THE DECLINE OF BRITISHNESS
A research study
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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily represent the views of the Commission for Racial Equality.

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SUMMARY

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

This report is to be read in conjunction with another report, Citizenship and Belonging: What is Britishness?, which was produced by ETHNOS for the Commission for Racial Equality, and published in 2005. The latter report investigated the ways in which British people of different ethnic backgrounds living in England, Scotland and Wales thought about ‘Britishness’ and about ‘success’.

METHODOLOGY

The findings are based on data elicited through three different methods: word association tasks, focus groups and sentence completion tasks. The research was carried out with a sample of 96 people from various ethnic backgrounds (white English, white Scottish, white Welsh, black Caribbean, black African, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi), all of whom were British citizens.

FINDINGS

What is Britishness?

Most participants in the study shared a common representation of Britishness, based on eight areas: geography, national symbols, people, values and attitudes, cultural habits and behaviours, citizenship, language, and various notable achievements. This representation was described in detail in the first report. It provides the background against which many of the views expressed in this report need to be understood.

Britishness in decline

As white people involved in the study were invited to talk about Britishness, many immediately and spontaneously changed the topic of the discussion slightly to talk instead about a perceived ‘decline’ of Britishness. This happened in all focus groups with white people. They attributed the decline to four main causes: the arrival of large numbers of migrants; the ‘unfair’ claims made by people from ethnic minorities on the welfare state; the rise in moral pluralism; and the failure to manage ethnic minority groups properly, due to what participants called ‘political correctness’. Political correctness was said to be present at all levels of government in Britain (local, regional and national) and to be driven by the political and legal agenda of the European Union.

Most white participants were distressed by this perceived decline of Britishness. They felt victimised and frustrated, and many anticipated that social unrest would become inevitable. Much of their frustration was targeted at Muslims, rather than at ethnic minorities in general. Indeed, there were some indications that white respondents were drawing distinctions between ethnic minority groups.

The British Muslims in this study also felt victimised and frustrated. They resented what they perceived as being asked to display their ‘loyalty’ to Britishness and to choose between their Muslim and British identities. They felt that white people perceived a fundamental incompatibility between being Muslim and being British, while they saw them as compatible.
The future of multicultural Britain

White participants were largely confused about the notion of ‘integration’. Most equated integration with assimilation. As they saw that people from ethnic minority groups had not completely assimilated, they then believed that people had simply refused to integrate, and that the project of multiculturalism had failed.

For ethnic minority participants, and for some white participants, integration was about participating fully in British society, while keeping alive certain parts of ethnic minority cultures. Those who shared this understanding of integration were generally satisfied with the current state of British society, although some questioned whether Britain’s multicultural policy was able to support successfully the integration of everyone in mainstream British society.

The study shows that the main barrier to integration is not self-segregation by ethnic minority groups, but the subtle and everyday ‘policing’ of the boundaries of Britishness by white people and their demand for complete assimilation. These practices are not necessarily underpinned by racism, but they do serve to relegate people from ethnic minority groups, and Muslims in particular, to the margins of British society. These practices are mainly due to the implicit view (discussed fully in the initial report) that ‘Britishness’ is the prerogative of white and predominantly English people, rather than an all-embracing citizenship that includes different people.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION

The key findings, and their strategic and operational implications, include the need to:

- define the vision for the future of race relations in Britain;
- make the case for multiculturalism and diversity;
- rethink the national story and the national identity;
- engage in a more evidence-based debate about the merits and failings of assimilationist policies; and
- work closely with both British Muslim and white British organisations.

Perhaps the most important point to emerge from this research is the need to think about race equality not only from the perspective of ethnic and/or religious minorities, but also from the perspective of the white majority. The latter makes up the environment in which ethnic and religious minorities lead their lives; unless they are brought along and made to feel part of changes to achieve equality, community cohesion cannot be achieved.

The study concludes with discussion of possible future research to further the CRE’s programme of work.
1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

This report is to be read in conjunction with another report, by ETHNOS, entitled *Citizenship and Belonging: What is Britishness?* The latter report investigated the ways in which British people of different ethnic backgrounds living in England, Scotland and Wales thought about ‘Britishness’ and ‘success’. In the course of carrying out the research, a number of other issues were raised. These were outside the remit of the initial project, but they were also of interest and importance to the Commission for Racial Equality. It was therefore decided to submit a separate report to cover them in detail.

METHODOLOGY

The research for this study combined three methods of data collection: word association tasks, group discussions as part of focus groups, and sentence completion tasks.

Each participant in the study was asked to complete two projective tasks individually: word associations and sentence completions. The word associations tapped into people’s less conscious, less rational views about key ‘target’ concepts, such as ‘British’, ‘ethnic minority’, ‘community’ and ‘culture’ (see Appendix A). The word associations were produced before the group discussions took place. Answers were therefore not influenced by group dynamics.

The group discussions then explored in-depth the nature of Britishness, people’s sense of identity and belonging, and their views on the future of race relations in Britain, among other topics (see Appendix B).

Finally, the sentence completion task required participants to write down five different endings for each of seven ‘trigger’ sentences that were presented to them (see Appendix C). The answers to this task were affected by the content of the earlier group discussions.

The research was carried out with a sample of 96 British people from various ethnic backgrounds (white English, white Scottish, white Welsh, black Caribbean, black African, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi). Each group was moderated by a researcher of a similar ethnic background to that of the participants.
As well as these formal sampling criteria, we made sure that participants in all groups reflected a balance in terms of social class, religious identification and length of residence in Britain. All the participants were UK citizens. Overall, there was a good mix of professionals, skilled and semi-skilled workers, students, retired people and housewives. Thus, although the opinions and experiences described in the report are based on a sample of 96 individuals from 10 focus groups, there is no a priori reason to believe that their views should be skewed in any particular direction. However, it is worth noting that we did not conduct a white focus group in London, where most of Britain’s ethnic minority population live and where multiculturalism – as a fact of life and as a policy – may be more widely accepted and valued.

The sessions lasted between 90 and 120 minutes in total, with group discussions taking up about three quarters of the time and the projective tasks requiring about a quarter. All discussions were tape recorded, transcribed and systematically analysed.

The fieldwork took place in August and September 2005.

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1 First generation refers to those who came to the UK as adults. Second generation refers to those who were either born in the UK or who schooled in the UK, having arrived as children. Third generation refers to the children of the second generation.
2. THE DECLINE OF BRITISHNESS

As we sought to explore the meaning of Britishness in focus groups, many white participants said that they did not know any longer what it meant to be British. They felt strongly that many of the attributes which they thought of as essentially British were no longer observable in their everyday life. From their perspective, there seemed to be few consensual notions through which they could still define Britishness. In each group with white people (in England, Scotland and Wales), a large proportion of the discussion focused on the decline of some idealised notion of Britishness that had existed in the past, rather than its contemporary reality. In this chapter, we report on the factors which white participants in the study believed explain their perception of Britishness in decline.

BRITISHNESS IN DECLINE

Many white participants had a sense that Britishness was once a ‘solid’ idea and a firm empirical reality espoused by all at home and recognised and respected by all abroad, but that this reality no longer existed.

[Respondent] 1: I don’t think our children will know what being British is all about. R2: Absolutely not. There will be no tradition. R3: I feel this country is not even our country. Being British, I don’t know what that means now. That’s how I feel. I don’t get it. I just don’t get it. I don’t get it. I can’t remember having fish and chips, but I can remember when I ate something not from England: a Chinese or a curry. I just don’t understand what being British is all about. R2: You just give up. R4: There’s nothing left that’s worth preserving. (White English, Manchester)

Britishness is a thing of the past. I think it has just declined maybe in the last 50 years or so since the war. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

I think it’s all just mixed with people from other countries. It’s getting quite confused and I think they’ve still got to grasp what it is. (White Welsh, Cardiff)

These participants did not merely describe a process of change, whether economic, political, social, cultural or demographic; they described a sense of loss and a decline in ‘traditional Britishness’. This was accompanied by confusion and dejection about contemporary Britishness. There was no equivalent sense of loss and decline in the groups made up of people from ethnic minorities. Their views were more focused on the difficulties of the present – in terms of racism and Islamophobia – than on the past.

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2 This perception, however, is partly contradicted by the detailed and relatively homogenous representations of Britishness that were discussed in detail in our earlier report; see Citizenship and Belonging: What is Britishness? (ETHNOS, 2005).

3 Islamophobia is a neologism referring to a fear or prejudice towards Muslims and the religion of Islam. In a landmark report in 1997 entitled Islamophobia: A challenge for all of us, the Runnymede Trust identified the attributes that allow for the qualification of events or situations as ‘Islamophobic’. While the definition and the specific attributes of Islamophobia are contested, the existence of the phenomenon is not.
THE ‘CAUSES’ OF THE PERCEIVED DECLINE

An increase in the ethnic minority population of Britain

In all focus group discussions, white participants attributed the perceived decline of Britishness to the presence of people from different national, ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. The sheer fact of this diversity was seen as problematic and unsustainable by a majority of white participants, especially in England and Scotland.

I think there is a lesser sense of Britishness today than what it used to be, because there are so many ethnic minorities coming here now so you don’t get that sense of as much Britishness anymore, but it’s still there. (White English, Manchester)

If you do go down that road [multiculturalism], you lose essentially what is regarded as Britishness. I think that’s what has happened in the past 50 years or so. We’ve tried to bring in other nations and languages and stuff, but as I said, what is perceived as Britishness has been in gradual decline. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

The multicultural part is so new that it’s just being accepted now. Whether that’s actually seen as being part of Britain, I’m not sure, with all the recent news about asylum seekers and all that sort of thing. And it’s almost like people are saying: ‘No. This is actually ruining Britain.’ A lot of racism is coming in now. (White Welsh, Cardiff)

Ethnic minorities were seen as representing a fundamental attack on the values that form the very core of Britishness. Indeed, many white participants believed that ethnic minorities did not share and, in some cases, actively undermined, many of the values, attitudes, cultural habits and behaviours they associated with Britishness, such as upholding human rights and freedoms, respecting the rule of law, being tolerant, queuing and speaking English. It is in this context that one must understand the portrayal of people from ethnic minorities by white participants as ‘murdering’ deviant family members, being intolerant, jumping the queue, being unable or unwilling to speak English, and so on.

If you are born into a Muslim family, if you don’t follow the Muslim rules, you are chucked out. You hear these horror stories of people being burnt or murdered by their families. I mean they are forced to live that way of life. We are lucky in this country that we can choose what culture we want to belong to. (White Welsh, Cardiff)

We are a very tolerant nation, the British people. That’s the problem, when we’ve got countries coming over here that aren’t that way of thinking. (White Welsh, Cardiff)

[Ethnic minority] people don’t believe in a queue, they try and jump to the front as well. (White Welsh, Cardiff)

These children do not ever learn to speak correct English. I don’t speak correct English but I don’t have a really dreadful accent. (White English, Manchester)
R1: They’re willing to come over and steal white women.
R2: Ah, but they call them white trash!
R1: Exactly yeah! (White Scottish, Glasgow)

The word association task confirmed the negative perceptions of people from ethnic minorities among white participants. Asked to write down the first three words that came to mind when thinking about ethnic minorities, most people produced descriptive associations, such as ‘black’, ‘Asians’, ‘Pakistanis’, ‘immigrants’, ‘different cultures’, ‘religion’, ‘Islam’, ‘community’. However, many also produced answers that were inherently negative, such as ‘trouble’, ‘don’t seem to be minorities’, ‘chip on shoulder’, ‘jump queue’, ‘anti-British’, ‘poor English’, ‘separate’ or ‘Third World’. Out of the 90 answers by white respondents, only three could be deemed positive: ‘colourful’, ‘neighbours’ and ‘hard working’. These associations were generated before the group discussions took place and so could not have been influenced by them.

The timing of the research may partly explain these findings. The fieldwork took place in August and September 2005, less than two months after the terrorist attacks on the London underground. The depth of negative feeling expressed by white respondents must be viewed in this context, and against a background of growing Islamophobia across Europe generally in the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. It was clear in the current study that Islam was a source of fear for many white participants. They perceived the ‘Muslim way of life’ – seen as a monolithic, homogenous bloc and based on representations of Islamic extremists portrayed in the mass media – as antithetical to, and incompatible with, their own lifestyle.

I: So you don’t think one can be British and Muslim?
Absolutely not. They are a completely different culture. We just don’t believe what they are saying. If a Muslim says something, I just don’t believe them at the end of the day. (White English, Manchester)

There’s nothing in common between them lot and us. They live their lives completely cut off from us. They wouldn’t be seen dead in a pub. (White Welsh, Cardiff)

The perceived separation between British Muslims and the white British population was linked to a considerable fear about what went on in the ‘parallels worlds’ inhabited by Muslim people. There was a deeply irrational fear that Britain – the streets, the schools, the government – would be taken over by (extremist) Muslims.

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4 A recent and authoritative report into Islamophobia in Europe in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 (Allen and Nielsen 2002), based on a compilation of 75 reports from EU member nations, unequivocally highlighted the regularity with which ordinary Muslims had become indiscriminate targets for abusive comments and sometimes violent attacks. It found that hate crimes against Muslims were becoming both more extreme and more socially accepted. The report concluded that, despite localised differences in each member state, ‘a greater receptivity towards anti-Muslim and other xenophobic ideas and sentiments has become, and may well continue to be, more tolerated’ across Europe (p 43). Some sociologists and cultural analysts (such as Said 1979) ascribe the growth of Islamophobia in the West to multiculturalism and identity politics, both of which have changed the way that prejudice is formed, by moving away from prejudice based on racial superiority, towards prejudice based on ideas of cultural superiority.
R1: Multicultural religious education in school isn’t a good idea. Our kids could get persuaded, like too immersed, like persuaded to go to the nasty side of it, like become a terrorist. There’s a danger there.

R2: They can get brainwashed. (White English, Manchester)

R1: I heard one of the foremost men from a mosque and he was saying that in 50 years, there would be a black flag over Downing Street. Basically, they’re saying it will be run by Muslims. That’s what they’re going for.

R2: They breed more than we do cos they stay at home. They have eight bedrooms for their eight children. […] They’re completely gonna take over our world. (White English, Manchester)

As documented elsewhere in Europe, our research indicated that fear of, and intolerance towards, Muslims is becoming more widespread. This fear, and the exaggeration of the ethnic minority presence on which it is predicated, is palpable to people from ethnic minority groups.

They [white people in London] kept saying Asians and all sorts of people coming in from abroad, they’re treading over our foot. I went: ‘What’s that supposed to mean?’ Basically, they’re saying there’s more, different types of people coming in and taking over their space. So they feel like a big giant is taking over everywhere. They feel like little ants! That’s how they put themselves, and I thought that’s not true! But if you do feel that, that’s why you’ll always get these Ministers putting rules limiting the number of people coming in. (South Asians, Cardiff)

Unfair claims on the welfare state

It was also clear that many white participants resented what they perceived as the unfair claims made by people from ethnic minority groups on the welfare state. There is evidence (Census 2001; Family Resource Survey 2000; Labour Force Survey 2005; Social Exclusion Unit 2000; and Survey of English Housing 2002) to show that, compared with their white counterparts, people from ethnic minority backgrounds are much more likely to be socially and economically excluded; for example, more likely to live in poor housing, in overcrowded conditions and in the most deprived wards, to be poor or unemployed, to suffer from poorer physical and mental health. While this may mean that some people from ethnic minority groups can make greater demands on the state, it does not necessarily mean, as implied by many white participants, that ethnic minority groups receive preferential treatment from welfare services.

This belief in preferential treatment for ethnic minorities was apparent in the responses to the projective techniques as well as in the group discussions. For instance, in relation to the trigger words ‘ethnic minorities’, answers included ‘spongers’, ‘drain on society’, ‘unemployed’, ‘unfair politics’ and ‘want everything’. In the group discussions, participants expressed similar ideas.

They get all the big houses because they have such large families. (White Welsh, Cardiff)

I used to investigate fraud and everybody that I worked with became more racist doing that job because the percentage of people that committed the fraud were
Asians and Pakistanis […] I’d be working seven days a week and couldn’t possibly afford to live in properties like theirs and they were clearing benefits as well. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

We work hard for a living as well. Instead of sponging. (White English, Manchester)

They are putting all sorts of monies towards Asian children and that’s not right. We are losing as a nation. We are losing our wealth because of that. (White English, Manchester)

Different reasons were invoked to make sense of this perceived preferential treatment, including the recognition that some people might have greater needs, as well as the view that ‘politically correct’ service providers deliberately gave ethnic minorities preferential treatment (or were scared into doing so by the threat of legal action), and the idea that people from ethnic minorities somehow connived to extort better provisions through fraudulent practices. The net result was a general sense that Britishness was in decline because white people were losing out to ethnic minority groups in the competition over state resources.

Moral pluralism and ‘political correctness’

Another concern emerging from white participants was the government’s handling of the moral pluralism5 that cultural diversity brings. There was a clear indication that they viewed institutional efforts to promote integration and cultural diversity as examples of ‘political correctness’. Political correctness was seen as ‘anti-British’ because it was perceived to undermine the democratic idea of freedom of speech. It was therefore held partly responsible for the decline of Britishness.

It’s the political correctness which has come down from central government which is eroding our British way of life. […] The rules that we’ve got now, there’s just an imbalance. The powers that be are just not getting it right. It needs to be looked at afresh. (White Welsh, Cardiff)

Our heritage is being removed, in the name of integration… (White English, Manchester)

You can’t say one thing, you can’t say another thing. You can’t do this, you can’t do that. There is no traditions left. (White English, Manchester)

I feel the government, and local councils as well, they are taking away everything about being British and being more politically correct and integrating everybody,

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5 Moral pluralism is the assumption that morality can no longer be defined in terms of a single, coherent body of knowledge (such as religion, science, philosophy), and the concomitant assumption that there are many moral ‘truths’, some of which may conflict with one another. The challenge for diverse and complex societies like Britain is finding the common ground, acknowledging the legitimacy of conflicting views, and establishing a minimal area of agreement so that diverse groups with different moral codes can live together peacefully. Clearly, moral pluralism is not an exclusive outcome of multiculturalism (as different moral systems can coexist within any one ethnic or cultural group); however, multiculturalism does bring it into sharper relief, making it easier for people to believe, as happened in the white focus groups, that multiculturalism itself causes moral pluralism, and that moral pluralism necessarily undermines ‘Britishness’. 
so that there is harmony. Well, there is never going to be harmony. (White English, Manchester)

R1: We are still a country of free speech.
R2: Yeah, but that's limited, it's becoming limited.
I: In what way?
R2: Well, let's say certain people can stand in the street and rant and rave about the rights of exploited Muslim culture.
R3: That's true. Some people seem to have more freedom of speech than others.
R2: There's that whole kind of political correctness that we are hiding behind.
R4: It's gone too far.
R3: The balance has tipped too far now...
R2: I think equality is not equal anymore.
R3: By bringing these sorts of rules in, they are eroding what is British ... Some of the things they are bringing in for political correctness is actually harming the British way of life. (White Welsh, Cardiff)

One of the problems with invoking ‘political correctness’ is that it enables people to avoid engaging with the substance of arguments that are dismissed as ‘politically correct’. Dismissing anything as ‘PC’ immediately garners support because there is an assumption that ‘everyone’ is against political correctness. In fact, what the white respondents in the study opposed was not necessarily political correctness per se (for example, the idea that carefully chosen language can encourage, promote or establish certain social outcomes and relationships, or the idea that language that excludes or insults a particular group in society should be resisted, or the belief that the resulting changes from these two efforts can benefit society); it was the nature of the outcome itself, namely racial equality and multiculturalism, which many opposed. No one took issue with the idea that language is a powerful tool to achieve social ends, but nearly everyone was angry that they felt they could no longer express what they took to be legitimate concerns and criticisms in relation to ethnic minorities. There was much resentment at the thought that white British people could become only a statistical majority, rather than a moral or normative one.

This was evident, for instance, in one group, when the completed socio-demographic forms and the word association tasks were collected from participants, and it was noticed that many had not written anything in response to being asked to give their ‘ethnic group’.

[Interviewer]: I notice from the forms that many of you have not completed the section on your ethnicity.
R1: I didn’t put anything, as I am not an ethnic minority.
R2: I would see other people as having ethnicity but not me.
If you’re filling a form in, it’s ‘British’. You can’t even put English. You’re not allowed to put English ...
R1: I actually don’t like the question. I don’t like being asked the question. I don’t want to say what I am. You shouldn’t have to say all the time who you are in your own country. I object to it. I feel forced to answer it and I don’t want to answer it. (White English, Manchester)

Some white participants found the very fact of being asked their ethnicity offensive, as this was perceived to reduce their own status to that of any other group. They felt very strongly that the values and lifestyles that used to make up Britishness no longer constituted the moral norm, and that their culture was being ‘diluted’ by the presence of ethnic minorities and misguided political tolerance.
The decline of Britishness in the eyes of white participants was the erosion of British sovereignty through the intrusion of ‘Brussels’ in national affairs. This cause was much less salient, but it was associated with the decline of Britishness, since ‘Europe’ was deemed to be a factor in the arrival of asylum seekers in the UK and was seen as a force towards ‘political correctness’.

R1: Our government don’t have the say they should have. The European Commission and Courts of Human Rights and Courts of Justice, they’ve all gone PC.
R2: Yeah and they’re directing our laws.
R1: It’s wrong.
R3: That’s bad. Political correctness, it’s all come from Europe. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

Anytime someone has a fall out with somebody else here, they always take it to the European court and they win. No matter what our British government say is right. They are diluting our laws and our rights. Our rights are now diluted over the rights of asylum seekers that come over here and demand rights that they didn’t get anywhere else, even in their own country, but we don’t throw them out. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

British constitutional arrangements help to support these contentions. Indeed, while there is a strong tradition of respecting individual rights in Britain, there is no constitutional bill of rights and no basis for courts to overturn parliamentary decisions which violate individual rights. Thus individuals who believe that their rights are violated – and these may be proportionately more likely to be from ethnic minority groups than the majority population – can indeed take their cases to the European Court of Human Rights, and may have domestic decisions overturned in their favour.

It is worth commenting here on some notable ‘absences’ in the data. While post-war migration, moral and cultural pluralism and closer integration with Europe are recognised by expert analysts as factors in the emergence of a new type of Britain, most experts (for example, see Parekh 2000) also include the dissolution of the British Empire, Scottish and Welsh devolution, and economic globalisation in their analysis. Such factors were almost entirely missing from the responses of the people interviewed for this study, regardless of their socio-demographic characteristics.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PERCEIVED DECLINE

Victimisation among white Britons

The most noticeable finding from the discussion by white participants about their belief in the decline of Britishness was a widespread sense of victimisation. In all white focus groups, participants argued that British society was no longer ‘fair’ and that the balance had tipped in favour of people from ethnic minorities (who were often said ‘not to be minorities’ at all).

R1: Black people … get away with much more than any white person gets and the minute people say no to them, they take out the racist card.
R2: I agree with what you say. I’m not brought up racist but the minute you say anything, they bring out this racist card. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

A young white lad was picked up off the street and murdered, brutally murdered, set on fire and three of the suspects fled to Asia. Had it been a black youth taken away by a white group and basically torched like the Klu Klux Klan used to do, they would be up in arms in government and they would come down on the community that’s done it. Yet when it happens the opposite way, it’s not as much furore. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

R1: I feel that I am discriminated against.
R2: I do.
R3: Oh, definitely!
R4: Our heritage is being taken away in the name of integration. We allow the ethnic minorities to almost hold their own identity but we have to give up our own. (White English, Manchester)

R1: Everybody is running scared of ethnic minorities so they get preferential treatment.
R2: They don’t have to queue. They don’t have to wait three or four days for an appointment because everybody is terrified and we are put at the back of the queue. (White English, Manchester)

I just want everything fair, I just want it to be fair. I just want to think that councils build as many churches as they do mosques, that if somebody opens a sandwich shop they have the same opportunities as someone who wants to open a corner kebab shop. I just want it to be fair. Right now, the system isn’t fair. (White English, Manchester)

These views reinforce the earlier discussion about the perceived strain that people from ethnic minority groups put on the welfare state, and the belief that they receive preferential treatment.

One could interpret these findings as a continuation of the dominant negative approach to immigration that has always been part of this society. From this perspective, the results indicate that the important progress made in promoting integration and acknowledging the benefits of cultural diversity has not changed underlying beliefs and associated feelings towards ethnic minority groups. Alternatively, one could see these results as indicative of some sort of ‘white backlash’ in the face of perceived concessions to ethnic minorities. From this perspective, the results indicate that the legal and political changes made in terms of race relations might have inadvertently contributed to deep feelings of alienation, disempowerment and victimisation among the white majority population. Both interpretations probably coexist. Indeed, the very fact that many white participants held negative views of people from ethnic minority groups may be the reason why they felt that any great stride towards their inclusion was discriminatory to the white majority.

Whether or not the feelings expressed by white participants are ‘objectively’ warranted, they have to be treated seriously: these feelings are subjectively real for those people. Importantly, they also have real consequences for people from ethnic minority groups, as they constitute the symbolic environment in which the latter lead their lives.
Victimisation among British Muslims

Another consequence of the way in which ethnic minorities, and Muslims in particular, have been framed as responsible for the decline of Britishness, was an acute sense of victimisation among British Muslim participants in this study. While many stated explicitly that they identified very strongly with Britain, many also felt that they were being unfairly asked to ‘choose’ between being British and being Muslim. The very question was felt to be entirely inappropriate since respondents themselves saw no incompatibility between their citizenship and their faith.

My whole family, immediate family, my children have gone to school, colleges, university, employment. I cannot see how people can say that they are not British, while their families are here and living here, buying things here and spending things here. What more do they want from us? Shall we dance with you? Go to bed with you? That’s not Britishness! Britishness is to feel a part of the country, which we are already part of the country, because we contribute work, we reach out to the people, we rub shoulders with the people. We don’t go to see the striptease, or we don’t sit around and hang around bars. That is the only difference. And if people think we’re not British for that, then I’m very sorry. (Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, London)

Nobody would ask a Scot to support England when they are playing against Scotland. And nobody questions their Britishness. But we have to support England against Pakistan, we have to pass the cricket test. Narrow-minded people! (Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, London)

Greater tolerance towards non-Muslim ethnic minorities

There is some fragile indication that the rise in anti-Muslim sentiment indicated by this report may be accompanied by a decline in racism directed at other ethnic minorities. On a few occasions, participants displayed a growing awareness of the differences between people from various ethnic minority backgrounds, and drew distinctions between black Caribbeans and Indians (who were deemed to be ‘OK’ or ‘like us’), Chinese (who were deemed to be different but who did not make any significant demands on the welfare state or on British civil society) and Muslims, recent migrants and asylum seekers and refugees (who were seen as fundamentally ‘other’). This trend may need to be monitored more closely.

I: Can you tell me why [Kelly Holmes] is acceptable [as British] but Amir Khan isn’t?
R1: To me, she is not a Muslim.
R2: She dresses like us, she speaks like us.
R3: She has the same values.
R1: See? We can integrate, you see?
I: So you think she is like us?
All: Yes. (White English, Manchester)

R1: It doesn’t matter if they tow the line or not, as long as you don’t get any problems from them. Like with Chinese, unless you upset them …
R2: Yep. Chinese keep themselves to themselves, don’t they? They don’t expect that you’ll change for them. (White English, Manchester)
We don’t get so many problems with the Indians up here, do we? They’re OK, I think. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

The threat of social unrest

The perceived decline in Britishness, the increased presence of ethnic minority populations, the anger at a ‘drain’ on the welfare state and moral pluralism, and the ‘political correctness’ of British and European statutory organisations, together with feelings of victimisation among both white and Muslim respondents, fuelled frustration on the part of some participants in the study. According to some white respondents, this was a serious problem, which could lead to ‘social unrest’, ‘trouble’, and even ‘civil war’.

We’re getting fed up now because there are so many refugees coming in. We were tolerant, but we are changing. If it gets as bad as it is in London, then I think a majority of people here are going to be racist as well. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

R1: [White] people are scared to rise up and say that it’s wrong.
R2: That’s why I think we’ll go down the route of right wing and you’ll see a rise in the BNP and the likes because nobody addresses it.
R3: Enoch Powell, he was going on about people coming into this country, and I remember my mum saying that he was really bigoted and terrible, but a lot of things he said have come true. I think he was probably right now. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

I think this hatred is much worse in the last few years, especially since the London bombings and all the rest of it. People who would never have called themselves racist are all sitting back and taking stock. Just ordinary everyday people. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

I think by not integrating, it might sound dramatic, but in my opinion, in our lifetime, we’ll go into civil war. (White Welsh, Cardiff)

There will be an uprising and it will happen, the rivers of blood.
You can only take so much. (White English, Manchester)

The prediction of social unrest was made in all focus groups with white people. However, the overall tone of the discussions revealed differences between national groups, with white English and white Scottish people more likely than white Welsh people to express frustration and aggression towards ethnic minority groups.

CONCLUSIONS

Most white participants in the study attributed what they perceived as a decline in Britishness to an increase in the ethnic minority population of Britain, which in turn placed financial demands on welfare services and encouraged the growth of moral pluralism, and the ‘politically correctness’ of national, regional and local government and of the European Union in dealing with ethnic minorities. Both white and Muslim respondents felt victimised, and the former predicted civil unrest as a result of growing tension between the white majority and the ethnic minority, especially Muslim, populations.
These results are represented graphically in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1: THE DECLINE OF BRITISHNESS: ITS ‘CAUSES’ AND CONSEQUENCES**

These findings are not entirely new; there are strong echoes in the work of other social scientists who studied the reactions of white British people to the ethnic minority groups settling in their midst (see, for example, Burns *et al* 1994; Dench *et al* 2006; and Hewitt 2005). The lack of novelty does not make the results any less disturbing, however. In our opinion, three aspects are particularly worrying.

First, the depth of feelings expressed: white participants were deeply engaged by ‘multiculturalism’ as they saw it and, given a platform to discuss Britishness, they almost immediately converted the topic into the decline of Britishness as caused by people from ethnic minorities. Most white people in the sample located the beginning of the decline of Britishness in the period following the Second World War. They also saw that the mass migration of people from the Caribbean and from the Indian sub-continent happened in the same period. It did not take much, therefore, for them to turn a temporal correlation – between perceived decline of national identity and the arrival of large numbers of immigrants – into a causation, which made ethnic minorities responsible for a decline of Britishness. Moreover, many white participants were emotionally attached to this belief and appeared impermeable to factual information that might contradict it.

Second, the arguments formulated, and the specific examples used to illustrate these, were remarkably common across groups, suggesting either that there are some very widespread sources of frustration among white British people in relation to people from ethnic minorities (see Dench *et al* 2006), or that there is a fairly cohesive (if not coherent) discriminatory public discourse on race, ethnicity and religion, which is somewhat unrelated to objective sources of frustration. Both explanations are probably combined. What is clear is that, in this study, the
discussion about ethnic minorities in general, and about Muslims in particular, relied to a great extent on sensationalist and negative media coverage, rather than on immediate, first-hand experience. Stories circulated in the media were digested and repeated, feeding existing stereotypes and fuelling fears.

Third, moderate and tolerant people seemed to lack any arguments or examples to defend their position: a minority of white participants disagreed with the views dominating the discussions, but they were unable or unwilling to challenge the trend of opinion. Some had to resort to private conversations after the groups were over to say that they did not agree with what had been voiced. One person actually completed the sentence beginning ‘I am…’ with ‘… sorry that so much racism was expressed’ in the post-discussion written exercise. But no one put forward a coherent argument to challenge the dominant opinion as the discussions unfolded. There is a lack of publicly available information for individuals wanting to counteract the negative stereotypes they hear and read about. This silence contributes to the feeling that racist and anti-Muslim rhetoric is acceptable because it is not challenged. It may also give the impression that the white participants are more racist or Islamophobic than they actually are.
3. THE FUTURE OF MULTICULTURAL BRITAIN

This chapter looks at how British respondents from all ethnic backgrounds perceived the future of community relations in Britain. We asked people to debate the advantages and disadvantages of three different models for race relations and to determine which one they favoured for Britain. The three prototypical options were described as follows:

- **assimilation**: a situation where people from ethnic minorities do not maintain their own culture, are immersed into the majority culture and espouse its norms and morals;
- **multiculturalism**: a situation where ethnic minority cultures are maintained and allowed to flourish, while participation in the majority culture is achieved successfully; and
- **separation**: a situation where ethnic minority cultures and traditional British culture ideally exist in isolation from each other.

These loose descriptions were intended to be triggers for the discussions rather than rigorous definitions, since complete cultural autarky and complete cultural dissolution are both equally impossible.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT ‘INTEGRATION’

All respondents were keen to discuss race relations and community cohesion in Britain, but there were difficulties in identifying a common terminology that would be understood by all. Despite the fact that researchers had provided ‘rough-and-ready’ definitions of the key concepts in relation to which they wanted feedback, precisely to ensure that all would have a common vocabulary to discuss the issues at hand, there were many instances where participants, particularly those in the white focus groups, shifted between ‘multiculturalism’, ‘integration’ and ‘assimilation’ in describing the same phenomenon or issue. This can be seen in the many quotes presented in this chapter.

ASSIMILATION

The trend of opinion in the white British sample was divided. Many respondents required assimilation from ethnic minorities, and many others wanted multiculturalism. Those who believed assimilation should take place often referred to the American policy of assimilationism – whereby people from ethnic minority groups are asked to see themselves as American first and to give up their other ethnic, racial or religious identities – as the model Britain should follow.

*R1: When you look at America and they have had the influx of different nationalities, Chinese, Italian or whatever, and America are a big country, and it was a new country, so they took quite a lot of these people in. But they are Americans first.*

I: And you think this is the way it should be here?

*R2: Yeah, if they have the stamp that they are British, they should behave as British. (White Scottish, Glasgow)*

*In America, you are a Chinese American, you are a Pakistani American, you are an Indian American, you are a Mexican American. That’s integration, not what we’ve got here. (White English, Manchester)*
By equating integration with assimilation, and requiring assimilation from ethnic minorities, these white respondents argued that integration had failed whenever they witnessed evidence of a lack of assimilation. People from ethnic minorities were said not to be integrating (assimilating) in the way they should. They were deemed to be living separate lives, refusing to have social intercourse with the majority white population.

R1: I’m not racist to any extent but I’d prefer it if these minorities were integrated to our culture, if they lived the life we live.
R2: Sure, but they’ll never ever do that.
R1: That’s the thing that annoys me. There was a recent article in Australia which was just basically saying that they don’t mind people coming into their culture as long as they embrace their customs, their culture. Then that’s fine. But when they try to live their culture and go against it, then that’s when they say go back to wherever you’ve come from.
I: And that’s the general sentiment here as well?
R1: Yes! (White Scottish, Glasgow)

If we had, say, Asian friends, they’d be friends because they act the way we do, they have the same interests. But it’s the ones that don’t try to embrace our culture, and they walk about and drive in cliques and live eight or twelve people in a house and stuff. They don’t assimilate here. They don’t integrate. They don’t perceive themselves as being Scottish or British. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

You spoke earlier about assimilation and different cultures under one umbrella. These are just theories. In reality, it’s not working and it doesn’t work. (White English, Manchester)

Many in the white focus groups were also concerned with government action in relation to integration and community cohesion (see chapter 2 on the causes of the decline). They felt that the government was imposing multiculturalism on them against their wishes; that it was trying to appease ethnic minorities; that it was being ‘politically correct’. This was deeply resented.

We have had this notion of integration forced upon us for the past 40 years, since people from the Commonwealth started coming into the country, and our government and our councils and everything decided that this is the best way to go. Well I don’t think that integration has happened one iota: 90 per cent of integration hasn’t happened. There are still Pakistanis, there are Bengalis, there are Indians, there are Chinese, there are still Polish, there are still Irish, there are still Jews. (White English, Manchester)

The problem is the politicians aren’t encouraging integration. People in power are not actually encouraging people to integrate. They are still encouraging different types of racial identities and they are not bringing them together. (White Welsh, Cardiff)
MULTICULTURALISM

The white perspective

While many white respondents were unhappy with the state of race relations, there was also a significant minority who fully supported multiculturalism as it is currently lived in Britain. They believed there was a peaceful coexistence of people from different ethnic groups, that there was considerable social intercourse between groups, and that this was positive and enriching for all.

I think it's fine the way things are now. I've got friends from every background and we all get on very well. They have their differences. I'm sure they think we have our differences as well. [...] The world would be a very bland place if we were all the same. (White Welsh, Cardiff)

The attitude that seemed to underpin this multicultural vision for the future of Britain was one of reciprocity: 'We go some way towards them; they go some way towards us'. This is not an easy attitude to arrive at because it presupposes that one’s own indigenous culture is not deemed superior, only different.

Going back to the whole British question, I think it’s to do with attitudes and it’s about getting ourselves in a steady environment and saying: ‘Right, we’ve got all these people here, let’s work with it.’ Right now, we’ve got pretty strong attitudes towards these people. That won’t change overnight all this ‘They do this, they do that’, and ‘I hate this, I hate that’ and I don’t think that will change, but it’s got to change through time, through us changing our attitudes and through them coming into our culture. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

From my perspective, I would quite like it if kids learned Hindu or Urdu as their second language. That would be much more useful than German! I think it should be completely balanced. If we are saying they’ve got to learn our language but we disregard their language, that’s again a superiority complex. I don’t think it’s fair. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

Although some white respondents favoured multiculturalism, they still had concerns about whether it was successful in light of the July 2005 terrorist attacks on the London underground. Both white and non-Muslim ethnic minority participants were beginning to question the success of Britain’s multicultural policy in terms of its ability to integrate people in mainstream British society. From their perspective, the bombings had demonstrated that ‘the Muslim community’ had failed to integrate, did not want to integrate, and had political loyalties outside of, and at odds with, the British state.

Participants debated what they felt was the ‘sine qua non’ for multicultural Britain to work. A number of recurrent themes appeared: learning the English language, schooling in the mainstream educational system so that British values can be learned and endorsed, respecting individual rights and freedoms, and respecting the democratic process to achieve political aims. (These themes partly reflected our findings in our earlier report about which elements represent Britishness – see Citizenship and Belonging: What is Britishness?) In all other ways, those who favoured the multicultural option felt that ethnic minorities should be able to maintain the integrity of their own cultures, in language, food, dress, faith, values and lifestyles.
They’ve all got their own schools and that shouldn’t happen. Ban the whole lot and have only one type of school. They could bring in their priest or rabbi or whatever into one lesson, but everyone should have one basic Scottish education and learn the same basic things. (White Scottish, Glasgow)

I think they should learn to speak English. They can still speak their language, but they need to learn English. (White Welsh, Cardiff)

The ethnic minority perspective

Ethnic minority participants in the study were remarkably homogenous in their views of the future of race relations in Britain: all wanted multiculturalism (sometimes termed integration) and no one wanted either assimilation or separation. Regardless of socio-demographic attributes or nationality, participants wanted both to maintain their culture and traditions, and to participate fully in British society (within the boundaries of what their faith or culture allowed). Many ethnic minority participants felt that they were ‘in-between’ two cultures (this was most often the case with second generation Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, who felt there were large differences between British culture and the culture of their ethnic groups); others felt that both the traditional culture and lifestyles of Britain and of their own ethnic group had changed and become much closer than before (this was mainly true for longer-established groups, such as black Caribbeans and Indians). These situations were generally seen as positive. What was clear, however, was that people from ethnic minority groups were not prepared to ‘give up their identity’, even as they did everything they could to integrate.

Assimilation means giving up your identity and that won’t be liked by our community because if you lose your identity, then you lose everything. (Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, London)

Britishness has to be based on diversity. People have different religions, different cultures. Keeping their own identity and that will not hamper [Britishness]. (Black Caribbeans, London)

We go to school here, we work here, we shop in ordinary shops, we socialise with work mates, we speak English. I mean what else do people want? (South Asians, Cardiff)

I think we’re totally integrated. We dress in our traditional way at home and we eat our own food at home, but when we’re out there with people, we do like the rest of them. We do everything we can to mix with all sorts of people. In fact, I’m sure we mix far more than they [white British people] do. (South Asians, Glasgow)

There was a long discussion in the Indian focus group about how participants felt they had changed, adapted to the British way of life and become ‘Westernised’. The discussion was informative for what it revealed about Indian participants’ perceptions of and identification with Britishness, and about the subtle ways in which integration takes place.

R1: We’re becoming more Westernised from the British people, like what we wear, and we’re also not supposed to go out and enjoy ourselves after work, but we’re starting to do that now.
R2: The education. The British people have a good education and we’ve been given that opportunity and you’ve got more of a chance of getting a job and bettering yourself for your own personal self.
R3: Being selfish. To think about yourself first and look after number one.
R1: Going away on holiday.
I: OK. You’re learning that from the Brits? How about your own personalities and characteristics, your attitudes, your values?
R4: Our attitudes and values are changing as well because obviously our parents are a lot more religious and things than we are. We would try and get away from it a bit, if possible.
R1: In a way, I think our side perhaps is serious and the English are not that serious. They live for the moment. We are adopting that way of life.
R2: Like Indian people like to save. But now we’ll go out there and buy our clothes and buy our cars.
R1: But still be careful. (Indians, Birmingham)

SEPARATION

The white perspective

The theoretical ideal of complete ‘separation’ between white people and those from ethnic minority groups garnered some support in the focus groups with white people, but none in the ones with ethnic minority participants.

As a result of what they viewed as the failure of ethnic minorities to integrate (assimilate), a number of white participants seemed to be dreaming of a return to some imagined status quo ante, when everybody in Britain was white and shared a homogenous culture. Some wanted to stop immigration, others argued that all contact with ethnic minority should be curtailed.

We want separation. But that’s something we’ll never have. (White English, Manchester)

We are too small a country to do what we are trying to do. There’s not enough space for us to bring in all these people. (White English, Manchester)

They’re just so backwards. You don’t really feel like talking to them at all, do you? (White Scottish, Glasgow)

The ethnic minority perspective

The idea of completely separating themselves from the white majority or from other ethnic minority groups was not entertained by ethnic minority participants. No one said they wanted to live in isolation from other social groups, and all claimed to participate in mainstream social and economic life in Britain.

I vehemently oppose [separation]. I think it’s really bad to insist to live on your own and not mixing with the others. It’s bad for your community to keep themselves to themselves. Bad, I think it’s bad.
Should be mixed. Then the culture, everything we can share, then we'll be more bond, racial bond with each other, more mixed and more acceptable of each other. (Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, London)

We haven't come here to live in some little Africa, just cold and grey! If we had wanted Africa, we would have stayed there. We want Britain. We want Scotland. But we want to be able to be ourselves as well. (Black Africans, Glasgow)

However, some participants introduced finer distinctions, which indicated that despite studying, working and shopping alongside white people, they chose to socialise with and marry people from their own ethnic group.

My whole family, immediate family, my children have gone to school, colleges, university, employment. I cannot see how people can say that they are not British, while their families are here and living here, buying things here and spending things here. What more do they want from us? Shall we dance with you? Go to bed with you? That's not Britishness! Britishness is to feel a part of the country, which we are already part of the country, because we contribute work, we reach out to the people, we rub shoulders with the people. We don't go to see the striptease, or we don't sit around and hang around bars. That is the only difference. And if people think we’re not British for that, then I’m very sorry. (Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, London)

The dynamics of exclusion and inclusion

Part of the discussion also focused on what respondents described as actually happening in everyday life – the small, local interactions between people which could either make multicultural Britain a successful reality or a failure.

It is important here to look at the barriers that prevent people from ethnic minorities participating fully and positively in mainstream British society. These include racism, prejudice and discrimination, but of greater importance are the everyday ‘innocuous’ questions and small gestures, which mark out ethnic minorities as ‘other’, and through which the boundaries of Britishness are maintained and ‘policed’. They are also related to the desire from some people from ethnic minority groups to limit their contact with the majority culture, either to avoid further discrimination or to preserve cultural traditions, or simply because a familiar cultural environment may be more comfortable.

Throughout the group discussions with ethnic minority participants, there were many examples of how they perceived that double standards were applied to them, compared with the white British population. Examples included having to pass the ‘cricket test’ (being required to declare their support for England over Pakistan in international test matches); being asked where they came from many times over until the answer fits the expectations of the person asking it, rather than actually reflecting someone’s true origins or identity; being forced to display ‘loyalty’ to Britain by not voicing criticisms about Britain or the government, in a way that is not required of white British people; being told to ‘go back home’ if they are being critical; being implicitly or explicitly asked to choose between their religion and citizenship, and so on. These practices mark out people from ethnic minorities as outsiders and do not foster a sense of belonging to Britain. Thus, while ethnic minority participants often said that they personally felt British, Scottish or Welsh, they pointed out that they were also constantly reminded that they are not always seen to be.
We really haven't got the right to criticise anything, compared to white British people in this country. We should have as much right as they have but, looking at our colour, they'll tell you to go back home. They'll say this is not your home; this is our home. If you're not happy, just leave. (Indians, Birmingham)

R1: Although we’re British, we don’t feel British. We still have to say that we’re Pakistani because we are not accepted as British.
R2: But we were born here!
R3: We can be British as long as we blend in with them. But if you are being yourself, if you want to keep to your culture, they won’t accept you. (South Asians, Glasgow)

You’re not really seen as a Welsh person because of your colour or because of your accent. I don’t particularly mind explaining it, but I think you do need to explain it. (South Asians, Cardiff)

The other day, I got someone saying quite loudly: ‘Oh, asylum seekers, blah, blah, blah,’ whatever the topic was. But then that was directed towards me and I felt really bad because I am not an asylum seeker. I’ve lived here all my life. But I am never viewed as a Welsh person or a British person. (South Asians, Cardiff)

People still say: ‘Where are you from?’ Glasgow. ‘No WHERE are you from. You can’t really be! Why are you black then?’ That kind of attitude doesn’t make you feel a part of this country. So if they feel that we are not from here, then it makes it difficult for us to feel that we belong with them. (Black Africans, Glasgow)

It appears that one important barrier preventing integration is not that ethnic minority respondents themselves have refused to integrate, but that they have been made to feel that they are forever outsiders, and therefore do not feel British. In order to be accepted as British, ethnic minority participants felt that they would have to assimilate, rather than integrate, which most resisted forcefully.

Another problem is that some ethnic minority participants (and white people) use strategies of self-segregation to preserve their own culture, to prevent contact with others (at least in certain spheres of life), or simply to feel at ease with people who share their values and experience of life in Britain.

My university is predominantly white people and I don’t talk to none of them. I can’t stand none of them to be perfectly honest! They’ve just got a whole attitude about them like they are better than you, sort of thing. So I just stick to the black people, like a typical stereotype. (Black Africans and Black Caribbeans, London)

R1: When you’re with Asian people, there’s more trust there, but when you’re with your white friends, you really have to be careful of what you’re going to say.
R2: I think you feel like you have to act in a certain way.
R1: Yes, whereas when you’re with your Asian friends, you can talk in your own language and just relax and be yourself. But with them, I’m not saying that in a nasty way, but with white people, you can’t really be yourself. That’s why we see more Asians. (Indians, Birmingham)
R1: Everything happens around alcohol and the pub so that makes it hard for us to really socialise with Scottish people. We see them at shops, at the doctors, at work, but otherwise, not much socially.
R2: It’s just that you can’t go out with them if you are a Muslim. You can’t drink, you can’t dance, you can’t do the night out thing because obviously it’s a different culture.
R3: I’ve got Muslim friends who go to the pub and don’t drink. They just drink orange juice or something.
R4: OK but there’s the stigma that our community attach when a Muslim goes into a pub. They start talking. They make up their own little story: she’s a bad woman.

(South Asians, Glasgow)

But participants also talked about small, everyday gestures that brought people closer together. Ethnic minority participants discussed cooking traditional food for white friends, choosing cafes where people from all faith and ethnic backgrounds can go to socialise after work, sending their children to local schools, inviting white people to Asian ‘functions’ (such as mendhis and valeemas, which are part of the wedding celebrations, Diwali and Eid festivities and so on). One example given showed both the difficulties and the benefits of integration, the social expectations of a local Indian community in Cardiff, the recognition of the efforts of others to reach out, and the power of friendship to transcend boundaries:

There was this big function at a temple and I just invited my white friends. They came to the temple and I knew everyone was looking at them and I was thinking: ‘What the hell is she doing? Why the hell are you wearing a short skirt for? You always wear trousers, why did you have to wear a short skirt just today?’ I knew that everyone was looking at her. But then I just held her hand and I took her in and I thought she’s my friend. She’s another human being and as soon as I held her hand, it was so soft, and I thought: ‘I really care about the person, that’s what matters. It doesn’t matter what the others think is right. She’s actually come out of her way to come visit and try and learn about the culture and I like that.’ (South Asians, Cardiff)

CONCLUSIONS

There was much confusion and misunderstanding displayed in the focus groups about what ‘integration’ meant. Most white participants equated it with assimilation, and felt that, as complete assimilation hadn’t occurred, this meant ethnic minority groups had refused to integrate and therefore that multiculturalism as a policy had failed. For ethnic minority participants, and some white respondents, integration was about participating fully in British society while keeping ethnic minority cultures alive. These participants were satisfied with the current state of British society; however, there were concerns raised by some white and non-white ethnic minority participants that recent acts of terrorism, such as the London bombings in July 2005, called into question the success of the project of multiculturalism. Our research showed that an important barrier to integration was the subtle and everyday ‘policing’ of the boundaries of Britishness by white people, as experienced by ethnic minority respondents. This policing was not necessarily underpinned by a virulent and intentional racist ideology, but appeared to be mainly a consequence of an implicit, unquestioned assumption that Britishness remained the prerogative of white and predominantly English people, rather than a more flexible, diverse and changing citizenship.
4. POINTS OF DISCUSSION

In this final section, we draw attention to what we take to be the most important or problematic issues to have emerged from the research as a whole. We then discuss some of the strategic and operational implications of the findings, and identify future research that could help to elucidate many of the issues raised in, but not resolved by, this current study.

KEY FINDINGS

A number of points emerged from the research.

- Britishness was often seen by white participants as the prerogative of white (English) people, and some of the white respondents who did recognise that this was not in fact the case felt resentful about it.

- According to most white participants, Britishness was perceived to be in decline. The decline was attributed to the following ‘causes’: the arrival of people from ethnic minorities and the subsequent demands on the welfare state, the moral pluralism partly created by the arrival of people from ethnic minorities, and the ‘political correctness’ which characterised the way race relations were managed at all levels of government in Britain and Europe.

- Participants from ethnic minority groups did not perceive Britishness to be in a similar state of decline.

- Many white participants expected ethnic minorities to assimilate (that is, to give up the culture of their country of origin and to entirely espouse British culture) rather than to integrate. They therefore believed that people from ethnic minorities had failed to integrate when cultural differences between ethnic groups persisted.

- All participants from ethnic minority groups favoured the multicultural model over either assimilation or separation. All wanted to have their cultural heritage recognised and valued, and all felt that they were integrated and that they participated sufficiently in mainstream British life. However, many argued that they were made to feel like outsiders by white British people.

- A minority of white participants also shared the view that multiculturalism was the most desirable state of affairs, and were relatively satisfied with the state of race relations in Britain.

- A minority of white participants claimed that they would prefer to curtail their contact with people from ethnic minorities, and to stop or slow down immigration.

- The terrorist acts in the United States in September 2001 and on the London underground in July 2005 seemed to have changed the way that participants viewed race relations. Anti-Muslim sentiment was expressed frequently and forcefully, mainly by white respondents, but also by non-Muslim ethnic minority participants. There were also some indications that white participants were drawing finer distinctions between ethnic minority groups, and displaying greater tolerance towards non-Muslim ethnic minorities.
Race relations were played out differently in England (London, Manchester and Birmingham), Scotland (Glasgow) and Wales (Cardiff), with ethnic minority participants in Scotland and Wales identifying more strongly with Scotland and Wales than ethnic minority participants in England. White participants from England and Scotland displayed greater frustration towards people from ethnic minorities in general, compared with white participants in Wales.

THE STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL AGENDA

These findings strongly indicate the need to:

- **Define the vision for race relations in Britain**

A clear vision for multicultural Britain is needed. Currently, some experts advocate a near assimilationist agenda. They want ethnic minorities to integrate more fully into the white British mainstream and believe that the current levels of social, cultural, economic and political difference between ethnic minority groups and the white majority pose a threat to civic society. From this perspective, they believe that the multicultural project has failed. Other experts, including Tariq Modood and Bhikhu Parekh, advocate a purer multicultural agenda. They want ethnic minority groups to partake in mainstream British society on their own terms, as long as they abide by British laws. They believe there is value in the cultural diversity which ethnic minorities bring to Britain and that this diversity needs to be actively encouraged to blossom. From our experience of research and policy in ethnic relations, we would suggest that the multicultural agenda is more realistic and desirable than the assimilationist one. One could even argue that multiculturalism has already won the day by default, as there are no clear and credible alternative positions (see Kymlicka 1998).

However, our findings indicate that multiculturalism cannot be implemented without managing the needs and fears of the white population, who make up the large part of the environment in which ethnic minorities live their lives. Any effort to promote cultural diversity must take account of the possible reactions of white British people. From some white participants, we saw what amounted to a ‘white backlash’ against people from ethnic minority groups. Historically, such reactions have occurred (in this country as well as in similar democracies like America and Australia) whenever the possibility emerged of whites having to compete with ethnic minorities on legal, occupational, educational or residential grounds, where white advantage would be diminished or nullified (Hewitt 2005). It is not surprising therefore that such a backlash should take place now, as the proportion of people from ethnic minority groups is increasing, and as policies and legislation for greater equality are being created and enforced. Ignoring the experiences and opinions of those white British people who feel threatened by this situation could mean that racist and Islamophobic extremism find fertile ground (Dench *et al* 2006 and Modood 2005).

- **Make the case for multiculturalism and diversity**

Currently, the right-wing press seems to be setting the agenda, with strong views against Muslims, asylum seekers and refugees, and Gypsies and Travellers in particular (Allen and Nielsen 2002; Greenslade 2005; and Lewis 2005). To counter one-sided or inaccurate reporting, evidence-based economic, political and moral arguments are needed. Our research showed that even those participants who supported multiculturalism were unable to back up their feelings with arguments during focus group discussions. It may be useful to think about multicultural appreciation as one of the basic daily living skills required to live in contemporary British society, and as a skill that has to be taught and fostered.
Rethink the national story and identity

The story of British ‘decline’ was virtually taken for granted by many participants. They seemed to imagine a golden age when Britain was powerful abroad and socially harmonious at home, and when everybody was white and culturally homogenous. Against this idealised vision, it is easy to see why participants might see Britishness as in decline and why they might hold people from ethnic minorities responsible. This suggests that Britain needs to rethink and retell its national story to counteract the assumption of past social harmony and its subsequent decline. It also suggests a need to reformulate the national identity to counteract the assumption of white homogeneity and to make diversity normal, rather than exceptional and problematic.

The exercise of collective redefinition concerns Britain’s present and future, as well as its past. While the history of countries like Canada, Australia and Malaysia are very different from that of Britain, these states have developed a national identity based on being multicultural (Hewitt 2005 and Kymlicka 1995). In this context, immigrants become integral to the nation-building project, rather than being perceived as a threat to some pre-existing national entity and identity. An inclusive, multicultural political project backed by a strong national identity is a much more attractive proposition for ethnic minority groups themselves; it makes people feel they belong and increases their motivation to integrate (Modood 2005).

Debate the merits and failings of assimilationist policies

The American assimilationist model seemed to appeal to many white participants. They wanted people from ethnic minority groups in Britain to define themselves as British first and foremost, and felt that this was happening in America. From an expert perspective, however, it is clear that racial discrimination and inequality has not disappeared in the United States, and that the American model has not created community cohesion and racial integration (see, for example, Kymlicka 1995; Steinhorn and Diggs-Brown 1999; and Wicker 1996).

Work closely with both British Muslim and white British organisations

Many organisations, including the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), central and local government, the media, businesses, charities, voluntary and community groups all have a role to play in contributing to positive public debate about ethnicity and religion, and in challenging negative and stereotypical views of ethnic minorities in general and Muslims in particular. As the CRE develops its work, we believe that there may be great benefits in working more closely with British Muslims. Perhaps more surprisingly, we also believe that the CRE may need to engage with the white British population, so that its work to promote racial equality is not seen as happening at the expense of white Britons; a perception which could be harmful to people from ethnic minorities.

The CRE needs to be proactive in its public relations and communications work, to generate arguments in favour of diversity and make these publicly available.

THE RESEARCH AGENDA

Our findings raise important questions. Many issues surfaced so clearly during discussions that they had to be covered in some detail, although they were not intended to be part of our remit. Not surprisingly, the findings throw up more questions than they answer. Further work – including qualitative research to explore certain ideas in depth, quantitative research to map opinions across different groups, and desk research to establish the evidence through literature reviews and to explore new policy ideas – is required on the following issues.
What conditions help to stabilise multicultural states?
What strategies can be put in place to foster community cohesion?
What do British people think about multiculturalism and integration?
Do they feel integration has been achieved: in what ways, to what extent, by whom?
What do they value about diversity?
What do they dislike or fear about diversity?
What difficulties do they encounter as citizens of a multicultural state?
How do they feel community relations ought to be managed?
Do they perceive greater differences today between various ethnic minority groups than they used to?
Has the current threat of terrorism changed their lives? How is it different from previous terrorist threats?
What do they think needs to be done to address negative and stereotypical perceptions of British Muslims, and to foster community cohesion?

These and other questions need to be asked, with great sensitivity, of the following groups: white Britons, British Muslims, non-Muslim ethnic minorities, and new migrants. While new migrants were not part of the current research, any attempt to understand how integration works (an objective to which our research sought to contribute) should include the experiences and needs of new migrants from the moment they arrive in Britain. By understanding better the difficulties migrants encounter, and the support they need to integrate and participate more fully in British life, we can ease the process of migration and make settlement in Britain easier for future migrants and those already living in Britain.
APPENDIX A
WORD ASSOCIATION TASK

NAME: _______________________________

PLEASE WRITE DOWN THE FIRST THREE WORDS THAT COME TO MIND WHEN YOU READ EACH OF THE WORDS IN THIS BOOKLET. DO NOT SPEND TIME THINKING ABOUT EACH WORD. JUST WRITE DOWN WHAT SPONTANEOUSLY COMES TO MIND. DO NOT CHANGE YOUR ANSWERS. THANK YOU.

We provide the example of the target word ‘British’ only. An identical format was used for the other target words, which were: ‘Scottish’, ‘Welsh’, ‘English’, ‘European’, ‘Ethnic minority’, ‘Success’, ‘Identity’, ‘Community’, ‘Difference’, ‘Culture’ and ‘Integration’. Each target word was printed on a separate page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BRITISH</th>
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<tr>
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CITIZENSHIP AND BELONGING: WHAT IS ‘BRITISHNESS’?
Discussion guide for lay respondents

This discussion will cover your views and ideas about the extent to which ‘Britishness’ is an important idea in society, what ‘Britishness’ might be, how you yourself relate to the idea of ‘Britishness’, and how/where it exists in the UK. Finally it will cover your ideas about the relationship between successful Britons and success.

The discussion will be recorded and will be completely anonymous and confidential. You will receive £35 as thanks for your time.

Introduction

- Ethnos – independent research company
- Confidentiality
- Recorded (audio-taped)
- Incentives
- Importance of research
- Time
- Housekeeping
- Personal introduction

Exploring attributes of ‘Britishness’ (30 mins overall)

Introduce word association exercise
12 words (10 mins)

Is there such a thing as Britishness? Does it make sense to talk about a ‘British identity’?
What does this mean or describe for you?

What kind of people do you think of when thinking of ‘the British’?

What makes these people British?

Explore both positive and negative aspects of these attributes:

- A way of looking/dressing?
- A way of thinking (such as a set of beliefs)?
- A certain set of values?
- A set of related/unrelated ideas?
- A set of behaviours?
- Anything else?

What are the bad things about the British? And the good?

Are there particular core aspects to British identity that are universally recognised?

What aspects of Britishness do you see in yourself?
Who do you think ‘decides’ on what is or is not British? Are there levels of Britishness?

**Britishness vs other national/supra-national identities (20 mins)**

Are there any differences or similarities between Englishness and Britishness?

How about Scottishness and Britishness?

And Welshness and Britishness?

Of the three, which is the most British and why?

Explore:

- Qualities
- Beliefs
- Value sets
- Approaches
- Behaviours, ways of interacting

Has (partial) devolution affected this at all?

Can you think of any aspect of Welsh/Scottish/English culture that is NOT very British?

**Europe**

What do you think about European identity (is there such a things as a European)?

What would you say are the key traits of being European?

Are there any similarities between being British and European? What about being English/Scottish/Welsh and European?

**Britishness and ethnic identity (20 mins)**

If I asked you what [ethnic] group you belong to, what would you say?

Do you think of yourself as English/Scottish/Welsh or not? [delete as appropriate to country in which discussing]

Would you say that your [ethnic] identity is an important or relevant part of the way in which you think about yourself?

We are interested in whether you feel your ethnic identity may be more important at some times rather than others.

How would you think of yourself when you are...

- At home with family
- At work (current and past work, and applying for work)
- Socialising with friends
- At sporting events
- In institutional settings (explore police, benefits office, school, banks etc)
- Whenever ethnicity is being challenged or undermined
- Any other

Do you find that sometimes other people treat you as an [ethnic group]?

- Who?
- When?
- How do you feel about that?

Is this ever something that you resent or actively try to resist? How/in what ways?

**Cost and benefits of British/ethnic identity (20 mins)**

Do you feel there are benefits to identifying as [your ethnic group]?

What is the nature of these benefits?

Explore:

- Psychological (sense of psychic security feeling located in a friendly and welcoming community, security from knowing where one is even if rest is hostile – explore Islamophobia, etc)
- Social (having friends from own background that can do things with, seeking potential partners of same background, etc)
- Economic (employment by others, support from others etc)
- Political
- Cultural (religion, mores, values, beliefs)

Does this identification involve any ‘cost’ to you?

Explore:

- Time involved in supporting these ties (if over long distance)
- Financial – in lost jobs opportunities, in maintaining contact to support ties, etc
- Psychological – in terms of maturation in UK, possible ‘struggle’ with identity in youth and the fall out from this in terms of self-identity and how one feels about oneself
- Cultural – ‘giving up’ some of your beliefs, values and approaches
- Discrimination and exclusion – if one ‘actively’ identifies with ethnic group. But would happen anyway?

Do you feel there are benefits to identifying as British?

What is the nature of these benefits?

Explore:

- Psychological (sense of psychic security/pride feeling located in a friendly and welcoming community)
- Social (having friends from own background that can do things with, seeking potential partners of same background, etc)
- Economic (employment by others, support from others, etc)
- Political
- Cultural (values, beliefs – and possible religion)

Does this involve any ‘cost’ to you?

What do people think of the relationship between their ethnic identity on the one hand and (their) British identity on the other?

Explore:
- Conflicting
- Mutually reinforcing
- Separate and discrete
- Both areas of conflict and areas that mutually reinforce each other
- Combination of the above

**Britishness and success (10 mins)**

Carrying on with the theme ‘success’, I want to look at what you think it is to be successful in Britain today. Firstly, who are the people that you think are successful? (List)

Why do you think they are successful?

Explore:
- Financial
- Personal achievement
- Fame/notoriety (explore ‘fame for fame’s sake’ as one extreme)
- Spiritual/moral or religious leadership
- Political
- Other

Are there any other people that you see in your everyday lives that you have not mentioned, who you think are successful?

Overall, what do you think goes to make a ‘successful Briton’?

Are there any common characteristics that you can see in the people who you think are successful?

Earlier I asked you to think about what goes to make up Britishness for you. Is it easier to think about Britishness if we think about ‘successful’ Britons?

Given everything we have discussed, I would like you to think about a few final sentences.

**Introduce sentence completion exercise (10 mins)**

**Close and thanks**
APPENDIX C
SENTENCE COMPLETION TASK

NAME: ______________________________________

PLEASE COMPLETE THE SENTENCES BEGUN BELOW. FOR EACH ONE, PLEASE TRY TO WRITE DOWN AS MANY SENTENCE ENDINGS AS YOU CAN. THANK YOU.

NOTES FOR CRE: Each sentence beginning was repeated five times. All sets of five identical sentences were printed on separate pages. The sentence beginning with ‘Scottish/Welsh/English people are…’ was adapted to match the region where the research was carried out. The sentence beginning with ‘I feel like an ethnic minority when…’ was only used with non-white British. The sentence completions were done after the group discussions had taken place.

I am …

Scottish/Welsh/English people are …

Britishness is …

I feel British when …

I feel like an ethnic minority when …

Successful Britons are …

Integration is about …
APPENDIX D
REFERENCES


