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Intercorrelations between essentialist beliefs and the social identities of religion, political affiliation, and nationality

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ESSENTIALISM OF DIFFERENT SOCIAL IDENTITIES

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Abstract

In this study, I investigated the relationships between political identity, religious identity, and national identity, as well as related attitudes about essentialism. I hypothesized that having essentialist attitudes about one identity group will correlate with having essentialist attitudes about other identities. I also predicted that the more important an identity is to one's sense of self, the more likely they will be to hold essentialist attitudes about that identity. Finally, I predicted that having a Republican identity positively correlates with essentialist views of one's national identity. In this paper, I discuss the theoretical basis, as well as the method, sampling procedures, limitations, and future directions.

Keywords:

Essentialism, Identity Centrality, Religion, Political Affiliation, Nationality

Intercorrelations between Essentialist Beliefs and the Social Identities of Religion, Political

Affiliation, and Nationality

Essentialism is defined as "beliefs that a human group is natural, immutable, discrete, informative, historically and cross-culturally invariant, and grounded in deep-seated, biological, factors" (Skewes, et al., 2018, p. 1). The concept is important, as racial and gender essentialism have been found to lead to racial (Mandalaywala, et al., 2018) and gender (Joyce & Walker, 2015) discrimination, respectively. However, a gap in the literature exists for other forms of essentialism. The purpose of this study is to determine how essentialist beliefs about religion, political affiliation, and nationality, respectively, correlate both with each other and with identification with these types of social identities, both in terms of categorical identification (e.g. "I am a Catholic") and identity centrality, or how important their categorical identity is to their sense of self (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Unlike race or gender, these three identities lack socially recognized physiological or biological markers, which may be more obviously associated with essentialism. Therefore, the essentialist elements of the identities used in this study might not be as immediately clear, but still as important for understanding discrimination and prejudice toward those of a different social identity. Further, a better understanding of the psychological underpinnings of these essentialist beliefs, in general, could improve our understanding of outcomes it has been shown to predict, such as discrimination, nationalism, and polarization.

Essentialism and Social Identity

Categorical Identity Membership

Categorization is an important aspect of social interaction, as it allows us to perceive the world around us more efficiently. However, this can lead to negative stereotyping and prejudice

(Kang, 2015; Tajfel, & Turner 2004). Categorization is a requirement of essentialism, as it provides the basic psychological structure, separate identities, that essentialist thinkers then view as being fundamentally different. Recently there is an increased understanding of the complexities of identity categories, such as multi-racial identities, non-binary gender and sexual orientation identities, and intersectionality. One consequence of essentialist thinking is that it fails to account for fluidity and intragroup variations in common identity categories (Kang, 2015).

Specific categorical identity memberships are also important, when it comes to predicting essentialist beliefs. For instance, men are more likely than women to hold essentialist views of gender (Smiler & Gelman, 2008). Of those men, this is especially true of those who report greater conformity to masculine norms. However, essentialist thinking does not necessarily lead to an individual thinking that their identity is the superior one. For example, Mandalaywala and colleagues (2017) argue that essentialism is associated with both White and Black individuals thinking of White people more highly than Black people. Although this research has found that differences in essentialist thinking are predicted by holding common privileged identities with socially constructed biological markers, there has been little research that has explored the effect of categorical identity membership on essentialist views held about other types of identities.

Identity Centrality

Identity centrality is characterized by how important a specific identity is to one's sense of self (Holmes, et al., 2019; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Individuals have multiple identities, for which they may hold different degrees of significance. Satherley and colleagues' (2020) found that political identity centrality is the strongest predictor of polarization. Both polarization and essentialism are associated with perceiving an extreme separation between two identities.

Unlike essentialism, however, centrality can also be associated with both positive and negative outcomes, in terms of identity development. On the one hand, greater centrality toward an identity may buffer against the psychological effects of discrimination (Cobb, et al., 2019). Centrality can also predict behavior that is identity-protecting. For example, Whites with high racial-ethnic identity centrality were more likely to vote for Donald Trump in 2020 (Blankenship et al., 2021) and were more likely to hold far-right extremist views (Bai, 2020). Although previous research has documented various outcomes of identity centrality, it has not as rigorously examined to what extent centrality predicts essentialist beliefs about corresponding identities.

Established Research on Psychological Essentialism

Previous research on essentialist beliefs has largely focused on a few key identities, which tend to be associated with physiological traits that have socially-constructed significance and meanings placed on them (e.g. skin color for race or voice pitch for gender). Identities that are more choice-based (e.g. religion or politics) or otherwise non-physical (e.g. nationality) have been under-represented in the extant research.

Gender-based Essentialism

Gender is highly essentialized, as one of the first social groups people are taught about at a young age (Meyer & Gelman, 2016). To a person who holds essentialist beliefs, the genders are viewed as biologically and socially distinct to a much greater degree than what is scientifically true. Sex and gender are also conflated, with elements such as anatomy and reproduction being inaccurately tied to gender. Gender is also seen as leading to significantly unique skills and traits between genders. Essentialist beliefs are also associated with strong views in favor of system justification, towards both traditional gender roles and the general status quo

(Skewes, et al., 2018).

Race-based Essentialism

Race-based essentialism arises from differences in appearance between members of different races. Essentialist views about race manifest in the belief that different racial groups are biologically distinct, even though any two randomly selected people of any race will share at least 99.9% of their DNA (Tawa, 2017). Stereotyping, or otherwise inferring attributes about certain races, has been shown to be at least partially as a result of essentialist beliefs (Mandalaywala, 2017). Examples include believing that certain races are inherently more intelligent or more athletic than others. Essentialist beliefs towards race have also been linked with prejudice, affecting an individual's willingness to engage with outgroup members. Such beliefs have been used to rationalize systems such as the Atlantic slave trade, by assigning different levels of worth to different races (Tawa, 2017). Schmalor and colleagues (2021) found that subjects were more likely to hold genes responsible for differences such as obesity or criminality when the subject had highly essentialist views. There has been much research aimed toward developing essentialism scales for race (Mandalaywala, et al., 2017, Yaylacı, et al., 2019).

Sexual Orientation-based Essentialism

Unlike race and gender-based essentialism, sexual orientation-based essentialism lacks immediately obvious physical markers. Additionally, research on the topic has often taken a multi-faceted approach, with both pro- and anti-sexual minority applications. One aspect of essentialist beliefs about sexual orientation includes believing that sexual orientation is biologically determined and fixed across the lifespan (i.e., one is born with their sexuality and does not choose it) (Morandini, et al., 2015). Another attribute of essentialist beliefs about sexual

orientation involves seeing sexual orientation identities as discrete categories. Anti-essentialist beliefs involve both seeing sexual orientation as a choice or dependent on outside factors, and seeing it as fluid or on a spectrum. In contrast to race and gender essentialism, those with certain essentialist beliefs about sexual orientation were found to hold more favorable attitudes toward sexual minorities, as they did not believe sexual orientation to be a choice. However, one subcomponent of this type of essentialism, believing that sexual orientation categories are discrete or that those within a category are overly similar, was linked to intolerance towards sexual minorities (Morandini, et al., 2015). Conservatives are more likely to believe that sexual minorities are fundamentally different from heterosexuals but are less likely to believe that sexuality is unchangeable (Hoyt et al., 2018). Morandini and colleagues (2015) found that gay men who viewed sexual orientation as biologically-based and discrete had less uncertainty about their sexual identity. Additionally, of those same gay men, those that believed sexual orientation is biologically based had lower levels of internalized homonegativity, or acceptance that the lower status of sexual minorities is justified, while those that believed in discrete categories of sexual orientation had higher levels of internalized homonegativity. Grzanka and colleagues (2015) had more complicated results than previous research, finding that students had more contrast in their beliefs about the homogeneity, discreteness, and informativeness of sexual orientation categories than in their beliefs about the naturalness of sexual orientation. Those exhibiting multidimensional essentialist beliefs and those with the highest discreteness, homogeneity, and informativeness beliefs had greater levels of homonegativity, in comparison to those who with higher naturalness beliefs.

Combined, this research demonstrates how essentialist beliefs can not only shape one's understanding of out-groups but can also shape one's understanding of their own in-groups.

Therefore, research on the topic is important for understanding the attitudes of members of both in-groups and out-groups.

Emergent Research on Other Types of Psychological Essentialism

I sought to study national, political, and religious essentialism because research on essentialist beliefs about identity groups other than gender, race and sexual orientation, is relatively sparse. This is surprising, since research on other identities has consistently shown that essentialist beliefs have predictive power, in terms of in-group/out-group dynamics and how individuals think and feel about their own social identity categories. While some researchers, such as Eisenberg (2017), discussed some of these other groups briefly, as part of a more general study on essentialism, few have looked at them directly. Newman and Knobe (2019) also discussed the concept of generalized essentialism, but their paper was a meta-analysis, comparing and contextualizing the findings of other researchers. Their contribution ends with an explicit call for further research into other types of essentialism, believing there is much that still needs to be examined.

In accordance with these recommendations, some emergent research, including by Chaney & Sanchez (2018), has dove deeper into essentialism by examining the intersection of previously studied forms of essentialist beliefs (e.g. racial and gender essentialism). However, they still did not investigate other types of identities. Nimrod and Heine (2010) speak at length on the ramifications of a general essentialist mindset, without directly examining the antecedents of the phenomena or looking at essentialist beliefs of specific identities. In general, articles discussing essentialist views of religious, nationality identities, or political affiliation are still relatively rare, and thus worthy of future research.

In terms of religious essentialism, Toosi & Ambady (2011) found that Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism were generally viewed as the most innate, while atheism and spiritualism were

viewed as the least innate, with Catholicism, Buddhism, and Protestantism viewed as being in the middle. They noted limitations, such as a lack of religious diversity and a lack of religious knowledge among their participants. Chalik and colleagues (2017) discussed a lack of clarity about how religious essentialism develops. They also found that religious essentialism decreases with age, though they noted their essentialism-testing scenario (which religion would a child born to Jewish parents but raised from birth by Christian parents likely join) was so strong that it could potentially have limited the results, even among those who generally hold essentialist views. Heiphetz and colleagues (2016) also found that religious essentialist views seemed to decrease with age. Porter (2012) did not find a link between a participant's religiosity and their essentialism, but also cited a lack of diversity, religious or otherwise, in their sample. These studies do not come to a clear consensus due to the various methodological difficulties that they described.

In terms of essentialist views of nationality and political affiliation, current research is even more underdeveloped. One study by Siromahov and colleagues' (2020) found that strong nationalist thinking correlated with essentialist beliefs while a separate study published in the same year by Siromahov (2020) directly connected essentialism to nationalism. Wilson (2018) found that affective polarization (the tendency to dislike and distrust members of other political groups) was also associated with political essentialism. Few studies examined the roles of categorical identity or centrality in predicting essentialism.

Given the apparent gap that exists in the research concerning these other types of essentialism, as well as their associations with each other and social identity (membership or centrality), I aimed to investigate the associations between essentialist beliefs for other important social identities. Unlike gender, sexuality, race, or sex, the identities of religion, political affiliation, and nationality are neither tied to any explicit physiological characteristics (e.g. race)

nor are they widely seen as having an entirely biological basis (e.g. sexual orientation).

Additionally, religion and politics have an element of choice that is not present in most of the

other examined identities. This raises the question of whether or not essentialist thinking towards

these identities manifests in the same way as it does with more biologically or

physiologicallybased identities.

The Current Research

Given Chaney & Sanchez (2018)'s findings that racial and gender essentialism correlate

with each other, I hypothesize that this applies more broadly to other forms of essentialist beliefs.

I also hypothesize, based on Satherley and colleagues' (2020) findings that political identity

centrality is the strongest predictor of polarization, that political identity centrality also correlates

with political essentialism. This is because both political polarization and political essentialism

focus on extreme perceived differences between two political identities. Furthermore, I predict

that this applies to the other identities as well, since I expect that the more important a personal

identity is to an individual, the more you would expect them to view out-group identities as

distinct from their group. Finally, I hypothesize Republican political identity positively correlates

with essentialist views of national identity, based on numerous findings of the correlation

between anti-immigrant/refugee views and conservatism (Cowling et al., 2019; Davidov et al.,

2020). If individuals see the identity of the nation as being threatened by out-groups, this would

mean that they see the nation as having a distinct, immutable character; these are beliefs directly

related to essentialism. Based on these expectations and the previous literature, I expect that:

1. Having essentialist attitudes about one identity group will correlate with having

    essentialist attitudes about other identities.

2. The more important an identity is to one's sense of self (i.e. higher identity centrality), the more likely they will be to hold essentialist attitudes about that identity.

3. Republican identity (both categorical membership and higher centrality) will positively correlate with essentialist views of national identity.

Method

Participants

The study utilized a convenience sample of 294 participants. The anticipated sample size was determined by a power analysis, using G Power for Windows; correlations were assumed to be at or above .2, with an effect size of $q = .3$, and an expected power of .8 (Faul et al., 2007).

Participants were acquired through James Madison University's psychology subject pool. The study required a diverse range of participants, meaning that no identities or other factors were either required or used as disqualifying criteria, besides the requirement that all participants be at least 18 years of age, reside within the U.S., and agree to the informed consent statement, in order to be in compliance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) criteria. Participants were compensated with one course research credit for their time. The study took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. I expected the majority of my participants would be American. Therefore, they were asked if they are American, and if not, had the option to self-describe. For religious affiliation, some write-in responses after selecting "None of the Above" were placed into the most sensible category (for example "None" into Atheist/Agnostic). Additionally, Multiple participants put a response along the lines of "Christian," "General Christian," or "Nondenominational Christian." These responses were placed in Evangelical, the most common category of Christianity within the United States (Pew, 2020). The sample was mostly White, not Hispanic/Latin American, female, and heterosexual/straight, with a trend toward being more

democratic and split between being either atheist/agnostic or Catholic, in terms of the most

numerous identity groups. See Table 1 for demographic information about the sample.

Table 1

Demographics

Baseline Characteristic		*n*	%
Race			
	Asian	18	6.12
	Black	21	7.14
	Multi-racial	18	6.12
	Native American	4	1.36
	Polynesian/Pacific Islander	4	1.36
	White	249	84.69
	None of the above	8	2.72
Ethnicity			
	Hispanic/Latin American	26	9.00
	Not Hispanic/Latin American	263	91.00
Gender			
	Male	93	32.18
	Female	190	65.74
	Non-binary	4	1.38
	None of the above	2	.69
Political Identity			
	Democrat	114	38.78
	Republican	80	27.21

	Libertarian	7	2.38
	Green	4	1.36
	Independent	48	16.33
	None of the above	35	11.90
Sexual Orientation			
	Heterosexual/Straight	237	82.01
	Homosexual/Gay/Lesbian	7	2.42
	Bisexual	31	10.73
	Pansexual	9	3.11
	Asexual	2	.69
	None of the above	3	1.04
Religious Affiliation			
	Mainline Protestant	39	13.49
	Evangelical	48	16.61
	Catholic	93	32.18
	Jewish	10	3.46
	Muslim	2	.69
	Buddhist	1	.35
	Atheist/Agnostic	85	29.41
	None of the above	11	3.81

Procedure

Participants were recruited through the JMU subject pool, using the SONA systems
signup platform, under the study name *Beliefs About Social Identity Groups*. Participants were
allowed to complete the study online and on their own time.

Prior to the beginning of the survey, informed consent was received from all of the participants, by having them agree to a statement at the beginning of the survey. Participants were not initially told that the study involves measuring essentialism, but only that the survey pertains to beliefs about social identity groups, so as not to potentially prime essentialist or nonessentialist beliefs. The informed consent statement stated that participants were allowed to skip any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. They could also end the study early without penalty.

The study asked for a variety of demographic information for the purpose of drawing correlational links between different identities of the participants and their essentialist beliefs. These questions included race, ethnicity, gender, political identity, sexual orientation, religion, and nationality. They then answered questions about their identity centrality for their political identity, religion, and nationality, respectively, before answering a set of questions measuring essential beliefs towards those same three identities. Afterwards, they were debriefed on the full purpose of the study and hypotheses, before they exited the survey and received their course credit. Participants automatically received course credit through this system, once their participation was verified.

Based on the nature of the tasks and the minimal risk to the participants, the study was exempt from full IRB review. In terms of ethical considerations, given the potentially damaging nature of this data if tied to a specific individual, strict anonymity was maintained. Additionally, thinking about one's potentially marginalized identities or comparing different identities to each other, while focusing on essentialism, could potentially be distressing for some individuals. Therefore, I included mental health resources in the debrief.

Measures

Centrality

The survey contained individual measures of identity centrality for each of the identities of interest, using an adapted version of Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) sub-scale for importance to identity, from the Collective Self-Esteem Scale. This subscale was later renamed "identity centrality," in their future work, and many other authors have adapted this into similar measures of identity centrality for specific identity groups (Blankenship et al., 2021; Scottham et al., 2008). Participants responded to a list of statements for each identity, using a Likert Scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). An example item from this sub-scale (for national identity) would be "In general, I'm glad to be a member of my national identity group." The full scale items can be found in Appendix A. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .73-.86 for the original sub-scales and .84-.90 for the current study.

Essentialism

To measure essentialism, this study utilized a questionnaire inspired by the Genetic Essentialism Scale for Race (Yaylacı et al., 2019) and the Essentialist Beliefs About Social Class Categories Scale (Kraus & Keltner, 2013). The GESR includes 15 questions, with response options on a five-point Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" with a "Don't Know" option. The EBASCCS included 10 questions, with response options on a seven-point Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

Using these original measures as a guide, nine experimenter-adapted questions were presented for each of the identity groups: political identity, religious identity, and national identity. The authors of the original scales found evidence of convergent validity and discriminant validity. Construct validity was supported by sensible relationships between the

original scales and social policy-relevant measures. Item 4 ("There are genetic differences among

[identity], but they are biologically insignificant") was dropped from each scale after it was

determined that confusion over its meaning significantly lowered reliability. It would appear that

both high and low essentialist thinkers could interpret the statement in a way that they agreed

with. Originally, the GESR had an alpha of .73 while the EBASCCS had one of .74. For my own

scales, political affiliation and national essentialism both had alphas of .71 and religious

essentialism had one of .72.

I chose to exclude variations on certain questions from the original scales, such

as

"Everyone's ancestors originally came from Africa" and "A person's social class is easy to

figure out even when they are from another country," because they were not easily adapted for

my three identities of interest. Example items for each included: "Members of certain political

identities may be smarter than others because of genetics," "It is easy to figure out another

person's religion just by looking at them," and "Children probably learn about nationality

automatically, without much help from adults." A complete list of questions and response

options can be found in Appendix B.

Data Analysis Plan

Preliminary Data Analysis

I first assessed general levels of participants' essentialist beliefs, by finding means and

standard deviations. I then determined if participants of different identity groups differed in their

essentialist beliefs and identity centrality for each corresponding identity, where there was

enough variation (political affiliation and religion), using paired samples t-tests. I did not test for

group-level differences in essentialism by national identity, as only 15 participants were non-

American. These results can be seen in Tables 2.

Hypothesis Testing Analysis

To investigate hypothesis one, I tested for correlations between the three different essentialist beliefs (political, religious, and national), utilizing Pearson's *r* correlations. For hypothesis two, I tested for associations between the identity centrality scores for the three target identities and essentialism of the corresponding identity, using Pearson's *r* correlations, focusing on identity centrality as the independent variable and the essentialism as the dependent variable. For hypothesis three, I first used a *t*-test, to examine whether there were differences between Republicans, Democrats and Independents in their ratings of national identity essentialism. Next, I tested for the correlation between Republican identity centrality and national essentialism.

Results

Descriptives

Means were consistent across the respective variables. Centrality means differed by .14 and essentialism means differed by.52, across different groups. The participants therefore had very similar levels of centrality and essentialism, respectively, towards all three of the identities. Full descriptive statistics can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptives

Variable		Mean	SD	Alpha
Centrality				
	Religious	4.63	1.01	.90
	National	4.62	.86	.84
	Political	4.48	.82	.87
Essentialism				
	Religious	2.15	.64	.72

National	2.67	.69	.71
Political	2.23	.65	.71

One-way ANOVAs were performed to compare the effect of specific group membership on the respective essentialism and identity centrality (e.g., the effect of political group membership on political essentialism). Democrats, Republicans, and Independents had high enough n to examine for political affiliation, while Mainline Protestants, Evangelicals, Catholics, and Atheists/Agnostics were numerous enough to examine for religion. A one-way ANOVA revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in political identity centrality between at least two groups ($F(2, 238) = 9.20, p < .001$). The same type of test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between at least two of the religious groups both in terms of religious identity centrality ($F(3, 261) = 23.52, p < .001$) and religious essentialism ($F(3, 261) = 9.92, p = .00$). Tukey's HSD Test for multiple comparisons found that the mean value of religious identity centrality was significantly different between Mainline Protestants and Atheists/Agnostics ($p < .001$, 95% C.I.: [.60, 1.51]), between Evangelicals and both Atheists/Agnostics ($p < .001$, 95% C.I.: [.80, 1.65]) and Catholics ($p = .01$, 95% C.I. = [.08, .92]), and between Catholics and Atheists/Agnostics ($p < .001$, 95% C.I. = [.37, 1.08]). Catholics ($M = 4.73, SD = .93$), Mainline Protestants ($M = 5.07, SD = 1.16$), and Evangelicals ($M = 5.23, SD = .87$) all viewed their respective religious identities as more central to how they view themselves than Atheists/Agnostics ($M = 4.01, SD = .77$), $p < .001$ in all instances. Evangelicals also had greater religious identity centrality than Catholics in this regard, with $p = .01$. The same test found that the mean value of religious essentialism was significantly different between Evangelicals and Atheists/Agnostics ($p = .02$, 95% C.I. = [.04, .61]), between Catholics and Atheists/Agnostics ($p = .00$, 95% C.I. = [.00, .25]), and between Mainline Protestants and

Catholics ($p = .04$, 95% C.I. = [-.62, -.01]). Evangelicals ($M = 2.20$, $SD = .57$) and Catholics ($M = 2.37$, $SD = .51$) were both more likely to have religious essentialist beliefs than Atheists/Agnostics ($M = 1.88$, $SD = .55$), $p = .02$ and $p = .00$, respectively. Catholics ($M = 2.37$, $SD = .$) were also more likely to have religious essentialist beliefs than Mainline Protestants ($M = 2.06$, $SD = $). The same test found that the mean value of political identity centrality was significantly different between Democrats and Independents ($p < .001$, 95% C.I. = [.26, .93]), and Republicans and Independents ($p < .01$, 95% C.I. = [.16, .87]). Democrats ($M = 4.65$, $SD = .81$) and Republicans ($M = 4.57$, $SD = .89$) both viewed their political identity as more important to their sense of identity than Independents ($M = 4.06$, $SD = .66$), $p < .001$ and $p < .01$, respectively. There was no statistically significant difference between any other groups for the given dependent variables ($p > .05$ in all instances).

Correlations

Table 4 demonstrates the relationships between various identity centrality and essentialism scales for the three studied identities. Significant, positive correlations were found between each form of essentialism. Significant, positive correlations were also found between each form of identity centrality. An unexpected significant, negative correlation was also found between political identity centrality and religious essentialism.

Table 3

Correlations

Variable	Rel IC	Pol IC	Nat IC	Rel Ess	Pol Ess	Nat Ess
Rel IC		.23***	.41***	.05	.03	.07
Pol IC	.23***		.21***	-.20**	-.09	-.11

Natl IC	.41***	.21***		.05	.01	.11
Rel Ess	.05	-.20**	.05		.73***	.57***
Pol Ess	.03	-.09	.02	.73***		.52***
Nat Ess	.07	-.11	.11	.57***	.52***	

*p < .05, ** p < .01, ***p < .001

Hypothesis Testing

My first hypothesis was that having essentialist attitudes about one identity group would correlate with having essentialist attitudes about other identities. The results support this, with the correlation between each pair of essentialist attitudes being significant and ranging from .52 to .73, with $p < .001$ in all instances.

My second hypothesis was that the more important an identity is to one's sense of self (i.e. higher identity centrality), the more likely they would be to hold essentialist attitudes about that identity. There was a trend toward being significant for national identity. The correlations for the political and religious variables were negative and positive, respectively, but neither were significant. The correlation between national identity centrality and essentialism trended towards significance at .11, with a *p*-value of .05.

My third hypothesis was that Republican identity (categorical membership and centrality) would both positively correlate with essentialist views of national identity. The findings partially supported this hypothesis. In terms of categorical membership, Republican identity, compared both to not being Republican, and to being a Democrat, respectively, correlated with national essentialism. There was also no correlation between political identity centrality and national essentialism among Republicans. This information can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4

Additional Correlations for

Hypothesis 3

Variable	National Essentialism
Republicans vs. Others	.14*
Republicans vs. Democrats	.15*
Republican Identity Centrality	-.12

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

Discussion

My first hypothesis stated that essentialist attitudes towards different identity groups would correlate with each other. This was supported by the results. Each of the three types of essentialism was found to have significant correlations with each of the other types. If someone had high essentialist views towards one identity, they would likely have high essentialist views towards the other two. This was unsurprising, as it was in line with prior research on the high correlation between various other types of essentialism (e.g. Chaney & Sanchez, 2018). However, my results are unique in that they focused on identity groups that lack socially recognized physiological or biological markers, which has generally not been the case in most previous research on essentialism. While I did not initially set out to examine it, I also found that identity centrality for the three different identity groups correlated with each other. Combined, this could suggest that the ways people perceive these three different identities, both in themselves and in others, are connected. This is interesting, as they are united by lacking physiological or biological markers but separated by the degree of choice in one's membership in the group (with one's birth nationality, at least, being generally seen as less of a choice than one's religion or political affiliation). A higher essentialism score would indicate that the participant disagrees with the assertion that these identities are non-biological, given that many

of the questions in the scale revolved around genes, appearance, and other physical differences.

However, it is worth remembering that even the biological and physical factors supposedly

apparent in race and gender have more genetic and behavioral significance applied to them than

is actually the case in real life. Perhaps the same focus on inconsequential physical differences

that leads to gender and racial essentialism is also applied to these three identities by essentialist

thinkers.

Nationality is the only identity where I found a trend towards significant correlation

between identity centrality and essentialism. This was in line with Siromahov's 2020 findings

that strong nationalist thinking correlated with essentialist beliefs. I was surprised not to find a

correlation between identity centrality and essentialism for religion and political affiliation,

especially for the political identity centrality and political essentialism results. Given Satherley

and colleagues' (2020) findings that political identity centrality is the strongest predictor of

polarization, I expected this to be highly positively correlated. Perhaps polarization and

essentialism are not as related as I initially assumed. Additionally, as previously mentioned, one

key difference between nationality and religion or political affiliation is that of choice. One does

not choose where they are born and changing nationalities generally has more barriers than

joining a different religion or political affiliation. Perhaps this difference contributes to why

people apparently perceive nationality differently. Additionally, due to my participant pool, I

was only able to survey Americans. It is possible that Americans with high national identity

centrality are especially extreme in their beliefs on the differences between nationalities, when

compared to their beliefs about religions or political affiliations.

The findings that Republican identity (both compared to not being a Republican and

compared to being a Democrat) correlated with essentialist views of national identity were

unsurprising, given the numerous findings of the correlation between anti-immigrant/refugee

views and conservatism (Cowling et al., 2019; Davidov et al., 2020).

As for why this was not the case for high Republican identity centrality, it is possible that

anti-immigrant and refugee views are not as linked to national essentialism as I had assumed.

Immigrants may be considered unacceptable by conservatives not because they are perceived as

biologically different, but for some other reason, such as alleged safety concerns or a belief that

they will take resources. There is also the possibility that the Republicans of James Madison

University, which leans liberal as an institution, are not as conservative (or differently

conservative), compared to the average Republican. Their beliefs may not fully align with a more

restrictive view of national identity. Binder (2014) wrote on how young conservatives within and

across different schools can differ dramatically in beliefs and tactics. This indicates that the

Republicans of any one school may not be very reflective of many of their peers.

Limitations

There are a number of important limitations to discuss in the context of the current

research. Drawing subjects exclusively from James Madison University's subject pool threatens

external validity, as JMU's psychology student population may not be a good representation of

Americans or people in general. For example, my subject pool was disproportionately White. As

an extension of this, the study was performed on the final testing day of the semester. This means

that the population used could be disproportionately likely to wait until the last minute on things.

There is a possibility that this population has less nuanced perspectives or conscientiousness,

when it comes to thinking about identities, compared to those who might complete surveys at the

beginning of the semester. As there was no experimental manipulation, a causal claim cannot be

supported by the present research; only a correlational claim can be inferred, limiting internal

validity.

Future Directions

Since a positive correlation between different essentialist mindsets was found, future

research can expand on this study of associations between these identities and other forms of

essentialist thinking, such as for race, gender, disability-status, or sexual orientation. This would

allow researchers to further interrogate how different types of essentialist views are related to

each other. Additionally, future research on the correlation between national identity centrality

and national essentialism could compare responses of Americans to participants from other

countries. Finally, future research on Republican identity could further examine the antecedents

for nationalism in Republicans. If Republican identity centrality is not a driving force, further

studies could investigate what is. They could also examine the Republican/Other and

Republican/Democrat difference in more detail.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

This study broke new ground in investigating under-studied varieties of essentialism,

helping push the overall essentialism discussion beyond just gender and race. The results of the

study demonstrated that national, political, and religious essentialist beliefs correlate with each

other, and that national, political, and religious identity centralities also correlate with each other,

broadening the general understanding of these identities. The results of this study also found a

potential link between national identity centrality and national essentialism, indicating a possible

28 antecedent of a potentially harmful outlook, as well as providing evidence against a potential

antecedent for political and religious essentialism. Furthermore, this study examined the

relationship between Republican identity and essentialist views towards nationality, finding

that Republicans and others and Republicans and Democrats differ in this regard. In doing so, it

contributed to a better understanding of the national political landscape.

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Appendix A

National Identity Centrality

INSTRUCTIONS: We are all members of different social groups or social categories. Some of

such social groups or categories pertain to gender, race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, and

socioeconomic class. We would like you to consider your membership in one of those particular

groups, specifically your national identity,, and respond to the following statements on the basis

of how you feel about that group and your memberships in it. There are no right or wrong

answers to any of these statements; we are interested in your honest reactions and opinions.

Please read each statement carefully, and respond by using the following scale from 1 to 7:

Strongly Disagree Disagree Disagree Somewhat Neutral Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly Agree

Please indicate your national identity group or nationality (e.g. "American," "Mexican," or

"Canadian"):

_____

1. I am a worthy member of my national identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. I often regret that I belong to my national identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. Overall, my national identity group is considered good by others. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Overall, my national identity group has very little to do with how I feel about myself. * 1
   2 3 4 5 6 7

5. I feel I don't have much to offer to my national identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. In general, I'm glad to be a member of my national identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. Most people consider my national identity group, on the average, to be more ineffective
   than other national groups. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. My national identity group is an important reflection of who I am. * 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. I am a cooperative participant in my nation. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. Overall, I often feel that my national identity group is not worthwhile. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. In general, others respect my national identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. My national identity group is unimportant to my sense of what kind of a person I am. * 1
    2 3 4 5 6 7

13. I often feel I'm a useless member of my nation. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. I feel good about being a member of my national identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. In general, others think that members of my national identity group are unworthy. 1 2 3
    4 5 6 7

16. In general, belonging to my national identity group is an important part of my self
    image.
    * 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

* Indicates items that are part of the centrality sub-scale.

Religious Identity Centrality

INSTRUCTIONS: We are all members of different social groups or social categories. Some of such social groups or categories pertain to gender, race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class. We would like you to consider your membership in one of those particular groups, specifically your religious identity, and respond to the following statements on the basis of how you feel about that group and your memberships in it. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these statements; we are interested in your honest reactions and opinions. Please read each statement carefully, and respond by using the following scale from 1 to 7:

Strongly Disagree Disagree Disagree Somewhat Neutral Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly Agree
Please indicate your religious identity (e.g. "Hindu," "Catholic," or "Atheist/Agnostic"):

_____

17. I am a worthy member of my religious identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. I often regret that I belong to my religious identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. Overall, my religious identity group is considered good by others. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. Overall, my religious identity group has very little to do with how I feel about myself. *
    1

    2 3 4 5 6 7

21. I feel I don't have much to offer to my religious identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22. In general, I'm glad to be a member of my religious identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23. Most people consider my religious identity group, on the average, to be more ineffective than other religious groups. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24. My religious identity group is an important reflection of who I am. * 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25. I am a cooperative participant in my religion. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

26. Overall, I often feel that my religious identity group is not worthwhile. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

27. In general, others respect my religious identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

28. My religious identity group is unimportant to my sense of what kind of a person I am. *
    1

    2 3 4 5 6 7

29. I often feel I'm a useless member of my religion. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

30. I feel good about being a member of my religious identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

31. In general, others think that members of my religious identity group are unworthy. 1 2 3
    4

    5 6 7

32. In general, belonging to my religious identity group is an important part of my self

    image. * 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

    * Indicates items that are part of the centrality sub-scale.

Political Identity Centrality

INSTRUCTIONS: We are all members of different social groups or social categories. Some of

such social groups or categories pertain to gender, race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, and

socioeconomic class. We would like you to consider your membership in one of those particular

groups, specifically your political identity, and respond to the following statements on the basis

of how you feel about that group and your memberships in it. There are no right or wrong

answers to any of these statements; we are interested in your honest reactions and opinions.

Please read each statement carefully, and respond by using the following scale from 1 to 7:

Strongly Disagree Disagree Disagree Somewhat Neutral Agree Somewhat Agree Strongly Agree

Please indicate your political identity group or nationality (e.g. "Democrat," "Republican," or

"Green"):

_____

33. I am a worthy member of my political identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

34. I often regret that I belong to my political identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

35. Overall, my political identity group is considered good by others. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

36. Overall, my political identity group has very little to do with how I feel about myself. * 1
    2 3 4 5 6 7

37. I feel I don't have much to offer to my political identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

38. In general, I'm glad to be a member of my political identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

39. Most people consider my political identity group, on the average, to be more ineffective
    than other national groups. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

40. My political identity group is an important reflection of who I am. * 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

41. I am a cooperative participant in my political group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

42. Overall, I often feel that my political identity group is not worthwhile. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

43. In general, others respect my political identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

44. My political identity group is unimportant to my sense of what kind of a person I am. * 1
    2 3 4 5 6 7

45. I often feel I'm a useless member of my political group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

46. I feel good about being a member of my political identity group. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

47. In general, others think that members of my political identity group are unworthy. 1 2 3 4
    5 6 7

48. In general, belonging to my political identity group is an important part of my self image.
    * 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

* Indicates items that are part of the centrality sub-scale.

Appendix B

Political Identity

1. Members of certain political identities may be smarter than others because of genetics.*

2. People of all political identities share most of the same genes.*(R)

3. People from different political identities can have the same physical traits or features.*(R)

4. There are genetic differences among political identities, but they are biologically insignificant.*(R)

5. It is easy to figure out another person's political identity just by looking at them.

6. I think even if everyone wore the same clothing, people would still be able to tell your political identity.

7. Other people's political identity is easy to figure out.

8. Children probably learn about political identity automatically, without much help from adults.

9. A person's political identity does not change from their political identity at birth.

Religious Belief

1. Members of certain religions may be smarter than others because of genetics.*

2. People of all religions share most of the same genes.*(R)

3. People from different religions can have the same physical traits or features.*(R) 4. There are genetic differences among religions, but they are biologically insignificant.*(R)

5. It is easy to figure out another person's religion just by looking at them.

6. I think even if everyone wore the same clothing, people would still be able to tell your religion.

7. Other people's religion is easy to figure out.

8. Children probably learn about religion automatically, without much help from adults.

9. A person's religion does not change from their religion at birth.

Nationality

1. Members of certain nationalities may be smarter than others because of genetics.*

2. People of all nationalities share most of the same genes.*(R)

3. People from different nationalities can have the same physical traits or features.*(R)

4. There are genetic differences among nationalities, but they are biologically insignificant.*(R)

5. It is easy to figure out another person's nationality just by looking at them.

6. I think even if everyone wore the same clothing, people would still be able to tell your nationality.

7. Other people's nationality is easy to figure out.

8. Children probably learn about nationality automatically, without much help from adults.

9. A person's nationality does not change from their nationality at birth.

The increasing points on the Likert scale will be assigned a value ranging from 1 to 5. Questions marked with "*" come from the GESR. Questions with no "*" come from the EBASCCS. Questions marked with "(R)" are reversed. The higher the number, the more intensely it demonstrates an essentialist mindset, unless it is reversed, in which case the opposite is true. Each subject will receive an average intensity score for each of the three factors. When combined with the demographic results, we can see both how common essentialist mindsets are in general, and what identities they most correlate with.

Appendix C

Please select your age:

- 18-100

Please select the option(s) that best match how you see yourself, in terms of your race:

- White

- Black

- Asian

- Native American

- Polynesian/Pacific Islander

- Multi-racial

- None of the above, with a fill-in option

Please select the option that best match how you see yourself, in terms of your ethnicity:

- Hispanic/Latin American

- Not Hispanic/Latin American

Please select the option(s) that best match how you see yourself, in terms of your gender:

- Man

- Woman

- Non-binary

- None of the above, with the option to self-describe

Please select the option(s) that best match how you see yourself, in terms of your political

identity:

- Democrat

- Republican

- Libertarian

- Green

- Independent

- None of the above, with the option to self-describe

Please select the option(s) that best match how you see yourself, in terms of your sexual

orientation:

- Heterosexual/straight

- Homosexual/gay/lesbian

- Bisexual

- Pansexual

- Asexual

- None of the above, with the option to self-identify

Please select the option(s) that best match how you see yourself, in terms of your religion:

- Mainline Protestant

- Evangelical

- Catholic

- Jewish

- Muslim

- Buddhist

- Hindu

- Atheist/Agnostic

- None of the above, with the option to self-identify

Please select the option(s) that best match how you see yourself, in terms of your nationality:

- American

- Other, with the option to self-describe