minority cultures. This is where group membership is seen as a voluntary engagement in some basic ideological principles, and through the lens of common citizenship, rather than a fixed or inherent quality that stems from ancestry (Ignatieff, 1994; Reijerse et al., 2015). Such a ‘civic’ representation of identity is more inclusive, and therefore, encouraging these representations through policy and education may facilitate multiculturalism and the management of diverse identities by all members of society.

To conclude, we acknowledge that any attempt to encourage integration and multiculturalism, and to create a climate where the integration of majority and minority cultures is both encouraged and embraced, will require a wide range of considerations and reforms. Our paper stresses the importance of considering essentialism as one such barrier to integration in the UK. A reduction in essentialist-based conceptions of the British identity may give rise to a greater sense of compatibility of minority and majority cultures, and therefore to greater inclusion of minority groups in British society.

Conflict of interest
All authors declare no conflict of interest

Author contribution
Nali Moftizadeh (Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing) Hanna Zagefka (Conceptualization; Supervision; Writing – review & editing) Abdinasir Mohamed (Data curation).
Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the Open Science Framework (OSF) at https://osf.io/473fu/?view_only=ba80ce5f285b409196f8407908ca5ab0.

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