

CATHOLIC BEFORE YOU'RE  
BORN?: ESSENTIALIZATION OF  
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

**ERIKA SALOMON**

**SEPTEMBER 2011**

# PSYCHOLOGICAL ESSENTIALISM

- Reasoning about some categories seems to stem from belief in an unobserved causal essence.



# PSYCHOLOGICAL ESSENTIALISM

- Not all concepts are essentialized.

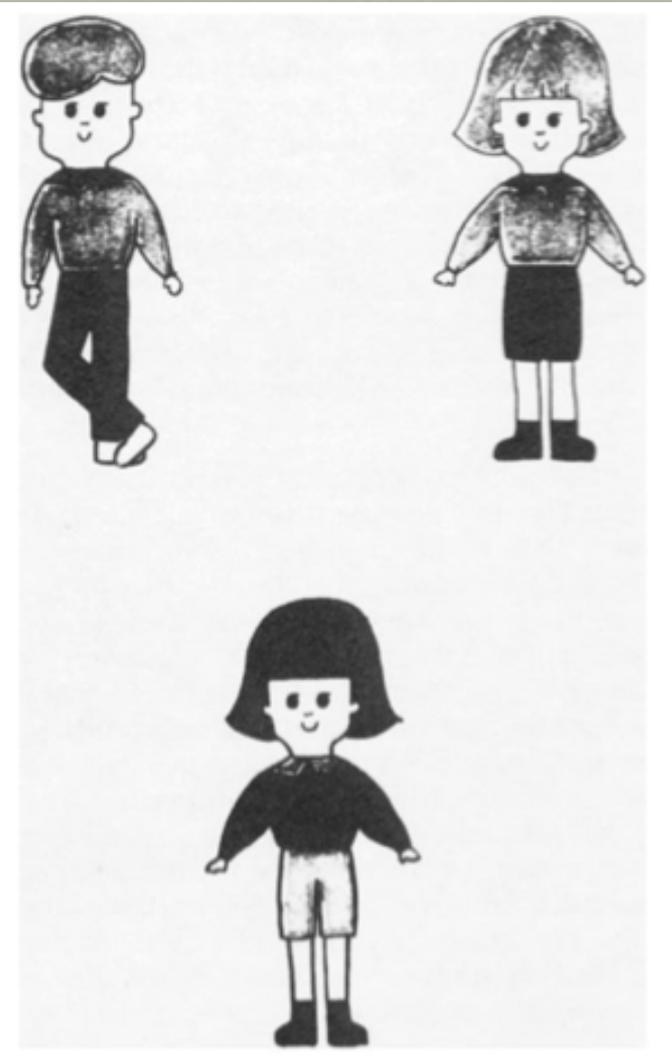


# PSYCHOLOGICAL ESSENTIALISM

- Entitativity:
  - Absolute category membership
  - Mutual exclusivity
  - Inherence
  - Uniformity
  - High informativeness
- Category membership  $>$  Features



# INSIDES & OUTSIDES



- Preschool children
- This boy has “andro” in his blood.
- This girl has “estro” in her blood.
- What does this boy have in his blood?

Gelman, Collman, & Maccoby (1986)

# PSYCHOLOGICAL ESSENTIALISM

- Essentialized categories also exhibit:
  - Innateness
  - Immutability
  - Stability over transformation
  - Biological basis
  - Transferability



*Santa strolls a Caribbean beach with Rudolph  
after his sensational sex-species-change operation.*

# CATEGORY STABILITY

- 3 kinds of transformations:
  - Insides removal
  - Outsides removal
  - Movement
- 2 kinds of targets:
  - Insides-relevant
  - Insides-irrelevant
- Identity and function questions
- 4 and 5 year olds
- Gelman & Wellman (1991)



# WHAT ABOUT RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION?

- Conversion
- Baptism
- Non-biological
- About belief and behavior
- Can't be identified except by asking

# RELIGIOUS CATEGORIZATION

- Elkind (1961, 1962, 1963, 1964)
  - Are you a Protestant/Catholic/Jew?
  - Is your family Protestant/Catholic/Jewish?
  - Are all boys and girls in the world Protestant/Catholic/Jewish?
  - Can a dog or a cat be a Protestant/Catholic/Jew?
  - How can you tell a person is a Protestant/Catholic/Jew?
  - What is a Protestant/Catholic/Jew?
  - How do you become a Protestant/Catholic/Jew?
  - Can you be an American and a Protestant/Catholic/Jew at the same time?

# RELIGIOUS CATEGORIZATION

- 5-7 years old
  - Observable, external characteristics distinguish groups
  - “Are all boys and girls in the world Catholic?” “No . . . Cause some are Irish and some are Russian” (Elkind, 1964)
- 8-9 years old
  - Emphasis on behavior
- 10+ years old
  - Emphasis on belief

# RELIGIOUS CATEGORIZATION

- People can tell Mormon from Non-Mormon faces (Rule, Garrett, & Ambady, 2011)

**Table 1.** Summary statistics for the signal detection analyses in Studies 1–2.

		Hits			False-Alarms		Accuracy ( <i>A'</i> )	
Condition	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Study 1	Full photos	19	.36	.12	.30	.13	.56	.09
Study 2	Eyes/brows only	25	.38	.14	.38	.15	.51	.09
	Noses only	20	.33	.12	.32	.13	.52	.09
	Mouths only	22	.35	.15	.35	.16	.51	.08
	Hairless faces	19	.35	.10	.31	.09	.54	.06
	No hair, eyes/brows, or mouth	20	.37	.15	.34	.14	.54	.07
	Inverted faces	20	.35	.13	.33	.14	.54	.07
	Outer shape removed	20	.43	.12	.39	.11	.54	.07

# ESSENTIALIZATION OF RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Ps rated categories'

- Discreteness
- Naturalness
- Immutability
- Stability
- Uniformity
- Informativeness
- Inherence
- Exclusivity
- Necessity

(Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2000)

122

Nick Haslam et al.

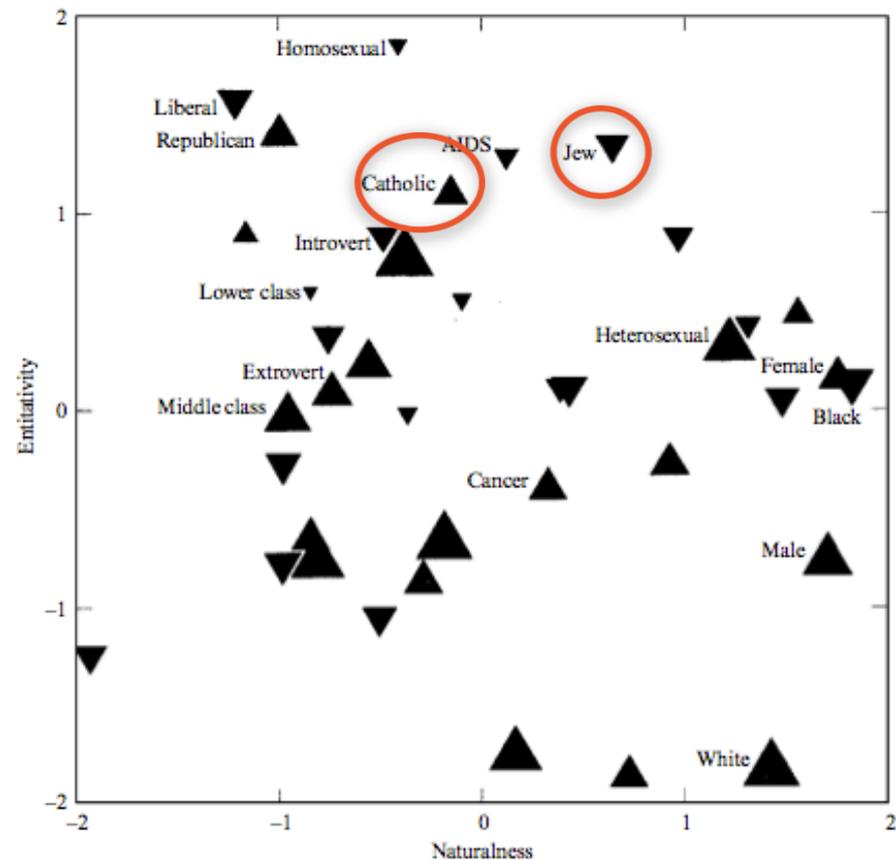


Figure 1. Location of the social categories on the two essentialism dimensions (upward pointing triangles represent higher status members of each category pair, and triangle size is proportional to mean status rating).

# ESSENTIALIZATION OF RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

(Toosi & Ambady, 2011)

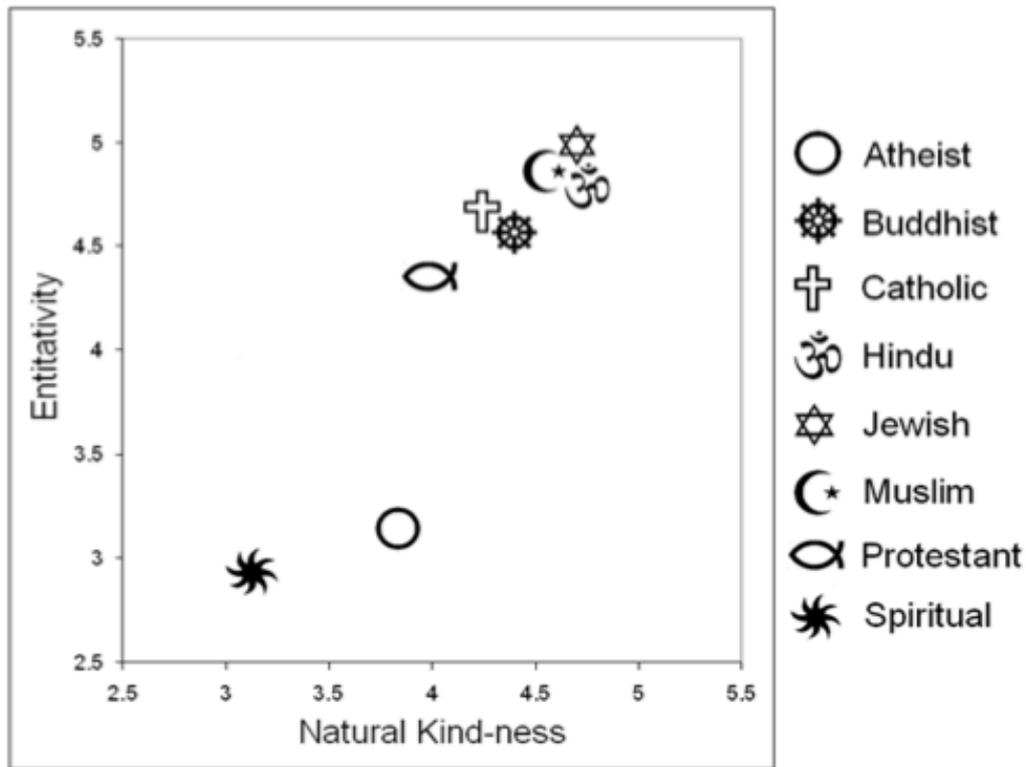


Figure 1. Scatter plot showing the approximate ratings for each religious identity on two dimensions of essentialism.

- *groupness*
- *interaction*
- *importance*
- *common fate*
- *common goals*
- *informativeness*
- *similarity*
- *discreteness*
- *naturalness*
- *immutability*
- *necessity*
- *stability*
- *underlying reality*
- *immateriality*
- *deep explanation*
- *membership explanative*
- *invisible link*

# METHODOLOGY

- Social desirability
- Verbose self-report measures
  - 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.
- Use of explicit knowledge

# GOALS

- Use methods more similar to developmental literature
- Reduce social desirability
- Isolate features of essentialist reasoning
- Tackle objections more directly

# STUDY: AGE OF IDENTITY

- At what age can one attribute a religious category label?
  - Innateness
  - Biological basis
- Comparison groups:
  - Race
  - Political ideology
  - State residence
  - Traditional religion
  - Non-traditional religion

# HYPOTHESES

- Age of attribution:
  - Non-Traditional Religion < Political Identity < State Residence = Traditional Religion < Race
- Lay Theory of Race will correlate negatively with the youngest age at which identity is attributed.

# METHOD

- 40 participants
- *Think about at what life stages a person can be said to be a member of the following social groups. Check off each life stage at which it would be reasonable to say a person belongs to each of these groups.*
- “Before Conception” to “After Death” and “In a Coma”

# CATEGORIES

- Political
  - Anarchist
  - Capitalist
  - Communist
  - Conservative
  - Liberal
  - Libertarian
  - Socialist
- Racial
  - Asian
  - African American/Black
  - Hispanic/Latino
  - Native American
  - European American/White
- Religious (Traditional)
  - Buddhist
  - Catholic
  - Hindu
  - Jewish
  - Mormon
  - Muslim
  - Protestant
- Religious (Non-Traditional)
  - Agnostic
  - Atheist
  - New Age
  - Scientologist
- State
  - Alabaman
  - Alaskan
  - Arizonan
  - Californian
  - Floridian
  - Idahoan
  - Iowan
  - Louisianan
  - Montanan
  - New Jerseyan
  - Texan

# METHOD

- Lay Theory of Race Scale (No, Hong, Liao, Lee, Wood, & Chao, 2008)
  - Biological basis
  - Immutability
  - Inherence
  - Stability of categories
- *Although a person can adapt to different cultures, it is hard if not impossible to change the dispositions of a person's [race / religion / political ideology / geographic identity].*

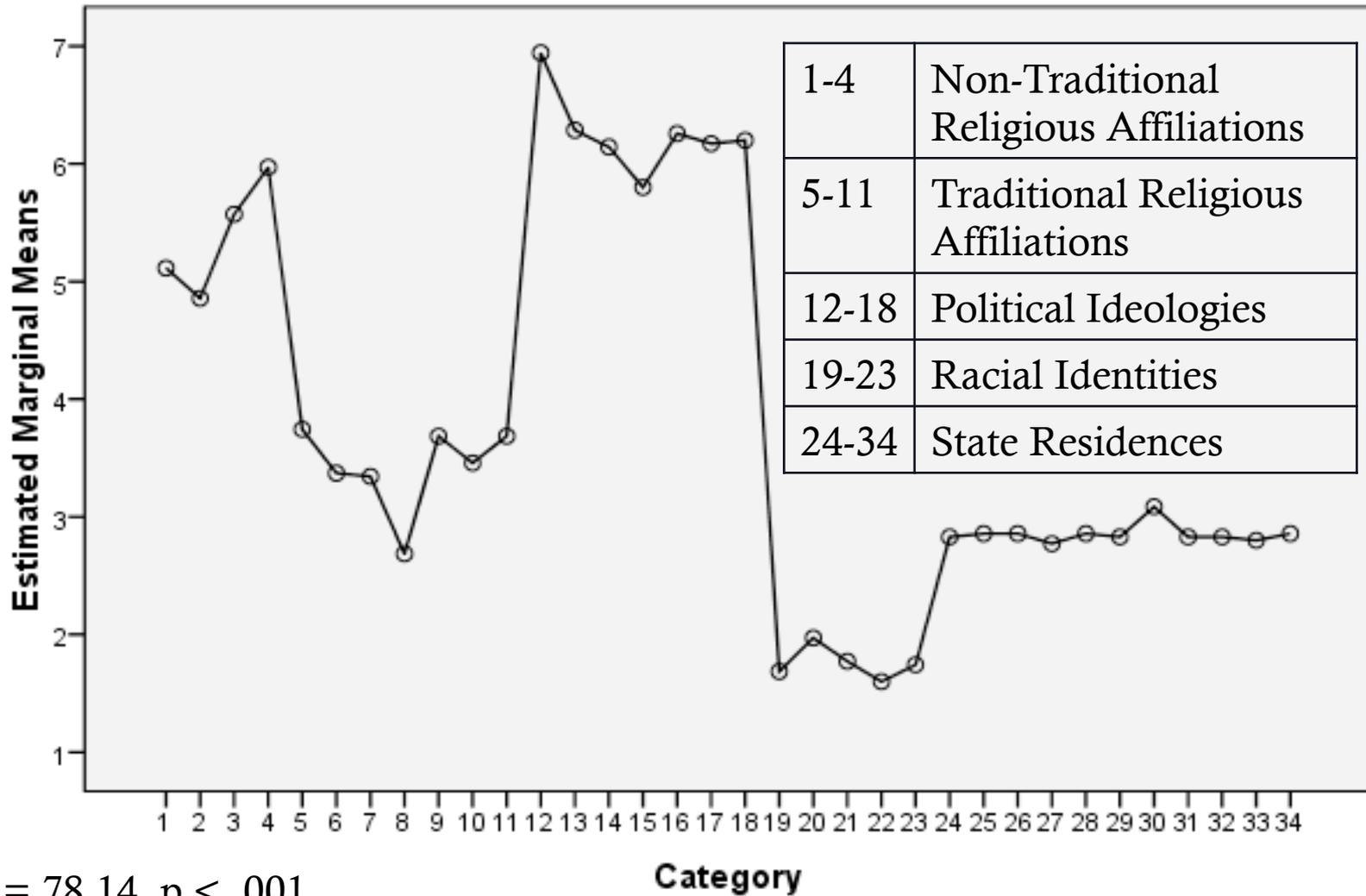
# RESULTS

- Many participants interpreted the instructions as checking off the *first* life stage a person could be called by the label.
- Created an ordinal variable based on the first box checked.

- |                      |                 |
|----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Before conception | 6. 15 years old |
| 2. In the womb       | 7. 20 years old |
| 3. 1 year old        | 8. 50 years old |
| 4. 5 years old       | 9. After death  |
| 5. 10 years old      |                 |

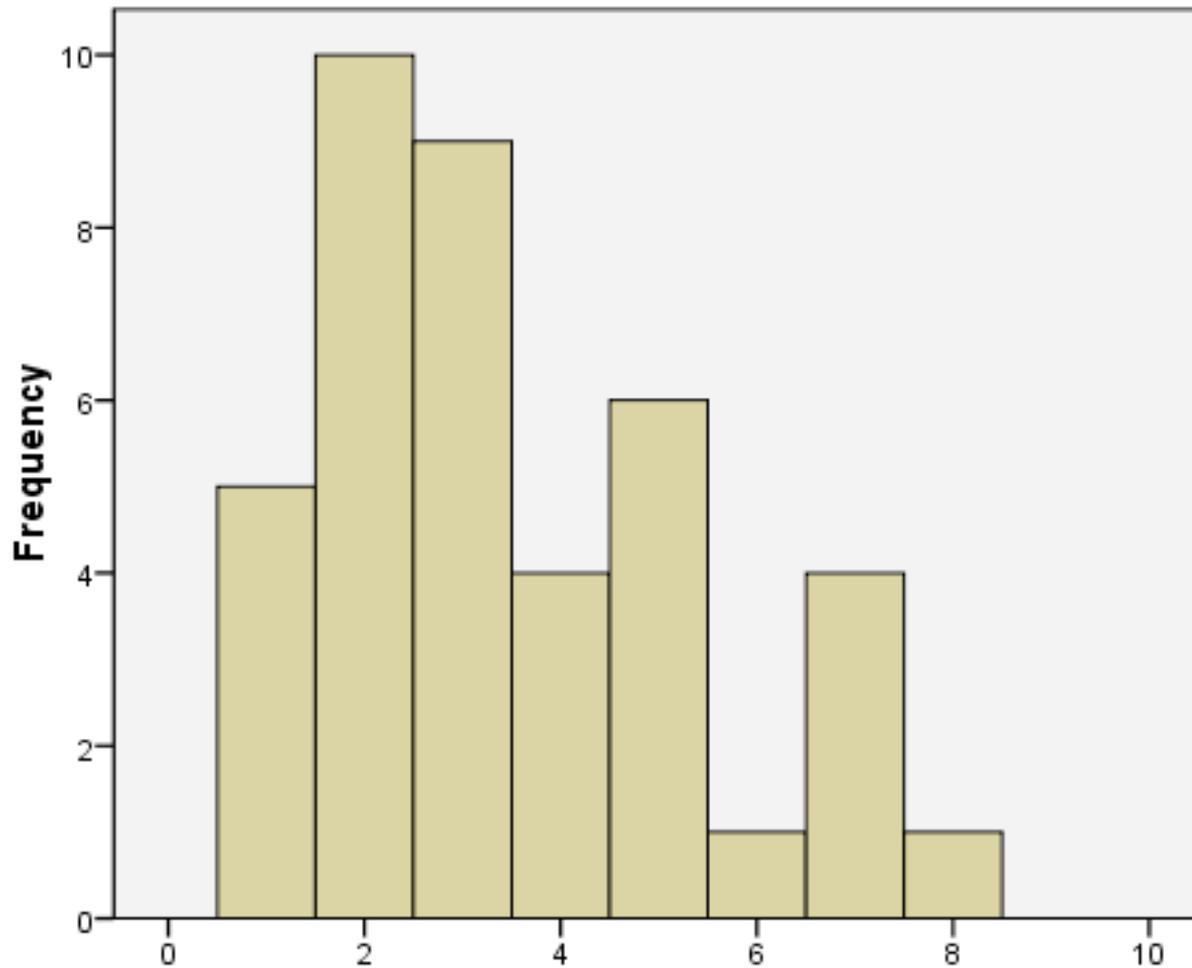
- Repeated measures ANOVA

## Estimated Marginal Means of FirstAge



$F = 78.14, p < .001$

# CATHOLIC DISTRIBUTION

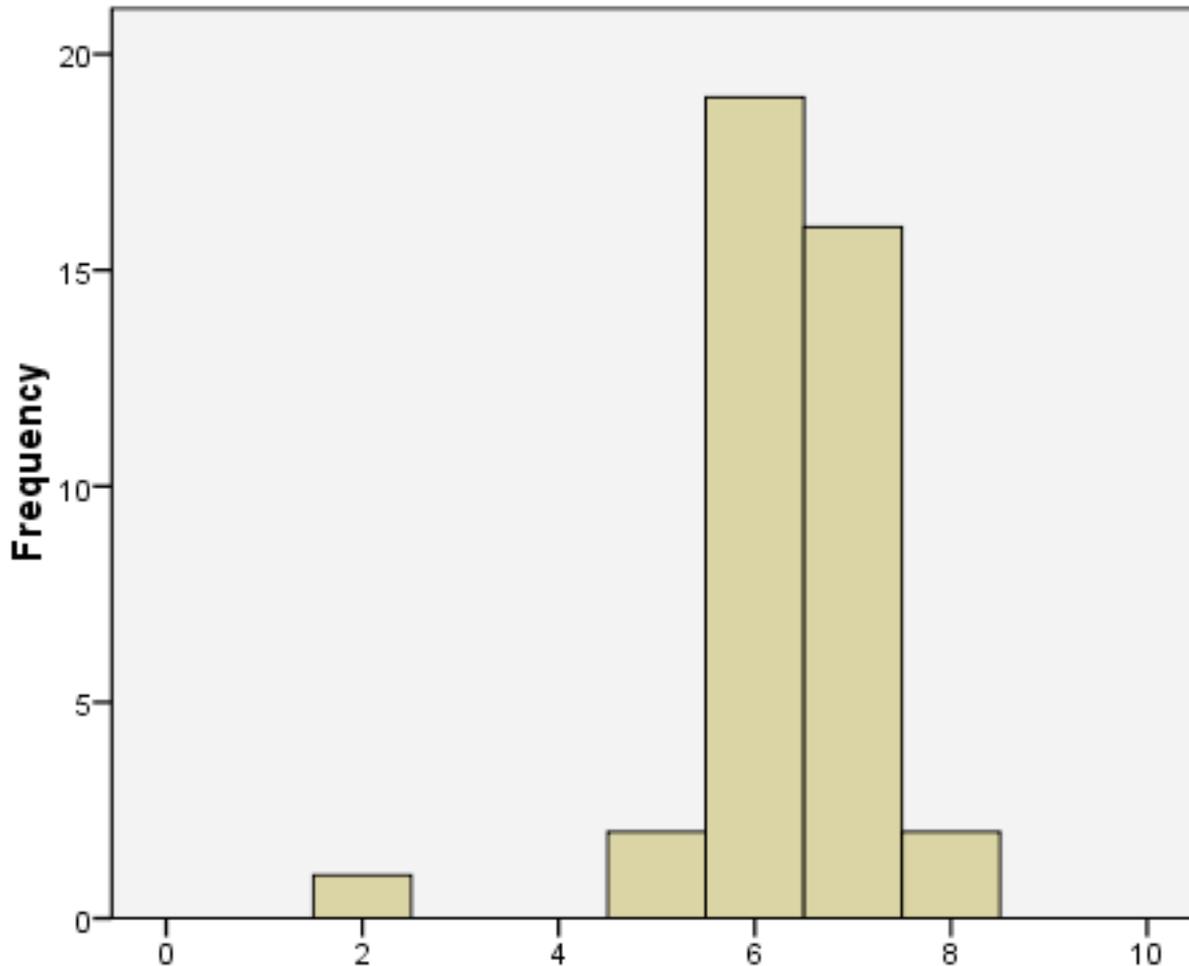


Mean =3.5  
Std. Dev. =1.935  
N =40

0. Before conception
1. In the womb
2. 1 year old
3. 5 years old
4. 10 years old
5. 15 years old
6. 20 years old
7. 50 years old
8. After death

First Age Given for Catholic Identity

# LIBERAL DISTRIBUTION

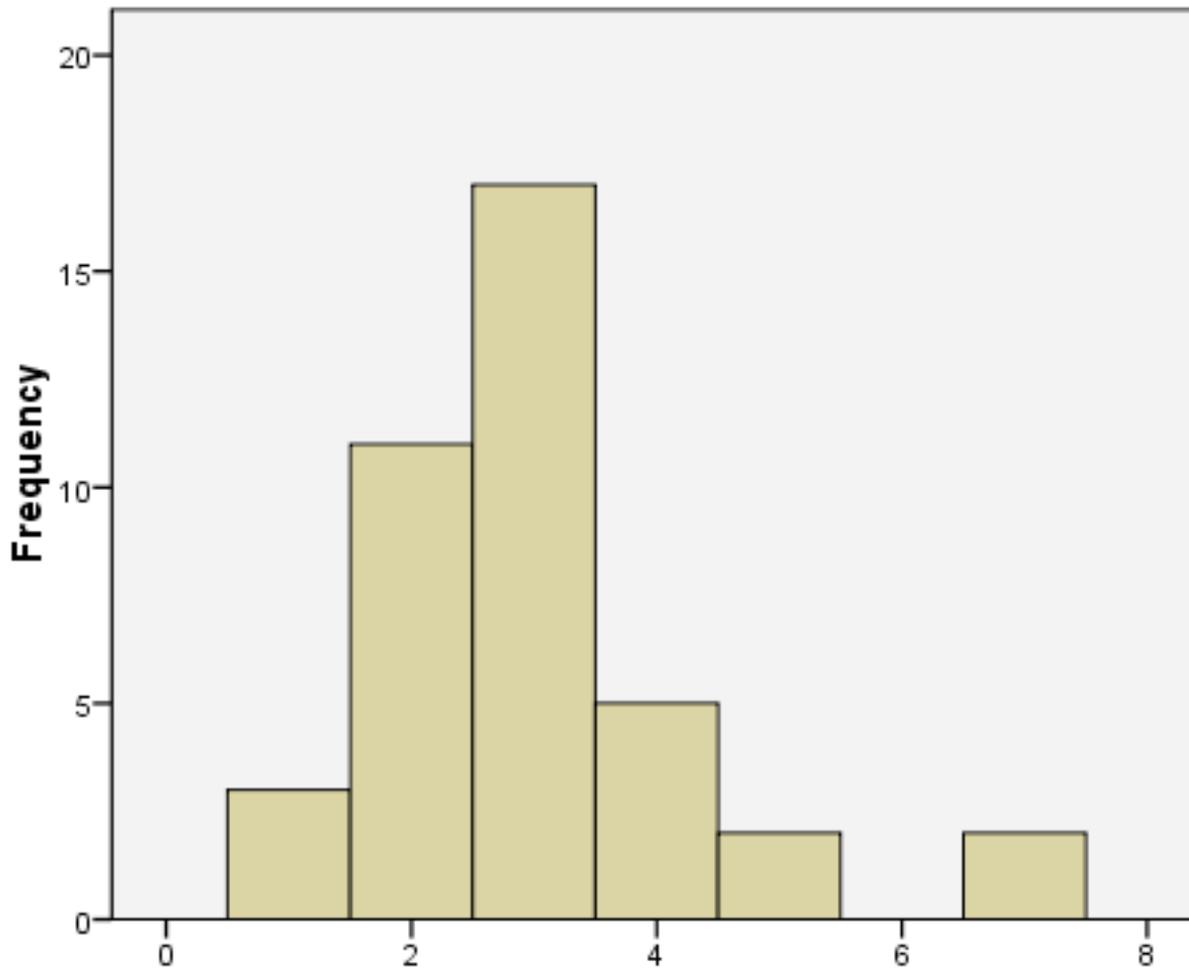


Mean =6.35  
Std. Dev. =0.975  
N =40

1. Before conception
1. In the womb
2. 1 year old
3. 5 years old
4. 10 years old
5. 15 years old
6. 20 years old
7. 50 years old
8. After death

First Age Given for Liberal Identity

# TEXAN DISTRIBUTION

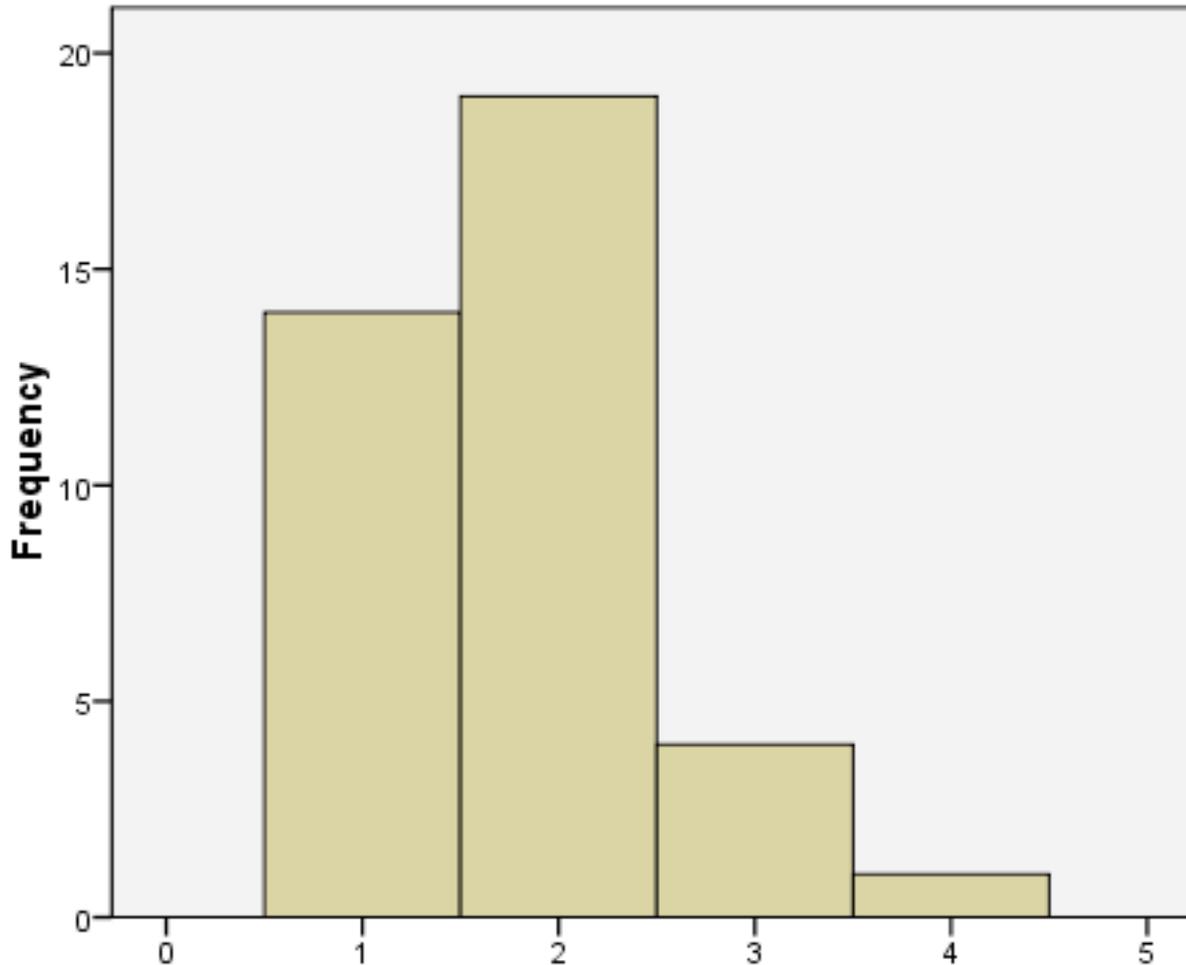


Mean =3  
Std. Dev. =1.32  
N =40

1. Before conception
1. In the womb
2. 1 year old
3. 5 years old
4. 10 years old
5. 15 years old
6. 20 years old
7. 50 years old
8. After death

First Age Given for Texan Identity

# BLACK DISTRIBUTION



Mean =1.79  
Std. Dev. =0.741  
N =38

1. Before conception
1. In the womb
2. 1 year old
3. 5 years old
4. 10 years old
5. 15 years old
6. 20 years old
7. 50 years old
8. After death

First Age Given for Black Identity

# CORRELATIONS

- Average scores on Lay Theory scales x Average minimum age for categories in group
  - Religion—All: **.092, n.s.**
  - Religion—Traditional: **.034, n.s.**
  - Religion—Non-traditional: **.192, n.s.**
  - Race: **-.079, n.s.**
  - State Residence: **-.261, n.s.**
  - Political Ideology: **.104, n.s.**

# CONCLUSIONS

- Participants are willing to assign religious affiliation labels to others at fairly young ages.
- Religious affiliation is unlike political ideology in this respect and more like geographic identity.
- This may point to folk intuitions that religious affiliation is more innate than other, superficially similar, categories.
- Different methods in the study of essentialism may diverge?

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Andrei Cimpian
- PRAM Lab
  - **Jesse Preston**
  - Ryan Ritter
  - Ivan Hernandez
  - Justin Hepler
  - Melanie Tanenbaum
- Jesse Bering

# IDENTITIES

- Political
  - Anarchist
  - Capitalist
  - Communist
  - Conservative
  - Liberal
  - Libertarian
  - Socialist
- Racial
  - Asian
  - African American/Black
  - Hispanic/Latino
  - Native American
  - European American/White
- Religious (Traditional)
  - Buddhist
  - Catholic
  - Hindu
  - Jewish
  - Mormon
  - Muslim
  - Protestant
- Religious (Non-Traditional)
  - Agnostic
  - Atheist
  - New Age
  - Scientologist
- State
  - Alabaman
  - Alaskan
  - Arizonan
  - Californian
  - Floridian
  - Idahoan
  - Iowan
  - Louisianan
  - Montanan
  - New Jerseyan
  - Texan

# LAY THEORY OF RACE

1. To a large extent, a person's [race/religion/political ideology/geographic identity] biologically determines his or her abilities and traits.
2. Although a person can adapt to different cultures, it is hard if not impossible to change the dispositions of a person's [race/religion/political ideology/geographic identity].
3. How a person is like (e.g., his or her abilities, traits) is deeply ingrained in his or her [race/religion/political ideology/geographic identity]. It cannot be changed much.
4. A person's [race/religion/political ideology/geographic identity] is something very basic about them and it can't be changed much.
5. [Races/Religions/Political ideologies/Geographic identities] are just arbitrary categories and can be changed if necessary.
6. [Racial categories/Religious categories/Political ideologies/Geographic identities] are constructed totally for economic, political, and social reasons. If the socio-political situation changes, the [racial categories/religious categories/political ideologies/geographic identities] will change as well.
7. [Race/Religion/Political ideology/Geographic identity] does not have an inherent biological basis, and thus can be changed.
8. [Racial categories/Religious categories/Political ideologies/Geographic identities] are fluid, malleable constructs.

Adapted from No, Hong, Liao, Lee, Wood, & Chao (2008)