

**Stony Brook University
The Graduate School**

Doctoral Defense Announcement

Abstract

Dual Intergroup Meanings of Essentialism: Implications for Understanding Prejudice
toward African Americans and Gay men

By

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Extensive Literature on lay theories suggests that the perception and judgments of groups are influenced by perceivers' theory of an underlying *essence* that causes or explains behaviors that are distinctive of members of a particular group. Yet, research has shown that essentialism is positively, negatively, or unrelated to stereotyping and prejudice. Using an integrative social-developmental perspective (Levy, West, & Ramirez, 2005), I empirically tested the intuition that some essentialist beliefs (biological basis, immutability, entity theory, informative potential, and binary categories) cause prejudice towards African Americans and Gay men. I hypothesized that different essentialist beliefs hold different implications for the two target groups, and that these implications are moderated by perceiver's characteristics (e.g. gender, status, and in-group identification). Findings suggest that increasing the salience of some essentialist beliefs has an effect on prejudice toward African Americans and Gay men. Findings also suggest that gender, in-group identification and status impact the effect of essentialist beliefs on prejudice towards these groups. The implications of this research for theorizing on essentialism and directions for future work in this area are discussed.

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