

Why is the History of Heterosexuality Essential? Beliefs about the History of
Sexuality and Their Relationship to Sexual Prejudice.

Katherine Hubbard

Peter Hegarty

University of Surrey

In Press: *Journal of Homosexuality*.

RUNNING HEAD: UNIVERSALITY

Author Note: This research was conducted by the first author under the supervision of the second in part fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Surrey. We thank Nick Haslam for comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript. Please direct correspondence to Peter Hegarty, Department of Psychology, University of Surrey, Guildford, GU2 7XH, United Kingdom, p.hegarty@surrey.ac.uk.

Abstract

Heterosexual people with more positive attitudes to lesbians and gay men generally believe that homosexuality is immutable, is not a discrete social category, and that homosexuality exists in all cultures and time periods. Equivalent beliefs about heterosexuality and beliefs about components of sexuality have been less-often researched. 136 people with diverse sexualities described heterosexuality as more universal across history and culture than homosexuality (Study 1). 69 heterosexual-identified participants similarly believed that love, identity, behaviour and desire were more historically invariant aspects of heterosexuality than of homosexuality (Study 2). Less prejudiced participants thought all components of homosexuality – except for identity – were more historically invariant. Teasing apart beliefs about the history of components of heterosexuality and homosexuality suggests that there is no “essential” relationship between sexual prejudice and the tension between ‘essentialist’ and ‘constructivist’ views about the history of sexual identity.

Keywords: Sexuality, essentialism, prejudice, ideology, history.

Why is the History of Heterosexuality Essential? Beliefs about the History of
Sexuality and Their Relationship to Sexual Prejudice

It is almost a truism of social psychology that high status identities are taken as the basis for social norms, and that those norms are then considered to apply to everyone. Such conflation reinforces inequality when they allow dominant group identities to use themselves as a standard for judging others (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999) or to recruit lower status group members' agency into serving the higher status group's agenda (Simon & Oakes, 2006). Many traditions of critical thought share the Hegelian assumption that dominance requires the illusion that the subordinate "other" is dispensable to the dominant group, even while the dominant group critically rely on the "other" for its ways of being. The analysis is common to such domains as class (Marx & Engels, 1978), gender (de Beauvoir, 1949/2011), colonization (Said, 1978), and, of course, sexuality (Warner, 1993).

Psychologists have also taken note of the tendency to conflate heterosexuality with universal categories such as society, nature, culture, and history. Herek (2007) distinguished sexual stigma at two levels of analysis; *heterosexist ideology* and *sexual prejudice*, describing the heterosexual ideology embedded in cultural practices as one that presumes and prescribes heterosexuality as a way of being for everyone. Other researchers have called this ideology *heteronormativity* (e.g., Hegarty, Pratto, & Lemieux, 2004; Warner, 1993). Heterosexist ideology is distinct from *sexual prejudice*, which Herek (2007) describes as the overt behavioural manifestation of sexual stigma. The effects of sexual stigma on the well-being of sexual minority people such as gay, lesbian and bisexual people are multiple and well documented (Meyer, 2003)

In recent decades, research psychologists have been advised to resist heterosexism by writing in an even-handed way about homosexuality and heterosexuality (Herek, Kimmel, Amaro, & Melton, 1991). People typically explain differences between sexual identity groups by linguistically positioning heterosexuality as the norm for comparison, rendering the psychology of sexual minority groups as ‘the effect to be explained’ (Hegarty & Pratto, 2004). Even scientists who express a desire to explain group differences in even-handed ways can end up focusing their explanations on sexual minority people (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001). Such asymmetric explanations have consequences for stereotyping. When one group is linguistically positioned as the norm and another as “the effect to be explained,” readers draw the conclusion that the former group is the one with greater power and agency (Bruckmüller & Abele, 2010; Bruckmüller, Hegarty, & Abele, 2012). As such, the advice to focus explanatory attention on heterosexuality appears to be sound, but difficult to follow in practice.

Informed by such analyses of heterosexist ideology, and the evidence their effects on scientific thinking about group differences the present article aims to examine *essentialist beliefs* about sexuality from a fresh angle. To be specific, research on essentialist beliefs about sexuality have often implicitly or explicitly focused on beliefs about *homosexuality*, such that beliefs about heterosexuality have remained unexamined. Moreover, beliefs about components of sexuality – love, identity, behaviour and desire – have not been empirically investigated. The two studies in this paper demonstrate the importance of addressing both issues. Before describing the studies, we review the development of psychologists’ interest in and understanding of essentialist beliefs about sexuality and detail how our work constitutes a fresh take on this area of growing interest.

Essentialist Beliefs About Sexuality

Essentialism is the belief that complex phenomena, such as social identities, are caused by unseen causes, such as genes, and that the actions of these agents can explain the particular characteristics of these phenomena (Medin, 1989). Research on essentialist beliefs about homosexuality has progressed in three waves. The attributional theory of stigma predicted that people would respond more harshly to a stigmatized target whose behaviour was perceived to be under personal control (Weiner, Perry & Magnusson, 1989). This theory inspired Whitley's (1990) research which showed that heterosexuals who consider sexual orientation a matter of personal choice espoused more negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. However, the argument that beliefs about personal choice were a *cause* of tolerant attitudes towards lesbians and gay men never gained support. Experiments which tested the effects of manipulating beliefs about sexual orientation on attitudes towards lesbians and gay men produced very mixed findings and frequent null results (see Hegarty, 2010; Hegarty & Golden, 2008 for discussion). Close analysis of historical shifts in public opinion in the United States also fail to support the idea that heterosexual Americans became more gay-friendly in recent years as a consequence of an a shift in their beliefs about the immutability of sexuality (Lewis, 2009).

A second wave of research was inspired by increased interest in essentialism in the interdisciplinary study of sexuality (DeCecco & Elia, 1993, DeCecco & Parker, 1995; Stein, 1990). Researchers tended to assume that beliefs about the 'essence' of group identity tended to be ideologically influenced and served the purpose of rationalizing inequality (Rothbart & Taylor, 1992; Yzerbyt, Rocher, & Schadron, 1997). However, sexuality appeared to some psychologists to be an exception to this rule, because heterosexual people who thought sexual orientation was genetically

determined expressed *more* positive attitudes toward lesbians and gay men (e.g., Bem, 1998). This tension was first addressed by Hegarty and Pratto (2001; Hegarty, 2002) who showed that beliefs in the ‘immutability’ of sexual orientation were negatively correlated with the belief that lesbians and gay men were ‘fundamentally’ different from heterosexuals. Furthermore, immutability beliefs were correlated with positive attitudes toward lesbians and gay men, and fundamentality beliefs were correlated with negative attitudes.

Similarly Haslam, Rothschild and Ernst (2000) described beliefs about social groups as varying about the extent to which those group were perceived as natural, and as discrete, bounded entities. These dimensions of ‘naturalness’ and ‘entiativity’ were found to be influenced by the status of the groups in question. Whilst two groups may be considered just as natural as each other, lower status groups were viewed as more homogeneous and more of an entity than higher status groups. Haslam, Rothschild and Ernst (2002) later observed that gay men were believed to be a more ‘entitative’ and less ‘natural’ group than two other lower status groups; women and Black people. In this later study, essentialist beliefs were correlated with sexual prejudice, but not with either sexism or racism.

Whilst the research of Hegarty, Haslam and their colleagues suggested that belief in the discreteness of sexual identity categories is related to prejudice, Falomir and Mugny (2009) reasoned that some heterosexual men might find gay men easier to tolerate if they were reassured of a categorical boundary between these two groups. In support of this idea, they found that only heterosexual men who were threatened by homosexuality reported reduced prejudice toward gay men when presented with a biological argument about sexuality. In total this wave of research suggested that essentialist beliefs have no “essential” relationship to prejudice, and that essentialist

beliefs could also be consequences of individual and group-based motives (see also Verkuyten, 2003; Yzerbyt et al., 1997).

A third wave of research was initiated by Haslam and Levy (2006), who conducted larger, more psychometrically sound studies of essentialist beliefs and prejudice than other researchers had done. Building on past research findings (e.g., Hegarty & Pratto, 2001; Whitley, 1990), Haslam and Levy (2006) isolated a belief in the immutability of sexuality, associated with lower sexual prejudice, and a belief in the discreteness of sexual orientation, associated with higher sexual prejudice. These authors also isolated a third dimension of belief in the ‘universality’ of sexual orientation across culture and historical time. They found that belief in the universality of homosexuality was positively correlated with immutability beliefs and negatively correlated with discreteness beliefs and sexual prejudice. This three-factor structure was robust across beliefs about the sexualities of women and the sexualities of men.

Simultaneously new theories of the development sexual orientation became better informed by feminist critiques of research on sexuality, and described men’s sexualities as more impervious to sociocultural and situational influence than women’s sexualities (Baumeister, 2000; Diamond, 2003; Hammack, 2005). These theories made sense of both existing findings that sexual minority men were less likely than sexual minority women to describe their identities as partially chosen (e.g., Golden, 1993; Savin-Williams, 1990), and newer research showing that women’s use of sexual identity labels often followed from their choice of female and male partners (Diamond, 2008). These theories assumed that biological essentialist models of sexuality, such as genetic theories, fit men better than women. They further suggested that beliefs about male and female sexuality might differ from each other.

Recent research in social psychology has tended to employ Haslam and Levy's (2006) framework. For example, Morton and Postmes (2009) studied the relationship between these three dimensions of essentialist belief and in-group identification among lesbians, gay men, and bisexual participants. Highly-identified participants endorsed beliefs in the universality of homosexuality the most, beliefs in discreteness did not co-vary with in-group identification, and beliefs in immutability co-varied with identification in situation-specific ways. Hegarty (2010) also used Haslam and Levy's three-factor theory in a study of changes in attitudes and beliefs among students completing a university seminar on LGBT psychology; prejudice reduction was correlated only with a reduction in discreteness beliefs.

The Present Study

In spite of its increasing complexity, the literature on sexual prejudice and essentialism had two conceptual limits. First, researchers have tended to assume that essentialist beliefs about homosexuality are of great interest to the neglect of beliefs about heterosexuality. Second, researchers have not interrogated essentialist beliefs about different components of sexuality, and the emergence of multifactorial models required to explain women's sexuality further prompt the need for such understanding. In Study 1 we tested whether beliefs about heterosexuality and homosexuality were equivalently strong, and in Study 2 we tested whether the relationships between sexual prejudice and essentialist beliefs about components of homosexuality and heterosexuality; love, behaviour, identity and desire were equivalent. By assessing relationships between essentialist beliefs about both homosexuality and heterosexuality and sexual prejudice, we aimed to both undo the effects of heterosexist ideology on this literature, and to investigate whether essentialist beliefs

reflected not only on ‘sexual prejudice’ but also on ‘heterosexist ideology’ (Herek, 2007).

Study 1: Essentialist Beliefs about Homosexuality and Heterosexuality

Study 1 explored whether heterosexual and sexual minority people’s essentialist beliefs about homosexuality and heterosexuality were the same or different. As beliefs about heterosexuality had not been examined previously in the literature, our hypothesis about the extent to which beliefs about homosexuality and heterosexuality would be similar or different were by necessity exploratory.

Method

Participants. Seventy three men and 63 women participated as volunteers (age range = 17 to 66 years, $M = 26.91$). Those who identified their sexualities as heterosexual or ‘straight’ ($n = 106$) were categorized as *sexual majority* participants. Those who identified as bisexual ($n=11$), homosexual, gay or lesbian ($n= 8$), and other ($n= 11$) were categorized as *sexual minority participants* for statistical purposes. Fourteen other participants who did not identify their sexuality, and one who failed to complete the essentialist belief measure were excluded from the analysis.

Materials. The materials consisted of the Essentialist Belief Scale used in Haslam and Levy’s (2006) third study, presented as a series of 6-point Likert items. This 15-item scale includes 5 items that each measure three dimensions of essentialist belief: discreteness, immutability, and universality. Four versions of the questionnaire were constructed to operationalize a 2x2 experimental design. Two versions of the questionnaire asked about women’s sexuality and two versions asked about men’s sexuality. Within these conditions, one version of the questionnaire

focused on homosexuality and the other focused on heterosexuality (see Appendix).

A demographic sheet followed the essentialist belief scale.

Procedure. Most participants were approached at public venues on campus and completed a paper copy of the questionnaire anonymously. Others were recruited via a snowball sampling method from the first researcher's personal contacts on social networking sites, and completed electronic questionnaires, which were returned them via email or posted to the researchers. Participants were randomly assigned to condition and all were debriefed as to the purpose of the study upon completing the materials.

Results

We calculated essentialism scores for each of the three sub-scales by averaging across the five items of each subscale. The discreteness variable had low reliability ($\alpha = 0.59$), and inspection of the correlation matrix showed that Item 2 was not robustly correlated with the other items. Excluding this item raised Cronbach's α to .65 for this measure, and below we report analysis for the scale with this item removed. The measures of immutability, and universality had moderate reliability ($\alpha = .73, .63$ respectively). While somewhat low, these reliability statistics are comparable with other studies which have used similar measures (e.g., Morton & Postmes, 2009). Absolute values of kurtosis and skew were less than 1 for all three variables indicating their normal distribution.

We next examined whether essentialist beliefs about homosexuality and heterosexuality were equally strong or were different by conducting three $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVAs. These ANOVAs had four between-subjects variables; target sexuality (heterosexual vs. homosexual), target gender (women vs. men), participant sexual

identity (majority vs. minority), and participant gender (women vs. men). Each of the three essentialist beliefs served as a dependent variable in each of the analyses.

We examined belief in discreteness first. None of these independent variables or their interactions had significant effects on discreteness beliefs, all $p > .10$. The analysis of immutability beliefs revealed two significant interactions. First, target sexuality interacted with participant gender, $F(1, 120) = 6.81, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .05$. Second, this two-way interaction was moderated by a further three-way interaction involving target sexuality, participant gender, and participant sexuality, $F(1, 120) = 4.52, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .04$. 2 x 2 ANOVAs conducted separately of sexual minority and sexual majority participants, revealed no significant effects among sexual majority participants, all $F < 1.7$, all $p > .20$. A significant interaction occurred between target group and participant gender among sexual minority participants, $F(1, 26) = 5.79, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .18$. Men believed heterosexuality to be somewhat more immutable than did women ($M_s = 4.08, 3.42$ respectively), while women believed in the immutability of homosexuality more than men did (4.12, 2.89 respectively). Tukey's post hoc test ($\alpha = .05$) revealed that neither gender difference was statistically significant.

The analysis of belief in the universality of sexual orientation demonstrated why beliefs about 'sexuality' and beliefs about 'homosexuality' are not always the same thing; participants perceived heterosexuality to be more universal than homosexuality ($M_s = 4.66, 4.27$ respectively), $F(1, 120) = 6.28, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .05$. Women also endorsed universality beliefs more than men did ($M_s = 4.59, 4.36$ respectively), $F(1, 120) = 4.23, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .03$, and the interaction between these two main effects approached significance, $F(1, 120) = 6.38, p = .07, \eta_p^2 = .03$. Women and men endorsed beliefs about heterosexuality to similar degrees ($M_s = 4.68, 4.63$ respectively), but women endorsed universality beliefs about homosexuality

somewhat more than men did ($M_s = 4.47, 4.07$ respectively). Tukey's post hoc test ($\alpha = .05$) revealed that neither gender difference was statistically significant. No other main effects or interactions were significant.

Lastly, we examined correlations between discreteness, immutability, and universality beliefs and participants' age. As in Haslam and Levy's (2006) study, universality beliefs about homosexuality were negatively correlated with discreteness beliefs, $r(70) = -.29, p = .01$, and positively correlated with immutability beliefs, $r(70) = .37, p = .001$. However, we did not replicate this structure among participants who reported their beliefs about heterosexuality. Belief in the universality and discreteness of heterosexuality, and belief in the universality and immutability of heterosexuality were not significantly correlated, $r(78) = -.19, .09$ respectively. Correlations between beliefs in discreteness and immutability were not significant with regard to either homosexuality or heterosexuality, $r = -.11, +.19$ respectively. Participant age was not significantly correlated with belief in immutability, discreteness or universality.

Discussion.

The most suggestive finding from our first exploratory study is that sexual minority and majority women and men reported greater belief in the universality of heterosexuality than in the universality of homosexuality. Similar differences in essentialist beliefs about homosexuality and heterosexuality were not observed with regard to beliefs about discreteness. The interacting effects of participant sex and target sexuality on beliefs about immutability must be regarded with some caution. Our sample was small, and larger community samples report a very different effect such that sexual minority men report their sexualities as more immutable than do

sexual minority women (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009). In sum, universality beliefs emerged as the dimension where it appears most important to tease apart beliefs about 'sexuality' in general, from beliefs about homosexuality and heterosexuality. Consequently, our second study examined beliefs about components of homosexuality and heterosexuality, and their relationship to sexual prejudice.

Study 2: Beliefs About the History of Homosexuality and Heterosexuality

In Study 1 people reported more belief in the universality of heterosexuality than in the universality of homosexuality. This effect might pertain to concepts such as heterosexist ideology (Herek, 2007) and heteronormativity (Warner, 1993) to varying extents. Because heterosexuality is implicated in human reproduction, it seems obvious and non-ideological that heterosexuality is universal across culture and history. As one participant in Study 1 wrote next to an item indicating agreement with the universality of heterosexuality, "of course, otherwise I wouldn't be doing this quiz." On the other hand, there was no obvious ceiling effect in participants' universality beliefs about heterosexuality, suggesting that this meaning is not the only one that people call to mind when they are asked to report their beliefs about heterosexuality. Indeed, sexuality is a multidimensional construct that involves such components as romantic love, sexual identity, and sexual desire (Diamond, 2003; DeCecco, 1982), not all of which have a clear causal relationship to reproduction. Showing an awareness of the differences between these components, another participant in Study 1 wrote in the margin next to a universality items about female homosexuality; "Not quite sure whether you mean females of whom have 'come out'

(sic) or if you mean female tendencies towards homosexuality...” Such comments suggest that some people sometimes call to mind different components of sexuality when reporting their essentialist beliefs.

Study 2 had three goals. First, we aimed to extend the finding that people believed more in the universality of heterosexuality than in the universality of homosexuality to a context in which people reported their beliefs about components of sexual identity. Second, we aimed to assess the relationship between those essentialist beliefs and sexual prejudice. Because Study 2 focused on sexual prejudice, we reported analysis only for heterosexual participants. Finally, Study 2 brought the psychological study of essentialist beliefs and debates about the history of sexuality into closer dialogue. In other domains, social psychologists have repeatedly found that beliefs about the history of intergroup relations can affect individuals’ reactions to contemporary inequalities (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998; Hopkins & Reicher, 2001; Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003; Liu & Hilton, 2005; McGarty et al., 2005; Sibley, Liu, Duckitt, & Kahn, 2008; Zebel et al., 2007). We discuss how our study engaged the ‘essentialism-constructionism’ debate among pro-gay history scholars next.

The ‘essentialism-constructionism’ debate was prompted by the recognition that homosexual behaviour had occurred throughout history (see Stein, 1990). Within this debate, ‘essentialists’ tended to argue that such behaviour implied that people with homosexual *identities* existed in pre-modern periods (e.g., Boswell, 1994), and “social constructionists” argued that homosexual identities only cohered in recent modern periods as sexuality became more central to Western concepts of personhood (Faderman, 1991; Foucault, 1978; Halperin, 2000). Essentialism might appear to be a pro-gay strategy because the assertion that gay people have always existed seems to

legitimate the rights of gay people to exist in the present. Indeed, belief in the universality of homosexuality is predictive of both lower sexual prejudice among heterosexuals (Haslam & Levy, 2006) and of higher identification with LGB identity among LGB people (Morton & Postmes, 2009). However, from a social constructionist perspective, the projection of gay identity back in time appears to be a case of ‘hindsight bias’ that overlooks the variable relationship between the components of sexuality across historical time (Fischhoff, 1975).

Real-world events in the United States of America also suggested the possibility of pro-gay constructivist beliefs debate on the rights which sexual minority citizens enjoy. Sodomy laws in the United States were upheld by the Supreme Court in the 1986 *Bowers vs. Hardwick* ruling which equated the old crime of ‘sodomy’ with modern homosexual identity, such that homosexuality could have no legitimate place in the nation’s traditions. This judgment limited the equal protection of sexual minorities quite severely in the subsequent years (Halley, 1993, 1994). *Bowers* was overturned in 2004 by the *Lawrence vs. Texas* judgment, in which the justices ruled that sodomy and sexual identity were different from each other, that sodomy laws targeted both homosexual and heterosexual acts, and that homosexual and heterosexual acts shared a similar right to privacy (see Herek, 2007; Tribe, 2004 for discussion). Contra to available social psychological findings (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Morton & Postmes, 2009), this recent legal history in the United States suggests that an essentialist theory is ‘not essential’ to oppose heterosexist ideology, and that beliefs about the historical universality of *identity* might have less clear relationships to sexual prejudice than beliefs about other components of sexuality.

In Study 2 we examined heterosexual participants’ sexual prejudice, and their beliefs about the universality of four components of sexuality across historical time;

love, identity, behaviour, and desire (Diamond, 2003; DeCecco, 1982). Both the debate among historians, and the difference between the Supreme Court decisions on sodomy laws differ not on the matter of the historical universality of “sexuality” in a general sense, but specifically on the historical universality of sexual identity. Past social psychological studies of essentialist beliefs and sexual prejudice have not asked examined beliefs about components of sexuality separately, as we did here.

Method

Participants. Thirty five men and 34 women, who all identified as heterosexual, took part as volunteers (age = 18-64 years, the mean age was 25.80 (*S.D.* 10.49).

Materials

The questionnaires consisted of two parts. The historical essentialism measure was developed for this study, and consisted of 16 items, made up of four sets of four items, each about four components of sexuality; romantic love, sexual identity, sexual behaviour and sexual desire. For each component of sexuality, the first three items were presented as 6-point Likert items, and the fourth was an open-ended measure. Two versions of the measure were constructed that referred to homosexuality and heterosexuality respectively (see Appendix). Second, the questionnaire presented the modern homonegativity scale (Morrison & Morrison, 2002), a 12-item measure of modern prejudice towards lesbians and gay men. All prejudice items were presented as 5-point Likert items. Demographic items were presented last.

Procedure. Participants were recruited using the same methods as Study 1 and were randomly assigned to condition.

Results

We first calculated historical universality scores. Individual 6-point Likert items were reverse coded where necessary such that high scores on all items indicated greater belief in historical universality. We standardized answers to the items in which the date of the emergence of sexuality was guessed. Based on participants' responses, we constructed a 15-point scale representing different historical periods, from those furthest back in time to the most recent. The first point on this scale represented qualitative responses indicating absolute timelessness (e.g., 'forever,' 'always'). Points 2-5 represented four millennial time periods; 20,000 BCE to 10,001 BCE, 10,000 BCE to 5,001 BCE, 5,000 BCE-1 BCE, and 0 AD to 1,099 AD respectively. Points 6-15 represented guesses that fell within century long periods from 1,100 AD to the present. Scores on this 15 point scale were multiplied by 0.4 to render their range comparable to the other items and reverse coded. The four items on each sub-scale were then averaged to form reliable measures of romantic love ($\alpha = 0.75$), sexual identity ($\alpha = 0.81$), sexual behaviour ($\alpha = 0.83$) and sexual desire ($\alpha = 0.82$). Two participants skipped some of the questions in which they guessed the date of emergence of sexuality, and thirteen participants skipped all of them. T-tests showed that mean scores did not differ on any of the subscales between participants who guessed the date of sexuality's emergence and those who did not, all $t < 1.25$, all $p > .23$. The relevant participants' scores were calculated as the average of the remaining three items. We also reverse coded the modern prejudice relevant items and averaged them to yield a reliable measure of modern prejudice ($\alpha = .87$).

We tested whether essentialist beliefs about the components of homosexuality and heterosexuality differed first. We conducted a MANOVA including two between subjects factors; target sexuality (homosexuality vs. heterosexuality) and participant gender (female vs. male) and participants' beliefs in the universality of love, identity,

behaviour and desire. Replicating the findings of Study 1, participants endorsed beliefs about the universality of heterosexuality significantly more than the comparable components of homosexuality, $F(1, 65) = 8.80, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .36$ (see Table 1 for specific effects). There was a marginally significant interaction between participant gender and target sexuality only in regard to beliefs about sexual identity, $F(1, 65) = 3.76, p = .06, \eta_p^2 = .06$. Women and men reported similar beliefs about heterosexual identity (both $M = 3.45$), but men endorsed the universality of homosexuality somewhat more than women ($M_s = 2.85, 2.10$ respectively). Tukey's post hoc test ($\alpha = .05$) revealed that this gender difference was not significant. As this non-significant, effect was opposite in direction to the non-significant gender interaction in Study 1, we did not interpret it further. All other main effects of gender and interactions were non-significant, $F < 1.5$, all $p > .23$.

Next, we examined the correlations between essentialist beliefs and prejudice (see Table 2). Prejudice scores did not differ between participants who completed the items about homosexuality and the items about heterosexuality ($M_s = 2.62, 2.48$ respectively), $t < 1$. Relationships between universality beliefs and prejudice were unequal across target groups. As Table 2 shows, belief in the universality of love, behaviour, and desire were significantly negatively correlated with prejudice, but only in the homosexuality condition. However, universality beliefs about sexual identity were not correlated with prejudice in either condition. Furthermore, while beliefs about the historical universality of different components of sexuality were almost universally positively correlated with each other, beliefs about the universality of homosexual identity were unrelated to the beliefs about the universality of homosexual love or homosexual desire. In other words, beliefs about the trans-historical universality of homosexual identity were distinct from beliefs about other

components of homosexuality and no clear relationship to sexual prejudice. Among heterosexual people, the belief in the historical invariance of homosexual identity does not seem to be essential to a non-prejudiced attitude to lesbians and gay men.

Discussion

As in Study 1, participants in Study 2 endorsed beliefs about the universality of heterosexuality more than beliefs about the universality of homosexuality. However, sexual prejudice was related to beliefs about the history of homosexual love, desire, and behaviour, but not to beliefs about homosexual identity. Both academic essentialist-constructivist debates turned and recent interpretations of sodomy law in the United States have turned on questions about the historical universality of *sexual identity* and not about the historical universality of *sexuality*. The finding that belief in the universality of homosexual identity is unrelated to prejudice may explain both why the more tolerant heterosexuals studied by Haslam and Levy (2006) and the more group-identified LGB people studied by Morton and Postmes (2009), are historical essentialists, and why many academics and Supreme Court judges can construct principled opposition to heterosexist ideology that assumes that sexual identities are *not* historically universal.

General Discussion

Beliefs about the universality of homosexuality and heterosexuality are not always mirror images of each other. Rather, people of diverse sexualities believe that heterosexuality is a more universal human experience than homosexuality (Study 1), and sexual majority people believe that homosexual love, identity behaviour and

desire have emerged in history more recently than their heterosexual counterparts (Study 2).

Our research provides a fresh perspective on the relationship between sexual prejudice and essentialist beliefs about universality. Only beliefs about homosexuality, and not beliefs about heterosexuality, were correlated with other forms of essentialist thinking (Study 1) and with sexual prejudice (Study 2). Past studies of universality beliefs about sexuality suggest that historical essentialism is a pro-lesbian/gay strategy (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Morton & Postmes, 2009). By teasing apart beliefs about different components of sexuality in Study 2, the present research suggests that essentialist beliefs about sexual identity may not be as essential to resistance against heterosexism as some theories, such as attribution theory, suggest (e.g., Weiner, 1995; Whitley, 1990).

Indeed, one of the curious features of ideologies that “other” is that they both deny the existence of the marked group and mark lower-status group features as different in the course of de-legitimizing them. Consequently, members of sexual minority groups are disadvantaged both when their identities are not acknowledged, and when those identities are singled out as a cause for concern (see Herek, 2007; Meyer, 2003). Because heterosexist ideology contains such contradictions, it is not surprising that the relationship between implicit theories of history and sexual prejudice is far from simple. Past studies (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Morton & Postmes, 2009) may have suggested that historical essentialism is the more pro-gay orientation to history than social constructionism. However, by teasing apart beliefs about different components of different sexualities, the present research suggests that such a conclusion would be premature. Like the justices who ruled in the 2004 *Lawrence vs. Texas* case (see Tribe, 2004), and pro-gay/lesbian social constructionist histories (e.g.,

Faderman, 1991; Halperin, 2000), Study 2 shows how the belief that homosexual identity is a modern construction is not, in essence, a heterosexist belief.

Finally, the evidence of complex relationships between essentialist beliefs and sexual prejudice ought to urge caution about using essentialist beliefs as a means of ameliorating sexual prejudice among heterosexuals, as theorists of the first wave of theorizing tended to do (Whitley, 1990). This interpretation overlooks pro-gay reasons to reject essentialist theories. Indeed, sexual prejudice is, in some places, becoming *modern*; and heterosexual people actively construct grounds to treat gay/lesbian people unfairly whilst appearing to treat them equally (Moreno & Bodenhausen, 2001; Morrison & Morrison, 2002; Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002; Hegarty, Pratto, & Lemieux, 2004 for evidence of modern sexual prejudice). Overlooking the complexity of reasons that people endorse or reject the biological theory could lead social psychologists to unintentionally collude with such modern prejudice by essentializing essentialist beliefs as either more or less pro-gay than they inherently are.

Like any empirical study, ours is open to criticisms about its scope. Replication with broader samples and with different measures of prejudice would assess whether we have found a universal trend in beliefs about universality beliefs or only an “existence proof” that applies to relatively liberal and well-educated college students. The studies are less open to the criticism that our conclusions could be reinterpreted on the grounds that heterosexuality *really is* a more universal experience than homosexuality, because heterosexual behaviour leads to reproduction, while homosexual behaviour does not. As we have shown here, people can call to mind different components of heterosexuality that vary in their relationship to reproduction and report different beliefs about each of them. Rather than assume conflate beliefs

about identity with beliefs about sexuality, or beliefs about sexuality with beliefs about homosexuality, we hope this study prompts more nuanced examinations of the relationship between essentialist beliefs and sexual prejudice.

References

- Baumeister, R.F. (2000). Gender differences in erotic plasticity: The female sex drive as socially flexible and responsive. *Psychological Bulletin*, *126*, 347-374.
- Bem, D.J. (1998). Is EBE supported by the evidence? Is it androcentric? A reply to Peplau et al. (1998). *Psychological Review*, *105*, 395–398.
- Billig, M., Condor, S., Edwards, D., Gane, M., Middleton, D., & Radley, A. (1988). *Ideological dilemmas: A social psychology of everyday thinking*. London: Sage.
- Boswell, J. (1994). *Same-sex unions in premodern Europe*. New York: Villard.
- Bruckmüller, S., & Abele, A. (2010). Comparison focus in intergroup comparisons: Who we compare to whom influences who we see as powerful and agentic. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *36*, 1424-1435.
- Bruckmüller S, Hegarty P, Abele AE. (2012) 'Framing gender differences: Linguistic normativity affects perceptions of power and gender stereotypes' *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *42* (2), pp. 210-218.
- De Beauvoir, S. (1949/2011). *The second sex*. Trans. C. Borde and S. Malovany-Chevallier. New York, NY: Vintage.
- DeCecco, J.P. (1982). Definition and meaning of sexual orientation. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *6*, 51-67.
- De Cecco, J., & Elia, J.P. (Eds.). (1993). *If you seduce a straight person, can you make them gay? Issues in biological essentialism versus social constructionism in gay and lesbian identities*. New York: The Haworth Press, Inc.
- De Cecco, J., & Parker, D.A. (Eds.). (1995). *Sex, cells and same-sex desire: The*

- biology of sexual preference*. New York: The Haworth Press, Inc.
- Diamond, L. M. (2003). What does sexual orientation orient? A biobehavioral model distinguishing romantic love and sexual desire. *Psychological Review*, *110*, 173-192.
- Diamond, L.M. (2008). Female bisexuality from adolescence to adulthood: Results from a 10-year longitudinal study. *Developmental Psychology*, *44*, 5-14
- Doosje, B., Branscombe, N. R., Spears, R., & Manstead, A. S. R. (1998). Guilty by association: When one's group has a negative history. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *75*, 872–886.
- Faderman, L. (1991). *Odd girls and twilight lovers: A history of lesbian life in twentieth century America*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Falomir, J. M., & Mugny, G. (2009). "I'm not gay...I'm a real man!": Heterosexual men's gender self-esteem and sexual prejudice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *35*, 1233-1243.
- Fischhoff, B. (1975). Hindsight is not equal to foresight: The effect of outcome knowledge on judgment under uncertainty. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, *1*, 288-299.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality, Vol. 1: An introduction*. New York: Random House.
- Golden, C. (1994). Our politics, our choices: the feminist movement and sexual orientation. In B. Greene, & G. M. Herek (Eds.), *Lesbian and gay psychology: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (pp. 54–70). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Halley, J. E. (1993). The construction of heterosexuality. In M. Warner (Ed.), *Fear*

- of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory* (pp. 82-102). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Halley, J. E. (1994). Sexual orientation and the politics of biology: a critique of the argument from immutability. *Stanford Law Journal*, *36*, 301–366.
- Halperin, D. (2000). *How to do a history of male homosexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hammack, P.L. (2005). The life course development of human sexual orientation: An integrative paradigm. *Human Development*, *48*, 267–290.
- Haslam, N., Rothschild, L. & Ernst, D. (2000). Essentialist beliefs about social categories. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *39*, 113-127.
- Haslam, N., Rothschild, L. & Ernst, D. (2002). Are essentialist beliefs associated with prejudice? *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *41*, 87- 100.
- Haslam, N. & Levy, S.R. (2006). Essentialist beliefs about homosexuality: Structure and implications for prejudice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *32*, 471- 485.
- Hebl, M.R., Foster, J. B., Mannix, L.M., & Dovidio, J.F. (2002). Formal and interpersonal discrimination: A field study of bias toward homosexual applicants. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *28*, 815-825.
- Hegarty, P. (2002). ‘It’s not a choice, it’s the way we’re built’: Symbolic beliefs about sexual orientation in the US and Britain. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, *12*, 153-166.
- Hegarty, P. (2010). A stone in the soup? Changes in sexual prejudice and essentialist beliefs among British students in a class on LGBT psychology. *Psychology and Sexuality*, *1*, 3-20.
- Hegarty, P. & Golden, A.M. (2008). Attributions about the controllability of

- stigmatized traits: Antecedents or justifications of prejudice? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 38, 1023-1044.
- Hegarty, P., & Pratto, F. (2001). Sexual orientation beliefs: Their relationship to anti-gay attitudes and biological determinist arguments. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 41, 121-135.
- Hegarty, P., & Pratto, F. (2004). The differences that norms make: Empiricism, social constructionism and the interpretation of group differences. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 50, 445-453.
- Hegarty, P., Pratto, F., & Lemieux, A. (2004). Heterocentric norms and heterosexist ambivalences: Drinking in Intergroup Discomfort. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, 7, 119-130.
- Herek, G.M. (2007). Confronting sexual stigma and prejudice: Theory and practice. *Journal of Social Issues*, 63, 905-925.
- Herek, G.M., Gillis, J.R., & Cogan, J.C. (2009). Internalized stigma among sexual minority adults; Insights from a social psychological perspective. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 56, 32-43.
- Herek, G.M., Kimmel, D.C., Amaro, H., & Melton, G.B. (1991). Avoiding heterosexist bias in psychology. *American Psychologist*, 46, 957-963.
- Hopkins, S., & Reicher, N. (2001). Psychology and the end of history: A critique and a proposal for the psychology of social categorization. *Political Psychology*, 22, 383-407.
- Iyer, A., Leach, C.W., & Crosby, F.J. (2003). White guilt and racial compensation: The benefits and limits of self-focus. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, 117-129.

- Lewis, G.B. (2009). Does believing homosexuality is innate increase support for gay rights? *The Policy Studies Journal*, 37, 669-693.
- Liu, J. H., & Hilton, D. (2005). How the past weighs on the present: Social representations of history and their role in identity politics. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 44, 537–556.
- Katz, J. N. (1995). *The invention of heterosexuality*. New York: Dutton.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1978). The German ideology, Part I. In R. C. Tucker (Ed.), *The Marx-Engels reader* (pp. 146–200). New York: Norton.
- McGarty, C., Pederson, A., Leach, C.W., Mansell, T., Waller, J. & Bliuc, A.-M. (2005). Group-based guilt as a predictor of commitment to apology. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 44, 659-680.
- Medin, D.L. (1989). Concepts and conceptual structure. *American Psychologist*, 44, 1469–1481.
- Meyer, I. (2003). Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 129, 674-697.
- Moreno, K. N., & Bodenhausen, G. V. (2001). Intergroup affect and social judgment: Feelings as inadmissible information. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 4, 21–29.
- Morrison, M. A., & Morrison, G. (2002). Development and validation of a scale measuring modern prejudice toward gay men and lesbian women. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 43, 15- 37.
- Morton, T.A., & Postmes, T. (2009). When differences become essential: Minority Essentialism in response to majority treatment. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 35, 656–668.

- Mummendey, A., & Wenzel, M. (1999). Social discrimination and tolerance in intergroup relations: Reactions to intergroup differences. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3, 158–174.
- Rothbart, M., & Taylor, M. (1992). Category labels and social reality: Do we view social categories as natural kinds? In G. R. Semin & K. Fiedler (Eds.), *Language and social cognition* (pp. 11–36). London: Sage.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Savin-Williams, R. C. (1990). *Gay and lesbian youth: Expressions of identity*. New York: Hemisphere.
- Sibley, C.G., Liu, J.H., Duckitt, J., & Khan, S.S. (2008). Social representations of history and the legitimation of social inequality: The form and function of historical negation. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38, 542-565.
- Simon, B., & Oakes, P. (2006). Beyond dependence; An identity approach to social power and domination. *Human Relations*, 59, 105-139.
- Stein, E. (Ed.) (1990). *Forms of desire: Sexual orientation and the social constructionist controversy*. New York: Garland.
- Tribe, L. H. (2003). *Lawrence vs. Texas: The fundamental right that dare not speak its name*. *Harvard Law Review*, 17, 1893 - 1955.
- Verkuyten, M. (2003). Discourses about ethnic group (de-)essentialism: Oppressive and progressive aspects. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 42, 371-391.
- Warner, M. (1993). Introduction. In M. Warner (Ed.), *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory* (pp. vii-xxx). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Weiner, B., Perry, R.B., & Magnusson, J. (1988). An attributional analysis of

reactions to stigmas. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55, 738–748.

Whitley, B.E. (1990). The relationship of heterosexuals' attributions for the causes of homosexuality to attitudes towards lesbians and gay men. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 16, 369-377.

Yzerbyt, V. Y., Rocher, S. J., & Schadron, G. (1997). Stereotypes as explanations: A Subjective essentialistic view of group perception. In R. Spears, P. J. Oakes, N. Ellemers & S. A. Haslam (Eds.), *The social psychology of stereotyping and group life* (pp. 20–50). Oxford: Blackwell.

Zebel, S., Pennekamp, S.F., van Zomeron, M., Doosje, B., van Kleef, G., Vliek, M.L., & van der Schalk, J. (2007). Vessels with Gold or Guilt: emotional reactions to family involvement associated with glorious or gloomy aspects of the colonial past. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, 10, 71-86.

Table1: Mean Belief about the Universality of Components of Homosexuality and Heterosexuality (Standard Deviations in Parentheses): Study 2.

Sexuality	Heterosexuality	Homosexuality	$F(1, 65)$	p	η_p^2
	(n = 30)	(n = 39)			
<i>Component</i>					
Love	4.08 (0.98)	3.55 (0.96)	5.67	.02	.08
Identity	3.71 (1.05)	2.33 (0.86)	36.64	<.001	.36
Behaviour	4.25 (1.01)	3.31 (1.24)	10.58	.002	.14
Desire	4.42 (0.82)	3.91 (1.07)	4.63	.04	.07

Table 2: Relationships between Beliefs about the Universality of Components of Homosexuality and Heterosexuality and Sexual Prejudice: Study 2.

	Love	Identity	Behaviour	Desire	Prejudice
Love		.66***	.67***	.67***	-.17
Identity	.05		.61***	.48**	.05
Behaviour	.64***	.38*		.55**	-.09
Desire	.76***	.18	.69***		-.22
Prejudice	-.52***	-.04	-.36*	-.51**	

Note: Correlations below the diagonal refer to beliefs about homosexuality (n = 46) and those above the diagonal refer to beliefs about heterosexuality (n = 39).

Appendix

Essentialist Belief Items (Study 1)

Discreteness

1. Sexual orientations are categories with clear and sharp boundaries: [Women/Men] are either [heterosexual/homosexual] or they are not.
2. [Heterosexual/homosexual] [women/men] have a necessary or defining characteristic, without which they would not be [heterosexual/homosexual].
3. [Heterosexual/homosexual] [women/men] and [homosexual/heterosexual] [women/men] are not fundamentally different.
4. Bisexual [women/men] are fooling themselves and should make up their minds.
5. Knowing a [woman/man] is [heterosexual/homosexual] tells you a lot about them.

Immutability

6. Sexual orientation is caused by biological factors.
7. Whether or not a [woman/man] is [heterosexual/homosexual] is pretty much set in early childhood.
8. [Women/men] cannot change their sexual orientation.
9. [Female/male] [heterosexuality/homosexuality] is an innate, genetically based tendency.
10. Doctors and Psychologists can help [women/men] change their sexual orientation

Universality

11. [Female/male] [heterosexuals/homosexuals] probably only exist in certain cultures.
12. [Female/male] [heterosexuals/homosexuals] have probably existed throughout human history.
13. In all cultures there are [women/men] who consider themselves [heterosexual/homosexual].

14. The proportion of the [female/male] population that is [heterosexual/homosexual] is roughly the same all over the world.

15. It is only in the last century that [female/male] [heterosexuals/homosexuals] have appeared in large numbers.

Belief in Trans-Historical Universality Items (Study 2).

Romantic Love

It is only in the last century people experiencing [homosexual/heterosexual] romantic love have appeared in large numbers.

People who experience [same-sex/opposite-sex] romantic love have always existed.

[Homosexual/Heterosexual] romantic love is a modern phenomenon.

If you had to guess at date at which [homosexual/heterosexual] romantic love emerged when would you guess? _____

Identity

It is only in the last century that people have self-identified as [homosexual/heterosexual] in large numbers.

People who self-identify as [homosexual/heterosexual] have always existed.

People identifying as [homosexual/heterosexual] is a modern phenomenon.

If you had to guess at date at which a [homosexual/heterosexual] identity emerged when would you guess? _____

Sexual Behaviour

It is only in the last century that [same-sex/opposite-sex] sexual behaviours have appeared in large numbers.

Sexual behaviours between those of the [same-sex/opposite-sex] have always existed.

[Homosexual/Heterosexual] sexual behaviours are a modern phenomena.

If you had to guess at date at which [homosexual/heterosexual] sexual behaviours emerged when would you guess? _____

Desire

It is only in the last century that [homosexual/heterosexual] sexual desires have appeared in large numbers.

[Same-sex/Opposite-sex] sexual desires have always existed.

[Same-sex/Opposite-sex] sexual desires are a modern phenomena.

If you had to guess at date at which [homosexual/heterosexual] sexual desires emerged when would you guess? _____