

## A Communibiological Examination of Ethnocentrism and Homophobia

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*This study examined relationships between ethnocentrism, homophobia, and human temperament, and the impact these variables have on human communication. The first phase of the study examined the relationship between homophobia and ethnocentrism, and indicated a substantial relationship. Previous research in psychobiology has noticed that many factors related to ethnocentrism are genetically based; therefore, the next phase of this study examined the relationship of both ethnocentrism and homophobia with Eysenck's temperamental framework (based on the super traits of extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism). There were no significant relationships between individuals' temperament and their level of either ethnocentrism or homophobia. The essay concludes by examining some implications of the findings for the study of human communication.*

In a world where language, currency, and business are becoming more global than local, learning how and why people communicate and interact with individuals from other cultures is extremely important. However, with increased global contact individuals often see their individual cultural groups as being central, and then reject possible cultural alternatives as being inferior because they disagree with their cultural ideology. This practice is commonly referred to as "ethnocentrism" (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). Understanding ethnocentrism for communication scholars is important because it has been shown to impact an individual's intercultural communica-

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tion competence (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997), to stunt social interaction (Jandt, 1995), and to influence an individual's use of violence towards an out-group (McCroskey, 2001, Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997, Wrench, 2001b, 2001c).

Unfortunately, as interaction between different groups increases, so does the level of mistreatment between in and out-groups in the United States' culture (Allport, 1954). For example, hate crimes, or crimes where an individual is specifically targeted because he or she belongs to a specific culture, are on the rise (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2001; People for the American Way, 1999). Although many of these crimes are physical in nature (e.g., pushing, throwing objects, and murder), many of them are communication in their orientation (e.g., harassing phone calls, cultural slurs, and verbal abuse). Understanding the basis of these acts against other people is, thus, important for communication scholars. Moreover, with increased global interaction, ethnocentrism seems to be rising not only in the United States, but also around the world (Neuliep & McCroskey, 2000). Although many anthropological, psychological, sociological, and communication experts have proposed theories for why this spiked increase in violence against out-groups has occurred, very little social-scientific research has been conducted.

Members of different cultural groups are having problems co-existing within the United States. Even prior to the new ethnocentric emphasis stemming from the attack on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC, the United States had problems with cultural group in-fighting. One group that has been especially vulnerable to negative behaviors caused by ethnocentrism has been the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) culture (People for the American Way, 1999). GLBT people are second only to racial minorities in the number of hate crimes perpetrated against them (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2001). In May of 2001, the human rights organization, Human Rights Watch, released a scathing treatise against the United States for what they called the "systematic abuse" of GLBT students in public schools (HRW, 2001). Racism has been a social problem that has been researched since the turn of the century, but homophobia is a relatively recent research endeavor (Eliason, 2000a). This study sets out to examine the concepts of ethnocentrism and homophobia and how they intersect with each other and relate to temperament. Only when we can understand the basis of ethnocentrism and homophobia, can we begin to understand why people of the in-group use specific communicative behaviors towards people in an out-group.

### ETHNOCENTRISM

The word *ethnocentrism* is derived from two Greek words: *ethnos*, meaning nation and *kentron*, meaning center (Klopf, 1998). When these words are combined, they suggest that ethnocentrism is the viewing of one's nation as the center by which all others are judged.

Klopf's (1998) understanding of ethnocentrism originally looked only at other nations, but Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) believed that the principles of ethnocentrism could be applied and examined from cultural and co-cultural, or sub-cultural, levels. Additionally, Neuliep and McCroskey argued that not all ethnocentrism is necessarily wrong and/or evil. An individual's sense of patriotism, for example, stems from her or his ethnocentrism. Although patriotism can be taken to the extreme, as we see in

many modern militia groups, having some sense of nationalistic pride helps members of a nation to band together. Ethnocentrism, thus, provides cultures and co-cultures a foundation for existence (Neuliep & McCroskey, 2000).

The first systematic analysis of ethnocentrism was conducted by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950) in their study examining the authoritarian personality. The authors examined fascism, anti-Semitism, and the anti-democratic personality. In relation to ethnocentrism, Adorno et al. argued that nationalism is highly related to ethnocentrism, ethnocentrism is an expression of authoritarianism, and authoritarianism is a personality defect. In addition, an individual's prejudice against a specific out-group constitutes a generalized personality profile; hence, prejudices should not be studied in isolation but as a holistic concept – ethnocentrism. In reaction to this study, Allport (1954) cautioned readers to be cautious of some of the notions Adorno et al. (1950) put forth. Allport (1954) argued that just because the correlations between disdain for Jews, Negroes, other minorities, and patriotism were quite high (all were correlated .69 or higher), this does not mean that all of prejudice can be explained by an individual's personality. As Allport (1954) argued:

Even a person with a highly prejudiced nature is much more likely to direct his animosity toward the Jews than toward the Quakers—though both are minority groups exerting perhaps more than their proportional share of influence in the business world and in government. The bigot does *not* hate all out-groups equally.... Such selective prejudice cannot be explained by fixing our attention exclusively upon the dynamics of personality. (p. 74)

Another of Allport's (1954) critiques was that Adorno et al. (1950) had focused primarily on personality predictors of ethnocentrism instead of examining the symbiotic relationship of ethnocentrism and personality characteristics. Although a number of personality characteristics have been shown to be both related to ethnocentrism and to an individual's temperament (e.g., authoritarianism, Adorno et al., 1950, Allport, 1954; aggression, Wrench, 2001b; dogmatism, Brusckie & Gartner, 1993; and moralism, Allport, 1954, Van Izendoorn, 1990), the relationship between an individual's temperament and ethnocentrism has not been investigated.

One commonly employed way of examining an individual's temperament is through the three-factor model of temperament created by Eysenck (1998) in the 1930s. The model consists of three super traits — ethnocentrism, neuroticism and psychoticism — that have been shown to be genetically based and accounted for a great deal of variance in various communication variables: communication apprehension, Beatty, McCroskey, & Heisel, 1998, Beatty & Valencic, 2000, Kelly & Keaten, 2000; verbal aggression, Valencic, Beatty Rudd, Dobos, & Heisel, 1998; communicator style, Bodary & Miller, 2000, Horvath, 1995; socio-communicative orientation, Cole & McCroskey, 2000; nonverbal immediacy, Cole, 2000; family communication patterns, Wrench, 2001a; communication competence, Wrench, 2001a; and humor, Wrench & McCroskey, 2001.

### HOMOPHOBIA

The development of the term *homophobia* has gone through many unique stages and understandings. *Homophobia* was originally coined by Weinberg (1972) to examine

an individual's irrational dread of homosexuals. The term could also be used to explain the self-hatred that many gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual people have (Eliason, 2000a, 2000b; Wickberg, 2000). Although, this early definition created a field of inquiry for sociologists, psychologists, and communication researchers, the understanding of Weinberg (1972) was that homophobia was a fear of GLBT people. This notion that prejudice towards GLBT was based solely on fear, caused many people to question the validity of the term itself. Sears and Williams (1997) extended the concept of *homophobia* in their definition, "prejudice, discrimination, harassment, or acts of violence against sexual minorities, including lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered persons. Evidenced in a deep-seated fear or hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex" (p. 4).

Other scholars have proposed that the term *homonegativism* be used in stead of *homophobia* to prevent the problem associated with the word "phobia" (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980; Mayfield, 2001). Jenkins (2000) went even farther with the term debate by referring to religious treatment of homosexual parishioners as being—*ethnohomophobia*—linking ethnocentrism and homophobia together. Although some gay, lesbian, and bisexual people do have internalized-homophobia, homophobia as a holistic construct tends to be significantly higher in heterosexuals (Herek, 1998).

Many researchers have focused more on some of the variables that may impact an individual's level of homophobia. Mottet (2000) found that people are less likely to interact with, and have less-positive predicted outcome values for an individual they are interacting with, if they know that the other person is a GLBT individual. This study demonstrates how homophobia can impact communication with another person. Mottet's findings are similar to Jandt's (1995) findings that ethnocentrism can stunt social interaction.

In another study conducted by Adams, Wright, and Lohr (1996), for instance, found that males who had seriously high levels of homophobia experienced higher sexual arousal when they were shown videos of homosexual intercourse when compared to males with lower levels of homophobia. The findings from this study suggest that people who suffer from high levels of homophobia are attracted to homoerotic images; thus, people with high levels of homophobia may be suffering from fear of their own attractions.

In yet another study, Lock and Kleis (1998) noted that homophobia in U.S. males appears to be related to anxieties about one's gender, gender role, and gender-role conformity, all of which have their origins in child development; although, at the same time, gender roles are primarily culturally derived. Moreover in males, most gender-role anxiety is related to the need to express power, authority, and dependency while showing that they do not exhibit femininity and passivity. This position is further supported by Patel and Long' (1995) study, which found a very strong relationship between traditional masculine values and homophobia. Patel and Long also noted that highly homophobic men saw homosexuality as a violation of traditional masculine values, which dehumanized gay men in the eyes of these highly homophobic men.

Harry (1990) further explains this dehumanization when he noted that homophobic men generally see gay men as "victims worthy of punishment for having violated gender norms, the offender not only excuses himself from opprobrium but sees himself as rendering gender justice and reaffirming the natural order of gender-appropriate behavior" (p. 353). Overall, people who are highly homophobic appear to be chas-

tising GLBT people because these individuals are not conforming to the highly homophobic individual's norms for gender behavior.

Given that ethnocentrism and homophobia appear to arise from similar backgrounds, our first hypothesis was:

*H1: Ethnocentrism is a good predictor of an individual's homophobia.*

Much of the literature indicates that males tend to be more ethnocentric than females. Therefore, given the predicted relationship between homophobia and ethnocentrism, the second hypothesis predicted:

*H2: Males will have higher levels of both ethnocentrism and homophobia than females.*

Although a few quantitative studies have been conducted examining homophobia, most of the research in this area has been qualitative in orientation. Overall, researchers infer that both ethnocentrism and homophobia appear to be derived from an individual's cultural background (Mayfield, 2001; Price & Dalecki, 1998; Wrench, 2001b). In contrast, considerable work by psychobiologists indicates that many traits have a very strong genetic basis (Beatty, McCroskey, & Valencic, 2001). In addition, a number of genetically based traits are related to ethnocentrism (see Adorno et al., 1950; Allport, 1954; Wrench, 2001b). Given that there is little research on the comparative effects of genetics and culture on either homophobia and ethnocentrism, the following research question was posed:

*R1: Are levels of ethnocentrism or homophobia predicted by temperament?*

## METHODS

### *Participants and Procedures*

Participants in this study were 188 undergraduate students in an upper division communication course that services a large mid-Atlantic university. Of the 188 participants, 105 (55.9 %) were males, 83 (44.1 %) were females. The mean age for the sample was 22.17.

The participants were asked to go to a secure web site where the survey was located. Only people who were directly aware of the study had access to the web site, so random people could not access the study and taint the sample. Once logged into the web site, participants filled out the questionnaire and submitted the form. When the form was submitted, the participants were taken to a secondary web page which included a form that they could fill out, print, and hand in to their instructors to receive credit for their participation. All participants in this study received extra credit for their participation.

### *Measures*

*Ethnocentrism scale.* The Ethnocentrism Scale was created by Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) to measure an individual's tendency to feel that her or his culture is the center of the universe. The revised version of the scale employed here (McCroskey, 2001) con-

sists of 22 Likert items ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. Fifteen of the items are scored; the remaining items are used as distracters. Higher scores are designed to indicate higher levels of ethnocentrism. The Ethnocentrism Scale had an alpha reliability of .90 ( $M = 32.54$ ,  $SD = 8.55$ ), which is consistent with previous studies.

*Homophobia scale.* The Homophobia Scale was created by Adams et al. (1996) to measure an individual's tendency to feel discomfort and fear around gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals. This scale consists of 25 Likert items ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. Higher scores are designed to indicate higher levels of homophobia. The Homophobia Scale had an alpha reliability of .95 ( $M = 55.97$ ,  $SD = 18.18$ ), which is consistent with previous studies.

*Temperament measures.* Eysenck, Eysenck's, and Barret's (1985) 12-item measure of psychoticism ( $M = 26.63$ ,  $SD = 5.37$ ) was embedded within a general questionnaire consisting of Eysenck's (1998) 10-item measures of extraversion ( $M = 37.57$ ,  $SD = 4.86$ ) and neuroticism ( $M = 28.09$ ,  $SD = 7.09$ ). Each of the items is designed in a Likert format with possible answers ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. Higher scores on each of the three instruments are designed to indicate higher levels of that specific super trait. The means and standard deviations found in this study are similar to previous studies that have used this measure. Alpha reliabilities were conducted for the three measures: extraversion .74, neuroticism .85, and psychoticism .67.

## RESULTS

The first hypothesis asserted that ethnocentrism would be a good predictor of an individual's homophobia. A linear regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of an individual's homophobia from her or his overall level of ethnocentrism. The regression equation was  $Predicted\ Homophobia\ Level = 1.208 * Ethnocentrism + 16.67$ . As hypothesized, people who had higher levels of ethnocentrism had higher levels of homophobia. The correlation between ethnocentrism and homophobia was  $.57$ ,  $t(186) = 9.41$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Approximately 32% of the variance of an individual's level of homophobia was accounted for by its linear relationship with ethnocentrism.

The second hypothesis, which predicted that males would have higher levels of both ethnocentrism and homophobia than females, was also supported. To examine this hypothesis, two one-way ANOVAs were conducted using sex as the independent variable and both ethnocentrism and homophobia as the two dependent variables. In this study, males ( $M = 33.79$ ,  $SD = 8.82$ ) had higher levels of ethnocentrism than females ( $M = 30.96$ ,  $SD = 7.80$ ),  $F(1, 186) = 5.18$ ,  $p < .05$ , and males ( $M = 61.61$ ,  $SD = 18.25$ ) also had higher levels of homophobia than females ( $M = 48.84$ ,  $SD = 15.45$ ),  $F(1, 186) = 25.91$ ,  $p < .0001$ .

The research question asked whether Eysenck's model of temperament (extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism) could predict an individual's level of ethnocentrism or homophobia. The first regression analysis indicated that this was not the case for ethnocentrism,  $F(3, 161) = .837$ ,  $p > .05$ , and the second regression analysis indicated that this was not the case for homophobia,  $F(3, 161) = .774$ ,  $p > .05$ .

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to examine the relationship between ethnocentrism and homophobia as interconnected concepts and (b) to examine the tem-

peramental basis of both ethnocentrism and homophobia. To better understand the results, each set of findings will be examined separately.

The first major hypothesis predicted that an individual's homophobia could be predicted by her or his ethnocentrism. A strong relationship was found between these variables. This finding lends credence to Neuliep and McCroskey's (1997) notion that ethnocentrism can be applied to more than just nationalism. In this specific study, we see that ethnocentrism can help us to understand why people are homophobic because homophobia reflects ethnocentrism directed towards a specific target.

The findings concerning the effects of sex on ethnocentrism and homophobia mirror findings previously noted by Wrench (2002), who examined homophobia, in that males had higher levels of both ethnocentrism and homophobia. One possible explanation for the differences in both ethnocentrism and homophobia between males and females concerns the category of male. Males in the U.S. are generally reported as the predominant in-group by researchers (Allport, 1954; Evans, 1981). It is possible that the more an individual becomes part of a culture's in-group, the more her or his ethnocentrism grows because he or she has more to lose if the status quo is interrupted. This idea mirrors the assertions commonly associated with the exploitation theory of prejudice (Allport, 1954; Wrench, 2001c), which says that power is a scarce entity and people who have power will do what is necessary to keep it and prevent others from getting it. In the United States today, heterosexual males are the people who are generally viewed as having the power.

The second major finding in this study was that temperament does not predict a meaningful variance in either ethnocentrism or homophobia. Since it would appear that levels of ethnocentrism and homophobia are not genetically based, these variables are likely culturally based. Although many communication-related traits have a strong genetic base (e.g., communication apprehension, Beatty, McCroskey, & Heisel, 1998, Beatty & Valencic, 2000, Kelly & Keaten, 2000; verbal aggression, Valencic, Beatty Rudd, Dobos, & Heisel, 1998; communicator style, Bodary & Miller, 2000, Horvath, 1995; socio-communicative orientation, Cole & McCroskey, 2000; nonverbal immediacy, Cole, 2000; family communication patterns, Wrench, 2001a; communication competence, Wrench, 2001a; and humor, Wrench & McCroskey, 2002), there appears to be no relationship between an individual's genetic make-up and her or his level of ethnocentrism and homophobia. This means that an individual's level of ethnocentrism and homophobia does not stem from the same source as many other communication-related traits.

### *Implications*

While the strong relationship seen between ethnocentrism and homophobia gives further credence to the idea that homophobia is simply ethnocentrism enacted, the findings have other implications for communication scholars as well. While many human communication variables are specifically temperamental (Beatty, et al., 1998; Beatty & Valencic, 2000; Bodary & Miller, 2000; Cole, 2000; Cole & McCroskey, 2000; Horvath, 1995, Kelly & Keaten, 2000; Valencic et al, 1998; Wrench, 2001a, 2001c; Wrench & McCroskey, 2002) there are still a variety of factors that have strong influences on human communication that are culturally driven, such as ethnocentrism.

Some researchers (Condit, 2000a, 2000b) have mistakenly suggested that the communibiological paradigm believes that *all* factors of human communication are

biologically driven; this simply is not the case. The communibiological paradigm simply realizes that not all of human communication behavior is learned. Ethnocentrism is a good example of a variable that can impact human behavior that is learned. However, it is also possible that it is rooted in still-unidentified brain systems not associated with temperament.

Ethnocentrism has been shown to impact an individual's intercultural communication competence (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997), to stunt social interaction (Jandt, 1995; Mottet, 2000), and to influence an individual's use of violence towards an out-group (McCroskey, 2001, Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997, Wrench, 2001b, 2002). While this study has aided in the understanding of the basis of ethnocentrism, additional research is still needed in how ethnocentrism is created within a culture. Only when a complete understanding of how ethnocentrism is created and disseminated within a culture occurs, can a more complete understanding of intercultural communication occur. Finally, there are a wide variety of interpersonal communication variables that have not been researched with respect to ethnocentrism. This emphasis in intercultural communication research would produce a more complete understanding of how ethnocentrism relates to and affects human communication.

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