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## **When does national identification lead to the rejection of immigrants? Cross-sectional and longitudinal evidence for the role of essentialist in-group definitions**

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WHEN DOES NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION LEAD TO THE REJECTION OF  
IMMIGRANTS? CROSS-SECTIONAL AND LONGITUDINAL EVIDENCE FOR  
THE ROLE OF ESSENTIALIST INGROUP DEFINITIONS

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**ABSTRACT**

Two studies were carried out in England to investigate the role of essentialist national group definitions in determining the effect of national identification on prejudice towards immigrants, and asylum seekers in particular. It was expected that the relationship between national identification and prejudice would depend on the degree to which participants endorse an essentialist ('ethnic') definition of their nationality. Consistent with this, study 1 (N=154) found that national identification is associated with negativity towards asylum seekers only among individuals who endorse an essentialist conception of the group, and shows no significant association with prejudice among those who reject such a conception. Study 2 (N=219) used a longitudinal design conducted over 6 weeks, allowing cross-lagged analysis of causality between essentialism, identification and behavioural intentions towards asylum seekers. A causal effect of essentialism on willingness to support a group acting against asylum seekers was observed, with no significant causal effect in the reverse direction. The reverse causal direction was observed in the case of support for a group seeking to support asylum seekers, with intended behaviours determining essentialism. The results are discussed in terms of the importance of group definitions in the study of ingroup affiliations and prejudice.

**When does national identification lead to the rejection of immigrants?**

**Cross-sectional and longitudinal evidence for the role of essentialist ingroup definitions**

The relationship between ingroup affiliations and prejudice has been discussed by social scientists for over 100 years. Sumner's (1906) account of 'ethnocentrism', for example, implies that one inevitably devalues outgroups as a consequence of belonging to a group oneself. Allport (1954), on the other hand, argued that this is not the case. Rather, ingroups are 'psychologically primary' (p. 42), and a sense of belonging to them does not necessarily lead to the rejection of outgroups, even if the presence of such an outgroup can serve to strengthen ingroup ties. In other words, according to Allport, you do not *need* to hate anybody to love your group, but it helps. In this paper, we will seek to demonstrate the importance of how group members *define* their group, rather than just the strength of their attachment, in determining outgroup attitudes.

It is clear that the issue of ingroup affiliations and prejudice has not disappeared since Allport's contribution. Brewer (1999) and Brown and Zagefka (2005) have highlighted the fact that the question of when and how ingroup affiliations give rise to active hostility towards outgroups remains crucial for the psychology of prejudice today. Brewer identifies a number of factors that might cause ingroup affiliations to give rise to active hostility, including threats to group distinctiveness and perceived moral superiority of the ingroup.

For Brown (2000), a significant limitation of work inspired by social identity theory is that it has not adequately distinguished ingroup bias or favouritism on the

one hand from prejudice on the other, where the latter term implies *negative* orientations, ranging from verbal rejection to genocide, towards a social category or its members (Allport, 1954). Billig (2002) expresses somewhat similar concerns when he argues that the social identity tradition has not adequately explained 'bigotry', as opposed to mere intergroup bias, though unlike Brown, he calls for these phenomena to be reconceptualised in discursive terms. However, even if ingroup identification and prejudice do not 'grow together, common products of the same situation' as Sumner (1906) claimed, people do show prejudice in terms of their own group memberships.

In their examination of nationalism, Reicher and Hopkins (2001) claim that the attempt to establish a generic relationship between ingroup identification and attitudes towards outgroups is "yet another example of psychology seeking to ignore the ideological character of identity definitions and look for generality in the wrong place" (p. 99). They claim that whether or not national identity entails negativity towards outgroups is entirely dependent on nationals' construal of that identity and national interests, as well as the construction of the outgroup as either supportive, harmful or irrelevant to those interests. The nation's identity content and interests cannot be taken for granted but rather are constructed in the context of debate about how national interest can best be served. For this reason, Reicher and Hopkins argue, national leaders' successful mobilisation of their audience depends on their being able to portray the identity content in such a way that their own projects can be construed as enabling the nation to realise what is constructed as its 'true' identity. This assertion is reflected in their methodology, which involves a detailed analysis of politicians' accounts of Scottish identity, Scottish interests, and how these are either realised or hindered by independence for Scotland.

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Despite Reicher and Hopkins' (2001) emphasis on specificity in their analysis, their account does point to a more general process: that of construing the content of collective identities in ways that orient those who share the identity towards a certain course of action. They do not claim that general psychological processes cannot be found, but rather that such processes occur in a context that is shaped by the availability of particular constructions of groups, and the deployment of these to achieve certain ends.

### NATIONAL IDENTITY CONTENT AND ANTI-IMMIGRANT PREJUDICE

Reicher and Hopkins' (2001) study on nationalism was primarily concerned with debates about national independence. However, similar processes might apply in the case of responses to immigration. Just as a national identity might be construed as being either realised or subverted by independence, depending on what 'identity' actually consists of, so might it be realised or hindered by immigration, depending on what nationality is based on, and who can potentially belong to it. Some researchers have reported positive relationships between the strength of national identification and more negative attitudes towards immigrants (Bourhis & Dayan, 2004; Verkuyten, 2004), while others report that the association is inconsistent (Jackson, Brown, Brown & Marks, 2001). We suggest that this relationship may be shaped by the way in which people define their nationality.

Smith (2001) distinguishes between ethnic and civic national identity. Ethnic national identity entails a representation of the national group based on a supposed shared ancestral origin, with the public life of the nation being based on traditional cultural practices. Civic identity on the other hand defines nationality in terms of

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citizenship, along with the institutional commitments and participation that this entails. These representations are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Rothi, Lyons and Chryssochoou (2005), for example, find endorsement of both representations in a sample of British people, with individual differences in the extent of support for each. The question of what makes the nation what it is, and who can potentially belong to it, is therefore variable even within a particular national context. Different definitions may be available at one time and place.

Smith (2001) also interprets nationalism as an ‘ideological movement’ (p. 9), with its core values being the pursuit (or preservation) of national autonomy, unity and identity. Given that these projects are central to nationalism, we can expect individuals for whom nationality is important to also show commitment to them. For individuals who understand the nation in ethnic terms, immigrants may be seen as a hindrance to the fulfilment of these values because they do not share the ancestral origin that is needed to be a potential member of the national group. Immigration is therefore likely to be opposed. On the other hand, if the ethnic definition of the nation is rejected, it may be possible to identify strongly with the nation, but not to see immigration as problematic. For example, Esses, Dovidio, Semanya and Jackson (2005) report that Canadians’ attitudes towards immigrants were improved by reading a newspaper editorial stressing pride in Canada, but also the common Canadian identity of immigrants and non-immigrants. Thus, how nationals define their nationality can be expected to determine the consequences of national identification for prejudice towards immigrants.

## NATIONAL GROUP ESSENTIALISM

Connor (1994) points out that, within ethnic nationalism, nationality is treated as immutable, as transcendent of political or economic circumstances, i.e. given by nature, and as amounting to a deep quasi-biological connection between members of the national group. Similarly, according to Ignatieff (1993), ethnic nationalists claim that the deepest commitments are those that one is born into rather than those that are chosen. Both authors note the parallels that ethnic nationalism implies between nationality and family, as well as symbolic value of references to 'blood' in achieving this.

These descriptions make it clear that ethnic national identity is a particular case of essentialism. Haslam *et al.* (2006) define essentialism as the belief in social categories as having a deep reality that is "unchanging and unchangeable by human nature, and ... has a 'natural' basis." (p. 64). It is clear, then, that an ethnic representation of the nation, whereby nationality is based on ancestry and blood ties and is therefore immutable, is an example of essentialism.

This conceptualisation of ethnic nationalism as a particular case of essentialism raises parallels with biological racism, whereby 'races' are held to be discrete biological groups, with behavioural differences tied to this biology (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Indeed, the historical development of ethnic nationalism has been linked to the popularity of biological theories of race in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hobsbawm, 1990/1992). Ethnic nationalism differs from biological racism in that the emphasis is on defining the national ingroup and its boundaries, rather than legitimising the low status of certain racialized groups in terms of their supposed inherent inferiority. Nonetheless, we argue that this form of ingroup essentialism is a source anti-immigrant prejudice.



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By defining nationality in terms of ‘blood’, ethnic nationalism necessarily excludes immigrants from belonging to the national group in almost all cases. This makes them potential impediments to national unity and identity, which are central goals of nationalism. Consequently, national identification can be expected to be associated with prejudice towards immigrants among individuals who endorse the essentialist definition of the national ingroup. However, to the extent that the essentialist definition is rejected, there is no reason to expect such a relationship, because immigrants are not necessarily excluded from being potential co-nationals. Therefore, national identification and anti-immigrant prejudice can be expected to be positively related only to the extent that essentialism is endorsed.

To our knowledge, the present research is original in examining the relationship between ingroup essentialism and prejudice. A number of studies have investigated the relationship between essentialist beliefs about various social categories and prejudice towards those same categories (e.g. Haslam, Rothschild & Ernst, 2000; 2002; Haslam and Levy, 2006; Jayaratne, 2006). These have led to the conclusion the relationship between essentialist beliefs and prejudice is highly context-specific, with very different associations, for example, in the case of ‘race’ versus that of homosexuality. Others have looked at more general beliefs about the immutability of human attributes and found that these influence intergroup attitudes and stereotyping (Keller, 2005) and moderate effects of social category salience on outgroup evaluations (Hong *et al.*, 2004). None of these studies address the possibility that essentialist beliefs about ‘us’ can affect our orientations towards ‘them’.

Rather than examining the relationship between essentialist beliefs or perceptions about certain groups, and prejudice towards those same groups, we examine how an essentialist conception of one’s own group can alter the effects of identification on

prejudice towards certain relevant outgroups. Thus, as well as being a facet of social cognition, essentialism (and specific instances of it such as ethnic nationalism) can also be considered in terms of identity content, or what Ashmore, Deaux and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004) refer to as the narrative/ideological dimension of collective identity.

## THE PRESENT RESEARCH

We report two studies that investigate this in the context of English people's prejudice towards asylum seekers. This target group was chosen because asylum seekers are currently a category of immigrants that is quite stigmatised in England, and so it allowed us to study outright hostile attitudes. Survey research indicates a growing antipathy towards immigrants in the UK (McClaren & Johnson, 2004). Asylum seekers (people who are seeking legal recognition of their status as refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention) have received much of the negative attention, despite representing a comparatively small proportion of the total number of immigrants. One representative survey indicates that only 26 percent of the UK population report willingness to be welcoming to asylum seekers and refugees (MORI, 2002). This figure is only 19 percent among 15- to 18-year-olds, which is the age group included in the present research.

In study 1, we tested the moderation of the relationship between national identification and prejudice by essentialism. In study 2, we probe this further by measuring intended behaviours towards asylum seekers, and by using a longitudinal design that allowed us to test for causality between essentialism, identification and

prejudice.

## STUDY 1

### *Overview and predictions*

Study 1 was conducted to investigate the hypothesised effect of endorsing an ‘ethnic’ conception of one’s national group (a form of essentialism) on prejudice towards asylum seekers. This was tested in a sample of English college students. It was hypothesised that national identification would be associated with negative affect towards asylum seekers only to the extent that individuals endorse an essentialist (i.e. ‘ethnic’) conception of English nationality.

### *Method*

#### *PARTICIPANTS*

Participants (N=154) were recruited from a 6<sup>th</sup>-form college, a form of secondary school, in southeast England. Students at such colleges represent a more heterogeneous population than do university students. One hundred and eleven females and 42 males took part, and one participant did not indicate his or her sex. Students reported ages from 16 to 25 years (mean = 17 years, s.d. = 1.16) and completed the questionnaire under supervision in their classrooms. Participation was on a voluntary basis, and students were thanked and debriefed after completing the questionnaire.

#### *MEASURES*

## National identification, essentialism and anti-immigrant prejudice

*Strength of national identification* was measured using 3 items ('I see myself as an English person', 'I feel good about the English' 'I'm glad to be English') rated by participants on a 7-point Likert scale indicating responses from -3 to +3. The items formed a reliable scale ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

*National group essentialism* was measured using a specially constructed 5-item scale. The items were constructed based on accounts of the concept in the literature (Haslam et al., 2006; Haslam et al., 2000; Yzerbyt *et al.*, 2004) and thus reflect the construal of the national group as having a deep reality that is natural and immutable. They are shown in table 1. The reliability of the essentialism scale is surprisingly high given that it consists of just 5 items ( $\alpha = .78$ ). This is probably partly due to the restricted content of the items, which mainly refer to "blood". It should therefore be noted that the scale taps one particular essentialist representation on the national group. It does not attempt to capture to entire range of essentialist beliefs about a group that might exist.

*Negative affect towards asylum seekers* was measured by asking participants to rate the extent to which they felt anger, fear, distrust and annoyance towards asylum seekers, with each item rated by marking an 'x' along a continuous 10cm line anchored at 0 and 100, with 50 marked at the midpoint. These 4 items formed a reliable measure of negativity towards asylum seekers ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

## Results

### SCALE VALIDATION

## National identification, essentialism and anti-immigrant prejudice

Principal components analysis conducted on the 5 essentialism items revealed a 1-component solution, explaining 54 percent of the variance (table 1), with item loadings ranging from .63 to .85. This confirms the expected single component structure of the measure.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

### *RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDENTIFICATION, ESSENTIALISM AND PREJUDICE*

Means and standard deviations for each variable are given in table 2, along with zero-order correlations between them. Affect scores were regressed on identification and essentialism scores, with the interaction term, which was computed as the product of centred identification and essentialism scores, added in a second step. The first step was significant ( $R^2 = .35$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and the second step significantly increased the variance explained ( $R^2$  change = .02,  $p = .04$ ). The beta estimates indicate an overall effect of national identification (standardised  $\beta = .27$ ,  $p < .01$ ) but not essentialism (standardised  $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .11$ ). The significant interaction term (standardised  $\beta = .16$ ,  $p = .04$ ) indicates that the relationship between identification and prejudice depends on the level of essentialism.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

Simple slopes (Aiken & West, 1991) were calculated to indicate the relationship between identification and prejudice at levels of essentialism one standard deviation

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above and below the mean (figure 1). The slopes confirm that, as predicted, identification is a significant predictor of negative affect when national group essentialism is high, but not when it is low.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

### *Discussion*

The results are consistent with the view that the relationship between identification and prejudice is determined by the extent to which an essentialist ingroup definition is endorsed. Among individuals who endorsed the view of Englishness being based on ‘blood’, i.e. an essentialist national definition, we observed a relationship between national identification and prejudice that was not present among individuals who rejected this definition. The finding is consistent with the view that not only the strength of identification, but also conceptualisation of what makes the group what it is, should be taken into account when seeking to understand the ingroup affiliation and prejudice. However, the cross-sectional design did not allow a true test of our causal hypothesis: that national identification and essentialism *cause* prejudice towards immigrants.

The mean prejudice score of 34.77 on a 0 to 100 scale might be taken to imply that there was little negative feeling toward asylum seekers. However, it must be pointed out that the scale does not measure agreement versus disagreement with a set of items, but rather the *intensity* of negative affect. A score below the midpoint does not therefore indicate that there were no negative feelings. Furthermore, more than 30 percent of the sample actually scored at or above the midpoint, with several individuals self-rating their negative affect higher than 80 out of 100. This indicates

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that there was overt fear, anger, distrust and annoyance towards asylum seekers, and a willingness to report it. Similarly, the mean essentialism score was well within one standard deviation of the scale midpoint. This means that the simple slope for ‘high essentialism’ does represent individuals who agree with the content of the scale.

### STUDY 2

Having established an association between essentialist conceptions of nationality and prejudice, we set out to extend the finding by employing a longitudinal design to establish the causal effects between essentialism and prejudice. The data from study 1 are consistent with the view that having an essentialist conception of one’s national group leads to a relationship between national identification and hostility towards immigrants. However, a reverse path is also plausible. Individuals who have prejudiced attitudes towards immigrants are likely to endorse a conception of their nationality that excludes them, to the extent that nationality is important. This alternative would be consistent with Reicher and Hopkins’ (2001) account of nationalism, whereby definitions of national identity content and boundaries are goal oriented. The nation can be constructed in different ways to imply that realising the nation’s ‘true’ identity should imply a particular orientation to an outgroup. Thus, existing theory might lead us to predict a causal effect of essentialism in interaction with identification on prejudice as well as an effect of prejudice on essentialism. The longitudinal design allowed us to test this reciprocal causality using cross-lagged analysis in multiple regression (Cohen *et al.*, 2003).

Study 2 also allowed us to extend the finding to intended behaviours towards asylum seekers, rather than just feelings about them. The dependent variable was

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therefore a measure of participants' willingness to support political groups that actively either oppose the presence of asylum seekers or support their rights. In addition to these self-report measures, we included a behavioural measure of willingness to help asylum seekers, with the expectation that this would be negatively related to national group essentialism.

### *Method*

#### *PARTICIPANTS*

A new sample of English school students took part in two waves of data collection. The first wave included 296 participants, 219 of whom (74 percent) were also included in the second wave exactly 6 weeks later. Given the lack of existing theory to inform the interval between measurement points, the 6-week interval reflects the need to allow sufficient time for some change in the dependent variable to take place, whilst minimising attrition. It reflects a methodological choice rather than a theoretical one. Students were aged 16 to 18 years (mean = 16.5, s.d. = .58) and completed the questionnaire under supervision in their classrooms<sup>1</sup>. The sample consisted of 158 females and 61 males. Participation was on a voluntary basis, and students were thanked and debriefed after completing the questionnaire.

#### *MEASURES*

*National identification* was measured using 6 items: 'Being English is not an important part of how I see myself' (reverse coded); 'Being English gives me a sense of who I am'; 'I have a strong sense of belonging with English people'; 'When I talk about the English, I usually say 'they' rather than "we"' (reverse coded); 'I don't feel good about the English' (reverse coded) and 'I'm glad to be English' rated by



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participants on a 7-point Likert scale indicating responses from -3 to +3. The items formed a reliable scale ( $\alpha = .81$ ). Although the choice of items reflects the intention to tap three dimensions of national identification (centrality, commitment and evaluation) that are described in the literature on collective identities (Ashmore et al., 2004), the items load onto a single dimension in PCA with loadings ranging from .42 to .80. They are therefore treated as a single variable.

*National group essentialism* ( $\alpha = .85$ ) was measured using the same scales as in study 1.

To measure *anti-asylum seeker behavioural intentions*, participants were asked to imagine a scenario in which a group of people in their neighbourhood had formed to prevent asylum seekers from living in the area. Participants indicated on a 7-point scale the likelihood (-3 = definitely not; 0 = maybe; +3 = definitely) that they would support such a group by signing a petition, writing to their member of parliament, donating money to the group and attending a demonstration, forming a 4-item scale ( $\alpha = .92$ ). The measure of *pro-asylum seeker behavioural intentions*, asked about support for a group that sought to 'protect the right of asylum seekers', but was otherwise identical to the 'anti' measure.

At the end of wave 2, we included a behavioural measure of active support for asylum seekers. On a final sheet of paper ostensibly separate from the questionnaire, participants were told that the researchers were assisting a charity that was interested in getting young people involved in voluntary work with asylum seekers. Participants were asked, if they were interested in being involved, to provide their email address to receive more information.

## Results

*PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS*

We first tested for selective attrition by conducting a multivariate ANOVA to compare matched and unmatched participants, with identification, essentialism and pro- and anti-asylum seeker behaviour scores from time 1 as dependent variables. No multivariate effect was observed,  $F(4,291) = 1.071$  ( $p = .371$ ). There is therefore no evidence for a systematic bias in attrition. Unmatched participants were then removed from the dataset, so that all analyses that follow include only individuals who took part in the entire study.

Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations for national identification, essentialism and positive and negative behavioural intention scores from time 1 and time 2, as well as their inter-correlations within time points and across the 6-week interval.

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

*SCALE VALIDATION*

As in study 1, principal components analysis conducted on the 5 essentialism items at time 1 revealed a 1-component solution, explaining 63 percent of the variance. The item loadings are shown in table 1. The time 2 responses also gave a 1-factor solution, explaining 65 percent of the variance. The loadings of individual items differed no more than .04 between time 1 and time 2. This again confirms the expected single component structure of the measure.

We also tested the factor structure of the behavioural intentions measures. Principal components analysis with direct oblimin rotation revealed a 2-component solution, explaining 80 percent of the variance. As would be expected if pro- and anti-

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items tap separate constructs, the pro- and anti-asylum items loaded separately onto the two components with loadings between .68 and .96. The highest cross loading was .35, with all other cross loadings below .30. The same structure emerges at time 2, with loadings between .74 and .97, and cross-loadings all less than .30. This supports our treatment of these measures as two separate variables.

### *CROSS-SECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ESSENTIALISM, IDENTIFICATION AND PREJUDICE*

We first sought to test the moderation hypothesis cross-sectionally using data from time 1<sup>2</sup>. Anti-asylum seeker behavioural intentions were regressed on national identification and essentialism scores, together with the interaction term computed as a product of centred identification and essentialism scores. The R<sup>2</sup> change standardized  $\beta$  values derived from this regression (table 4) indicate that national identification is a significant positive predictor of the behavioural intentions and that this relationship is dependent on the level of essentialism.

[INSERT TABLE 4 HERE]

The analysis was then repeated using the ‘pro-’ rather than ‘anti-’ behaviour as the dependent variable. As expected, this yielded an opposite pattern of results (table 4). Identification negatively predicts the pro-asylum seeker behavioural intentions, and this relationship is moderated by essentialism.

To probe these interactions, simple slopes (figure 2a) were calculated to indicate the relationship between identification and anti-asylum seeker behavioural intentions

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for essentialism scores at 1 standard deviation above and below the mean (Aiken & West, 1991). This revealed that identification only predicts anti-asylum seeker behavioural intentions at high and mean levels of essentialism, with no significant relationship among individuals low on essentialism. Turning to *pro*-asylum seeker behaviours (figure 2b), identification is only a predictor of intentions to engage in these behaviours at high and mean levels of essentialism. When essentialism is low, there is no significant relationship between identification and *pro*-asylum seeker behavioural intentions.<sup>3</sup>

In order to test for the effect of identification and essentialism on the behavioural measure of support for asylum seekers, a logistic regression model was tested. Eighteen participants out of 219 (8 percent) provided an email address to be contacted about voluntary work with asylum seekers. Providing an email address was regressed on essentialism, national identification and their interaction term at time 2. This revealed a marginal effect of essentialism [ $\chi^2(1) = 2.89, p = 0.09$ ] but not identification [ $\chi^2(1) = 0.01, p = 0.92$ ]. The interaction term was non-significant [ $\chi^2(1) = 0.09, p = 0.77$ ]. It should be noted that these significance values relate to non-directional tests, while our prediction for essentialism was directional. The effect of essentialism can therefore be considered to be significant. Individuals with higher essentialism scores were less likely to provide an email address. Because the behavioural measure could only be included once, at the very end of the study, the analysis could only be carried out cross-sectionally at time 2. It could not be included in the cross-lag analysis below.

*CROSS-LAGGED ANALYSIS OF CAUSALITY BETWEEN ESSENTIALISM AND PREJUDICE*

Cross-lagged regression analyses<sup>4</sup> were used to investigate the causal relationships between essentialism, identification and prejudice. We regressed anti-asylum seeker behavioural intentions at time 2 on essentialism and identification at time 1. The interaction was term added in a second step. Behavioural intention at time 1 was also included in the model to control for stability. The parameters (table 4) indicate that national group essentialism and identification have small but significant positive causal effects on intentions to act against asylum seekers. However, the addition of the interaction term did not significantly improve the model. It can be therefore be inferred that national group essentialism causes more hostile behavioural intentions. However, there is no evidence that it moderates the effect of national identification.

The analysis was repeated with pro-asylum seeker behavioural intentions as the dependent variable. This showed no evidence for a causal effect of essentialism or identification on pro-asylum seeker intentions. The addition of the interaction term is non-significant, indicating that there was no evidence that the causal effect of identification on pro-asylum seeker behavioural intentions depends on the level on essentialism.

To test for the effect of prejudice on essentialism, we regressed essentialism scores at time 2 on pro- and anti-asylum seeker behaviours at time 1, together with the interactions of each of these variables with national identification, controlling for national identification and essentialism at time 1 (table 5). ‘Pro-’ behaviours have a significant effect on essentialism, while ‘anti-’ behaviours have no significant effect.

*Discussion*

The cross-sectional evidence from study 2 replicates the finding from study 1: that the relationship between national identification and prejudice depends on the extent to which participants endorse an essentialist definition of the national group. The association between essentialism and behavioural intentions, however, is highly significant across all the tests that were carried out. We also found evidence for an association between national group essentialism and the behavioural measure of support for asylum seekers.

The longitudinal analysis indicates that national group essentialism causally increases willingness to act against asylum seekers. Although we found no longitudinal evidence for the predicted moderation of the association between identification and prejudice, this does not mean that no such moderation occurs. McClelland and Judd (1993) have demonstrated that field studies have only 20 percent of the efficiency that experiments have to detect interactions. This is because of the non-optimal distributions of the component variables, which reduces the power of the moderator estimate. We lose further power by having to control for stability across time. We should therefore not conclude prematurely that the effect of causal effect of identification is un-moderated by essentialism. Furthermore, the finding that the essentialist ingroup definition *causes* a willingness to act against an immigrant group is an original and important one, in terms of both the relationship between essentialism and prejudice and the general study of national identity and immigration.

There is also evidence of causality in the reverse direction (from behavioural intention to essentialism), but only among high identifiers. In the case of intentions to act in support of the outgroup, however, we observe an effect only from behavioural

intentions to essentialism, whereby willingness to act in support of asylum seekers leads to a rejection of the essentialist definition of the nation. This is consistent with Reicher and Hopkins' (2001) account of the action-oriented construction of national identity content. According to this account, the characteristics and boundaries of the national group are not taken for granted, but are constructed in order to imply a particular group response or action. In other words, social categories are not simply perceived, but are oriented towards a future goal. Here, we find evidence not only that identity content can be a determinant of prejudice towards an outgroup, but also that the construal of identity can actually be a means of realising one's intentions against them. More broadly, this points to the dependence of ingroup identity content on the intergroup context in which it is embedded.

As with the affect measure in study 1, the mean level of anti-asylum seeker behavioural intentions is below the midpoint of the scale. However, again, it is within one standard deviation of the midpoint. Given that the measure asks about the extent to which participants would take actually engage in behaviours against the outgroup, these scores are consistent with our characterisation of this context as one in which one does find overtly hostile reactions towards a category of people.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Taken together, these studies highlight the crucial role of identity content in intergroup relations. They illustrate that the consequences of group identification, and its association with attitudes and behaviours towards outgroup, is contingent on how the ingroup is defined: the question of what makes us 'us'. The findings demonstrate that ingroup definitions have a real causal role to play.

## National identification, essentialism and anti-immigrant prejudice

National identity content and particular constructions of nationality, of which national group essentialism is an example, have been extensively examined within critical and discursive research traditions (Billig, 1995; Condor, 2000; Wallwork & Dixon, 2004). However, as we have seen, they can be usefully incorporated into quantitative approaches as well. In the case of nationality, identity content is crucial because it determines how nationalist projects of autonomy, unity and identity (Smith, 2001) are either realised or hindered by a given outgroup. This adds further weight to the argument that social identity *processes* should not be treated as independent from *content*, as they often are (Livingstone & Haslam, in press).

Much research on intergroup relations is based on contexts in which who is 'in' and who is 'out' is fixed and can be taken for granted (or is dictated by the researcher). There are contexts, however, such as in host-immigrant relations, where this is not the case. The question of whether various immigrant and minority groups are to be regarded as part of the national ingroup is crucial to the debates through which pro- and anti-immigrant sentiments are formed. The ethnic national definition that we have investigated here is a specific form of essentialism. What is needed is a more developed account of how individuals' endorsement of particular essentialist definitions of groups such as this relate to the more generic construct of psychological essentialism described in social cognition (Yzerbyt *et al.*, 2004), as well as to widely shared essentialist constructions of social categories, and the political interests that they serve (Stoler, 1997). Pehrson, Vignoles and Brown (2007), for example, distinguish empirically between ethnic definitions of nationhood at individual and collective levels using multilevel analysis of survey data. Future work on



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essentialism could usefully clarify the relationship between individual and collective processes involved in essentialist definitions of social categories.

NOTES:

1. As one reviewer suggested, the fact that individual participants are nested within class groups raises a potential issue of non-independence in the data. We therefore repeated each analysis as a multilevel model with a random intercept using HLM 6. The coefficients and significance values showed exactly the same pattern as those obtained from the traditional regression models reported in the paper.

2. The same cross-sectional analysis conducted on time 2 responses revealed the same pattern of results.

3. We also repeated the analysis using a similar negative affect measure to that used in study 1, rated on a Likert scale rather than the 0-100 scale. Although the interaction term was non-significant, the analysis showed that same pattern as in study 1, with simple slopes again indicating a relationship between identification and negative affect where essentialism is at the mean level ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $p = .04$ ) or one standard deviation above the mean ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $p = .06$ ), but not where essentialism is low ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $p = .18$ ). There was no longitudinal effect of essentialism on negative affect.

4. As described by Cohen *et al.* (2003), causality between variables X and Y can be inferred from longitudinal data by regressing Y at time 2 on X at time 1, whilst also including Y at time 1 in the model. This controls for the stability of Y. Any remaining variance (i.e. change) that is explained by variables from time 1 can be considered to be causal effects.

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Table 1: Principal components loadings of essentialism items

	Study 1	Study 2: Time 1	Study 2: Time 2
'From our ancestry, something deep in the heart clearly distinguishes the English from other nations.' (Ess 1)	.63	.73	.76
'It is our English blood that basically makes us who we are throughout our lives.' (Ess 2)	.75	.81	.82
'Something in our blood has defined the English character throughout history.' (Ess 3)	.85	.87	.90
'The Englishness in our blood makes us prefer to stick together.' (Ess 4)	.76	.78	.80
'Englishness isn't "in the blood"' (Reverse coded; Ess 5)	-.66	-.76	-.74

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Table 2: Means of and inter-correlations among variables (study 1). All correlations are significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

	M	SD	2.	3.
1. Identification	1.37	1.14	.48	.31
2. Essentialism	-.70	1.18	-	.29
3. Negative affect	34.77	23.14		



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Table 3: Means of and inter-correlations among variables (study 2)

	M <sub>T1</sub>	SD	M <sub>T2</sub>	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Identification	.90	1.11	.84	.98	<b>.76</b>	.47/.49	.35/.35	-.34/-.27
2. Essentialism	-.23	.89	-.50	1.25	<b>.41/47</b>	<b>.69</b>	.53/.56	-.33/-.29
3. Anti Behaviour	-1.13	1.55	-1.18	1.52	<b>.36/40</b>	<b>.50/.55</b>	<b>.80</b>	--.55/-.50
4. Pro Behaviour	-.78	1.37	-.82	1.40	<b>-.35/-.25</b>	<b>-.38/-.28</b>	<b>-.52/-.48</b>	<b>.79</b>

Note:

Coefficients on or below the diagonal in bold type are T1-T2/T2-T1 correlations (the first coefficient in each pair is the correlation of T1 values of variables in column 1 to T2 values in variables in top row, and the second shows the reverse direction). Above the diagonal are cross-sectional correlations at T1/T2.

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Table 4: Standardised  $\beta$  values for the cross-sectional and longitudinal regression of anti- and pro-asylum seeker behavioural intentions indices on identification and essentialism. \*\* indicates  $p \leq 0.01$ . \* indicates  $p \leq 0.05$ . † indicates  $p \leq .10$ .

	Cross-sectional analysis				Longitudinal analysis			
	Anti		Pro		Anti		Pro	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
Essentialism	.45**	.45**	-.20**	-.20**	.14**	.14**	-.05	-.05
Identification	.16*	.16*	-.27**	-.27**	.10*	.10*	.04	.04
Essentialism * Identification		.15*		-.16*		.05		.05
Stability		-		-		.68**		.79**
R <sup>2</sup>	.29**	.31**	.15**	.18**	.66**	.66**	.62**	.62**
R <sup>2</sup> change		.02*		.03*		.00		.00

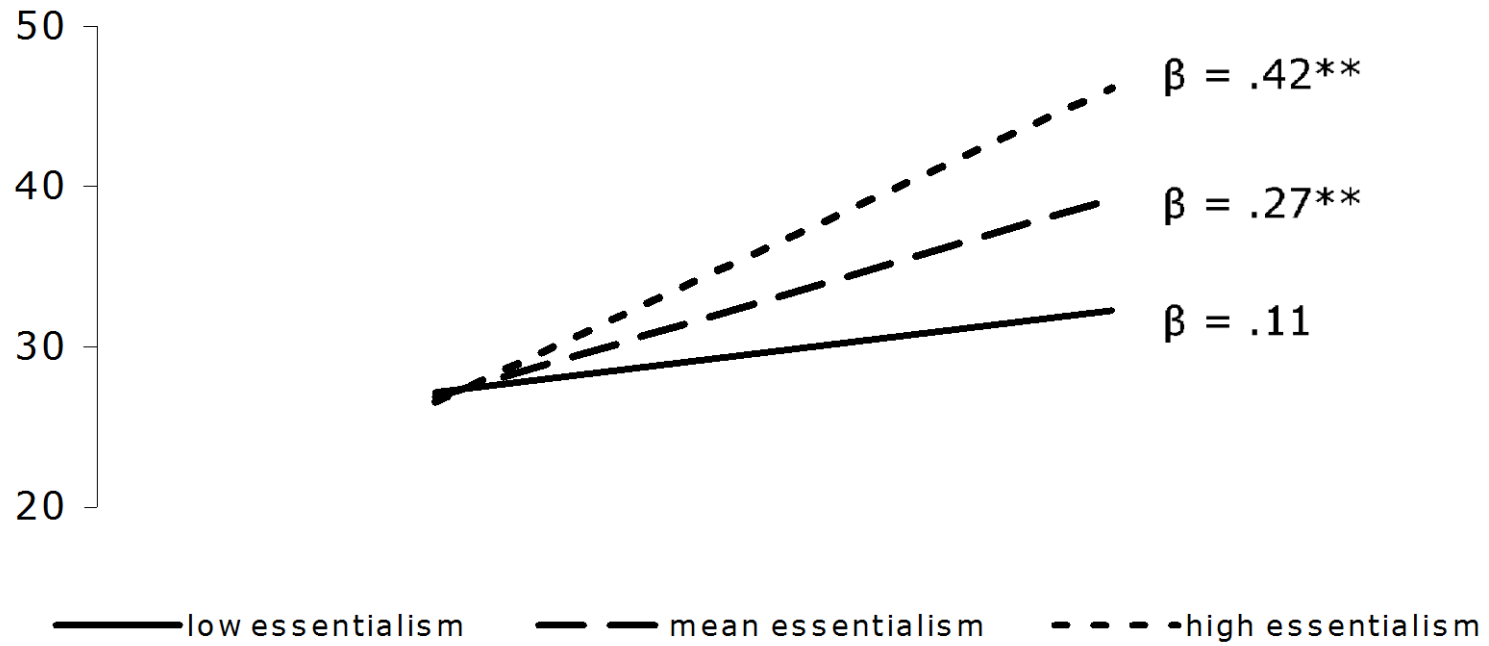
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Table 5:  $R^2$  statistics and  $\beta$  values for the cross-lagged analysis of the effects anti- and pro-asylum seeker behavioural intentions and national identification on essentialism. \*\* indicates  $p \leq 0.01$ . \* indicates  $p \leq 0.05$ . † indicates  $p \leq .10$ .

	$\beta$ (effect on essentialism)
Stability	.55**
Identification	.17**
‘Pro-’ behaviours	-.16*
‘Anti-’ behaviours	-.02
‘Pro’ * Identification	.10
‘Anti-’ * Identification	.15†

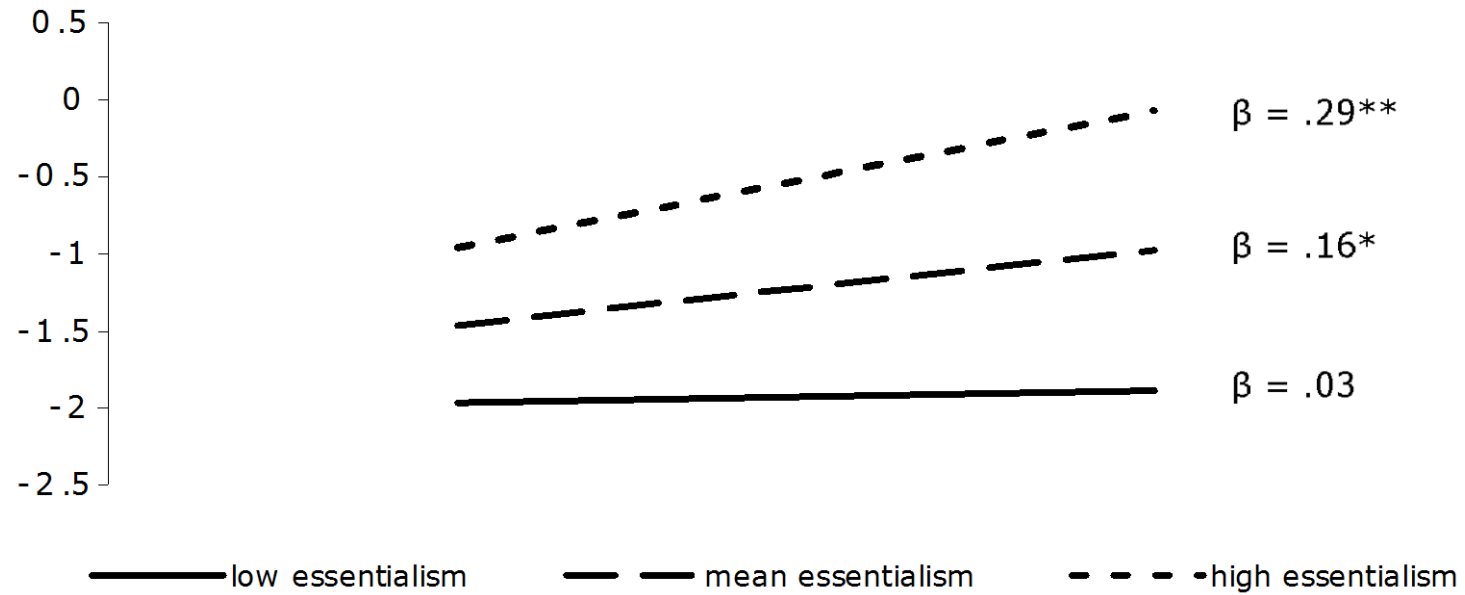
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Figure 1: Effect of national identification on negative affect towards asylum seekers at essentialism scores of mean  $\pm$  1 standard deviation.



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Figure 2a: Effect of national identification on intention to support an anti-asylum seeker group at essentialism scores of mean  $\pm$  1 standard deviation.



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Figure 2b: Effect of national identification on intention to support pro-asylum seeker group at essentialism scores of mean  $\pm$  1 standard deviation.

