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Why does ingroup essentialism increase prejudice against minority members?

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A study with British participants ($N = 90$) tested a potential mediator of the effect of essentialist beliefs about the national ingroup on prejudice against immigrants. Essentialist beliefs were defined as beliefs in genetic determinism, a basic assumption that group membership is “written in the blood” and that the groups’ boundaries and characteristics are determined by genetic and/or biological factors. Essentialist beliefs were expected to play an important role in the formation of prejudice. They were predicted to be associated with a reduction in the perceived possibility of immigrants’ adopting the mainstream culture. Further, it was expected that essentialist beliefs would be positively associated with perceptions of intergroup threat, which in turn would be associated with a stronger demand for immigrants adopting the mainstream culture. Taken together, essentialist beliefs were predicted to be associated with a greater discrepancy between the demand for and perceived feasibility of culture adoption. This discrepancy was hypothesized to mediate the effect of essentialist beliefs on prejudice against immigrants. Structural equation modeling analysis and mediation analysis supported the hypotheses, showing that essentialism attributed to the national ingroup results in people demanding something seemingly impossible from immigrants, and that this situation in which immigrants have little chance of fulfilling majority members’ expectations results in prejudice against them. Thus, results show that perceptions of the ingroup are associated with attitudes to the outgroup, and they outline an explanatory mechanism for the positive correlation between essentialism and prejudice which has been found in previous research. Theoretical and applied implications are discussed.

Keywords: Essentialism; Prejudice; Minority members.

Une étude auprès de participants britanniques ($N = 90$) examine un médiateur potentiel de l’effet des croyances essentialistes concernant l’endogroupe national sur les préjugés envers les immigrants. Les croyances essentialistes sont définies comme des croyances en un déterminisme génétique, une hypothèse de base voulant que l’appartenance à un groupe est «écrite dans le sang» et que les limites et les caractéristiques des groupes sont déterminées par la génétique et/ou par des facteurs biologiques. On s’attend à ce que les croyances essentialistes jouent un rôle important dans la formation de préjugés. Il est prédit qu’elles soient associées à une réduction de la possibilité pour les immigrants d’adopter la culture dominante. De plus, il est prévu que les croyances essentialistes soient associées positivement aux perceptions de menace intergroupe, qui à leur tour seraient associées à une plus forte demande d’adoption de la culture dominante par les immigrants. Dans l’ensemble, on s’attend à ce que les croyances essentialistes soient associées à une plus grande discordance entre la demande et la faisabilité perçue d’une adoption de la culture. Selon l’hypothèse, cette discordance médiate l’effet des croyances essentialistes sur les préjugés envers les immigrants. L’analyse par modélisation en équations structurelles et l’analyse de médiation soutiennent les hypothèses, indiquant que l’essentialisme attribué à l’endogroupe national entraîne les gens à demander quelque chose d’apparemment impossible aux immigrants, et que cette situation, dans laquelle les immigrants ont peu de chances de répondre aux attentes de la majorité, entraîne des préjugés envers eux. Ainsi, les résultats montrent que les perceptions de l’endogroupe sont associées à

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des attitudes envers l'exogroupe et ils soulignent un mécanisme explicatif de la corrélation positive entre l'essentialisme et les préjugés déjà trouvée dans les recherches antérieures. Les implications théoriques et pratiques sont discutées.

Una investigación con participantes británicos ($N=90$) puso a prueba un mediador potencial del efecto de las creencias esencialistas acerca de un subgrupo nacional sobre los prejuicios contra los inmigrantes. Las creencias esencialistas se definieron como las creencias en un determinismo genético, una suposición básica que sostiene que la pertenencia al grupo está "escrita en la sangre", y que los límites y características del grupo están determinados por factores genéticos y/o biológicos. Se piensa que las creencias esencialistas tienen una función importante en la formación de prejuicios. Se predijo que iban a estar asociadas con la reducción de la posibilidad percibida de que los inmigrantes adopten la cultura predominante. Además, se esperaba que las creencias esencialistas tengan una asociación positiva con la percepción de amenazas intergrupales, que a su vez estaría asociada con una demanda más fuerte para que los inmigrantes adopten la cultura predominante. Tomadas en conjunto, se predijo que las creencias esencialistas están asociadas a una mayor discrepancia entre la demanda y la viabilidad percibida de la adopción cultural. Se hipotetizó que esa discrepancia medió el efecto de las creencias esencialistas sobre el prejuicio contra los inmigrantes. El análisis de modelado de ecuaciones estructurales y el análisis de mediación apoyaron la hipótesis, mostrando que el esencialismo atribuido a los resultados del subgrupo nacional exigía algo prácticamente imposible de los inmigrantes, y que esta situación, en la cual los inmigrantes tienen poca probabilidad de cumplir las expectativas de la mayoría de los miembros, resulta en prejuicios contra ellos.

Nations vary in terms of popular perceptions of what determines group membership (Smith, 2001). While membership in some countries is defined mainly in civic terms, in others it is delineated along ethnic principles. There are also variations between members of the same country in terms of how strongly they endorse different conceptualizations of nationhood. Such intracountry differences in self-definition can be observed to covary systematically with other political attitudes, notably attitudes to immigration and immigrants. A common pattern is that those people who endorse the notion of blood citizenship are also those who tend to be sceptical toward ethnic minority groups (Pehrson, Brown, & Zagefka, 2009). This paper aims to explain this association by highlighting a mediator for the effect of modes of national self-definition on prejudice against immigrants. In other words, it will examine *why* the endorsement of essentialist beliefs regarding the national ingroup might increase prejudice against immigrants.

Ethnic nationalism, which defines group membership in terms of blood (Smith, 2001), is one specific form of psychological essentialism. This phenomenon has been defined by Yzerbyt, Rocher, and Schadron (1997) as a belief that all members of a social category have an essential feature in common; that category memberships are immutable; that inferences about members of the category can be easily made; that features of category members can be interpreted in light of a unifying theme; and that category membership is exclusive. Other definitions of essentialism exist (e.g., Medin & Ortony, 1989; Rothbart & Taylor, 1992).

Despite some theoretical differences, theorists agree that essentialism is a belief that things are defined by an underlying essence, and when applied to social categories these are often treated as if they were natural kinds with discrete well-defined borders, intracategory homogeneity, mutual exclusivity, and unalterability (see, e.g., Demoulin, Leyens, & Yzerbyt, 2006; Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2002; Kashima et al., 2005).

Although essentialist beliefs can theoretically pertain to any category, we are interested in how individuals apply them to their national ingroup in the form of ethnic nationalism (see also Pehrson et al., 2009). Therefore, like Denson, Lickel, Curtis, Stenstrom, and Ames (2006), we use the term "essentialism" to refer only to beliefs about natural kinds with strong biological connotations and not to beliefs about entitativity. Our focus is on the biological component of psychological essentialism, as expressed in lay theories of genetic determinism (for a similar focus, see Keller, 2005). Ethnic nationalism defines national group membership as something immutable that is based on quasibiological (blood/genetic/hereditary) connections between category members (Smith, 2001). People who subscribe to this view believe that group membership is inherited and attainable only through belonging to a certain blood line, that it has a natural (genetic or other biological) basis, and that it is unchangeable and stable (Zagefka, Pehrson, Mole, & Chan, 2010). Such beliefs have wide-reaching implications for how individuals perceive their ingroup and relevant outgroups (Verkuyten, 2004), although these beliefs are not

necessary justified or based on fact (Zagefka, 2009).

Essentialism has often been found to be associated with political attitudes. It has been linked to right-wing authoritarianism (Haslam & Levy, 2006), social dominance orientation (Keller, 2005; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), and political conservatism (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Keller, 2005; Lewontin, Rose, & Kamin, 1984). Furthermore, it is also associated with opinions on topics that are pertinent to the issue of immigration directly, such as a rejection of multiculturalism (Verkuyten & Brug, 2004; see also No et al., 2008), stereotyping (Bastian & Haslam, 2006; Hoffman & Hurst, 1990; Levy, Stoessner, & Dweck, 1998), and prejudice against ethnic out-group members (Allport, 1954; Bastian & Haslam, 2008; Epstein Jayaratne et al., 2006; Keller, 2005; Morton, Hornsey, & Postmes, 2009; but see Haslam et al., 2002; Verkuyten, 2003, for some important qualifications to this general pattern).

Research on the strategic use of essentialism has demonstrated that prejudice can inform the endorsement of essentialist beliefs (Morton et al., 2009). However, it has also been suggested that essentialism itself impacts on intergroup attitudes and specifically prejudice (see e.g. Bastian & Haslam, 2006). We hypothesize that one reason why essentialism is linked to increased prejudice against immigrants might have to do with the discrepancy between the perceived feasibility of, and demand for, immigrants adopting the majority culture.

Upon arrival in a new country, immigrants can choose to maintain (or not) their original culture. Similarly, they can choose to adopt (or not) the mainstream culture (Zagefka & Brown, 2002). These are often called acculturative strategies, and they are commonly thought of as orthogonal choices (Berry, 1997). Of course, it is not only immigrants who will have certain views about the merits of culture maintenance and/or culture adoption; majority members will also often have preferences about how they want immigrants to live (Zagefka & Brown, 2002).

Own preferences of minority and majority groups, and each group's perceptions of what the other group wants, as well as the interplay between the two have received considerable research attention in the past (Brown & Zagefka, 2011). However, what has not been studied to date is the perceived *feasibility* of culture adoption and maintenance. We believe that particularly the perceived feasibility of culture adoption will be relevant when examining the impact of essentialist beliefs on attitudes to immigrants.

The fact that essentialist beliefs are related to acculturative choices has been demonstrated for minority members (No et al., 2008). We propose that essentialist beliefs are also related to the acculturation strategies that majority members demand from minority members, and in the following we will outline what might be expected of the effect of essentialism on acculturation choices and their perceived feasibility. In a nutshell, it is proposed that essentialist beliefs will decrease the perceived feasibility of culture adoption. Simultaneously, essentialist beliefs are hypothesized to increase perceived identity threat, and perceived identity threat is in turn expected to increase the demand for culture adoption. The resulting discrepancy between the demand for and perceived possibility of culture adoption, in turn, is expected to be associated with prejudice.

Focusing first on the effects of essentialism on feasibility of culture adoption, the endorsement of an essentialist ideology should decrease the perceived ease of "becoming British." After all, if Britishness is seen as only attainable through descent, it should not appear possible to become British through other means. Those high in essentialism will see the British culture and way of living as an expression of something that has a deep biological basis. Hence, although they might concede that immigrants can try to "mimic" the British way of life, they will still believe that immigrants cannot truly be, act, or live in an authentically British way, because this is seen as only possible for white Anglo-Saxons.

Furthermore, essentialism can be expected to increase perceived identity threat. As suggested in Zagefka and colleagues (2010), those who define their ingroup in essentialist terms will perceive group boundaries to be more clear-cut, more rigid, and less permeable, and they will also defend the idea that group boundaries should be so. In other words, ethnic nationalist beliefs are both descriptive and normative. Therefore, essentialists should be more concerned with trespassing and contamination of the ingroups' essence by outsiders. It is hypothesized that this concern with trespassing and contamination will increase perceived identity threat for the following reason. People who are preoccupied with protecting their ingroup's identity might be expected to guard it more vigilantly, and to be more sensitive to potential violations. Put simply, people are more likely to detect a threat (whether founded in fact or imaginary) if they are looking for it because they are concerned about it. They will have a more finely attuned radar for threatening information. Because of this, essentialists should be more concerned with

protecting the ingroup from outside threats and fearful of changes to the ingroup due to alien influences. They should be more sensitive to, and therefore perceive more, symbolic threat (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) to the ingroup's values, beliefs and traditions.

Perceived identity threat, in turn, might be associated with more demands for culture adoption. The idea that perceived threat will have a negative impact on attitudes that are generally liberal and permissive and allow minority members to retain their separate identity, such as in multiculturalism and integration, has been proposed repeatedly within the field (e.g. Zagefka, Tip, González, Brown, & Cinnirella, 2012). Generally, under conditions of threat majority members are less likely to support multiculturalism, and more inclined to reject the notion that minorities with separate identities are welcome. For example, Tip, Zagefka, González, Brown, and Cinnirella (2012) found that a perception among majority members that minority members want to maintain their culture was positively associated with perceived threat, and perceived threat in turn was negatively associated with endorsement of multiculturalism. Because of these negative effects of threat on tolerance towards cultural diversity, we expected in the present context too that threat might increase the demand that minority members adopt the majority culture. After all, a natural reaction to threat is wanting to get rid of the source of the threat, and immigrants turning into Britons is a very effective way of annihilating the source of the threat.

Of course, threat might not only be associated with more demand for culture adoption, but also with a range of other responses, such as a demand for the immigrants to leave. Indeed, such responses might often occur simultaneously, and in the acculturation field it has long been acknowledged that certain acculturation preferences, such as a desire for assimilation and separation, might not be as orthogonal as the theory would propose and that they might indeed be interrelated in rather more complex ways (Van de Vijver, Helms-Lorenz, & Feltzer, 1999). However, in the present context we were not interested in these other responses, but merely in the effect of threat on demand for culture adoption, since this variable is the one crucial for the discrepancy between what is desired and what is perceived as feasible by those who adhere to essentialist views.

Summing up the processes described so far, it is suggested that essentialist beliefs will increase the demand that immigrants do something which is perceived to be impossible. While the proposed

bivariate effects of essentialism on threat, and of threat on demand for cultural adoption, seem quite straightforward, the resulting sequence of proposed events is somewhat perplexing. Essentialists are less likely to perceive culture adoption as viable. At the same time, they are more likely to feel threatened by immigrants (because they fear and are more likely to detect "dilution" of their ingroup) and because of this perceived threat they might ironically be keener on immigrants becoming British as a consequence. So, essentialism might have the paradoxical double effect of simultaneously decreasing the perceived possibility that immigrants become British, but increasing the demand that they should do exactly that (via threat).

We now turn to the hypothesis that a discrepancy between what is perceived as feasible and what is demanded will increase prejudice. It is assumed that wanting something that cannot be delivered is a frustrating experience. In fact, one can define "frustration" as a state of having the fulfillment of one's desire prevented. From Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears' (1939) frustration-aggression hypothesis onwards, it has been suggested that frustration necessarily leads to some form of aggression. This aggression can take the shape of intergroup violence (Hovland & Sears, 1940) or might be evident in a milder incarnation as increased prejudice (Cowen, Landes, & Schaet, 1958). On this basis, it can be assumed that people will dislike those whom they perceive as incapable of fulfilling their desires. Having one's demands frustrated is an adverse experience, and people will be negatively inclined towards those they perceive to be responsible for this negative state. Therefore, it is the discrepancy between the perceived possibility of culture adoption and the demand for it that can explain the negative effect of essentialist beliefs on prejudice against immigrants. Translating this idea into a hypothesis about mean levels, this means that those participants who score high on essentialism (rather than low) would also manifest greater discrepancies between feasibility of and demand for culture adoption. Importantly, we do not expect essentialism to impact on the *relationship* between feasibility and demand, but on the *divergence* between the two.

Overall, it was expected that essentialist beliefs would be associated with a reduction in the perceived possibility of immigrants' adopting the mainstream culture. Further, it was expected that essentialist beliefs would be associated with more perception of threat, which in turn would be associated with a stronger demand for

culture adoption. Taken together, essentialist beliefs were predicted to be associated with a stronger discrepancy between the demand for and perceived feasibility of culture adoption. It is this discrepancy that was hypothesized to mediate the effect of essentialist beliefs on prejudice. These hypotheses were tested in Britain, focusing on attitudes to Pakistani immigrants. This immigrant group was chosen because it constitutes a sizeable minority in the UK, and one that is currently very salient due to recent Islamophobic trends.

METHOD

Participants

Ninety students participated in the study as part of their course requirements (65 female, 22 male, 3 unspecified; mean age 24.08 years). All participants self-reported to be of British nationality.

Procedure and measures

Data collection was accomplished by means of an electronic questionnaire available via the Internet and advertised to volunteer participants on the Intranet pages of a university in the South-East of England. The study was advertised as a survey of social attitudes.

To measure *essentialist beliefs*, we relied on measures used by Pehrson et al. (2009). Participants answered the following questions on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = totally disagree to 7 = totally agree): It is the British blood that makes British people who they are; A person can be British, even if their parents came from another country and are not British (reverse-scored); Who and how the British are is determined largely by the British biological heritage; Genetic factors largely determine the British character; One's ancestry does not make a person British (reverse-scored); Throughout history, the British character has been defined by something in the blood; Their shared blood membership makes British people want to stick together; What makes a British person British isn't in the blood (reverse-scored); If someone has British parents then this person is automatically British too, even if he/she has never been to the UK and if he/she does not speak any English. The scale had good internal reliability, with Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$.

To measure the *perceived possibility of culture adoption*, participants answered the following questions (1 = totally disagree to 7 = totally agree): With time, Pakistani immigrants can

become truly British if they want to; Pakistani immigrants can take on the British culture; Pakistani immigrants can take on the British way of living; $\alpha = .74$.

To measure the *demand for culture adoption*, participants answered the following questions (1 = totally disagree to 7 = totally agree): Pakistani immigrants should become truly British; Pakistani immigrants should take on the British culture; Pakistani immigrants should take on the British way of living; $\alpha = .85$.

To measure *perceived identity threat*, participants answered the following questions (1 = totally disagree to 7 = totally agree): I think that essential aspects of the British culture will be weakened because of the high number of Pakistani immigrants in Britain; Because of the high number of Pakistani immigrants, the British people will lose their values; Because of the high number of Pakistani immigrants, the British people will lose their cultural traditions; I believe that the high number of Pakistani immigrants will influence my own way of living; The high number of Pakistani immigrants might change the main religion in the UK; $\alpha = .83$.

The measure of *prejudice* had a heavy "social distance" element because this concept has been frequently used as a component of prejudice measures (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). It captures the behavioral intention aspect of prejudice, a reluctance to enter into social relationships with outgroup members. Items were: I would not like it if the majority of people in my class were Pakistani; Sometimes I think this country would be better off if there were fewer Pakistanis; The problems that the Pakistanis face are because of the way they are; I would not have any problems with having a Pakistani girlfriend/boyfriend (reverse-scored); I would not like having a Pakistani boss or teacher; I would feel uncomfortable if a Pakistani sat beside me on the bus; $\alpha = .80$.

Participants also completed some other items, such as questions about their age and sex, and they indicated what they considered to be their nationality and ethnicity. All aspects of the research complied with the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society and the American Psychological Association.

RESULTS

Descriptive analyses

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations are displayed in Table 1. The mean score for

TABLE 1
Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the measured variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Essentialist beliefs					
2. Perceived possibility of culture adoption	-.44***				
3. Demand for culture adoption	.34***	-.14			
4. Perceived identity threat	.49***	-.37***	.51***		
5. Prejudice	.61***	-.45***	.49***	.67***	
Mean	3.23	3.50	3.98	3.33	2.79
Standard deviation	.97	1.08	1.49	1.31	1.09

*** $p < .001$.

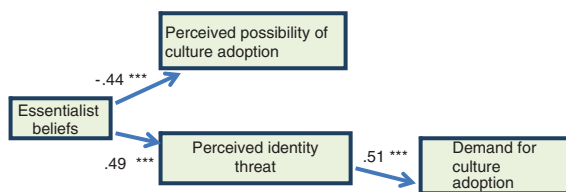


Figure 1. Essentialist beliefs simultaneously decrease the perceived possibility of culture adaption and increase the demand for it.

each variable fell slightly below the middle of each scale, with good variability on all variables. The pattern of bivariate correlations is in line with what might be expected.

Do essentialist beliefs simultaneously decrease the perceived possibility of culture adaption and increase the demand for it through the increase of identity threat?

A path analysis was conducted with structural equation modeling (SEM), using the EQS software. “Essentialist beliefs” were specified to predict both the “perceived possibility of culture adoption” and “perceived identity threat.” “Identity threat.” in turn, was specified to predict the “demand for culture adoption.” The model fitted the data well, $\chi^2(3) = 5.95$, ns ; CFI = .96; GFI = .97; SRMR = .06. As can be seen in Figure 1, all the individual paths were significant and in the hypothesized direction. Furthermore, “essentialist beliefs” had a significant indirect effect on “demand for culture adoption,” $z = 3.82$, $p < .001$.

Additional confirmation in favour of the hypothesis was sought by running an alternative model, with the aim of demonstrating that this would have a worse fit with the data than the hypothesized model. To this end, an analysis was conducted where all paths of the original model were reversed (so that “demand” now predicted

“threat,” and “threat” and “perceived possibility” both predicted “essentialist beliefs”). As expected, this alternative model fitted the data considerably less well, thereby yielding further support for the hypothesis, $\chi^2(3) = 15.59$, $p < .002$; CFI = .82; GFI = .92; SRMR = .15.

Does the discrepancy between what is perceived as possible and what is demanded increase prejudice?

The results of the SEM analyses demonstrate that essentialist beliefs are simultaneously associated negatively with the perceived possibility of culture adaption, and positively with the demand for it. In other words, they are positively related to the discrepancy between what is perceived as possible and desirable. According to the hypothesis, wanting immigrants to do the impossible will be associated with prejudice, because people will dislike those whom they perceive as incapable of meeting their wishes.

To test this hypothesis fully, an index of the discrepancy between perceived feasibility of and demand for culture adoption was devised, by subtracting the former from the latter. Values on this index range from -6 to 6 . The midpoint of the scale is zero, which signifies no discrepancy between what is perceived as possible and desirable. Positive values express a perception that culture adoption is perceived as more desirable than it is possible. Negative values express a perception that culture adoption is less desirable than possible. Therefore, positive values indicate a problematic situation, where something unfeasible is demanded; i.e., where the impossible is demanded from immigrants. In contrast, negative values suggest a less problematic state, where something is not demanded even though it is perceived to be theoretically possible. In other words, the top end of this scale corresponds to the most problematic discrepancy.

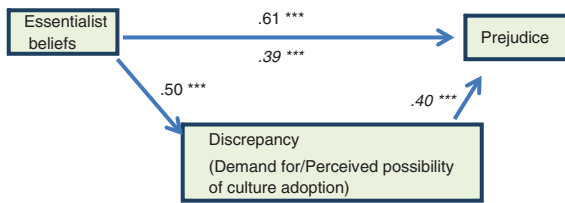


Figure 2. The discrepancy between what is perceived as possible and what is demanded mediates the effect of essentialist beliefs on prejudice. Displayed are beta weights. The values in italics pertain to the analysis which incorporates two predictors.

A quick note on discrepancy scores should be added. These are sometimes criticized for bringing about a measure of interpretational ambiguity, because the same resulting discrepancy value can be derived in different ways (e.g. $6-2=4$; $7-3=4$; $5-1=4$). However, because the present prediction concerned precisely the hypothesized effect of a mismatch between what is perceived as desirable on one hand and feasible on the other, a difference score seemed—albeit imperfect—the most direct operationalization of this concept. An alternative would have been to use double-barrelled items (e.g., “I believe immigrants should become British even though I do not believe they are able to do this”). Because such items bring with them their own—and in our view more grave—measurement theoretical problems, we settled on the difference score as the better alternative.

To test directly whether the discrepancy between demand and feasibility would mediate the effect of essentialist beliefs on prejudice, Baron and Kenny’s (1986) method was employed. According to this, three conditions need to be fulfilled to demonstrate mediation: (1) The independent variable must significantly predict the mediator; (2) the independent variable must significantly predict the dependent variable; and (3) when independent variable and mediator predict the dependent variable simultaneously, the effect of the independent variable must be significantly reduced and the mediator must still exert a significant effect.

As illustrated in Figure 2, all three conditions were met. Displayed are beta weights generated in regression analyses for predicting each target variable. The two values in italics pertain to the analysis which incorporates two predictors (testing the third condition). The Sobel test confirmed that the drop from .61 to .39 was indeed a significant decrease, $z=3.51$, $p<.001$. In other words, the analysis confirmed that the effect of essentialist beliefs on prejudice was—as predicted—partially mediated by “discrepancy.”

DISCUSSION

Clear evidence was yielded that the effect of essentialist beliefs about one’s national ingroup on prejudice against immigrants is at least partially mediated by an increased discrepancy between a demand for, and the perceived possibility of, culture adoption on the part of the immigrants. As such, the current contribution further illuminates some of the effects of essentialism on prejudice previously highlighted in the literature (e.g., Keller, 2005), by testing what the documented association between the two variables might be mediated by. Essentialism had the ironic effect of being simultaneously negatively associated with the perceived feasibility of culture adaption, but positively associated with the demand for it (the latter mediated by threat). Unsurprisingly, dislike for immigrants was higher the more immigrants were perceived to be unable to fulfill one’s wishes.

We believe these findings are exciting for several reasons. Firstly, although previous research has demonstrated that essentialism covaries systematically with political opinions and intergroup attitudes, little work to date has tried to get to the bottom of this by answering the *why* question; i.e., by examining mediators. We do not mean to suggest that “discrepancy” will be the only important mediating factor, and others might be highlighted by future work. Undoubtedly, it will be important to consider the variables highlighted by Stephan and Stephan (2000), such as intergroup anxiety. We do, however, hope that this paper can help to highlight the importance of trying to explain some of the associations that have previously been reported in the literature, and stimulate further research.

Secondly, this work is the first one to highlight the importance of researching the perceived feasibility of different acculturation choices. This is a novel concept that has not received attention in the acculturation literature to date. Others have noted that one should not only analyze minority and majority members’ demands, but also what they actually put into practice (Navas, Rojas, Garcia, & Pumares, 2007). The construct of what is perceived as feasible has not been highlighted, however, and one could speculate that it is just as important, if not more so, as what is demanded from and what is practiced by minority members. One can imagine that in many situations it will be impactful whether different acculturation options are perceived as workable, by both minority and majority members, and more research is needed to determine how the perceived feasibility of different

acculturation choices impacts on intergroup relations in minority–majority contexts.

Thirdly, few efforts have been made in the past to combine research on essentialist beliefs about national groups and acculturation choices (although see Bastian and Haslam, 2008). At the heart of both research traditions is a concern with the relations between minority and majority groups. The two topics are therefore inherently related, and we hope that this paper can help to stimulate further integrative approaches. As a next step, it would for example be interesting to examine the effects of not only essentialist beliefs about the ingroup and the perceived feasibility of culture adoption, but also essentialist beliefs about minority outgroups and, for example, the perceived feasibility of a *rejection* of culture maintenance. Just as ingroup essentialism seems to inform majority members' beliefs about whether minority members can adopt the majority culture, one might speculate that essentialism attributed to the minority group might impact on the degree to which minority members are perceived to be able to reject and shed their original culture. Future research could usefully measure essentialism attributed to minority and majority groups simultaneously, to assess their impact on both the perceived feasibility of culture adoption and culture maintenance.

Like all research, the current contribution has some notable limitations that should be acknowledged. The present design was correlational, with the inherent uncertainties about the causal direction of observed effects this brings. Future research could benefit from employing experimental designs. Also, the present research focused on Pakistanis as one salient minority group. There is no theoretical reason to assume that the pattern would not generalize to other groups also, but of course this would have to be tested.

From an applied point of view, an important message for practitioners would be that it is important not only to focus on how people perceive “the other,” i.e., the minority outgroup, but that one also needs to consider how people perceive their own ingroup. Unless essentialist notions about the ingroup are addressed, positive messages about the outgroup are bound to be ineffective. So, when trying to improve intergroup attitudes, a good starting point might be not to issue messages about “them,” but to instead issue messages about “us.”

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