



# Cultural integration, subjective identity, and well-being: global migrants in the UK

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Accepted: 19 October 2023 / Published online: 4 November 2023  
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## Abstract

Recent waves of immigration in Western societies have drawn attention to social transformational challenges and their repercussions for migrant physical and mental wellbeing. Research into migration has tended to focus on Cultural Integration (CI) with Western country cultures and social norm. We fill a research gap in which the social transformation repercussions and the evolutionary function of human psychology remain underexplored. We theorize how the Evolutionary Fitness and Subjective Significance of Identity can emerge from CI, thus, positively impacting Subjective Well-Being (SWB) of migrants. To legitimize the model we propose, sets of rigorous empirical analyses were developed, drawing on panel data of 5,558 respondents from 7 waves of global migrant surveys within the UK during 2009–2018. Our results supported our hypotheses by suggesting that a tightly defined CI was negatively related to SWB, but a relatively *fluid* orientation towards CI was positively related to SWB, and the positive relationship became more compelling when the Subjective Significance of Identity (SSI) emerged from the integration process, such that the indirect effect of CI through SSI on SWB was strongest when the degree of SSI was high. Our study offers implications for how policymaking and management strategies can integrate cultural characteristics, increasing migrants' cultural confidence, self-esteem, and economic creativity in the country of residence.

**Keywords** Cultural integration · Evolutionary fitness · Subjective significance of identity · Subjective well-being

## Introduction

Recent statistics highlight the dramatic rise in the global population residing in countries outside their country of origin while the subpopulation has grown to an estimated 258 million in 2017, up 49% since 2000, and reached almost 281 million in 2020 (IOM, 2021). The number of migrants living in high-income countries increased from 9.6% in 2000 to 14% in 2017 (IOM, 2021). In the United Kingdom (UK), the foreign-born population increased from approximately 5.3 million in 2004 to over 9.5 million in 2021 (Mcauliffe

& Triandafyllidou, 2021), and global migrants currently accounts for 14% of the UK total population (67 million). EU migrants in the UK increased faster during the 2000s and 2010s, yet non-EU foreign-born migrants have formed the largest volumes of migrant population and cultural heterogeneity, while in 2021 UK had nearly 70% of foreign-born migrants, compared to the rest of EU foreign-born migrants. Diverse footprints of migrants and the dynamic landscapes of migration persistently draw research attention to cultural integration.

Cultural Integration (CI) seemingly is a challenging factor for migrants as well as for migrant residence countries, such as the UK. CI attempts to promote, combine, and incorporate diverse cultures, and their influences on both local citizens and migrants. In Western countries, CI is expected to lead to a coherent pattern of values and taken-for-granted “implicit institutional logics, societal norms, and commonly endorsed personal values” (Peterson et al., 2018). CI plays a vital role in shaping culture and individual behaviour, helping migrants integrate shared values and value diversity, shaping collective behavioural patterns that allow individuals, groups, and communities justify and legitimise different

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behaviours by encouraging specific economic, social, and political arrangements (e.g., markets, marriage, democracies) (Bisin et al., 2008; Fryer & Torelli, 2010). CI transforms differentiated behavioural norms into shared preferences, values, and aspirations (Wang et al., 2021), which are expected to become “commonly endorsed personal values”, which encourage individuality as well as interdependency (Peterson et al., 2018). CI encourages prosocial behaviour, generating collective actions (Wang & Giovanis, 2021), enhancing entrepreneurial activity among heterogeneous groups, thus, strengthening both *diversity* and *unity*—the *uniqueness* of a competitive nation (Wang et al., 2021).

Nonetheless both empirical and conceptual studies have revealed that migrants face persistent challenges that run counter to the logic of CI (Blessi et al., 2016; Giovanis, 2021) while the social transformations are known as to change migrant social cultural, psychological, and economic patterns of life (Hendriks & Burger, 2020; Swidler, 2001). Regarding social cultural patterns, research has reported that even among the second-generation, some migrant communities feel culturally distant, regarding their identity, ethnicity, cultural values, and social norms (Bisin et al., 2008). Empirical research conducted in the UK, the US, and within the European Union (EU) reported that migrants’ sense of self and identity was a significant factor in their level of emotional distress (Bisin et al., 2008). Regarding changes in economic patterns, research provided evidence that had suggested although the change often led to desirable outcomes, such as rising income or wealth, which however was not inevitable, not logically increased SWB—this had been known as the “Easterlin paradox” (Easterlin, 2001). Subsequent studies also identified although early income growth increased SWB, this relationship was frequently reversed in a later process, and in certain circumstances, the perceptions of early benefits fell away swiftly (Melzery & Muffelsz, 2017). Regarding psychological patterns, research has argued that “migration is one of the most significant stressful life events” (Bak-Klimek et al., 2018:1566), cultural challenges adversely affect SWB, causing distress for some and worsening economic and social conditions for others. Migrants face multiple stressors, including language barriers, unfamiliar behavioural norms (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2023), loss of social, familial, and other support networks, and for some, discrimination, and underemployment (Hendriks & Burger, 2020).

Immigration waves draw research attention to the repercussions of social transformations. Social transformations lead to a period of “unsettled lives” of migrants once their life experiences and cultural understandings that they seek to maintain are disturbed (Swidler, 1986, 2001), which adversely affect migrant Evolutionary Fitness, such as their abilities to adapt and to fit into the new social environment. “Acculturation” coined by Redfield et al., (1936:

149) stressed that “groups of individuals, having different cultures” have “subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns” to comprehend host country cultural patterns and behaviours. Tightly defined integration or “acculturation” requires change in behaviour, beliefs, and other cultural presentations. Counter to the above, research has reported such approach incurs a psychological cost that affects migrants’ SWB (Bak-Klimek et al., 2018; Hendriks & Burger, 2020). Our contention is CI neither can be adequately explained by “cultural convergence” nor by “acculturation”. Cultural variances coexist in societies. Social transformations involve migrants in constantly shifting fitness landscapes, whereby CI and adjustment are “not fully comfortable and familiar” (Swidler, 2001: 101), so that, relatively fluid CI implies (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2023), and this is concerned with migrant Evolutionary Fitness (EF). The EF in Darwinian theory is such that emerging from the evolutionary selection of traits (phenotypic behaviours), to select those who perform better than others, though not the best possible (Johnson et al., 2013). The EF allows individuals to maintain and develop their fitness traits, which are deemed as adaptation to variation (Cunha & Heckman, 2009), other than convergence into one set of culture (Vaisey, 2019). Adaptation to variation implies cultural configuration and embeddedness, and the flexible approach to CI enables the evolutionary quality of migrant CI. This conjecture resonates with Swidler’s (1986) cultural toolkit theory (i.e., repertoire of resources available or can be drawn for solving different types of problems). The toolkit is an essential source of creativity that has adaptive value in differentiated environments (Swidler, 1986, 2001; Weber & Dacin, 2011). The EF therefore improves migrant SWB, and drives human population to evolve, thus, resilience of organizations and societies. However, how that Darwinian evolutionary processes can entail migrants maintaining fitness levels in changing and challenging environments remains under-researched.

To fill the research gap, we draw out a link between CI and EF. We theorize that EF is concerned with migrant cultural confidence, creativity, and entrepreneurship, which not only increase migrant SWB, but also economic activity of the migration country. The EF emerges from relatively fluid orientation towards CI that enables individuals to accumulate cultural resources and make choices over how their resources are configured in variant situations. The fitness risen explains migrants’ adaptation to variation, given the pervasive form of flexibility for adaptation and selection, to build new identities, to select those traits that have potential to perform well in the changed environments. While a relatively fluid approach to CI better explains the SWB, the Subjective Significance of Identity (SSI) implies for CI and SWB. The SSI is to be distinguished from the overweighted cultural behaviour presentations and Economic Presentation of Identity (EPI), which have been criticized by studies

(e.g., Melzery & Muffelsz, 2017; Streib, 2017). EPI involves situations encounter cultural and economic presentations of identities, such as, social rank, identity prestige, and social class, which consequently affect SWB. We draw attention to the SSI, while prior research on CI has neglected the SSI and given less attention to individual need for self-esteem and the need to belong (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016; Benabou & Tirole, 2006). The SSI evolves represents the human evolving psychology that can figure strongly in changing environments (Swidler, 2001; Weber & Dacin, 2011), as such, we remain SSI as that being a lower-class member or a sub-cultural or minority religious group does not have to think of their identities less salient, less probable, or less they can contribute to the national identity, prestige, and growth. The SSI has gained growing interest in research (e.g., Akerlof & Kranton, 2010; Aoki, 2007; Collier, 2016), whereby the question that requires further studies is: How does the SSI impact the relationship between CI and SWB?

We hitherto highlighted the objectives of our study and the constructs of the proposed model (ref. Figure 2). First, the model suggests there is an either positive or negative relationship between CI and SWB, depending on how CI accommodates a range of cultural orientations, such that CI can be efficacious if the plasticity of migrants' cultural backgrounds, experiences function effectively in the resident country's cultural orientations. Second, the relatively fluid approach in part represents the flexibility that enacts the EF while migrants have some choice in their identity and consequently greater scope to influence economic and social decisions (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010). Third, the adaptive approach to CI enables the SSI to emerge that has far-reaching consequences for migrant SWB, while the choices they make over identities, and how they relate to others both nationally and within the organization or group can make their salient identity more probable, regardless their social rank and religious state (e.g., go to a Western Church or Mosques). Importantly, we represent a new strand of research on human evolutionary psychology by focusing on EF and SSI in the research field of CI and SWB, within the empirical context of global migrants in the UK.

Our study in three areas contributes to migration studies. First, by proposing a relatively fluid approach to CI, we argue that research would benefit from the idea that individuals accumulate cultural resources and have choices over how their resources are configured depending on the situation. In contrast to literatures that emphasize tightly integrated individual value sets that converge to a common set of end values, the critical debate that we seek to address is that the standard approach to CI forms an inadequate base for research and policymaking in culturally differentiated societies and therefore studies will need to move beyond the restrictions imposed by much of tightly defined CI thinking. Second, CI is malleable, and to some extent drives the EF.

We theorize that migrants exercising a pervasive form of flexibility enables a better approach to CI, by which changes according to circumstances, leading to the creativity that neither can be found in *acculturation* studies, nor be found in the emphasis of *cultural convergence*. We contribute to policy choices by drawing attention to social-cognitive spaces that value different combinations of cultural resources, or at least do not reject them, as in the fluid societal cultures discussed by Acemoglu and Robinson (2023). Third, we value more the human evolving psychology, specifically, the SSI in the model relationship between CI and SWB. We draw on theory from well-documented studies in evolutionary economics and social identity theory to construct the model, while choices of identity are not portrayed in acculturation studies. We contribute to the migration and evolutionary psychology literature by showing how the inner self that drives a person's identity also provides a capacity for adaptation through a change in economic and social expectations for personal benefit. Our study offers implication for how organizations and policymakers can drive the incentive to encourage SSI, enhancing satisfaction, tolerance, and happiness, thus, strengthening the relationship between CI and SWB.

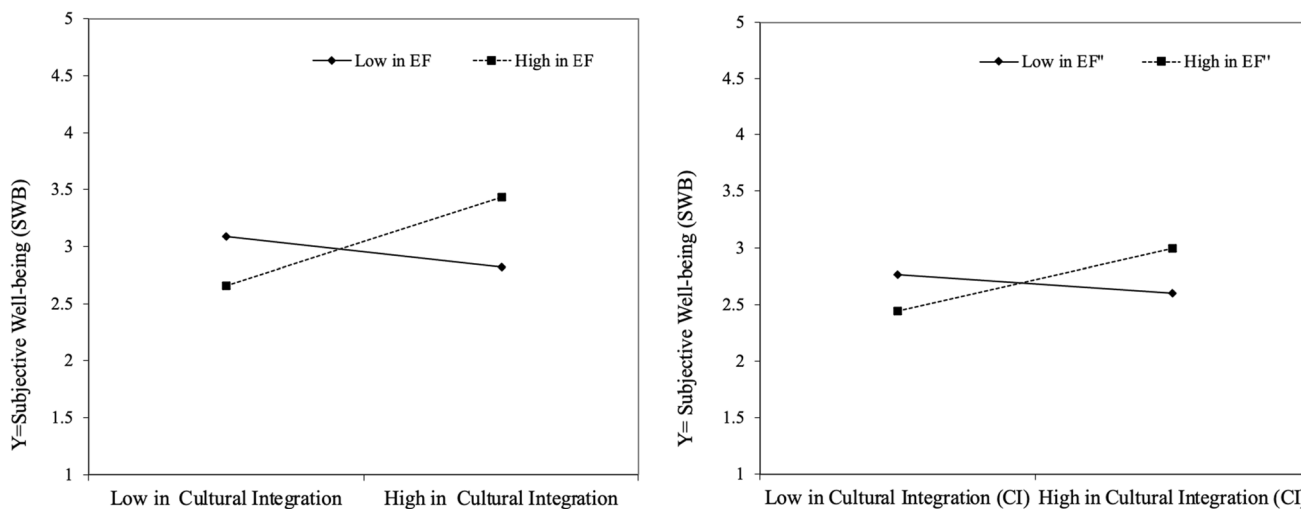
## The theoretical framework and hypotheses

Cultural resources include prominent beliefs that people have about the world, that shape a person's life strategies (Peterson et al., 2018) or strategies of action (Swidler, 1986, 2001). Cultural integration (CI), therefore, integrates concepts, beliefs, representations, narratives, observational information, social norms, and social practices integral to life such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals (Swidler, 1986: 273). Migrants entering unfamiliar environments develop skills in using cultural material to obtain needed and valued resources for acting on events and making decisions. The fluidity of a societal culture such that the UK becomes relevant when it provides migrants with some flexibility in how cultural resources are configured. Migrants construct new strategies of action which tend to be more organized, more coherent, more resembling "guidelines" for action (Swidler, 2001). The capacity for "bringing new possibilities for action into being" (Swidler, 2001: 107) can be understood in terms of Evolutionary Fitness (EF), in relation to adaptation to variation- the key to survival (Cunha & Heckman, 2009; Johnson et al., 2013). The EF is a means of shaping the cultural repertoires required for constructing new patterns of life and action driving cultural creativity. Cultural resources used in engaging with communities, social networks, and the workplace enable CI to make sense for migrants, if there is some plasticity afforded by society in how new resource combinations are assembled. From which

the EF can evolve, which in our proposed model is a mediator (see, Fig. 2), enabling the SWB to be improved. The EF is also a moderator (see, Fig. 1), moderating the direct relationship between CI and SWB, such that the relationship is positive and strong if the degree of EF is high.

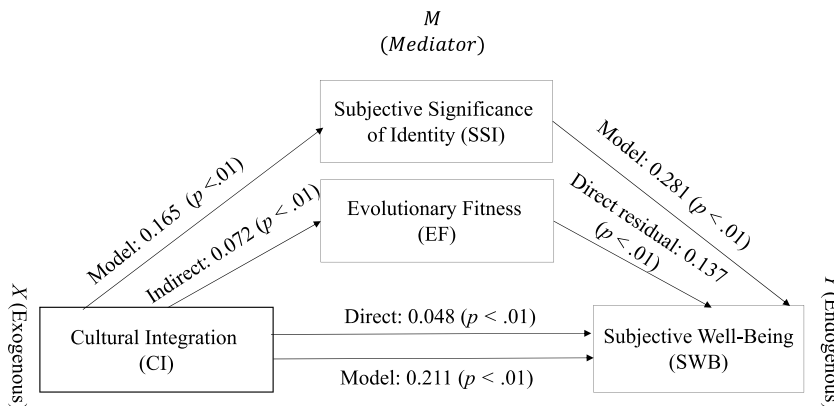
While a relatively fluid orientation encourages the migrant’s intrinsic motivation of CI, the mechanisms emerged from the process will also bring out the Subjective Significance of Identity (SSI), which then reinforces SWB. Akerlof and Kranton (2010) brought attention to the subjective importance that individuals attach to their identity and the distinct behaviours they generate. While identity is not completely a free choice, people have some choice and certain identities become more probable. The SSI in our model is presented by global migrants irrespective of their ethnicity, social rank, age, and gender. The SSI is a psychological disposition (Collier, 2016), such as thinking of being a valuable member of the society or the group. The migrant confers group identity, group esteem, thus, self-esteem (Akerlof

& Kranton, 2010). This is the essential characteristics of SSI and is to be distinguished from the Economic Presentation of Identity (EPI) that in seeking CI in an absolute fitness can create identity anxiety or emotional distress for the migrant if her self-image remains unaffirmed, thus, serving as a driver that often leads to a negative effect on SWB. The SSI is created when the migrant interacts within other social interactants and integrates her culture with that of the group or organization. As identities aggregate, migrants increase self-esteem by obtaining an “insider identity”, such as social acceptance, a member of the group, and a proactive contributor to the group, no matter who they are, as a boss, or a subordinate employee. The SSI therefore has a mediation effect, such that the indirect effect of CI through the SSI on SWB is positive and strong, when the magnitude of the SSI is high. Essentially, we propose the EF model that not only drives migrant economic value creations, but importantly their SWB, under the changing social and economic conditions.



**Fig. 1** Moderation effects of the evolutionary fitness on the direct relationship between cultural integration and subjective well-being (Left= Higher Mean, Right= Lower Means)

**Fig. 2** Cultural integration (CI) and subjective well-being (SWB): Direct, indirect, and total effect of the model



## Direct relationship between cultural integration and subjective well-being

Moving beyond “acculturation” as a means of achieving Cultural Integration (CI), we propose that greater coherency can incur when the destination culture has some degree of flexibility (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2021, 2023), and further, we argue that fluidity in culturally evolved systems has the potential to improve CI efficacy and migrant SWB. Our approach is to be distinguished from “acculturation” as a means of CI with its emphasis on cultural styles, such as “acting white”, and culture convergence. That “cultural style” (Fryer & Torelli, 2010) often excludes those without cultural capital, institutions acting as “gatekeepers” determine what is acceptable (Streib, 2017). Which, namely, enables migrant upward mobility, but attempts at cultural convergence that, in effect, leads to social isolation and feelings of rejection when the range of culturally acceptable behaviours fails to match aspirations (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2021). As culture is ingrained in national institutions, cohesive subnational groups, regions, and ethnic or religious communities (Fryer & Torelli, 2010; Peterson et al., 2018), migrants can become tied to their natural cultural groupings, their ethnicity, and religion, and thus may experience network closure (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2021). In restricting opportunities beyond traditional boundaries, closure can lead to distress for some, in which migrants feel psychologically detached or experience disparities in their life chances and career development. The tightly defined CI often pressurizes migrants to make social comparisons (Melzery & Muffelsz, 2017). Stressors of life incur well-being if migrants compare themselves to members of the native population, as the pressure to integrate is a source of psychological tension and anxiety that impairs SWB. Studies show that psychosocial hardships in the host nation, cultural differences, linguistic barriers, and social degradation negatively impact SWB (Hendriks & Burger, 2020).

To resolve the issue, we proposed the relatively fluid approach to CI, and our approach represents a shift from thinking of culture as one coherent system of consciously held “values” to one that offers a more differentiated conception as found in the work of Swidler (1986, 2001). On this turn, culture becomes a set of practical skills, tacit procedures, and embodied “know-how” that migrants use for sense making and for structuring decisions that inform everyday actions. Our disaggregated view of CI is less an interconnected coherent “web of meaning” at the societal level or that of subcultures and is more a reservoir of relatively small and independent fragments of information and disparate meanings (Weber & Dacin,

2011: 289). Our approach is evolutionary based, though not the slowly developing incrementalist approach. It is often associated with Darwinism, and its relevance is due to cultural transmissions. In formulating our hypotheses from an evolutionary perspective, we claim that adaptation to variation improves cultural meaning, organisational learning, and performance (Johnson et al., 2013). Cultural communication involves a timescale that relates to migrant adaptive capacity. Adaptation often necessitates psychological adjustments through developing greater cognitive alignment with variant social groupings (Peterson et al., 2018; Weber & Dacin, 2011) such as attaching “importance to being British” that then leads to greater intrinsic motivation or the willingness to be British, thus, enhancing the meaning of CI. Adaptation shapes behavioural presentations, and changes cultural mosaics and mental models, such as using English and linguistic abilities and improving fitness in the environment (Hendriks & Burger, 2020), which could then drive prosocial behaviour with host country nationals (Giovanis, 2021; Wang et al., 2021).

The adaptive flexible approach therefore also means that CI operates at the level of individuals, through supplying the means or the tools for navigating their environments (Weber, 2005: 228). Through exposure and experience of varied situations, migrants acquire a repertoire of cultural resources which in varying configurations are used for solving different kinds of problems (Swidler, 1986: 273). Migrants absorb, utilise, and configure culture for personal benefit in their attempts to adapt or ‘fit-in’ with the norms practised of host country nationals. Essentially our approach places greater weight on the fluidity-oriented CI, creating satisfaction of migrants whom having their actions affirmed by relevant others in the groups within which they participate. The relatively fluid approach therefore is expected to be more effective and meaningful for culturally variant migrants who wish to take up residency in the UK, and other Western societies. We postulate that the fluidity-oriented approach towards CI can lead to effective and beneficial outcomes for migrants, for their cultural values and business activities, and for host country nationals, which consequently improve SWB of migrants. Conversely, CI in seeking fitness or absolute fitness in Western cultural styles, categories, and behaviours, such as social rank, household income, residence styles, locations, marriage, among others (e.g., Acemoglu & Robinson, 2023; Easterlin, 2001; Hendriks & Burger, 2020) will negatively affect migrant SWB. Formally, we hypothesize.

**Hypothesis 1.** Cultural integration (CI) impacts SWB, whereby a relatively fluid CI orientation positively relates to SWB, otherwise, it negatively relates to SWB.



## Mediation effect of the evolutionary fitness

The Evolutionary Fitness (EF) mechanism enables migrants to adjust to the country of residency more fittingly. The EF in our hypothesis formulation, essentially, is explained by *creative decision* and *cultural confidence* (Giovanis, 2021; Swidler, 1986) so that migrants respond more effectively to the changing social conditions and business circumstances. Where the cultural material can be reorganised in contextualised implications, and the combined and configured cultures increase creativity in the host country. Migrants typically work with multiple, competing and even contradictory cultures rather than being steeped in a single coherent set of culture (Vaisey, 2019). Culture's causal effects focus on "strategies of action" (Swidler, 1986: 278), and migrants use new strategies to model new ways of thinking and feeling and actively learn by supporting new ways of organising social life. As language and communication skills are essential functions for settled lives (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2021; Hendriks & Burger, 2020), migrants use language, gossip, and stories to choose between actions and solve daily problems (Swidler, 1986). These cultural resources enhance migrant interactional competence *confidence*, while the approach to CI enables migrants to go with what they know and "act in ways that utilise their skills" (Vaisey, 2019: 13). Cultural resources and repertoires, along with social practices, enable CI positively impacting SWB when the EF evolves across time and space. Essentially, migrants, in facing challenges from differences in the cultural society, apply multiple sets of cultures and interact with variant social groups (Giovanis, 2021). Thus, the approach to CI enables the EF to evolve that strengthens the relationship between CI and SWB.

As EF evolves, *creative decisions* increase, so does *cultural confidence*. Migrants have the capacity for combinations of different cultural attributes for action and decision-making, while cultural material includes sources that extend to cultural entrepreneurship, equipping them with more creative solutions to different kinds of problems (Swidler, 2001). By placing greater weight on creativity, culture is perceived as a flexible toolkit of cultural resources that people draw on in choosing between actions and solving everyday problems. As EF rises from market transactions and social interactions while migrant dealing with businesses, the EF generated creates a *moderation effect* (e.g., H2a, Fig. 1) on the direct relationship between CI and SWB, such that the relation is strong when the EF is high. As the CI enables an adaptive, flexible, approach to cultural attributes and the connections, it provides more confidence to migrants, the EF therefore also emerges from CI that then creates a *mediation effect* (e.g., H2b,

Fig. 2). That is because of the relatively fluidity-oriented CI enables culture embeddedness, and that creates cultural reciprocity- benefits for both migrants and the migration country, bringing up greater fit (EF) and improved SWB. Thus, we hypothesize.

**Hypothesis 2a.** The evolutionary fitness (EF) moderates the direct relationship between the CI and SWB, such that the direct relationship is positive when cultural confidence and creativity are high.

**Hypothesis 2b.** The evolutionary fitness (EF) has a mediation effect, such that the indirect effect of CI through EF on SWB is high, when the degree of EF is high.

## Mediation effect of the subjective significance of identity

In our hypothesis formulation, the Subjective Significance of Identity (SSI) is the willingness to be an employee, a manager, or a supervisor, which functions in driving migrants perceive a sense of oneness with others (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2016), fulfilling the need for belonging. The SSI enacts beliefs and expectations to form part of a mutually consistent set of within-group beliefs, creating more self-awareness in definitions of their identities in how others see them, and make choices for self-expectations as well as group expectations (Aoki, 2007), to be a valuable member of the society, to address the needs of group esteem (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010). The interdependency forms the intrinsic motivation or the *insider identity*, while migrants interact with the group to seek social affirmation of their identity. The intrinsic motivation, the "insider identity" (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010), creates happiness, regardless of social rank and social class. As the SSI encompasses members' identities, namely, their social and work role identities, it further connects to the sense of membership, place-based identities, and social belonging, such as belonging to a given place or a subgroup. On this turn, SSI enacts tolerance, satisfaction, driving migrants to contribute to the group and the organisation without accounting for much of a monetary reward (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010). The SSI encourages migrants to contribute to their group or organisation through their self-esteem and group esteem (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), motivating them to fulfil the need to belong and satisfy (Benabou & Tirole, 2006).

We hitherto define SSI as a psychological disposition (Collier, 2016), having a connection to the choice of social identity (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010), a choice that gives more weight to the functionality of social and work role identities will connect more to the prestige of the place, and contribution more to the place or the organisation. The SSI then generates shared beliefs, values, and preferences

that enhance SWB, while the SSI accommodates certain behavioural traits, and cooperative norms. The SSI represented either by being an employer, a supervisor, or an entrepreneur, drives migrants to enjoy a working life, as CI encourages the inner self's capacity for adaptation and social expectations. The outcomes reside with the fluid adaptive approach to CI that enables more positive outcomes to be generated, other than acting on cultural conversion. As migrants are more willing to integrate, being a valuable contributor to the group and society, they raise SSI, representing satisfaction, tolerance, and happiness, serving social expectations. The SSI generated reinforces the relationship between CI and SWB, thus, our third hypothesis is:

**Hypothesis 3.** a) Cultural integration positively relates to SSI, and b) SSI has a mediation effect on the direct relationship, such that the indirect effect of CI through SSI on SWB is high, when the degree of SSI is high.

We should distinguish the SSI from the Economic Presentation of Identity (EPI). When the EPI raises a desire for a self-imagined identity salience (significance), it drives the choice of identity or economic decision that, in accordance with the Easterlin (2001) paradox, as we explained earlier—the migrant's "social comparison" of which, gain in happiness associated with income growth also decayed rapidly (Melzery & Muffelsz, 2017). With the tightly oriented CI orientation, the EPI could seek a Western economic presentation of identity, such that represented by residential styles, social rank as categorized by household incomes, housing location, and so forth. As an economic or external state affects individuals' internal state and SW, that state drives individuals to involve the risk of holding identity for economic decisions (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010) and the need for approval of that recognition. Consequently, unbalanced presentations or expectations lead to "an image consequence", such as taking a risk in holding that belief. When the self-expected image is disconfirmed, an unresolved inconsistency in the premise underlying the need for conformance and differentiation may create "a state of tension" or discomfort from being "psychologically inconsistent" (Aronson & Inzlicht, 2004). The unmet self-expected EPI could lead to psychological distress, giving rise to a loss in confidence and feelings of being less worthy (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). If migrants feel their identities are less probable or perceive themselves as less worthy or less fit, the EPI could lead to reduced cultural confidence, reduced SSI, and consequently a declined SWB. The fourth hypothesis we test is:

**Hypothesis 4.** b) The Economic Presentation of Identity (EPI) with the tightly defined cultural integration orientation is negatively related to Subjective Well-Being

(SWB), and b) is negatively related to the Subjective Significance of Identity (SSI)

## Research summary and justifications

Several studies have explored CI in the context of Western countries, including Germany, Spain, Italy, the UK, and the United States, a few studies have focused on China, specifically in the context of 'in-country' African co-workers. The main variables examined are demographic and socio-economic characteristics, such as gender, age, education, marital status, and housing satisfaction. Among these studies, empirical work has mostly argued that income and higher educational attainment are the foremost positive components of SWB and a significant determinant of CI. However, counterintuitive, high income does not always support higher levels of happiness. The paradox informs the first gap in prior studies. Consequently, studies found that unemployment and age were negatively related to SWB (Blessi et al., 2016; Giovanis, 2021; Reyes-Martínez et al., 2021). Second, most studies on the social impact of CI and acculturation suffer from explanatory flaws because they presume the existence of a relationship between CI and SWB without explaining how it occurs (Galloway, 2009). Recent research (Blessi et al., 2016; Giovanis, 2021) has focused on social capital theory and identified the relationship between cultural participation, integration, and SWB, but the crucial human capital: the evolutionary function, human evolving psychology, and adaptive skills, has not been sufficiently explored. Third, prior studies suffer from explanatory failure. CI confronts challenges from the mixed effects that studies have generated, such as on specific dimensions of well-being. Some cultural activities produce statistically significant outcomes, but others do not (Daykin et al., 2008). Research findings were unable to provide unbiased explanations about the importance of CI concerning demographic and socio-economic characteristics, due to the narrow range of variables considered (age, income, marital status) (Blessi et al., 2016; Giovanis, 2021). Most studies have considered the total sample without distinguishing between natives and migrants (Blessi et al., 2016; Reyes-Martínez et al., 2021). This leads to the fourth shortcoming, that studies have not provided the reasons for the variance nor verified the significance or explained the signs of the estimated coefficients.

While the findings lack verification, the model construct validity must be further contested. Otherwise, studies cannot offer unambiguous findings to policymakers and research communities. Given the several research gaps identified, first, we fill the gaps by raising the value of SSI in migrant SWB. Second, we examine how the EF and SSI can strengthen the CI relationship between CI and SWB by placing them on the moderating or mediating roles. The

Darwinian adaptive approach leads to the EF and SSI, in terms of social belong and place-based identities, while CI involves psychological, and social-cultural adaptations across country borders, that imply adaption to variation (Cunha & Heckman, 2009; Johnson et al., 2013). Thus, our EF and SSI frameworks strengthen migrant SWB, though they have been set aside in previous research. Third, doing so, we also dress the challenge emerged from CI issues and how research moves beyond demographic (age and gender) and socio-economic characteristics (income and housing, among others). Such descriptive orientation may neither provide an insightful understanding of policymaking nor offer an approach that can guide migrants to adapt to the society in which they have chosen to reside. We address the issues by introducing a relatively fluid orientation of CI, which fills the third gap. As social transformations and identity transitions remain the biggest challenge, we provide an approach emphasising culture configuration above culture conversion. When status-driven identity and self-image identity are used as measures they have tended to generate “identity conflict” and “social degradation” seriously affect SWB, thus, CI.

Forth, given the debate on the methodological limitations of prior studies, we address them with a set of techniques. We focus on the archetypal Western culture, the UK, and due to the prodigious increase in migrants our empirical analysis draws on a longitudinal study of global migrants in the UK. We use the total population and limit the analysis to the employed over seven waves; thus, our data speaks to the model. We test hypotheses H1-H4 and introduce a set of measures well-documented in the literature. We enhance the CI measure by three sets of items that account for intrinsic; behavioural; and economic attributes, which provide more insightful and less likely biased explanations of CI issues. We legitimize our model constructs, specifically, the constructs of mediator and moderator variables through a three-step approach, including Confirmatory Factor Analysis. We demonstrate research rigour and insightfulness through a set of hypotheses tests, together with the analytical design, that enhance the model construct validity. For instance, the direct effects of CI on SWB should consider the indirect effect of the *z-value*, but the mediation/moderation effects of EF and SSI have neither been considered nor tested in prior migration studies. We use the 7-level analysis (mediator, moderator, covariance, control, etc.), through Hays’ PROCESS macro, which is a step advance over many studies relying on two levels of descriptive analysis, where crucial factors that should have been considered have been discarded. Our robustness checks of the model construct validity further suggest that our findings offer a better understanding of CI in relation to migration and hence more valuable implications for policymakers and interested research communities.

## Empirical Methods

### Survey randomization and justification

We employed data from the 7-waves survey studies of the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) from 2009 to 2018. The survey data collection of UKHLS was conducted in England, Scotland, and Wales, and another in Northern Ireland. We made sequential efforts to ensure the randomisation process of the sampling procedures. At the same time, the UKHLS techniques maintained *complete randomness* (cf., Bruce et al. 2022) by the project sampling, having included all ages above 18th migrants either as British citizens or permanent residents. Given our analytical focus on employees, both *block* and *stratification* of randomisation methods enabled our sample selection by continuously including those who participated in all the 7-waves surveys. This setting helps us to eliminate potential biases due to leaving the sample or non-response. Our *stratified* randomised participants resulted in a sample that had achieved balance among groups (managers, supervisors, and generally employees), which as participants’ baseline characteristics (Bruce et al., 2022), also enabled the balance of the combination of covariates (i.e., happiness, health-related to social conditions and social class).

Our studies captured all the sample data from England, Scotland, and Wales, based on a total of 47,520 addresses and 2,395 addresses for Northern Ireland. Additionally, the data collection included a short section of telephone interviews to examine any concerns with integrating members of the former British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) sample component. Two minor pilot studies and a dress rehearsal were conducted before the first Wave of the primary survey. Ninety-one of those interviewed in the Wave 1 pilot included households participating in the BHPS. Then all instruments and data-gathering processes were tested in a pilot for Wave 2. The adult self-completion questionnaire was administered on paper at Waves 3 and onwards (Lynn & Knies, 2016). In total, we included the 7-Waves study. The longitudinal as well as wider coverage of surveys strengthened both our observation randomness and model validity (Gujarati & Porter, 2009). The surveys recorded detailed and rich information on the demographic, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of the migrants.

The seven-waves study with wider data captures (nations, employee groups, generations) and longitudinal nature enabled the study to avoid common methods variance (CMV) (i.e., using a single group). Our testing techniques adopted both random and fixed effects to address potential common methods bias (CMB), such that could relate to a “rater effect” or emotional bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). More specifically, migrants might locate to areas with more opportunities



for self-employment and managerial positions, overestimating our estimates and generating a positive bias in the cross-region estimates, which also enhance *randomization* (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The estimates also avoided biases from the error terms that might be correlated with the regressors included in the model (Gujarati & Porter, 2009). We employed robust quantitative techniques for longitudinal data and controlled for unobserved characteristics and omitted variable bias (Allison, 2009).

### Measure of SWB (Dependent)

We used three variables for the DV of well-being (see, Table 1). The first was the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12), which had values ranging from *not at all satisfied* to *extremely satisfied*. GHQ-12 was a well-documented measure of an individual's mental well-being,

designed and developed by Goldberg and Blackwell (1970) and has been extensively used in various fields, including psychology, sociology, economics, and epidemiology (Giovanis, 2021; Schnitz et al., 1999). The second variable was the general health measure on a 5-point scale, ranging from very poor to excellent health status. The studies by Hendriks and Burger (2020) and Giovanis (2021) explored the role of cultural integration in the well-being of migrants measured by life satisfaction. The third variable was general happiness and answers to the “What is your overall happiness” question measured on a 4-point Likert scale. Bak-Klimek et al. (2018) suggested that negative SWB could result in psychological distress, such as anxiety and depression. We tested these three -sets, which could help explain issues about migrant mental well-being and social and economic behaviour in cross-cultural contexts (Bisin et al., 2008; Cunha & Heckman, 2009).

**Table 1** Summary of data statistics ( $N=5,558$ )

Control Variables	Average	Standard Deviation	Mini value	Maxi value
<i>Continuous</i>				
Age	40.842	16.108	15	95
<i>Categorical</i>				
Gender (Female)	42.94	Marital Status—Married	51.89	
Education—University	35.29	Marital Status -Singles	30.63	
Education—High school	17.33	Marital Status -Separated	2.15	
Education—Secondary school	22.13	Marital Status -Divorced	8.85	
Education—Elementary school	25.03	Marital Status -Widowed	6.48	
<i>DV items (SWB)</i>				
General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12)	10.213	2.794	0	12
Health status	3.470	1.166	1	5
Happiness	3.033	0.603	1	4
<i>IV items</i>				
Years effort for adaptation in UK	19.016	19.481	0	65
Importance of being British	7.050	3.105	0	10
House styles furnish/unfurnished	25.47	Style private furnished	18.54	
Local housing	18.38	Style rented unfurnished	8.46	
<i>EF items (MV)</i>				
Conversation skills (English)	0.803	0.397	0	1
Reading/writing (English)	0.748	0.433	0	1
Cultural confidence (Ability to face problems)	2.989	0.588	1	4
Entrepreneurial creativity (Capable to take decisions)	3.039	0.559	1	4
<i>SSI items (MV)</i>				
Manager	10.38	Entrepreneurs or self-employed	22.2	(0, 1)
Supervisor	10.84	Employees (at companies)		(0, 1)
Employees	78.78	General staff/employees	78.8	(0, 1)
<i>EPI items (MV)</i>				
House tenure-Owned with mortgage	28.11	Local authority	11.30	
House tenure- Owned outright	15.59	From employer	2.15	
Monthly household income	3,352.245	2,862.772	0	20,000
Household size	3.567	1.887	1	12

## Measure of CI (Independent)

For the CI (IV), we obtained the 5-item measure (on a 10-point scale or 5-point scale, respectively), ranging between 1 = “not at all important” and 10 = “extremely important”. First, our evaluations considered the intrinsic motivations for CI and included the variables: i) *the importance of being British*, ii) *willingness to be British*, iii) *years for effortful adaptation to the UK*. For the alternative hypothesis, we considered the four-item measure related to social and economic integration. These are iv) *mixed housing location*, v) *residential styles* (i.e., *furnished/unfurnished*), vi) *local authority rented*, or vii) *housing association rented*, which in part symbolise CI with Western social norm or economic values, while they are also the gestures of how migrants integrate with Western communities in creating the political or social intimacy (Hendriks & Burger, 2020; Schrnitz et al., 1999). These factors, along with marital status, have been generally considered by research on migrant CI (e.g., Easterlin, 2001; Giovanis, 2021; Hendriks & Burger, 2020), and we seek to understand which of them are positively or negatively related to SWB. Other studies have also included the education of migrants (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2021, 2023; Melzery & Muffelsz, 2017), which is used as a control in our study.

## Moderator and mediators

We considered a two-dimensional measure for the mediator (and moderator) of EF. The utility of cultural material and configurations were measured on a 10-point scale, and we included: i) *skills and utility of written English*; ii) *skills and utility of oral English skills*. To evaluate the CC, we employed the 2-item measure related to capacity and skills: i) *making work and life-related decisions in the cultural society of residency*, and ii) *being culturally confident when facing differences or challenges from the cultural society*. These variables were measured on a 4-point scale, ranging between 1, indicating not all and 4, which showed highly confident. The justification for using these variables relied on the literature on evolutionary fitness (e.g., Swidler, 2001) and migration studies (Cunha & Heckman, 2009). Communication skills and cultural confidence are fundamental for establishing settled lives (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2021, 2023; Swidler, 1986, 2001).

The mediating variable of SSI employed the 3-item measure (nominal data) that evaluated migrants' intrinsic motivation to perform on whatever identity choice was available to them: i) *manager* (or an entrepreneur); ii) *supervisor* (or a business consultant); iii) *employee*. These SSI variables were consistent with our modelling in line with social identity theory in economics (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010; Aoki, 2007). We also examined the Economic Presentations of Identity

(EPI) that drew CI to variables related to economic status, social rank, *household size*, *household incomes* (monthly), and *ownership* (*mortgaged or owned*). We considered the variables for the EPI, as they had been employed in the research of social comparisons in the SWB of migrants (Melzery & Muffelsz, 2017), recognizing that these factors impose different challenges or stresses (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2021, 2023), affecting life and hampering well-being (Hendriks & Burger, 2020).

## Control variables

We further drew on control variables, including age, gender, education, and marital status, among others. These factors could also affect SWB across time and countries (Bak-Klimek et al., 2018; Giovanis, 2021).

## Data validity test

To verify the reliability and validate the measurement items, we performed on a set of procedures, including abstraction, deducting, and pilot studies of the pre-survey of 25 migrants at both managerial-staff levels (Strauss & Smith, 2009). Using a criterion in the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), our results showed a range of values between 1.037–4.793, which were well below the suggested cut-off of 10. We checked the inter-correlations among the items which showed all significant coefficients within the range of 0.024–0.613, and none was above  $\geq 0.613$ , suggesting no collinearity. Among them, higher means rested on evolutionary fitness ( $mean = 2.09$ ,  $mean = 2.01$ ), which was significantly correlated with both GHQ-12 ( $\beta = 0.613$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and general health ( $\beta = 0.240$ ,  $p = 0.022$ ). We also checked for Composite Reliability (CR), which was above the required level (0.70), suggesting no attrition bias. We used Bayesian null model, the independent sample test to examine data variance, the items of construct measure accounted for the difference in the range of 42%–64%, when the  $p$ -values were less than 0.05, it indicated enough variance in the sample variables (Snijders & Bosker, 2012). We checked individual level data difference including age, gender groups. For the scale data of SWB, the  $F$ -statistic with degrees of freedom ( $df$ ) and mean square ( $m^2$ ) derived from the ANOVA (Levene's test of Homogeneity of Variation) between Man and Women groups was  $F(2, 5556) = 0.726$ ,  $m^2 = 14.373$ ,  $p = 0.484$ . For the Subjective Significant Identity (SSI), the Levene's test of Homogeneity of Variation between Man and Women groups was  $F(2, 5556) = 1.279$ ,  $m^2 = 12.367$ ,  $p = 0.278$ . For the Evolutionary Fitness (EF), the Man and Women groups was  $F(2, 5556) = 0.677$ ,  $m^2 = 4.947$ ,  $p = 0.508$ . All comparisons suggested the acceptance of null hypothesis of no homogeneity of variance.

We then applied Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and verified the construct validity of the Evolutionary Fitness (EF) measure (with the items on scales). The test results were  $\chi^2(8) = 1998.482$ ,  $p = 0.021$ , while the Comparative fit index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) were very close to 1 with values of 0.999 and 0.998, respectively, indicating a very good fit of data, and the composite scale data Cronbach's Alpha was 0.787. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.057, with a 90% Confidence Interval (CI) [0.051, 0.064], ranging in acceptable values for a good fit of the model. We also verified the construct validity of the Subjective Significance of Identity (SSI), which reported  $\chi^2(6) = 2002.76$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , CFI = 0.993, TLI = 0.982, RMSEA = 0.002, 90% CI [0.144, 0.155], and the composite scale data showed Cronbach's Alpha as 0.860. The (IV: CI) construct validity showed  $\chi^2(21) = 2413.158$ ,  $p = 0.012$ , CFI = 0.951, TLI = 0.853, RMSEA = 0.076, 90% CI [0.275, 0.294], which in the goodness of fit data indices ranged from good fit to super fit. The (DV: SWB) construct showed a weaker fit but was acceptable  $\chi^2(12) = 5111.346$ ,  $p = 0.034$ . TLI and the Coefficient of determination were equal at 1, and RMSEA was 0.009, indicating a very good fit for the model, and the composite scale construct Cronbach's Alpha was 0.883. The multiple tests showed our data validity and strengths.

### Statistical test procedures

In testing the hypotheses, we developed multiple procedures, through the three-stage empirical analysis. In Stage 1, we developed initial data testing, including 5,558 observations (Table 1). In Stage 2, we commenced hypotheses testing, as reported in Table 2. We employed the Fixed Effects model, which is a model with observations on unit-specific fixed effects, allowing us to control for unobserved characteristics such as skills, intelligence quotient (IQ), and labour characteristics that vary across geographical areas but are consistent over time (Allison, 2009). Then, we explicitly sought to examine the EF and the SSI variables with the data analysis of three employment types. We built on the initial significance and developed the multilevel analysis including mediators, moderators, and covariate combinations. We adopted the Hayes PROCESS macro within a linear model, given its suitability for testing models containing various combinations of factors. The test included the direct, indirect, and total effects (Hayes, 2022). And the results from the test of the moderation effect are illustrated in Fig. 2 and in Table 3. In the Stage 3 test, we developed robustness checks for legitimising the mediation effect of the EF and SSI towards the model and data construct validity, we included all 5,558 observations. Since our dependent variables in columns 1–2 are ordered, and binary in the remaining estimates, we used the Logit model widely applied in management, economics,

and sociology studies (Muller et al., 2005). We report the results in Table 4.

In hypotheses testing, we estimated equations that include the direct effect of X (CI) on Y (SWB), as expressed in Fig. 2. We also considered the control variables and the error term for the unobserved variable effect. The regression is:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x + \beta_2 y + B_3 + e^Y \quad (1)$$

where the model considered the direct relationship between the exogenous X (CI) and the endogenous Y (SWB) variable. The mediation effects of EF (and SSI) on the dependent variables are expressed as:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 M + M_y + \varepsilon_x \quad (2)$$

Equation (2) was used to test H<sub>2</sub>. For H<sub>3</sub>, we considered the mediator, which was expressed by the interaction with the IV of X (CI), and the estimated regression is:

$$M_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 M_x + \beta_{1x} M_y + \varepsilon_m \quad (3)$$

In the observations of the model constructs (Fig. 2), such as the direct, indirect, and total effect, the  $X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$  was mediated by  $M$  by using the latent variables of EF and SSI. The mediator  $M$ , by creating an indirect ( $\beta_{xM}$ ) effect, could also impact a value-change in the residual effect ( $\beta_{My}$ ), and then the total effect on  $Y$  could be shown by the estimated coefficients (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The equation is:

$$Y = B_0 + B_1 X + B_2 X_M + B_3 x M_y + e^Y \quad (4)$$

where  $Y$  was predicted by the exogenous variables ( $\beta_{xM}$ ) and the endogenous outcome ( $x_{My}$ ), and  $e$  as the error term in the model referred to the unobserved variable effects.

## Results

### Report on data profiles

Table 1 reported our primary test of the variables used in the study, which included migrant education level, data profiles also showed about 43 per cent were female. The average length of residency was 19 years, with a maximum value of 65 years. The item of being British showed an average value of 7.05 (measured on a 10-point scale), suggesting that, on average, the migrant intrinsic motivation on the variable was relatively high in our sample. Most of the migrants were married, 51.89 per cent, followed by singles, at 30.63 per cent. Cultural confidence and creativity variables showed the average value for utility and skills in English conversations as 0.803, implying that 80.3 per cent developed adequate language skills and had no difficulty speaking English. For variables of confidence in facing problems and making

**Table 2** Hypotheses tests: Cultural integration and SWB with the mediators' role

<i>Variables</i>	Model 1 DV: GHQ-12	Model 2 DV: General Health	Model 3 DV: General Happiness
<i>Control</i>			
Age	-0.0141**	-0.0187***	-0.0041***
Education (Reference- University)	(0.0071)	(0.0021)	(0.0015)
High School	-0.2082 (0.1737)	-0.0858 (0.1198)	-0.0832 (0.0548)
Secondary School	-0.1253 (0.2545)	0.1472** (0.0651)	-0.1253 (0.0887)
Elementary School	0.2852 (0.2038)	-0.2711*** (0.0612)	-0.0201 (0.0416)
Separated	0.3817 (0.3111)	-0.0810 (0.0891)	0.0200 (0.0691)
Divorced	-0.6663** (0.3254)	-0.0330 (0.0488)	0.0218 (0.0352)
Widowed	-0.4454*** (0.1643)	-0.2546** (0.1032)	-0.1530* (0.0892)
Singles	-0.6488 (0.4226)	-0.0731 (0.0902)	-0.0071 (0.0669)
<i>Cultural Integration (IV)</i>			
Importance of being British	0.0172 (0.0188)	0.0098* (0.0056)	0.0035 (0.0040)
Years effort for adaptation in the UK	0.0184*** (0.0071)	0.0164*** (0.0020)	0.0035** (0.0015)
Skills utilities: speaking English	0.1945** (0.0912)	0.2593** (0.0507)	0.0131 (0.0395)
Skills utilities: reading/writing English	0.4880*** (0.1868)	0.1271** (0.0542)	0.0513 (0.0410)
Local mixed housing	-0.5005** (0.2496)	-0.0447 (0.0798)	-0.0893* (0.0535)
Cultural housing styles: furnish/unfurnished	-0.5102* (0.2755)	-0.1976 (0.1396)	-0.2025*** (0.0589)
Local authority rented	-0.4336** (0.2509)	-0.2070*** (0.0689)	-0.0550 (0.0536)
<i>Evolutionary Fitness (MV)</i>			
Ability to face problems	0.1470** (0.0564)	0.0727 (0.1712)	-0.2179 (0.1519)
Capable to take decisions	0.4130*** (0.2133)	0.1587** (0.0713)	0.2873* (0.1687)
<i>Subjective Significance (MV)</i>			
Being a manager (entrepreneur)	0.7891*** (0.3005)	0.2912*** (0.0943)	0.1015* (0.0591)
Being a supervisor	0.2094 (0.2915)	0.0710 (0.0918)	0.0158 (0.0565)
Being an employee	0.0807 (0.1055)	0.0538 (0.0445)	0.0293* (0.0159)
<i>Economic Presentations of Identity (MV)</i>			
Household income	0.2370*** (0.0774)	0.0747*** (0.0206)	0.0291** (0.0142)
Owned with mortgage	-0.4398** (0.2075)	-0.1237** (0.0595)	-0.1278*** (0.0445)
With renting associations	-0.8315*** (0.2761)	-0.4106*** (0.0767)	-0.2185 (0.0586)
No. observations	5,558	5,516	5,516
R Square	0.0569**	0.2428**	0.0466*

Standard errors within parenthesis, *p*-values within square brackets, \*\*\*, \*\* and \* indicate significance at 1%, 5% and 10% level



**Table 3** Mediation effects on the direct relationship between cultural integration and subjective well-being

IV and Interaction items	Model 1 DV: GHQ-12	Model 2 DV: General Health	Model 3 DV: General Happiness
Importance of being British	0.0463** (0.0206)	0.0179 (0.0223)	0.0445** (0.0208)
Years effort adaptation in the UK	0.0311*** (0.0069)	0.0120* (0.0072)	0.0114* (0.0059)
Cultural Integration (English)	0.9551*** (0.3665)	0.6062** (0.2735)	0.4506** (0.1802)
<i>Direct/indirect effect (x → m → y)</i>			
Cultural Integration × Confidence	0.312*** (0.093)	0.221** (0.093)	0.228*** (0.067)
Cultural Integration × Creative decision	0.413* (0.2133)	0.1587** (0.0713)	0.2873* (0.1687)
<i>Direct/indirect effect (x → m → y)</i>			
Cultural Integration × Manager	0.0866* (0.0437)	0.2538* (0.0912)	0.3587* (0.1913)
Cultural Integration × Supervisor	0.0401 (0.033)	0.0059 (0.0084)	0.0021 (0.0017)
Cultural Integration × Employee	0.0118 (0.0261)	0.095* (0.0739)	0.0278* (0.0511)
No. observations	5,558	5,516	5,516
R Square	0.1765**	0.3428**	0.1456*

Standard errors within parenthesis, *p*-values within square brackets,

\*\*\*, \*\* and \* indicate significance at 1%, 5% and 10% level

creative decisions, we specified the highest value as “more so than usual” and the worst case as “much less than usual”. For the mediating variables (SSI), our sample showed that 78.78 per cent were employees, and 20 per cent were managers, entrepreneurs, or supervisors. The average monthly household income was around £3,350. For the DV, the average GHQ-12 was high at 10.21, measured on a 12-point scale, with a standard deviation of 2.79. The respective values for general health status were 3.470 and 1.166. The average and standard deviation for general happiness was 3.033 and 0.603, respectively, measured on a 5-point scale, as described in the previous section.

## Hypotheses test results

In testing *the direct relationship* between Culture Integration (CI) and SWB, our results (in Table 2) suggested that Hypothesis 1a was supported. The CI (in Model 1), as explained by the variable of the intrinsic importance of *being British*, was positively related to *general health* ( $\beta = 0.009$ ,  $p = 0.08$ ). The CI explained by the variable of *adaptation efforts* in the UK was positively related to all DVs: GHQ-12 ( $\beta = 0.018$ ,  $p = 0.053$ ); *general health* ( $\beta = 0.016$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ); and *general happiness* ( $\beta = 0.0035$ ,  $p = 0.051$ ). Most behavioural variables representing the economic aspects of CI were negatively related to SWB. The housing styles, either local authority rented or rented through housing associations was negatively related to *general health* (Model 2) and some

was insignificant in explaining *general happiness* (Model 3), lending some support to the alternative hypothesis (H1b).

Results suggest that Hypotheses 2a and 2b were supported (see, also Fig. 1). The CI variable (i.e., *the ability to speak English*, and so forth) positively related to the EF variables and brought out the positive coefficients of DV (SWB and other variables). The CI positively related to GHQ-12 ( $\beta = 0.195$ ,  $p = 0.035$ ), general health ( $\beta = 0.259$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ), but became insignificant in the general happiness regression. Similarly, *the ability to write English* was positively related to GHQ-12 ( $\beta = 0.488$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and general health ( $\beta = 0.127$ ,  $p = 0.045$ ) but was not correlated with happiness. The EF variable of being *capable of taking decisions or creativity* was positively related to all well-being outcomes. The variable of *cultural confidence* and the ability to face problems was positively related to GHQ-12 ( $\beta = 0.147$ ,  $p = 0.036$ ). While the EF evolving, migrant actions and decisions correlated more with social groups, thus, improving SWB.

Results (more in Table 3) supported Hypotheses 3a and 3b, showing a positive relationship between the *Subjective Significance of Identity* (SSI) of *being a manager* and GHQ-12 ( $\beta = 0.789$ ,  $p = 0.012$ ), a positive relationship between SSI and general health ( $\beta = 0.291$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ), and general happiness ( $\beta = 0.1015$ ,  $p = 0.13$ ), and between SSI (of *being employees*) and general happiness. The indirect effect of CI through SSI was positive on GHQ-12 ( $\beta = 0.087$ ,  $SE = 0.044$ ,  $p = 0.051$ ) and on general health ( $\beta = 0.254$ ,  $SE = 0.091$ ,

**Table 4** Effects of mediators (EF and SSI) on cultural integration and on subjective well-being

Items	Model 1 EF(Confidence)	Model 2 EF(Creative)	Model 3 SSI(Manager)	Model 4 SSI(Supervisor)	Model 5 SSI(Employee)
<i>Control Variables</i>					
Age	0.0042*** (0.0015)	0.0034** (0.0014)	0.0396 (0.0342)	0.0233** (0.0157)	0.0056 (0.0122)
Education (Reference- University)					
High School	-0.0485 (0.0388)	-0.0282 (0.0461)	1.3448* (0.6883)	-0.1160 (0.6507)	-0.4965 (0.7359)
Secondary School	-0.0587 (0.0505)	0.1303* (0.0769)	1.9746*** (0.4989)	-0.7801 (0.5560)	-0.1733 (0.3908)
Elementary School	1.2300*** (0.3134)	0.0465 (0.0411)	3.8549*** (0.6060)	-1.0027** (0.4508)	0.6478** (0.2911)
<i>Cultural integration</i>					
Importance of being British	0.0076* (0.0041)	0.0091** (0.0038)	0.0463** (0.0206)	0.0179 (0.0223)	0.0445** (0.0208)
Years effort adaptation in the UK	0.0036** (0.0015)	0.0035** (0.0014)	0.0511*** (0.0069)	0.0120* (0.0072)	0.0114* (0.0059)
Conversation skills	0.0399 (0.0424)	0.0451 (0.0365)	0.0671** (0.0321)	0.0656** (0.0302)	0.5646*** (0.1588)
Skills in reading-writing	0.0781* (0.0408)	0.0991*** (0.0374)	0.0396*** (0.0093)	0.0233** (0.0091)	0.0232*** (0.0067)
EPI: Household size	0.0053 (0.0084)	0.0062 (0.0076)	-0.3067*** (0.1134)	-0.1756* (0.0994)	0.0154 (0.0613)
EPI: Household income	0.0382** (0.0172)	0.0030 (0.0157)	0.0574*** (0.0155)	0.1838 (0.1640)	-0.2939** (0.1393)
<i>SWB</i>					
General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12)	0.1450*** (0.0464)	0.2773* (0.1697)	0.1786** (0.0345)	0.1401* (0.0330)	0.0118 (0.0261)
General health	0.3830* (0.2023)	0.1577** (0.0733)	0.1538* (0.0932)	0.0059 (0.0084)	0.1950** (0.0739)
General happiness			0.3487** (0.2013)	0.0021 (0.0017)	0.0078 (0.0151)
No. observations	5,558	5,558	5,516	5,516	5,516
LR $\chi^2$	1,002.30*** [0.000]	1,030.50*** [0.000]	1,065.26*** [0.000]	996.256*** [0.000]	1,022.16*** [0.000]

Standard errors within parenthesis, *p*-values within square brackets, \*\*\*, \*\* and \* indicate significance at 1%, 5% and 10% level

*p* = 0.07), especially, for the managerial population. The mediation effect of SSI was more effective for employees, mediating the relationships between CI and SWB, especially, for general health ( $\beta = 0.095$ ,  $SE = 0.074$ ,  $p = 0.11$ ) and general happiness ( $\beta = 0.028$ ,  $SE = 0.051$ ,  $p = 0.12$ ), when the degree of SSI was high.

Results from the test of the effect of *Economic Presentations of Identity* EPI (H4 a, b) showed that *household income* was positively related to well-being outcomes, but identity categorized by economic status and social ranks (*household size/incomes*) were either negative or insignificant. *Local mixed housing and housing styles* (symbolizing the CI orientations) with Western culture and social norms were either negatively related to, or insignificant for SWB. Other EPI variables, such as home ownership through a mortgage were

negatively related to SWB. Hypothesis 4a was supported. Results from the test of the effect of EPI on the SSI (see, also Table 4) suggested that Hypothesis 4b was supported. Although EPI was positive related to EF (in Table 2), it was negatively related to all SSI variables, suggesting the negative impact of EF in tightly defined CI, specifically, on managers ( $\beta = -0.307$ ,  $SE = 0.1134$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

The test of multiple models included *control variables*, of which results suggested that increases in age were related to lower levels of well-being. However, concerning education, respondents who had completed a university degree had higher levels of well-being than those who had completed elementary school. Secondary school graduates also had higher levels of health status. As regards marital status, both divorced and widowed respondents reported lower levels of

well-being compared to married, while there was no difference in the well-being levels between single, separated, and married respondents.

### Further tests of mediation effects

Table 3 reported the results from testing three models. First, results (Model 1) suggested that a relatively fluid orientation towards CI with higher levels of *intrinsic motivation* and *adaptive efforts* was positively related to SWB (H1). The variable of CI (in Model 2) positively related to the mediation variable of *cultural confidence*. The indirect effect of CI through *cultural confidence* (EF) on SWB (GHQ-12) was high and positive ( $\beta=0.312$ ,  $SE=0.093$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and positive on general happiness ( $\beta=0.228$ ,  $SE=0.067$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The indirect effect (H2a, b) of CI through *creative decision* (EF) on GHQ-12 was positive ( $\beta=0.413$ ,  $SE=0.213$ ,  $p=0.023$ ) and positive on general health ( $\beta=0.159$ ,  $SE=0.071$ ,  $p=0.05$ ), when the degree of EF was high. The variable of CI positively related to the mediation variable of *subjective significance of identity* (SSI). The indirect effect (H3a, b) of CI through SSI on GHQ-12 was positive ( $\beta=0.087$ ,  $SE=0.044$ ,  $p=0.022$ ) and on general health was positive ( $\beta=0.254$ ,  $SE=0.091$ ,  $p=0.015$ ), especially, for the managerial population. The mediation effect of SSI was more effective for employees, mediating the relationships between CI and SWB, and general health ( $\beta=0.095$ ,  $SE=0.074$ ,  $p=0.032$ ) and general happiness ( $\beta=0.028$ ,  $SE=0.051$ ,  $p=0.051$ ), when the degree of SSI was high.

Using the GHQ-12, we tested the moderation effect of EF (H2a) by calculating the means and standard deviations (+SD, -SD) and we observed both higher and lower means. We displayed the results of the moderation effect of EF, using the higher-level mean (in Fig. 1a) and the lower-level mean (in Fig. 1b), which suggested that CI increased SWB, in the effect of EF, especially when the degree of EF was high (in Fig. 1a): +SD:  $\beta=0.050$ ,  $p<0.01$ ; 95% CI [0.028; 0.072]; and -SD:  $\beta=0.025$ ,  $p=0.013$ ; 95% CI [0.006; 0.033].

### Robustness checks and limitation highlights

We obtained further results from the robustness checks in Table 4, which firstly suggested that the CI was reinforced with the mediation effect (EF and SSI), given the greater coefficients. Second, concerning CI, the importance of *being British* presented higher coefficients in two population groups: *managers*  $\beta=0.046$ ,  $p=0.05$ , and *employees*  $\beta=0.045$ ,  $p=0.042$ , compared with the findings in Table 2. Third, *cultural confidence* had a strong association with SSI, which was expressed by the estimated coefficient  $\beta=0.051$ ,  $p<0.01$  and *creativity decision* for managers shown by  $\beta=0.039$ ,  $p<0.01$  for the ability to write in English, and

$\beta=0.067$ ,  $p=0.05$  for the ability to speak English. Overall, with the EF and SSI functioning, SWB and general happiness, especially for managers, increased ( $\beta=0.348$ ,  $p=0.05$ ). Both EF and SSI had positive associations with the fluidity-oriented CI and impact SWB positively. In testing the *Economic Presentations of Identity* (EPI), the association between household size and CI was negative when the respondent was a manager and supervisor ( $\beta=-0.306$ ,  $SE=0.113$ ,  $p<0.01$ , and  $\beta=-0.175$ ,  $SE=0.099$ ,  $p=0.11$ ). Also, when the EPI was expressed by *household income* it presented a negative association for employees ( $\beta=-0.294$ ,  $SE=0.139$ ,  $p=0.05$ ). The results were consistent with our previous test results, lending further support the Hypotheses, specifically, H4a, and H4b.

Figure 2 presents the overall effect of the model:  $R^2=0.601$ ,  $SE=7.899$ ,  $F(df_1 6, df_2 5,552)=3,741$ ,  $p<0.01$ , in which the direct relationship became stronger ( $\beta=0.211$ ,  $p=0.021$ ) when the mediators (EF and SSI) were in place, compared with the relationship without mediator functioning ( $\beta=0.048$ ,  $SE=0.006$ ,  $p=0.09$ ). The association between CI and EF was positive ( $\beta=0.072$ ,  $SE=0.005$ ,  $p=0.07$ ). The direct (residual) effect of CI on SWB through EF was strong ( $\beta=0.137$ ,  $SE=0.004$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), whereby the indirect effect of CI through the SSI on the SWB was strongest ( $\beta=0.281$ ,  $SE=0.006$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) when the magnitude of SSI was high. The robust checks produced consistent findings, suggesting that EF and SSI created the mediation effect, which made the direct relationship between CI and SWB more potent.

Inevitably, our study has some limitations. First, our analysis is subjected to limited variables. To further strengthen the analysis would imply variable enhancement through the development of surveys. Concerning the flexible and relatively fluid orientation of CI, the measure of CI can be specified to allow “cultural entrepreneurship” and “cultural configuration” to enter the conceptualisation, which supports the variables of cultural confidence underlying EF. The second limitation is that we have not considered participation in socio-cultural activities. Thus, future research may also explore the role of participation in various activities concerning social and cultural configurations, which play a more significant role in the labour market outcomes, such as using information about participation in sports events, cinema attendance and theatre, and other recreational activities. The third limitation is that we have not considered the racial, ethnic, and national background of the respondent. More specifically, we have not identified race and the migrants’ country of origin and whether the disparities in cultural integration and well-being vary across those characteristics. Future empirical studies can be conducted for similar countries in terms of receiving migrants from various places in the world, such as Germany and the USA, so that the findings can be compared to studies focussing on single countries.

## Discussion

Through sets of rigorous tests, we obtained results that supported our hypotheses. First, the fluidity-oriented CI is positively related to SWB, specifically, the *importance of being British* as a domain of the CI, improves general health by almost 0.01 per cent. Also, the *years of adaptation efforts* in the UK are significant for all SWB outcomes. Further, there is a positively significant relationship between adaptation efforts in the UK and GHQ-12 at 0.018, general health at 0.016 and happiness at 0.0035, and the estimated coefficients are significant at the 1% level. The ability to speak English improves GHQ-12 by 0.194 and general health by 0.259, and the estimates are significant at the 5% level. Like the above, migrants positively integrate their *abilities* to read and write in English, which are significant at the 5% level. With the EF, being capable in making *decisions* is positively related to all well-being outcomes, improving GHQ-12 by 0.413 (significant at 1% level), enhancing general health and happiness by 0.158 and 0.287 respectively, and significant at 5% and 1% level. Also, the *ability to face problems* is positively related to all well-being outcomes explored, and *cultural confidence* is significantly related to GHQ-12. More specifically, managers' report higher levels of GHQ-12 at 0.789 and general health at 0.291- both significant at 1% level- and higher levels of happiness at 0.101 (significant at 10% level). The results are consistent with previous studies that found a positive relationship between cultural integration, socioeconomic status, professional class, and well-being (Daykin et al., 2008; Giovanis, 2021).

Our study substantially contributed to the literature by exploring the functions of EF and SSI in the relationship between CI and SWB. As previous studies examined the role of language proficiency in CI (e.g., Hochman & Davidov, 2014; Nakhaie, 2020), we consider the *moderation* and *mediation* effect of EF. More specifically, *cultural confidence* and *creative decisions* grow as EF develops. Migrants can combine diverse cultural attributes for action and decision-making and implement innovative solutions to various challenges. The EF moderates the relationship between CI and SWB as it develops through social exchanges. With an adaptable CI strategy, migrants gain self-assurance and confidence through their cultural characteristics and networks, giving rise to EF. Our findings show that EF creates a *mediation* effect that emerged from CI, driving the embeddedness that produces cultural reciprocity, the evolving EF strengthening the relationship between CI and SWB, as migrants face challenges from cultural differences in the host society whom by employing multiple sets of cultures and the embeddedness strengthened utilises and interaction with variant social groups, which in turn raised the SWB.

Our study sought the function of SSI in cultural integration and well-being. The results showed that migrants interacted with groups to seek social confirmation of their identity and fulfil the belonging to a group. The SSI motivates migrants to contribute to the group and the institution without seeking financial compensation and enhancing their well-being regardless of their rank and status in society. The SSI enacts beliefs and expectations to form a mutually consistent set of within-group beliefs, fostering greater self-awareness in defining identities concerning others' perceptions. This allows individuals to make decisions considering their own and the group's expectations and enhances their SWB. Moreover, our findings differ from the literature as behavioural variables that represent the economic aspects of CI are negatively related to SWB. For instance, we found that *local mixed housing* and *housing styles*, as symbolizing CI with Western culture, and social norms, are negatively related to SWB. Those in *local mixed housing* are more likely to report lower levels of GHQ-12 by 0.505 (significant at the 1% level) and lower happiness by 0.089 (significant at the 10% level), while it becomes insignificant in the general health regression estimates. Also, cultural housing styles are negatively related to GHQ-12 by 0.510 at the 10% significance level and negatively associated with happiness at 0.202 at the 1% significance level.

Another important finding is the *Economic Presentations of Identity* (EPI), by which those identity variables categorized in tightly defined CI orientations either negatively related to SWB or as insignificant, confirming hypothesis 4a. While the results are consistent with the previous literature about the negative relationship between household size (Giovanis, 2021), homeownership through a mortgage is negatively related to SWB, reducing GHQ-12 at 0.439 and general health at 0.123 -both significant at the 5% level- and happiness at 0.128 (significant at the 1% level). However, we find a positive relationship between household income and SWB, with values of 0.237 for the GHQ-12 and 0.074 for the general health status (both at the 1% significance level) and 0.029 for the happiness at the 5% significance level, confirming H4b, whereby household income is negatively related to SSI, negatively related to employees' SWB. Overall, our results lend more support to hypotheses 2b, and 3b of which the fluid orientation of CI have contributed more to SWB through the effects of EF and SSI and the relationship are strong when the magnitudes of EF and SSI are high.

We introduced in our model Swidler's cultural toolkit approach (1986, 2001). Migrants bring with them a repertoire of skills, which are refined and adapted to meet local exigencies, they also have 'agency', and hence our results show faster adaption and change than is predicted by the Darwinian evolutionary process. An evolutionary approach would typically investigate how the individual inherits cultural information from social learning, and Darwinian



processes are gradual, glacial, and may take several generations. In Swidler's account, the repertoire is a starting point, and cultural fluidity has more to do with how individuals mobilise different parts of their repertoire. According to Swidler, culture is 'lightly' internalised and subject to change quickly. This offers meaningful implication for Policymaking, while migrants move to the UK and other Western countries for a better life – improved socioeconomic well-being within a generation (about 25 years or less), and some expect improvements soon after arriving, and we know from the Easterlin paradox that even when income or wealth is rising, it may not lead to improved SWB. Acemoglu and Robinson (2023) add to this by arguing that a person's ability to change depends on the cultural fluidity of society – the ability to rewire cultural attributes to offer different configurations. While organizations and Policymakers develop understanding of migrants, we offer interpretations that the UK as having a fluid culture, should make it easier for migrants to integrate. Nevertheless, the UK is a class-based society that imposes restrictions on the degree of fluidity for those occupying lower middle-class and working-class social spaces, and for them, culture might be hard-wired. Our findings shed valuable insights on this debate and provide empirical evidence about the significance of a relatively fluid CI orientation and the role of EF and SSI in CI and well-being.

## Conclusion

Overall, our approach is to be distinguished from studies of "acculturation" or tightly defined cultural orientations which define the extant literature on CI. Our model speaks to cultural multidimensionality and how experiences and social expectations shape culture and identities in different social contexts. Our study contributes to the extant literature by bringing more insightful findings. Our findings showed how tightly defined CI affects well-being, whereby a fluid orientation towards CI promotes SWB. The EPI negatively relates to SWB, especially for employees and supervisors, though managers reported higher levels of well-being. This finding may be due to the latter, mostly entrepreneurs and leaders, having dynamic social networks for business opportunities and skills development, from which they might have derived more SWB. On the other hand, this finding suggests that reducing social inequality in social transactions and interactions is essential. Importantly, our findings suggest that the EF and SSI should be central to the conceptualisation and legitimisation of CI, which are crucial for understanding well-being, thus, offering further implications for policy-making and organisational practice concerning issues about the migrant workforce in organisational environments that are consistently changing.

Our study advances theory in CI and provides an approach to the EF, accommodating the dynamic landscapes of migration and migrant footprints. Migrants have the agency to adapt to socially differentiated situations and have culturally adjusted themselves to displaying desirable attributes, such as the SSI and an "insider identity". Migrant EF raises SWB, and higher levels of health and happiness rested on the SSI. In contrast, CI negatively relates to the EPI in seeking absolute cultural fitness, which leads to poorer mental health and lower SWB. Our results relied on longitudinal survey data of large populations and variant employment groups. Our study reshapes research that is more directly concerned with measures of "acculturation", "social comparisons", and other narrowly defined integration items. Concerning policymaking and organisation practice, crucially, we have also explained the role in nudging intrinsic motivation for integration and support to migrant workforces, the importance of bringing together different perspectives of knowledge, skills, and diverse cultural traits of the migrant workforce, towards the economic uniqueness of the organisation and the nation.

## Declarations

The data were derived from the UKHLS and are confidential and cannot be distributed. These can be requested from the UK Data Archive for research purposes at no cost.

The project and the current paper do not create a Conflict of Interest with any public, group, or individual. The project does not involve direct human or animal data/cell collection. The research procedure has followed and complied with the Ethical Rules applicable to journal publications.

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**Competing interest** The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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