BPS Social Psychology Section Conference, St Andrews, August 2012
Symposium: Conceptual and methodological developments
in the study of cultural identities

The essence of nationhood:
How ordinary people make sense of nationality,
and how essentialist beliefs create acculturative problems

Dennis Nigbur, Anke Franz, Ian Hocking
(Canterbury Christ Church University),
Denis Hilton, Laetitia Charalambides
(Université de Toulouse II Le Mirail),
Hanna Zagefka
(Royal Holloway, University of London),
Roberto Gonzalez
(Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile)
& Linda Tip
(University of Sussex)

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The essence of nationhood

- **national identity & cultural psychology**
    - *not just an example of a social identity: the strange treatment of European nations at the hands of social psychology*

    - *What do people imagine (Anderson, 1991) as the nation?*

    - *What are the consequences of these imaginings?*

    - *phenomenology & prediction*

    - *interdisciplinary perspectives, multi-methodological approaches*

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The focus group study

- **national identity as a collective experience**
  - *Anderson's (1991) imagined community*
  - *Billig's (1995) banal nationalism*
  - *symbols, values, trait stereotypes (Nigbur, 2004)*

- **focus group study on the involvement of history in experience & sense-making of national identity**
  - *see Nigbur & Franz (2011) at last year's conference*

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Focus group study: Method

- focus group study on collective experience
    - *precedent: Settles et al. (2008) on race & femininity*
    - *homogeneous & friendly groups, ingroup moderator*
    - *focus on lived experience & sense-making (phenomenology)*
- qualitative data collection in 3 countries
    - *2 English groups (3 + 5 undergraduates & postgraduates)*
    - *2 German groups (5 + 4 professionals)*
    - *3 French groups (4 + 5 + 5 postgraduates & professionals)*
    - *1 group of French expatriates in the UK (5 professionals)*

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Focus group study: Analysis

- emphasis on psychology & phenomenology of nationhood suggests IPA (Smith et al., 2009) …

  - *doubts about suitability of focus group data for IPA (Smith et al, 2009, p. 71)*

  - *Settles et al. (2008) used a variant of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)*

  - *Howitt (2010, p. 106) suggests thematic analysis or a discourse-analytic approach*

  - *… but we argue that we analyse feelings, experience and sense-making rather than patterns or discourses.*

- some phenomenological-discursive-thematic hybrid?

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Delineating the British & English

- pride as an end in itself and glue for the nation
- trouble in defining the boundaries & content of an inclusive nationality
  - *history as a possession (see Condor, 1997)*
  - *island nation (see Abell et al., 2006)*
  - *winning the war; military & diplomatic world duty*
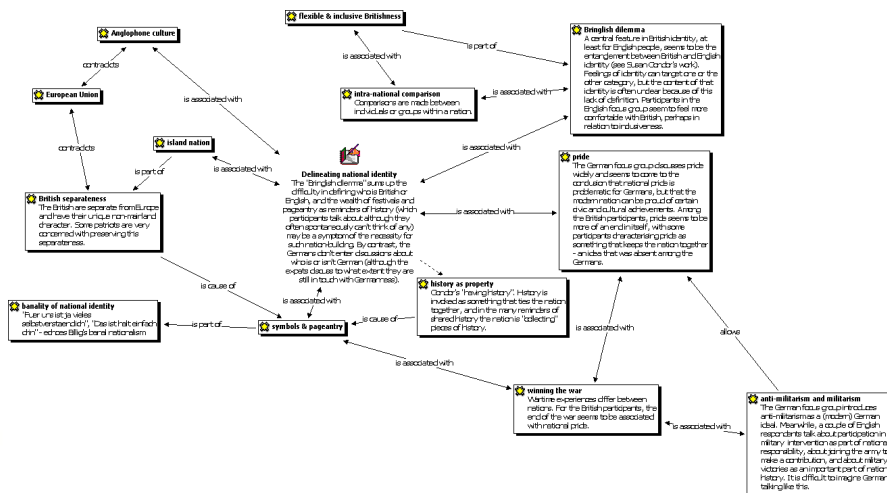
British or English or what?

Ahm, so there is a kind of sectarianism when you get onto that scale, so I think a lot of people would feel more nationally English while Scottish and whatever, ah, but I mean, you can get that regionally, er, I'm British, my passport says I'm British if, if I have to fill out a form I'm always British because you can't be anything else … but if I get together with my Northern mates before a football game, we're Northern, I mean, you know, and we're proud of it, ahm, and, you know …

… there are two competing extremes within the values we stand for, certain things and we always said we do, justice, fairness, freedom, equality, all that kind of stuff … ahm … on the one hand is we have pushed that forward, you know, we, our identity, we've taken our identity round the world with us and the British Empire was largely driven by English values, wasn't it, so we, we put out what was basically an English justice system […] the system was taken around the world and we stood by that and we have always seen ourselves as champions of that but then the other side of it is, which is part of our identity, is that we've always been very protective about our place and who we are and we have not been successfully invaded since 1066, so that has got to count for something.

The German pride dilemma

- national pride widely discussed but seldom claimed for oneself

- things to be proud of

  - *democracy, anti-militarism, anti-jingoism, anti-nationalism, lessons learnt from the "German burden"*

  - *cultural, ecological, economic, sporting, logistic achievement*

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Affective & expressive reluctance

> We are still constrained. <u>Through</u> history. When we stand there and say, I'm proud to be German, or to be a German, then that still sounds immediately … in the, yea, to third parties … sounds <u>wrong.</u> That's still not considered right that you, er, people still don't like to hear it. From that point of view, that's certainly … related to the past.
>
> Well, I don't like hearing it from <u>myself, either.</u> Well, if I myself say now, er … yea. Precisely because of history, right? \It's in you.

- **deep sense of discomfort at expressing pride**
  - *'Andrea' locates this in others, 'Reiner' in the self*
  - *'Reiner' doesn't even proceed to say the sentence*
  - *subjectively related to history and the 'German burden'*

The football World Cup in 2006

> … and when you then went abroad, you even often felt ashamed … to be German. I know the feeling too. And it's correct, I experienced it that way too, I'm not sure if it's right, but I experienced it that way, in 2006, that there was a … clear change happening. That … people … well, somehow suddenly thought …
>
> 'Come on, we'll show that we\
>
> \Yes, exactly\
>
> \can do it, and we can organise a large event like this.' Perhaps that really was a flicking of the switch.

- a momentous event for an innocuous & unselfconscious German sense of pride & nationhood

- "the world as guests of friends"

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French secularism & intellectualism

… a thing that would perhaps be more French with regard to religion, that's effectively … this clear separation between the church and the state, that … secularism which you have still, perhaps, a bit more in France than elsewhere.

Well, at the level of religion already. We have … we call ourselves secular but we're mostly atheist. And also, anything that is religion, spirituality – that's not very politically correct. And that, in other countries, that's much more overt. You just have to go to Spain, well, the people there are very Catho and that doesn't create problems. Or in the United States … there's plenty of religions, eh?

It's … in France, one is strong at talking, criticising and saying, but one doesn't act much. […] There are many debates, people who talk, but who don't do much.

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Focus group study: Discussion

- Participants generally seem reluctant to ascribe an 'essence' to national identity …

    - *qualifications of heterogeneity, disavowal of nationalism – familiar from discourse analyses (e.g. Condor, 2000)*

    - *special case: German pride dilemma (not just a discourse?)*

- … but all end up talking about essential aspects in individual interpretations of shared meanings.

    - *rationalisation of national character by historical reference*

    - *shared awareness of history as property & responsibility*

- a method to study systemic & individual identities?

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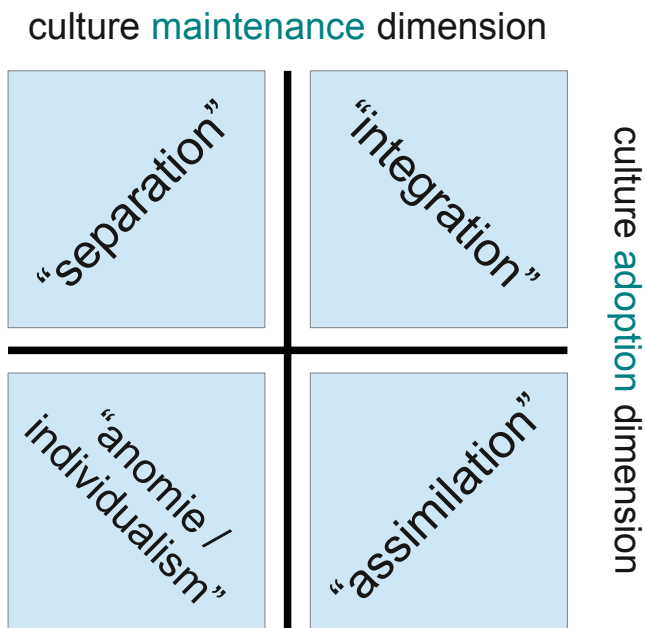Promoting excellence in psychology

The correlational study

- see Zagefka et al. (in press, IJP)

  - *essentialist belief in blood citizenship associated with scepticism towards minorities (e.g. Pehrson et al., 2009)*

  - *examining the mediating role of acculturation orientations (e.g. Berry, 1997) and symbolic threat (e.g. Stephan & Stephan, 2000)*

  - *How are essentialist beliefs about nationhood related to the rejection of minority groups?*

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Acculturation & threat

- **acculturation orientations (e.g. Bourhis et al., 1997)**

culture **maintenance** dimension

"separation" "integration" "anomie / individualism" "assimilation"
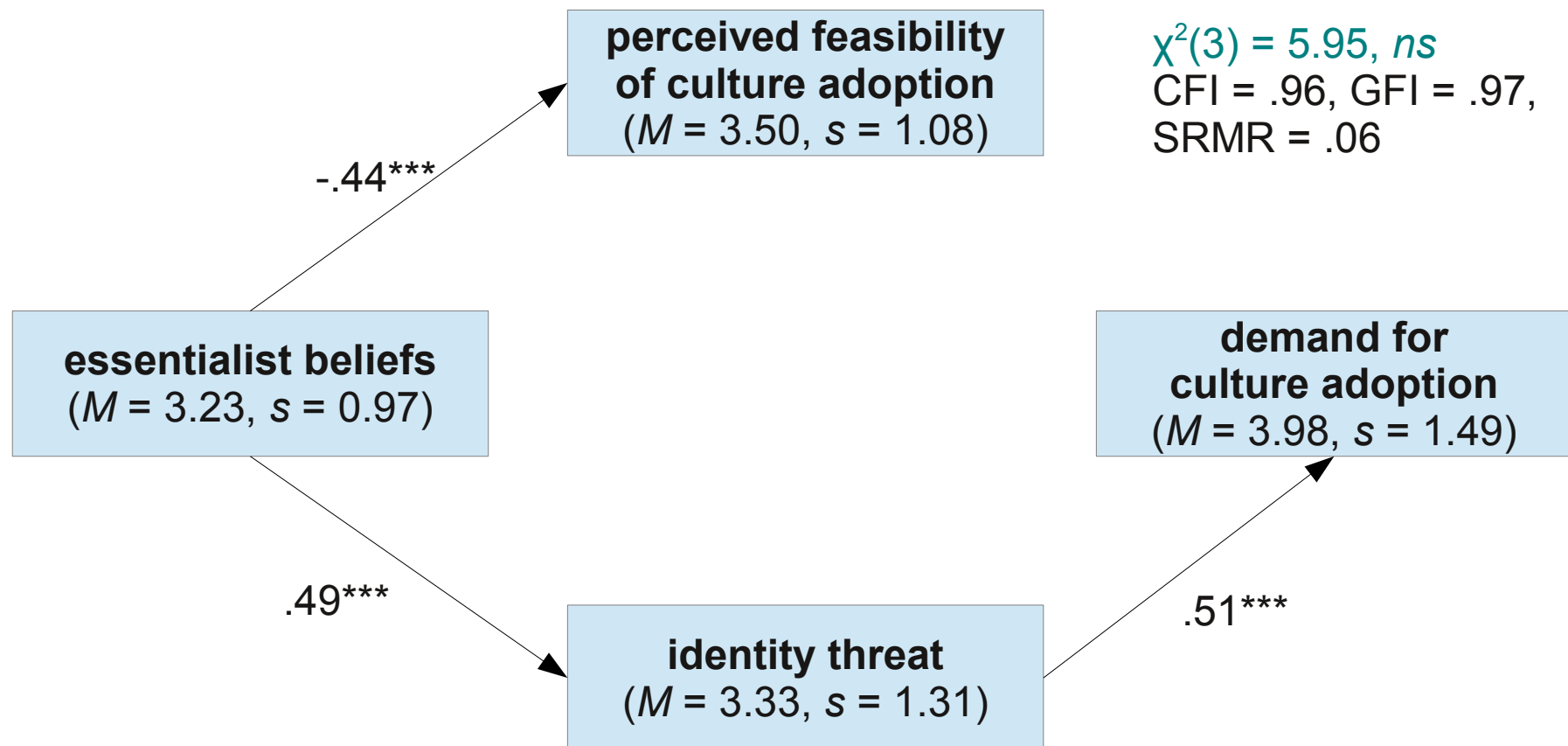
culture adoption dimension

- **intergroup perceptions (Tip et al., 2012)**

  - *majority group perception of minority group's culture maintenance is associated with increased perceptions of threat …*

  - *… and decreased support for multi-culturalism*

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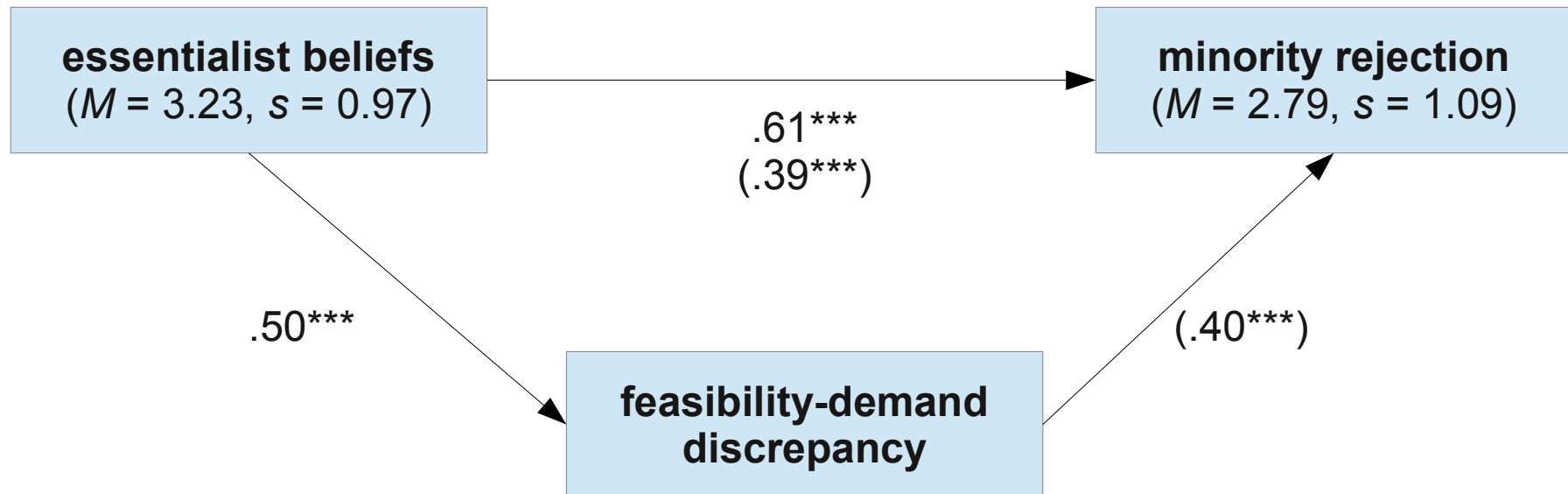Promoting excellence in psychology

Correlational study: Method

- online survey of 90 British students

  - *65 women, 22 men, 3 undisclosed, mean age 24.08 years*

  - *essentialist beliefs (9 items, Cronbach's α = .81)*
    "It is the British blood that makes British people who they are"

  - *feasibility of culture adoption (3 items, α = .74)*
    "Pakistani immigrants can take on the British culture"

  - *demand for culture adoption (3 items, α = .85)*

  - *perceived identity threat (5 items, α = .83)*
    "… the British people will lose their values"

  - *rejection of minority group / prejudice (6 items, α = .80)*
    "I would not like having a Pakistani boss or teacher"

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Essentialism, threat, adoption

perceived feasibility
of culture adoption
(M = 3.50, s = 1.08)

$\chi^2(3)$ = 5.95, *ns*
CFI = .96, GFI = .97,
SRMR = .06

essentialist beliefs
(M = 3.23, s = 0.97)

-.44***

demand for
culture adoption
(M = 3.98, s = 1.49)

.49***

identity threat
(M = 3.33, s = 1.31)

.51***

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Essentialism & rejection: Mediation

essentialist beliefs
(M = 3.23, s = 0.97)

minority rejection
(M = 2.79, s = 1.09)

.61***
(.39***)

.50***

(.40***)

**feasibility-demand
discrepancy**

- essentialism predicts discrepancy between perceived feasibility of, and demand for, culture adoption

- discrepancy partially mediates essentialism-rejection link

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Correlational study: Discussion

- paradoxical effect of essentialist beliefs about majority nation: demanding the (perceived) impossible
  - *culture adoption by minorities becomes very difficult*
  - *simultaneously: minority groups perceived as threatening & not sufficiently adapted to mainstream culture*

- dislike for minorities predicted by this discrepancy

- group relations influenced by thoughts about own group
  - *ethnic & civic criteria of nationhood (Smith, 1991); feasibility of adoption & "integration"*
  - *sensitivity to intergroup threat (Stephan & Stephan, 2000)*

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Conclusions

- **multiple approaches & methods**
  - *insight into people's thinking about nationality & some consequences*
  - *what can become conscious and what isn't*
  - *practical complementarity of methods (see Verkuyten, 2005)*

- **a clearly social-psychological angle**
  - *individual interpretation & adoption of systemic (cultural) identity*
  - *attitudinal & behavioural outcomes*

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