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Ratings of Essentialism for Eight Religious Identities

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As a social identity, religion is unique because it contains a spectrum of choice. In some religious communities, individuals are considered members by virtue of having parents of that background, and religion, culture, and ethnicity are closely intertwined. Other faith communities actively invite people of other backgrounds to join, expecting individuals to choose the religion that best fits their personal beliefs. These various methods of identification influence beliefs about the essentialist nature of religious identity. Essentialism is when social groups are considered to have deep, immutable, and inherent defining properties. In this study, college students ($N = 55$) provided ratings of essentialism for eight religious identities: Atheist, Buddhist, Catholic, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, and Spiritual-but-not-religious. Significant differences in essentialism were found between the target groups. Results and implications for intergroup relations are discussed.

In 1954, Gordon Allport wrote in *The Nature of Prejudice* about categorization on the basis of essential attributes. He began by using the example of a house. All houses are structures that share the essential attribute of being habitable, he pointed out, although they may differ in the nonessential attributes such as size, color, and so on. He then continued,

> Similarly, to be a Jew, a person must possess a certain defining attribute. It is somewhat difficult ... to tell just what this attribute is, but it has to do with a person's connection by descent (or conversion) to people having a Judaic religious tradition. (p. 171)

In this manner, Allport began to explain how some human categories are based on the belief that the members share a certain defining essence.

Since Allport, many other scholars have developed and extended the concept of essentialism, or the belief that social groups have "deep, hidden, and unchanging properties that make their members what they are" (Prentice & Miller, 2007, p. 202). Medin (1989) explored psychological essentialism from a cognitive approach through his work on categorization. This work was soon

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extended to examine social categories such as race and ethnicity (Gil-White, 2001; Hirschfeld, 1996; Verkuyten, 2003), gender (Gelman, Collman, & Maccoby, 1986; Prentice & Miller, 2006; Taylor, 1996), and caste (Mahalingam, 2003), as well as the structures of social identities (Lickel et al., 2000) and theories of person perception (Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998). Researchers have found that in many cases essentialist beliefs are associated with increased stereotyping and prejudice (Dasgupta, Banaji, & Abelson, 1999; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; Rothbart & Taylor, 1992; Williams & Eberhardt, 2008; Yzerbyt, Rocher, & Schadron, 1997; Yzerbyt, Rogier, & Fiske, 1998) but not always (e.g., Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2002; Jayaratne et al., 2006).

However, very little research beyond that first description from Allport has examined essentialism specifically in the context of religion. This poses a substantial gap in the literature due to the unique nature of religious identity. Compared to ascribed categories such as ethnicity or gender, people can potentially play a larger part in determining their own religious identity. At the same time, religious communities differ in their views of the role of choice in religious identity. Morris (1996) made this distinction in his work on communities of *descent* and *assent*. In descent-based religious communities, individuals are considered members by virtue of having parents of that background, and religion, culture, and ethnicity are closely intertwined, as in the cases of Judaism and Hinduism in general. Conversion to such faiths is typically rare and difficult. Alternatively, in assent-based faith communities, membership is based on agreement with a set of beliefs and practices. These communities tend to actively invite people of other backgrounds to join, expecting individuals to choose the religion that best fits their personal beliefs and conceptions of truth. Examples of this include Buddhism and most forms of Protestant Christianity.

Of course there is a great deal of complexity to the issue of religious identification (cf. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2007; Ysseldyk, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). Even within the same broad religious category, there is a diversity of approaches; for example, Reform Jews are more often willing to accept converts than Orthodox Jews. In Islam, non-Muslims can join by publicly reciting the Shahada—the testimony of faith—with sincerity, yet in some interpretations Islam is also considered a patrilineal religion, where membership is determined through descent from a Muslim father (Abou El Fadl, n.d.). However, in the present work we are interested in the common perceptions of religious groups rather than actual practices. Even the effect of common portrayals in the media and public parlance which emphasize assent versus descent aspects of religious identities (e.g., Jamal & Naber, 2008) may have an influence on perceptions of the permeability of those categories, which in turn may influence beliefs about essentialism.

Essentialism has been shown, across several studies, to have more than one dimension. In 2000, Haslam, Rothschild, and Ernst asked participants to rate 40 different human categories, including race, sex, and political affiliation, on several traits theorized to be associated with essentialism. They found that the traits formed two factors. The first, *natural kind-ness*, was composed of traits reflecting the discrete, natural, and immutable nature of the identity, and the presence of necessary features or characteristics to define members. The second factor, *entitativity*, reflected perceptions of how much the category seemed like an entity, a cohesive and interconnected whole (Haslam et al., 2000).

How does identity choice influence these dimensions of essentialism? Further results from Haslam et al. (2000) begin to suggest an answer. The authors found that of all the human categories included in the study, the categories of sex, ethnicity, and race—identities ascribed

at birth—received the highest scores on traits related to natural kind-ness. On the other hand, categories with substantial choice—appearance, politics, and interests—received the lowest ratings for natural kind-ness. Entitativity ratings varied greatly depending on the group in question (e.g., political affiliation was more entitative than appearance, despite receiving similar ratings for natural kind-ness). The researchers also gathered ratings on Jews and Catholics, to represent the category of religion. Although they did not test this directly, the average ratings of Jews were higher than Catholics on both factors relating to essentialism. This suggests that the role of choice in identity in general, and for religion in particular, may indeed affect perceptions of essentialism.

Demoulin, Leyens, and Yzerbyt (2006) expanded on this work in two ways. First, they directly examined differences between identities that are imposed or forced upon people (such as race, age, and sex) and identities that people choose of their own volition (such as occupations and political affiliation). Second, in addition to collecting ratings on traits used by Haslam et al. (2000) and additional traits from Lickel et al. (2000) in examining natural kind-ness and entitativity, they added a separate scale to examine the concept of *subjective essentialism*, defined as a belief in an underlying essence, for each category. Their results showed that forced social categories were perceived more as natural kinds and less entitative, whereas the opposite was true for chosen social categories. There was no difference between the two category types in the degree of subjective essentialism. These findings suggest a trade-off in terms of entitativity and natural kind-ness.

In the current study, we looked more closely at essentialism for a range of common religious identities, using the same listing of traits employed by Demoulin et al. (2006, Study 2). In this study we included Atheists, Buddhists, Catholics, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Protestants, and Spiritual-but-not-religious as categories, plus filler groups. Our first goal was to examine the relationship between the factors of essentialism for religious groups. The findings from Demoulin et al. (2006) would lead us to expect that religious identities ascribed at birth may be viewed more as natural kinds, whereas religious identities that are chosen may be viewed as more entitative. However, Cohen, Hall, Koenig, and Meador (2005) suggested that because descent religions place a higher value on social relationships than assent religions, where the focus is on the individual's volition, this may lead to greater perceptions of both entitativity and natural kind-ness for members of descent religions, as suggested by data from Haslam et al. (2000). This would indicate that those religions where membership is determined by birth would receive higher ratings not only on natural kind-ness but other dimensions of essentialism as well. Thus one purpose of the current study was to examine if what has been found in previous research on identity choice would hold true for religious identity more specifically and if there would be a trade-off between natural kind-ness and entitativity, or alternatively if there would be a positive correlation between the dimensions of essentialism.

In either case we expected that higher ratings of natural kind-ness would be attributed to members of descent religions. Another purpose of this study was to examine ratings for the different religions. Of our eight religious identities, we expected to find that Judaism and Hinduism would be viewed as descent religions and given higher ratings of natural kind-ness. Although various interpretations of Muslim identity formation exist, we expected that Islam would also be essentialized as a descent religion due to the common conflation of Muslim and Arab/Middle-Eastern (Jamal & Naber, 2008). We hypothesized that Catholics would be more essentialized than Protestants, based on Cohen and Hill's (2007) findings, and that Buddhism

would be considered and essentialized as an assent religion. Finally, we expected that Atheists and Spiritual-but-not-religious would be essentialized as assent-based identities, as these groups are defined primarily through lack of belief or affiliation.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 55 Tufts students, recruited for partial course credit: 38 female, 17 male; 37 White, 9 Asian, 5 Biracial, 3 Black, and 1 Latina student. Self-defined religious backgrounds were as follows: 15 Jewish, 10 Catholics, 4 Protestants, 2 Christians, 3 Hindus, 2 Muslims, 1 half Jewish/half Greek Orthodox, 1 Buddhist/Shintoist, 1 Odinist, 5 Agnostic, 2 Atheist, 1 Spiritual-but-not-religious, and 8 who marked none or unsure. Thus our participant population was predominantly Christian, Jewish, and Agnostic or nonreligious.

Procedure

Upon providing informed consent, participants were provided a paper packet and given as much time as they needed to complete it. Each page of the packet featured a different trait associated with essentialism and the names of 16 target groups for participants to provide ratings. The target groups included Atheists, Buddhists, Catholics, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Protestants, and Spiritual-but-not-religious, as well as some filler groups: Engineers, Musicians, Democrats, Republicans, Asian Americans, Latino Americans, Men, and Women. The traits corresponded to the following names (for the full text of the descriptions, please see the appendix): *groupness, interaction, importance, common fate, common goals, informativeness, similarity, discreteness, naturalness, immutability, necessity, stability, underlying reality, immateriality, deep explanation, membership explanative*, and *invisible link*. We also included an indexing variable called *ascribed*.

The order of presentation of traits and target categories were both counterbalanced across participants. All ratings were made on 7-point scales with anchors appropriate to the traits. At the end, participants completed a short demographic form, were debriefed, and were thanked. The duration of the study was 30 to 40 min. on average.

RESULTS

Data were first examined by participant gender (male, female) and religious group (Christian, Jewish, or other) to see if ratings were significantly different; they were not—all F values < 2.9, *ns*. Ratings from all 55 participants were collapsed to produce a 16 (target categories) × 17 (essentialism traits) matrix, with values representing averages from all participants. We reverse-scored variables so that higher scores always indicated a greater degree of essentialism, then subjected these data to a principal-components analysis with varimax rotation, which yielded three factors according to both Kaiser criterion and the scree test. These three factors explained 90.88% of the total variance (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Factor Loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis with
Varimax Rotation of Essentialism Traits

Traits	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Groupness	.33	**.89**	.12
Importance	.21	**.88**	.37
Informativeness	−.32	**.87**	.05
Interaction	.54	**.80**	.02
Common goals	−.47	**.77**	−.16
Similarity	.13	**.76**	.44
Invisible link	.26	**.74**	.58
Common fate	.17	**.71**	.61
Necessity	**.97**	.15	−.14
Immutability	**.95**	.09	.09
Membership explanative	**.94**	.21	−.13
Naturalness	**.93**	−.09	.21
Discreteness	**.87**	.16	.15
Immaterial	−.27	.23	**.92**
Underlying reality	.28	.45	**.81**
Deep explanation	−.59	.16	**.77**
Stability	.52	−.12	**.75**

Note. Factor loadings > .70 are in boldface.

The first two factors aligned well with what previous studies termed natural kind-ness and entitativity, respectively. The first factor, which explained 35.34% of variance, was composed of traits associated with naturalness as opposed to artificialness, immutability of category membership, the presence of necessary features to demarcate membership, the discreteness of category boundaries, and the presence of something that explains category membership. The second factor included traits associated with how much a category seemed like a coherent entity: how much the category feels like a group, the importance and informativeness of category membership, the similarity of and degree of interaction between members, the presence of common goals and a common fate, and the perception of an invisible link that connects category members. This factor explained 32.90% of variance. The third factor included the traits of stability over time, existence of an underlying reality despite superficial differences, the presence of an immaterial thing that explains membership, and a deep explanation for category membership. This accounted for 22.64% of variance.

We calculated factor scores for each category by averaging across ratings for the traits that loaded highest on each factor. Natural kind-ness, therefore, was composed of discreteness, naturalness, immutability, necessity, and membership explanative and had a reliability value of $\alpha = .95$. Entitativity consisted of groupness, interaction, importance, common fate, common goals, informativeness, similarity, and invisible link ($\alpha = .94$). Finally, we named the third factor deep reality; it included the four traits of stability, underlying reality, immateriality, and deep explanation ($\alpha = .80$). The resulting factor scores for each social category are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Categories and Factor Scores

Category	Natural Kind-ness	Entitativity	Deep Reality	Ascribed [Index]
Race and sex				
Asian	5.84 (1.00)	4.40 (1.01)	3.66 (1.13)	6.44 (1.00)
Latino	5.71 (1.02)	4.30 (0.96)	3.61 (1.12)	6.47 (0.86)
Man	6.37 (0.64)	3.90 (1.14)	3.77 (1.24)	6.62 (0.53)
Woman	6.35 (0.63)	4.12 (1.08)	3.60 (1.26)	6.62 (0.53)
Religion				
Atheist	3.84 (0.94)	3.13 (0.95)	4.21 (1.16)	1.61 (1.16)
Spiritual	3.12 (0.96)	2.92 (0.92)	4.07 (1.12)	1.84 (1.20)
Buddhist	4.30 (0.84)	4.64 (0.90)	4.92 (0.99)	3.29 (1.59)
Protestant	3.99 (0.84)	4.36 (0.88)	4.44 (0.96)	3.50 (1.66)
Catholic	4.26 (0.89)	4.69 (0.89)	4.55 (1.03)	3.71 (1.71)
Hindu	4.64 (0.95)	4.75 (0.86)	4.72 (0.97)	3.95 (1.83)
Muslim	4.63 (0.98)	4.85 (0.87)	4.57 (0.97)	4.24 (1.81)
Jew	4.65 (1.02)	4.90 (0.85)	4.60 (1.02)	4.35 (1.79)
Occupation/Political affiliation				
Engineer	3.67 (0.96)	3.67 (0.87)	3.12 (0.99)	1.76 (1.29)
Musician	3.76 (1.09)	4.02 (0.95)	3.66 (1.12)	1.93 (1.30)
Democrat	3.39 (0.92)	4.36 (0.76)	3.47 (0.89)	1.93 (1.21)
Republican	3.46 (0.95)	4.45 (0.74)	3.53 (0.94)	2.04 (1.32)

Note. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses.

Although there were no significant correlations between the factor scores for all groups combined (all r values $< .42$, $df = 14$, all p-values $> .11$), there were significant correlations between the factors when considering only religious groups. The correlation between the religious groups' natural kind-ness and entitativity scores was $r(6) = .91$, $p = .002$. Deep reality scores for the religion ratings were correlated at $r(6) = .81$, $p = .016$ and $r(6) = .86$, $p = .006$ for natural kind-ness and entitativity, respectively. Furthermore, when considering all groups, religions and nonreligions included, the ascribed index was correlated extremely highly with only the natural kind-ness factor, $r(14) = .97$, $p < .001$, but not the other two factors, $r(14) < .25$, $p > .3$. Yet when considering only the religious groups, the ascribed index was significantly correlated with all factors: with natural kind-ness, $r(6) = .87$, $p = .005$; with entitativity, $r(6) = .97$, $p < .001$; and with deep reality, $r(6) = .73$, $p = .041$.

Next, factor scores were calculated for each social category for each participant, resulting in 55 scores for each of the 16 groups for natural kind-ness, entitativity, and deep reality. For each of the three factors, repeated measures analyses of variance were performed on these scores to see if there were significant differences between the social categories. Sphericity could not be assumed, so Greenhouse-Geisser sphericity corrections were used to determine significance. There were significant differences among categories in factor scores for natural kind-ness, $F(15, 810) = 99.85$, $p < .001$; entitativity, $F(15, 810) = 34.46$, $p < .001$; and deep reality, $F(15, 810) = 23.80$, $p < .001$.

To explore this further, we first collapsed across all religious groups, and compared them with the average values across all occupation and political party categories on one hand, and

the ethnicity and sex categories on the other, using repeated-measures t tests. For natural kind-ness, religions were collectively less essentialized than ethnicity and gender, $t(53) = 20.56$, $p < .001$, and more essentialized than occupation and political affiliation, $t(53) = 6.63$, $p < .001$. For entitativity, religions were collectively not significantly different than ethnicity and gender, $t(53) = 1.12$, $p > .30$, ns, or occupation and political affiliation, $t(53) = 1.73$, $p > .09$, ns. Finally, for the third factor of deep reality, religions were rated higher than ethnicity and gender, $t(53) = 8.57$, $p < .001$; they were also rated higher than occupation and political affiliation categories, $t(53) = 10.76$, $p < .001$.

Moving to the primary research question, we used orthogonal contrasts to examine differences between ratings of religious groups. Given that religious identity could be chosen based on assent to a set of beliefs or, on the other side of the spectrum, ascribed at birth and based on descent, we had hypothesized that religions would be essentialized to differing degrees. These data supported our hypothesis that there is a range of essentialism associated with different religious identities.

For the first factor, the degree to which religious groups are considered to be natural kinds, we first compared Spiritual and Atheist to the rest of the religious groups and found a significant difference such that Spiritual and Atheist groups were rated lower on natural kind-ness, $t(432) = 9.19$, $p < .001$. The Spiritual category was rated significantly lower in natural kind-ness than the Atheist category, $t(432) = 4.11$, $p < .001$. We then compared ratings for Protestants and Catholics with Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and Jews and found a significant difference, $t(432) = 3.70$, $p < .001$, such that Protestants and Catholics were considered less as natural kinds; there was no significant difference between these two Christian groups, $t(432) = 1.67$, $p = .096$. Buddhists were rated significantly lower in natural kind-ness than Muslims, Hindus, and Jews, $t(432) = 2.34$, $p = .020$, but there were no differences between these three groups, Muslims, Hindus, and Jews, which received the highest ratings of natural kind-ness, all ts < 0.1, ps $> .9$.

To examine entitativity ratings, we again began by contrasting Spiritual and Atheist with the rest of the religious groups and found a significant difference, $t(432) = 17.02$, $p < .001$, such that Spiritual and Atheist were considered less entitative than the other categories. Spiritual was not significantly different from Atheist, $t(432) = 1.209$, $p = .23$. We then contrasted Protestant and Catholic with Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and Jews and found a significant difference, $t(432) = 2.52$, $p = .012$, such that Protestant and Catholics were less entitative than the other groups; furthermore, Catholics were rated as more entitative than Protestants, $t(432) = 1.99$, $p = .047$. There were no significant differences in ratings of entitativity between Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and Jews, all ts < 1.2, all ps $> .22$. (See Figure 1.)

For the deep reality factor, our contrasts showed that the categories of Spiritual and Atheist were rated lower on this factor than all other religious groups, $t(432) = 4.23$, $p < .001$. None of the other contrasts between religious groups were significant, all t-values < 1.8, all p-values $> .07$.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we gathered ratings on several traits associated with essentialism to examine whether various religious categories are essentialized differently. Results showed that the traits
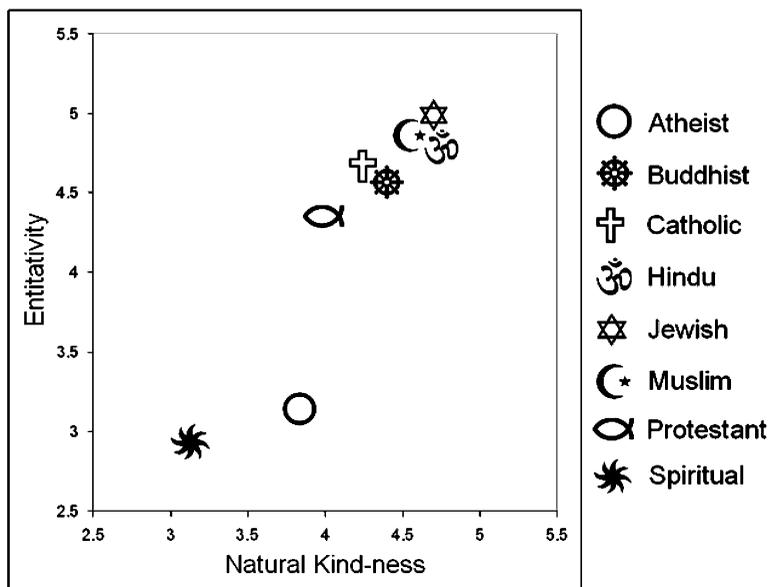
FIGURE 1   Scatter plot showing the approximate ratings for each religious identity on two dimensions of essentialism.

associated with essentialism formed three factors, which we named natural kind-ness, entitativity, and deep reality. Although when all groups were considered there were no significant correlations, we found that for religious groups, the three factors correlated strongly with each other. Whereas more generally, chosen identities are considered more entitative and forced identities are considered more natural (Demoulin et al., 2006), the religious identities we explored did not show this trade-off. The data instead supported the hypothesis developed in Cohen et al. (2005) that when religious groups are considered to be natural and immutable, they are also considered coherent and entitative. This finding highlights one of the ways in which religion is unique as a social identity.

Comparing religious group ratings on the three factors of essentialism, we found that some religions were ranked similarly, but others were significantly different. Atheists and Spiritual-but-not-religious were given the lowest ratings of all the groups on entitativity, natural kind-ness, and deep reality, with Atheists considered more as natural kinds than Spiritual. The Christian groups, Protestant and Catholic, were rated higher than the Atheist and Spiritual on entitativity and natural kind-ness, with Catholics considered more entitative than Protestants. Buddhists were rated lower than Muslims, Hindus, and Jews on natural kind-ness, but equivalent in entitativity and deep reality. Finally, Muslims, Hindus, and Jews were given the highest ratings of natural kind-ness, entitativity, and deep reality and were not significantly different from each other on any of these factors.

In other words, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism were considered not only to be more deeply held, natural, and unchangeable than other religious identities but also to be more cohesive, more important to members, more united by common goals and a common fate, and so on.

Spiritual and Atheists were, conversely, viewed as more malleable identities, without the degree of cohesiveness that characterized the other religious identities. Catholics, Buddhists, and Protestants were rated somewhere in the middle. These data demonstrate that people essentialize certain religious groups more than others, thus providing a compelling picture of the spectrum of religious identity in relation to essentialism.

Our data, however, were not without their limitations. First, the religious make-up of our participant sample was representative of the religious identities at the experiment site. Although comparisons showed no difference between participant responses by religion, nevertheless we cannot be certain that our results would not have been different in a participant population that had higher representations of other religious groups, or in a cultural setting with very different perspectives of these religious groups. Second, the rampant problem of what one scholar terms religious illiteracy (Prothero, 2007) suggests our participants may not have known much about any of our target religious groups. However, our interest was more in perceptions of essentialism than in the actual truth of how religious groups form and maintain their membership. Particularly in relation to Islam, despite the multiple formulations of how to become a Muslim, it appears that our participants tended to rely more heavily upon the descent-based interpretation than the assent-based interpretation. We hope that future research examines this topic with different populations and in other cultures, thereby elucidating the effects of cultural context on perceptions of religious essentialism.

We believe the topic of essentialism merits further investigation as it relates to the realm of religious identity, because of the implications of essentializing social categories. Essentialist beliefs, particularly entitativity beliefs (Spencer-Rodgers, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2007), have been associated with increased endorsement of stereotypes (Bastian & Haslam, 2006), increased attention to stereotype consistent information (Bastian & Haslam, 2007), and increased justification of social inequalities (Verkuyten, 2003). In a recent article, participants who essentialized race showed less emotional concern after reading about racial injustice and were less likely to have friends and to take steps to develop friendships with people from different racial groups (Williams & Eberhardt, 2008). On the other hand, essentialist beliefs including natural kindness have also been associated with less prejudice toward stigmatized groups when these beliefs imply a lack of control over the stigma and associated behaviors, as in the cases of obesity (Crandall et al., 2001), sexual orientation (Jayaratne et al., 2006), and poverty (Zucker & Weiner, 1993). Further research suggests that the relationship may work in the other direction: People endorse essentialist beliefs as a result of the perceived tolerance of those beliefs and in accordance with their own pre-existing levels of prejudice toward the stigmatized groups (Avilla, 2010; Hegarty, 2002). For example, research has found that prejudice against Muslims predicts perceptions of entitativity (Newheiser, Tausch, Dovidio, & Hewstone, 2009); this may in part explain the high ratings of essentialism that Muslims received in our study.

Future research should examine how essentialism of religious identities is related to stereotyping and prejudice. For example, it might be that the religious identities that received the highest ratings of essentialism in our study—namely, Muslims, Jews, and Hindus—are prone to stereotyping and prejudice in forms that would not be similarly applied to the groups that received lower ratings of essentialism. Efforts at understanding and improving interfaith relations should take these differences into account. Furthermore, religious violence targeting groups that are high in essentialism may have underlying motives that differ from violence targeting groups low in essentialism. Governments or groups trying to eradicate a religious

population where membership is perceived to be through descent might take an ethnic cleansing approach—using genocide and forced expulsion. Where religion is viewed as a matter of assent and less essentialized, violence would instead likely take the form of coerced statements of disbelief, indoctrination of children, and other disincentives to become a member of the religion. To resolve and prevent religious violence and foster effective peace efforts will require a careful examination of the perceptions of the groups being targeted.

Overall, our findings suggest that religion is not perceived as homogenous but rather that some religious identities are perceived to be more essentialized than others. This has implications for the way that we conceptualize the idea of religion as well as intergroup relations between people from different religious backgrounds.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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APPENDIX
Essentialism Traits

Groupness: Some categories can qualify as "groups," some categories qualify to a lesser extent. To what extent do the following categories "not qualify at all as groups" or "can very much qualify as groups"?

Interaction: In some categories, people interact very much with one another. In some, there is almost no interaction between members of the category. To what extent do members of the following categories "not interact at all with one another" or "interact very much with one another"?

Importance: Some categories are very important in the eyes of the people that are part of it. Some have no importance at all in their eyes. To what extent are the following categories "not at all important" or "very much important" for their members?

Common Fate: In some categories, members of the category share with one another common fate. In some categories, members are not linked by a common fate. To what extent do members of the following categories "not share common fate" or "share common fate"?

Common Goals: In some categories, members of the category pursue common goals. In some categories, members are not linked by any common goals. To what extent do members of the following categories "not have common goals" or "pursue common goals"?

Informativeness: Some categories allow people to make many judgments about their members; knowing that someone belongs to the category tells us a lot about that person. Other categories only allow a few judgments about their members; Knowledge of membership is not very informative.

Similarity: Some categories contain members who are very similar to one another; they have many things in common. Other categories contain members who differ greatly from one another, and don't share many characteristics.

Invisible link: For some categories, members seem to be linked with each other by some invisible thing. For other categories, nothing seems to link members with each other.

Discreteness: Some categories have sharper boundaries than others. For some, membership is clear-cut, definite, and of "either/or" variety; people belong to the category or they do not. For others, membership is more "fuzzy"; people belong to the category in varying degrees.

Naturalness: Some categories are more natural than others, whereas others are more artificial.

Immutability: Membership in some categories is easy to change; it is easy for group members to become non-members. Membership in other categories is relatively immutable; it is difficult for category members to become nonmembers.

Necessity: Some categories have necessary features or characteristics; without these characteristics someone cannot be a category member. Other categories have many similarities but no features or characteristics are necessary for membership.

Membership explanation: In some cases, we feel that members of a category all possess something that convincingly explains membership in the category even if it is rather abstract. In some other cases, explaining membership in the category does not seem that easy.

Stability: Some categories are more stable over time than others; they have always existed and their characteristics have not changed much throughout history. Other categories are less stable; their characteristics have changed substantially over time, and they may not always have existed.

Immateriality: Membership in some categories seems to be due to some immaterial thing that, even if it is hard to say what, is at the same time very real. For some other categories, we don't have the impression that we can spot some immaterial thing that explains membership in the category.

Deep explanation: Some categories have an explanative power. Something deep inside categories' members explains membership of these individuals in the category. For other categories, nothing deep inside the members can explain membership in the category.

Underlying reality: Some categories have an underlying reality. Although members have similarities and differences on the surface, underneath they are basically the same. Other categories also have many similarities and differences on the surface, but do not correspond to an underlying reality.

Ascribed [Index variable]: Membership in some categories is the result of an individual choice to consider oneself a member of the group. Other categories do not have this element of choice; members must be born into the group or possess certain predefined characteristics outside of their control that will determine their membership.