

## Author Version.

Published as Hegarty, P. (2013). Essential differences: Constructing frames of reference in spontaneous explanations of differences between the British and the Irish. *Irish Journal of Psychology*.

## Abstract

Past research has found that explanations of group differences focus attention on lower status and less prototypical social groups, whilst positioning higher status and more prototypical groups as the norm for comparison. The present experiment examined attention in explanations of national group differences. 239 Irish and British students read vignettes that attributed either relatively more overconsumption of alcohol, or of fatty foods, to either Irish or British people, and wrote explanations of these group differences in their own words. As predicted, the explanations focused more on the group described as over-consumers. Participants did not explain the national out-group more than the national in-group, and did not explain the Irish or the British more. Rather, explanations focused particularly on the Irish only when they were described as over-consumers of alcohol. These findings show flexibility in the setting of norms for comparison, and an influence of essentialist stereotypes, rather than ethnocentrism or historical power differences, on the spontaneous framing of explanations of group differences.

## Keywords

Stereotyping, Explanation, Norm Theory, Social Cognition, Nationality

When people encounter differences between social groups, whom do they focus on as the figural cause of that difference, and whose attributes slip into the background as implicit norms for comparison? The present study examines *which* national groups become the background norm for comparison among Irish and British students explaining differences between their two national groups. The study develops a line of research which has examined the focus of attention in explanations of differences between social groups, and the present findings suggest one way that power may be enacted by drawing attention to the purported features of some national groups while dis-attending to others.

### *Normative Identities and the Explanation of Group Differences*

Intellectual traditions such as Marxism (Marx & Engels), feminism (Bem, 1993, deBeauvoir, 1949/2011), African-American thought (DuBois, 1903; Morrison, 1993), gay/lesbian thought (Herek, 2007; Warner, 1993), post-colonial theory (Said, 1978), social identity theory (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Simon & Oakes, 2006) and their intersections (e.g., Lorde, 1984; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), all share the assumption that higher status groups maintain their power by conflating their own characteristic with the universal case, such that powerless groups are positioned as 'other.' Social cognition researchers have reached similar conclusions from a different route on inquiry. In an early experimental study, Miller, Taylor, and Buck (1991) found that American college students were far more likely to call to mind a man, rather than a woman, when asked to think of a typical voter. Similar study participants also spontaneously explained gender differences in voting by describing features of women voters that made them different from male voters more than the reverse. Similarly asymmetric explanations of group differences that focused attention on the lower status group have been observed when students explained differences between sexual identity

groups (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001; 2004) and differences between African-Americans and European-Americans (Pratto, Hegarty & Korchmaros, 2007). Such asymmetric explanation have also been detected in the scientific record; psychologists' published explanations of gender differences focus on women and girls more than on men and boys (Hegarty & Buechel, 2006). These asymmetries are large; participants in experiments typically reference lower status groups about three times as often as higher status groups when explaining gender, sexuality, or ethnic differences (see Pratto et al., 2007). Such research suggests a social cognitive level of explanation of the dynamics of group hegemony and othering that operates by taking some groups as the norm and "others" as the effect to be explained.

These asymmetrical explanations have been explained in social cognitive terms as effects of fleeting mental representations of social categories called *category norms* (Kahneman & Miller, 1986). According to Kahneman and Miller (1986), category norms are representations that are constructed on-the-fly from exemplars of the relevant category and which exist fleetingly in working memory. Category norms make the features of the exemplars from which they are drawn into implicit defaults for comparison, and focus conscious attention on the atypical features of category members (see also Pratto et al., 2007). Kahneman and Miller (1986) noted that category norms are frequently drawn from the most prototypical members of the category, but that prototypicality is only one determinant of inclusion in category norms. Thus prototypical exemplars are most available to consciousness in many contexts, (e.g., Rosch et al., 1976), Kahneman and Miller's (1986) norm theory allows an account of categorization that unconsciously – but not inevitably – takes the attributes of higher status group as the standard of reference for all. Indeed, Kahneman and Miller (1986) were motivated to explain mental events such as the sense of surprise arising from discovering that an exemplar does not match the category norm, as when a person is surprised to learn that a woman's spouse is also a woman (c.f., Land & Kitlinger, 2005). These authors also described *event norms* as default scripts for social events. Just as atypical identities are spontaneously made the focus of explanation, atypical features of events are more likely to become the focus of social explanation and counterfactual thinking (Kanazawa, 1992; Kahneman & Miller, 1986; Mandel & Lehman, 1996).

Habitual asymmetric explanations of group differences also have consequences for the reproduction of power inequalities. When differences between fictional groups and familiar groups with roughly equal social power are described, readers infer that the group positioned as the linguistic norm for comparison is more powerful, is more agentic, and is less communal than the group positioned as the group to be explained (Bruckmüller & Abele, 2010). Similarly when gender differences in leadership styles are described in terms of how men differ from women – rather than how women differ from men - the perceived size and legitimacy of male power, and the magnitude of the gender stereotypes that rationalize that power difference are all attenuated (Bruckmüller, Hegarty, & Abele, 2012). In sum, studies on habitual asymmetries in explanation, and their consequences for perceptions of intergroup relations suggest a feedback loop between beliefs about group's status and the linguistic framing of group differences. Importantly, this feedback loop appears to operate not only when participants take part in experiments, but also when scientists publish descriptions and explanations of real social groups (Hegarty & Buechel, 2006). As such, rendering asymmetric explanations of group differences may be a form of 'ontological gerrymandering' that puts lower status groups at a disadvantage by "making problematic the truth status of certain states of affairs selected for analysis and explanation, while backgrounding or minimizing the possibility that the same problems apply to assumptions upon which the analysis depends" (Woolgar & Pawluch, 1985, p. 216)

### *Nations as Category Norms*

How might norm theory predictions apply to the explanation of differences between similar national groups with a history of power inequality? Nation states have been described as powerful, yet taken for granted, forms of social organization (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995; Hobsbawm, 1990). States can set the background norms with respect to which people live out their understandings of themselves as residents and citizens of particular nations. As Billig (1995) has noted, newspapers and other media are peppered with implicit references to the nation state that oblige people to take the nation as an implicit reference point in everyday life. However, within social groups some individuals are often consensually believed to be more prototypical, ordinary or ideal members of the social category than are others. Most nationalities embed the language, religion or other ways of being of some of their citizens in the practices of statecraft to the exclusion of others (Hobsbawm, 1990; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). As a result some sub-groups within the nation appear to be prototypical members of the national 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) while others appear to be 'ethnic' minorities (Maybury-Lewis, 1997).

Pratto et al. (2007) argued that state formation may engender asymmetric explanations of group difference. While nation states have historically espoused equality for all, many have extended full rights and responsibilities of citizenship only to ethnic majority heterosexual male citizens (see Pratto et al., 2007). Historically, groups marked as "other," such as women, and ethnic, religious, sexual and linguistic minorities have continued to struggle to achieve those same rights within modern nation states, with variable success. Thus findings that women voters became the focus of explanation in late 20<sup>th</sup> century experiments in the United States (Miller et al., 1991) could evidence long-term ideological effects of the construction of citizenship within the United States in androcentric terms.

However, Condor (2000, 2006) has also argued that the power of the state to set norms for citizens' and residents' understandings of differences may be quite contingent. For example, in the European archipelago under study here, state power is made contingent by power-sharing agreements between the two 'nations' with regard to Northern Ireland, the devolution of power to Scotland Parliament and the Welsh Assembly within the UK, as well as the legal and economic framework of the European Union (including the Republic of Ireland's inclusion and the UK's exclusion from the Eurozone). Indeed, norm theory's claim that different working representations of social categories can be constructed from different elements in different situations fits well with Condor's (2006, p. 654) argument that nations are represented not by "simple person categories" but by "hybrid collections of human beings, objects, and geographical locations."

Qualitative studies also speak to diverse ways that people attend or dis-attend to specific features of nationality in talk. English people have been observed to obliquely reference 'this country' to rhetorically distance themselves from national identification while also voicing in-group pride (Condor, 2000). English people most commonly talk about Britain's island status when discussing Britain's position within Europe, but Scottish people reference island status to assert British citizenship while disavowing a British social identity (Abell, Condor, & Stevenson, 2006). Different locations with respect to the State affect talk among people with the same national identification. Stephenson and Muldoon (2010) found that Roman Catholic Irish adolescents in Northern Ireland flagged their identification as "Irish" explicitly in interviews, while their counterparts in the Republic appeared keen not to appear "too Irish." Such qualitative studies demand a theory of social categorization that does justice to the flexible ways that states, nations, and geographical locations are constructed differently by ordinary people in diverse political and rhetorical contexts to account for both the stability and contingency of the effects of state power on people's thinking and talking about national groups.

The present study is only the second attempt to study asymmetries in the explanation of national groups experimentally, and the first such attempt in which both national groups being explained were also sampled. Hegarty and Chryssochoou (2005) examined the relative prototypicality of EU countries among British students, using classical Roschian methods, and relative prototypicality affected preferences for statements about similarity between countries (c.f., Tversky, 1977). However, when asked to predict whether the findings of a study conducted in one country would generalize to others, patterns of induction, judgments of similarity between countries, and patterns of verbal explanation across three experiments all suggested that the country that had been first studied became the background norm, irrespective of its prototypicality. The country to which participants were generalizing became the focus of explanations of predicted group differences. These findings cannot be easily explained by category-based induction models (Osherson, Smith, Wilke, Lopez, & Shafir, 1990) or in-group projection models (Waldzus, 2010) which predict that people will take more prototypical entities and social groups as reference points for judgment. They are more consistent with feature-based models of induction (Sloman, 1993), and theories of attentional shifts (Kruschke, 2003) which both posit that people will conflate common features with more familiar categories and distinctive features with less familiar categories during learning and induction. In conclusion then, the only previous experiments on the explanation of national differences emphasized how prototypicality did *not* determine which groups were positioned as the norm for comparison and which were the effect to be explained. For that reason, the present experiment was approached with three competing exploratory predictions as to when participants would orient to the Irish and when to the British when explaining differences between them.

### *The Present Study*

In the current study, British and Irish students explained Irish-British differences in alcohol and fatty food consumption, and the focus of their explanations was examined. The research reviewed above, suggested three competing hypotheses as to how participants would selectively attend to the particulars of each group. First consider the possibility that Britain might serve as a normative comparison for such contrasts, just as men, straight people and European-Americans do, when gender, sexual identity, and ethnic differences are explained. Billig (1995) has described how the national status of more powerful nations, such as the United States, is referenced transnationally in banal ways that are unimaginable for less powerful nations. The history of British colonization of Ireland, Britain's greater size and population, Britain's current privileged status within such international bodies as the UN, G20, and NATO, and empirical findings that British students consider Britain to be a more prototypical EU country than Ireland (Hegarty & Chryssochoou, 2005) all suggest the hypothesis that British people might become the norm for comparisons in all cases. If this were the case, then differences between British and Irish people should be explained by focusing on attributes of the Irish more than those of the British, just as explanations of gender, ethnic, and sexual identity differences have been found to focus on the attributes of lower status groups (Pratto et al., 2007).

Second, a competing hypothesis is suggested by the possibility that the state strongly determines sets new norms for personhood among the citizens of a nation (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995). Such ideological processes would lead Irish and British students to take their own national in-group as the default reference point when explaining differences, in an *ethnocentric* way (Levine & Campbell, 1972). This hypothesis is further suggested by Stevenson and Muldoon's (2010) study in which Roman Catholic Irish adolescents who lived in a state that recognized their nationality as a default dis-attended to their Irishness while those who lived in a state in which their nationality was not a default spontaneously flagged

up their Irishness. By sampling participants within both countries, this study allows a test of the hypothesis that nationals of both countries would take their own in-group as the norm for comparison.

A third possibility is suggested by arguments about the *limits* of states in determining people's constructions of the nation, and variability in their accounts (e.g., Abell et al., 2006; Condor, 2000, 2006; Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010). Stereotypes are widespread shared beliefs about the attributes of national groups (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996), and *stereotyping* is the application of stereotypes in social judgment (Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadron, 1996). Stereotyping might affect the focus of explanation of differences between national groups, particularly when the stereotype pre-dates the existence of the state itself. One of the most pervasive and long-standing stereotypes of the Irish people concerns excessive alcohol consumption (Greenslade, Pearson, & Madden, 1995). This stereotype is evidenced even in the earliest US psychology experiments on ethnic stereotypes (Allport, 1954). As is common among stereotypes, the stereotype linking the Irish with excessive alcohol consumption fails to recognize variability (Judd & Park, 1993), taking no account of the disproportionate number of Irish members of the Pioneer movement who abstain from alcohol altogether (Greenslade et al., 1995). When a difference-to-be-explained is stereotype-consistent, then explanations might focus particularly on the stereotyped group, because the stereotype provides a ready-made essentialist explanation of the group difference (Yzerbyt, Rocher, & Schadron, 1997), suppressing alternative explanations that might invoke characteristics of the other group to-be-explained.

To examine if explanations of national differences in excessive consumption of alcohol particularly affected the focus of explanations, participants were asked to explain why either the Irish or the British consumed alcohol excessively. The experiment included control conditions in which participants explained differences in fatty food consumption. As social explanations focus on violations of expectancies and of social scripts (Pratto et al., 2007), I predicted that participants would focus their explanations on whichever national group were presented as 'over-consumers' of alcohol or of fatty foods. The three alternative hypothesis described above were tested by examining where this focus on over-consumers was moderated. If category norms were always formed around the higher status British group, then explanations should focus more on the Irish in all conditions. If all participants formed nation-specific ethnocentric norms, then explanations should focus more on out-groups in all conditions. If explanations were affected by the stereotype linking the Irish with excessive alcohol consumption, then explanations should focus more on the Irish only in the conditions where differences in alcohol consumption are being explained.

## Method

### *Participants*

One hundred and seventy-five psychology students in an Irish University who identified their nationality as Irish and 64 psychology students in an English university who identified their national as "British" "UK" "English" or "Welsh" participated in a classroom exercise. No participants identified as Scottish. Fifty four foreign students who participated were excluded from the analysis presented below, including one British student in the Irish University. Participants identified their gender as female ( $n = 197$ ) or male ( $n = 42$ ), and their ages ranged from 17 to 50 years ( $M = 20.75$ ,  $S.D. = 4.78$  years).

### *Design*

The study had a 2x2x2 design. Participants were categorized as either Irish or British, and they read vignettes about excessive *alcohol* or *fatty food* consumption, in which either

*Irish* or *British* people were described as more common over-consumers. Within each national group, participants were randomly assigned to condition.

### *Materials*

The materials consisted of a one-page questionnaire which presented participants with bogus data and asked them to explain that data in their own words. Four versions of the questionnaire manipulated whether the behaviour described was *alcohol consumption* or *fatty food consumption*, and whether the Irish or the British were described as over-consumers. The alcohol consumption materials that problematised the British read as follows:

#### *European Union Study of Alcohol Consumption Rates*

As part of a larger health initiative, the European Union (EU) has been examining rates of alcohol consumption in different EU countries. High rates of alcohol consumption can cause health problems over the long term. This is known as *problem drinking*. Last year an EU health researcher studied the drinking habits of 1,000 people in each of fifteen EU countries over a three month period. The percentage of participants with problem drinking habits was different among the British and Irish participants in the study.

|   |         |         |
|---|---------|---------|
|   | Britain | Ireland |
| Percentage of people showing problem drinking | 35%     | 20%     |

In the fatty food consumption conditions, the term “problem drinking” was replaced with the term “problem eating” and the term “alcohol consumption” with “fatty food consumption.” The percentages were the same in the alcohol and fatty food consumption conditions. In the conditions in which the Irish were the over-consumers, the percentages were reversed from those shown above. In all conditions, participants were prompted to explain the findings in their own words as follows.

Social scientists try to explain why differences between social groups were observed. Why do you think a difference was observed between these two groups here?

Ten blank lines followed upon which participants were to write their explanations. Demographic items were presented last.

### *Procedure*

All participants took part as part of a classroom exercise that was introduced as being about habits of explaining empirical data. Participants within each country were randomly allocated to one of each of the four experimental conditions, and all participants worked independently of each other. After they had completed, participants were debriefed by being told that the data they had seen had been generated for the purposes of the study and that other participants in the room had seen and explained the opposite findings to the ones they had seen. Both the rationale for the current study and past findings on asymmetries in explanations of group differences were described (e.g., Pratto et al., 2007). Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Irish institution and the study was deemed exempt in the British institution.

### *Coding of the Explanations*

As in previous studies on category norms and explanations, two coders used a coding scheme to determine the number of references to each target group in each explanation. They coded several types of linguistic reference to each group. First, they coded the use of

*contrastive phrases* such as “more than” or “less than” that contrasted one figural group against a background comparison of the other group (e.g., “Britain is *more* influenced by American culture *than* Ireland”). Such contrastive references were coded as references to the figural group only. Second, they coded all sentences in which one group was positioned as the agent of the verb in the sentence (e.g., “Ireland has a history of alcoholism”). Third, they coded all sentences in which a group was made the object of some action (e.g., “In Britain, *we are constantly reminded of* the war on obesity”). Fourth, they coded all statements about the group’s situation (e.g., “The beer is better in Ireland”). Fifth they coded all adverbs that modified any of these verbs. (“Britons may also just hide their drinking habits *better*”). The first coder coded all explanations, and the second coder independently coded 63 explanations. Coders agreed about the number of references to Irish and to British people in the explanations ( $r(62) = .98, .97$  respectively) and so the first coder’s scores were deemed reliable and analyzed.

## Results

Participants produced between 0 and 14 references to Irish people and between 0 and 17 references to British people. Many participants focused exclusive on only one group, and made no reference at all to either the Irish ( $n = 115$ ) or to the British ( $n = 182$ ). Skew and kurtosis scores all fell outside the bounds for normality (all  $M/S.E. > |1.96|$ ) and the data were analyzed using non-parametric statistics. See the mean number of references to each national group in each condition of the study in Table 1.

### *Focus of Explanations of National Differences*

The study’s design assumed that participants would focus attention on whichever group were described as over-consumers. I tested this hypothesis by splitting the sample according to the identity of the over-consuming group, and using a Wilcoxon signed rank test to examine which group was referenced more often. As predicted, there were more references to the Irish than to the British when the Irish were described as the over-consuming group ( $M_s = 4.01, 1.09$  respectively),  $Z = 6.04, p < .001$ , and more references to the British than to the Irish when the British were described as the over-consuming group ( $M_s = 2.99, 2.01$  respectively),  $Z = 1.99, p < .05$  respectively. Recall that the three competing hypotheses were tested by examining when and where this basic pattern was modified. First, to examine if Britain was constructed as the category norm across the board, I first examined if more references were produced to either of the two national groups within the experiment as a whole. Wilcoxon tests showed that the explanations did include more

Table 1: Mean Number of References to Irish and British People by Experimental Condition (Standard Deviations in Parentheses).

| Over Consumers<br>Type of Consumption | British      |              | Irish        |              |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|                                       | Fatty Foods  | Alcohol      | Fatty Foods  | Alcohol      |
| <i>Irish Participants</i>             |              |              |              |              |
|                                       | ( $n = 40$ ) | ( $n = 45$ ) | ( $n = 48$ ) | ( $n = 42$ ) |
| References to the Irish               | 2.38 (2.82)  | 1.64 (1.97)  | 2.52 (3.16)  | 5.45 (4.19)  |
| References to the British             | 3.47 (4.21)  | 2.07 (2.38)  | 1.48 (2.48)  | 0.55(1.40)   |
| <i>British Participants</i>           |              |              |              |              |
|                                       | ( $n = 16$ ) | ( $n = 19$ ) | ( $n = 13$ ) | ( $n = 16$ ) |
| References to the Irish               | 1.69 (4.33)  | 2.37 (3.48)  | 4.31 (2.59)  | 4.50 (4.15)  |
| References to the British             | 2.06 (3.34)  | 4.94 (4.67)  | 2.15 (3.72)  | 0.50 (1.15)  |

references to Irish people than to British people overall ( $M_s=3.01, 2.05$  respectively),  $Z = 3.00, p = .003$ . Whilst this focus on the Irish - the traditionally less powerful group - is consistent with past norm theory findings, the size of the effect is considerably smaller than the 3:1 ratio of references observed in similar studies of explanations of ethnic, sexuality, and gender differences (see Pratto et al., 2007).

Next I examined if participants were more likely to refer to attributes of national out-groups than national in-groups, as theories of ethnocentrism might predict. This hypothesis was firmly refuted. Mann-Whitney tests showed that Irish and British students' explanations included similar numbers of references to the Irish ( $M_s = 2.97, 3.13$  respectively),  $U=5532, Z = .15, p=.88$ , and similar numbers of references to the British ( $M_s = 1.86, 2.54$  respectively),  $U=5312, Z = .69, p=.49$ .

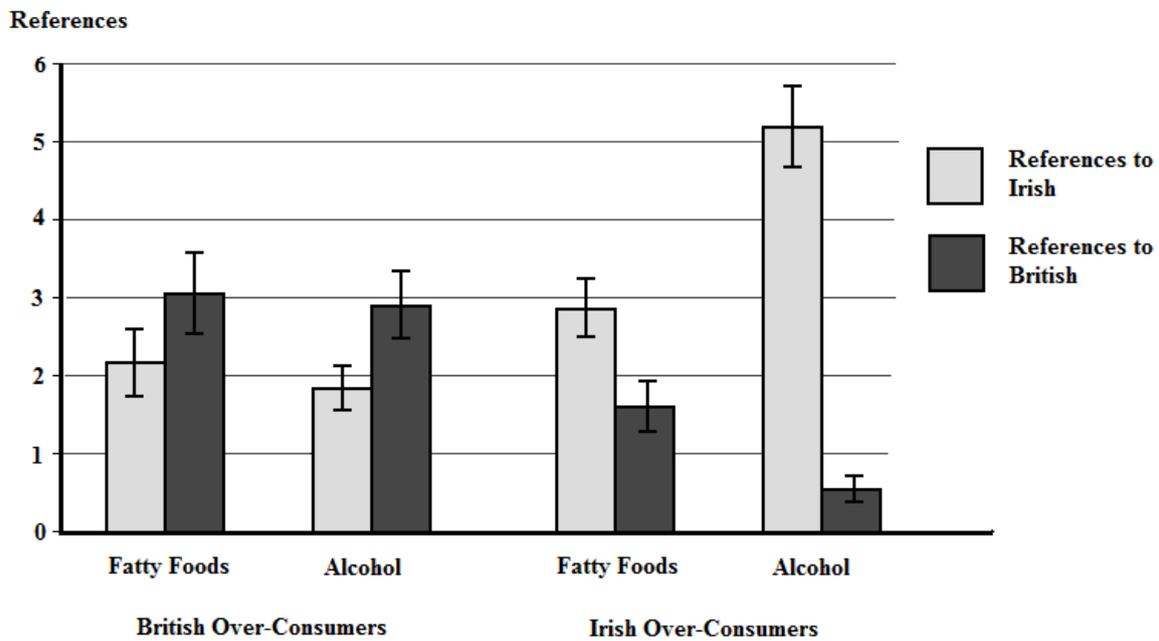
Third, to test the essentialist stereotyping hypothesis I subdivided the sample into four groups according to the identity of the over-consuming group and the form of consumption being explained. As Figure 1 shows, there was a trend to focus explanations on over-consumers in all cases. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests revealed that this trend was not significant when the British were described as over-consumers of fatty foods,  $Z=0.48, p=.63$ , or of alcohol,  $Z=1.26, p=.21$ . However, the trend to focus on Irish over-consumers was significant in both the fatty foods and the alcohol conditions,  $Z=2.26, p=.02, Z= 6.03, p<.001$  respectively. Were these trends moderated by the form of over-consumption described? Mann-Whitney tests showed that more references were made to the Irish when they were described as over-consumers of alcohol rather than fatty foods,  $U=3105.50, Z=3.00, p=.003$ . Moreover, fewer references were made to the British when the Irish were presented as over-consumers of alcohol rather than fatty foods,  $U=1450.50, Z=2.17, p=.03$  respectively (see Figure 1). In other words, attention shifted to Irish over-consumers particularly when they over-consumed alcohol rather than fatty foods. When the British were described as over-consumers, participants in the fatty foods and alcohol conditions produced an equivalent number of references to the Irish,  $U=2604, Z=.09, p=.93$ , and to the British  $U=2545.5, Z=.34, p=.74$ . In other words, consistent with the stereotyping hypothesis, only the Irish became a particular focus of explanation when they described as over-consumers of alcohol.

#### Discussion

In the present study, Irish and British students spontaneously focused explanations on whichever nation group was presented to them as over-consumers of alcohol or fatty foods, irrespective of whether that group was their own national in-group or out-group. In addition, both groups of students particularly focused attention on the Irish when they were described as confirming the stereotype of the Irish as over-consumers of alcohol. In the condition in which the Irish were described as over-consumers of alcohol, 90% of the references coded were to Irish people, and only 10% were to British people. In the other conditions, only 61% of the references that we coded were to the over-consuming group. Of the three competing hypotheses presented in the introduction, these results clearly support the essentialist stereotyping hypothesis.

Participants did not focus attention on the Irish across all conditions, suggesting that Britain does not serve as a norm for all British-Irish comparisons. Interestingly, Hegarty and Chryssochoou's (2005) observed that British students at the same campus as the one sampled here categorized the UK as a more prototypical EU country than Ireland. National groups in this region do not become the focus of explanation simply because they have smaller populations, have historically held less power, or are perceived as less prototypical within overarching institutions such as the EU. This pattern of results renders these findings very different from previous of asymmetric explanations of gender, sexual identity and 'ethnic' differences (Pratto et al., 2007). Rather the findings extend Hegarty and Chryssochoou's

Figure 1: Mean Number of References to National Groups in Explanations of National Differences by Type of Consumption and Over-Consuming Group



Note: Error bars denote standard errors within groups.

(2005) findings that prototypicality has little effect on the construction of differences within EU countries. While women seem to “have” gender more than men, and Blacks seem to “have” race more than Whites (c.f., Fiske, 1998), Irish people only “have” nationality more than British people do in particular kinds of circumstances.

Nor do these results suggest that states have such determinative effects on their citizens thinking that people always take their own national in-group as the norm for comparison. As such, these findings cannot be explained by the existence of ethnocentric category norms that render in-group national identities implicit and feature out-group identities as matters to be explained. Even when participants are asked to think about differences that have come to light as part of a “health initiative” of the EU, they do not seem to take their in-group as the default standard of comparison, as models of in-group projection would suggest (Waldzus, 2010). Past norm theory research on explanation has not always sampled participants from all members of the target groups. For example, research on the explanation of sexual identity differences (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001, 2004) and on ethnic differences in the US (Pratto et al., 2007) were conducted with largely straight, and largely European-American samples respectively. Along with findings that women and men focus attention on groups similarly in explain gender differences that they write in experiments (Miller et al., 1991) or in psychology articles (Hegarty & Buechel, 2006), the present experiment suggests that habits of explanation construction may be similar across social groups in many circumstances.

The support for the essentialist stereotyping hypotheses in the results of this experiment suggests a flexible and situation-specific process of foregrounding and

backgrounding. This pattern is consistent with the flexible use of essentialism in the discourse of differences and similarities among citizens and immigrants (Verkuyten, 2003), as well as the rhetorical ways that Irish, English and Scottish people have been shown to attend and dis-attend to Irish and British national identities in talk (Abell et al., 2006; Condor, 2000; Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010). However, we cannot conclude that this flexibility was simply rhetorical. Postmodern accounts of speech act theory emphasize how speakers do not necessarily “possess” the terms by which their own speech acts proceed (Butler, 1997). Similarly, Condor (2006, p. 673) points out that discourse about identity often has features which are not intended by the speaker but which are made available by the structure of the discourse itself. It is difficult to see how either self-serving or group-serving motives would lead both Irish students and British students alike to all attend to the Irish particularly when described as over-consumers of alcohol. Rather, this study confirms the power of essentialist stereotypes not only to predetermine the attributions that are made about group differences, but also to predetermine *to whom* those differences will be attributed.

The use of student participants to test these hypotheses may seem ironic, particularly when their long-standing status as the unmarked norm as participants in psychology studies, and their increasing use even in cross-national studies are kept in mind (Danziger, 1990; Moghaddem & Lee, 2006). Moreover, my categorization of some of the students as “British” is contestable, as many identified with nationalities within the United Kingdom such as “English” or “Welsh.” The experimental method demands the construction of participant groups that are certainly open to alternative constructions. Ontological gerrymandering that foregrounds some questions and backgrounds others is inevitable in social science research (Woolgar & Pawluch, 1985), and such gerrymandering frequently occurs when social scientists present their accounts of participants’ identities in realist terms while drawing attention to the way that those same participants flexibly construct social identities in their own terms (Hammersley, 2003). Clearly this is the case in my construction of participants as “British” rather than as “UK participants” or as “English and Welsh participants.”

In conclusion, I would urge readers not to allow the use of orthodox methods of experimentation, student participant samples, or social cognitive levels of description and explanation here to imply that these patterns of explanation are ‘natural’ or inevitable. Explanation is a constructive process that goes beyond the information given (Asch & Zukier, 1984; Kunda, Miller, & Claire, 1990), and explanations of group differences not only occur in everyday talk and in psychology classrooms, but also in determinative policy contexts of the sort modelled here, in which powerful actors in supranational organizations like the EU attempt to formulate evidence-based policy. Models of modern state power sometimes assume that those who are the target of attention are also the most disempowered (Foucault, 1977/1975). In such a context, it is important to know that category norms are applied flexibly, and that stereotypes affect who becomes explained when national differences become visible to the public and to policy makers through empirical research. Quantitative studies such as this one can form critical resources that explain how explanations get framed in discourses that are assumed to be objective (Hegarty & Buechel, 2006), but which nonetheless have consequences for the groups who are being explained (Bruckmüller et al., 2012).

## Author Note

Thanks to Todd Morrison and to Freyja Quick for help with data collection and with coding respectively. Please address all correspondence to Peter Hegarty, Department of Psychology, University of Surrey, Guildford, GU2 7XH, United Kingdom, p.hegarty@surrey.ac.uk.

## References

- Abell, J., Condor, S., & Stevenson, C. (2006). "We are an island": Geographical imagery in accounts of citizenship, civil society, and national identity in Scotland and in England. *Political Psychology, 27*, 207-226.
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Allport, G.W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Asch, S.E., & Zukier, H. (1984). Thinking about persons. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 46*, 1230-1240.
- Bem, S. L. (1993). *The lenses of gender*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism*. London: Sage.
- 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, A.E. (2012). Framing gender differences: Linguistic normativity affects perceptions of gendered power and gender stereotypes. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 42*, 210-218.
- Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. New York: Routledge.
- Condor, S. (2000). Pride and prejudice: Identity management in English people's talk about 'this country.' *Discourse & Society, 11*, 175-205.
- Condor, S. (2006). Temporality and collectivity: diversity, history and rhetorical construction of national entitativity. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 45*, 657-682.
- Danziger, K. (1990). *Constructing the subject: Historical origins of psychological research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- de Beauvoir, S. (1949/2011). *The second sex*. Trans. C. Borde and S. Malovany-Chevallier. New York, NY: Vintage.
- Devos, T., & Banaji, M.R. (2005). American = White? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 88*, 447-466.
- DuBois, W.E.B. (1903). *The souls of Black folk*. Chicago, IL: A.C. McClurg & Co.
- Fiske, S. T. (1998). Stereotyping. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed., Vol 2 (pp. 357-411). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Foucault, M. (1977/1975). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. A. Sheridan Trans. New York: Vintage.
- Greenslade, L., Pearson, M., & Madden, M. (1995). A good man's fault: Alcohol and Irish people at home and abroad. *Alcohol and Alcoholism, 30*, 407-417.
- Hammersley, M. (2003). Conversation analysis and discourse analysis: Methods or paradigms? *Discourse & Society, 14*, 751-781.
- Hegarty, P. & Buechel, C. (2006). Androcentric reporting of gender differences in APA articles, 1965-2004. *Review of General Psychology, 10*, 377-389.
- Hegarty, P. & Chryssocchoou, X. (2005). Why are our policies so much better than theirs? Category norms and the generalization of policies between EU countries. *Social Cognition, 23*, 491-529.

- Hegarty, P., & Pratto, F. (2001). The effects of category norms and stereotypes on explanations of intergroup differences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 723-735.
- 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.
- Herek, G.M. (2007). Confronting sexual stigma and prejudice: Theory and practice. *Journal of Social Issues*, 63, 905-925.
- Hilton, J. L., & von Hippel, W. (1996). Stereotypes. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 47, 237-271.
- Hobsbawm, E.J. (1990). *Nations and nationalism since 1870*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Judd C. M., & Park B. (1993). Definition and assessment of accuracy in social stereotypes. *Psychological Review*, 100, 109-28
- Kahneman, D., & Miller, D. T. (1986). Norm theory: Comparing reality to its alternatives. *Psychological Review*, 93, 136-153.
- Kanazawa, S. (1992). Outcome or expectancy? Antecedents of spontaneous causal attribution. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 18, 659-668.
- Kruschke, J.K. (2003). Attention in learning. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 12, 171-175.
- Kunda, Z., Miller, D.T., & Claire, T. (1990). Combining social concepts: The role of causal reasoning. *Cognitive Science*, 14, 551-577.
- Land, V., & Kitzinger, C. (2005). Speaking as a lesbian: Correcting the heterosexual presumption. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 38, 371-416.
- Levine, R. A. and Campbell, D. T. (1972) *Ethnocentrism: Theories of conflict, ethnic attitudes and group behavior*, New York: Wiley (Linville)
- Leyens, J.-P., Yzerbyt, V.Y.A., & Schadron, G. (1996). *Stereotypes and social cognition*. London: Sage.
- Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Ithaca, NY: Crossing Press.
- Mandel, D. R., & Lehman, D.R. (1996). Counterfactual thinking and ascriptions of cause and preventability. *Journal of Personality of Social Psychology*, 71, 450-463.
- 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.
- Maybury-Lewis, D. (1997). *Indigenous peoples, ethnic groups, and the state*. New York: Allyn & Bacon.
- Miller, D. T., Taylor, B., & Buck, M. L. (1991). Gender gaps: Who needs to be explained? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 61, 5-12.
- Moghaddam, F.M., & Lee, N. (2006). Double reification: The process of universalizing psychology in the three worlds." In A.C. Brock (ed.), *Internationalizing the History of Psychology* (pp. 162-183). New York: NYU Press.
- Morrison, T. (1993). *Playing in the dark: Whiteness and the literary imagination*. New York: Vintage.
- Mummendey, A., & Wenzel, M. (1999). Social discrimination and tolerance in intergroup relations: Reactions to intergroup differences. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3, 158-174.
- Osherson, D., Smith, E.E., Wilke, O., Lopez, A., & Shafir, E. (1990). Category-based induction. *Psychological Review*, 97, 185-200.
- Pratto, F., Hegarty, P. & Korchmairos, J. (2007). Who gets stereotyped? How communication practices and category norms lead people to stereotype particular people and groups. In Y. Kashima, K. Fiedler, & P. Freytag (Eds.), *Stereotype*

- dynamics: Language-based approaches to stereotype formation, maintenance, and change* (pp. 299-319). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Purdie-Vaughns, V., & Eibach, R. P. (2008). Intersectional invisibility: The distinctive advantages and disadvantages of multiple subordinate-group identities. *Sex Roles, 59*, 377-391.
- Reicher, S., & Hopkins, N. (2001). *Self and nation*. London: Sage.
- Rosch, E., Mervis, C.B., Gray, W.D., Johnson, D., & Boyes-Braem, P. (1976). Basic objects in natural categories. *Cognitive Psychology, 8*, 382-439.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social dominance: An intergroup theory of social hierarchy and oppression*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Simon, B., & Oakes, P. (2006). Beyond dependence; An identity approach to social power and domination. *Human Relations, 59*, 105-139.
- Slovic, S. A. (1993). Feature-based induction. *Cognitive Psychology, 25*, 231-280.
- Stevenson, C., & Muldoon, O.T. (2010). Socio-political context and accounts of national identity in adolescence. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 49*, 583-599.
- Tversky, A. (1977). Features of similarity. *Psychological Review, 84*, 327-352.
- Verkuyten, M. (2003). Discourses about ethnic group (de-)essentialism: Oppressive and progressive aspects. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 42*, 371-391.
- Yzerbyt, V., Rocher, S., & 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). Cambridge, England: Blackwell.
- Waldzus, S. (2010). Complexity of superordinate self-categories and ingroup projection. In R. Crisp (Ed.), *The psychology of social and cultural diversity* (pp. 224-254). Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Warner, M. (1993). Introduction. In M. Warner (Ed.), *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory* (pp. vii-xxxi). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Woolgar, S., & Pawluch, D. (1985). Ontological gerrymandering: The anatomy of social problems explanations. *Social Problems, 32*, 214-227.

