

## Attributions for sexual orientation vs. stereotypes: how beliefs about value violations account for attribution effects on anti-gay discrimination

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### Abstract

Attributions for sexual orientation strongly predict opposition to gay rights policies; however, we propose that beliefs that gays and lesbians violate important values drive gay rights opposition and account for the relationship between attributions and anti-gay discrimination. In two studies, we found that beliefs that gays and lesbians violate values accounted for much of the relationship between attributions and anti-gay discrimination. In addition, these stereotypes were the most powerful predictors of opposition to gay rights when both value violations and attributions were included in the model. Results also demonstrated that violations of specific values predicted opposition to policies relevant to those values. This suggests that attributions of choice over sexual orientation are less relevant for predicting opposition to gay rights than beliefs about choice to uphold or violate values.

The fight over policies intended to benefit gays and lesbians in the United States has been contentious. Opposition to gay rights is often predicated on the belief that gays and lesbians choose their sexual orientation or that it is the result of parental upbringing, whereas support for gay rights is often associated with beliefs about the biological origins of sexual orientation (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008; Herek, 1984, 1986, 1987; Jayaratne et al., 2006); Sakalli, 2002; Whitely, 1990; Wood & Bartkowski, 2004). In fact, attributions regarding the origins of sexual orientation are now recognized as some of the most powerful predictors of attitudes toward gays and lesbians and the policies that affect them. For example, two nationally representative samples of the United States surveyed in 2003 and 2006 (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008) revealed that attributions of the origins of sexual orientation (biological vs. upbringing/choice) were the strongest predictors of both attitudes toward gays and lesbians and toward gay rights policies. Believing that homosexuality had a biological origin increased the probability of support for legal rights and protections for gays and lesbians and moral judgments by about 40% (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008, Study 2). In fact, attributions were more powerful predictors of attitudes toward gay rights than either religious orientation or political conservatism—two variables that have historically been

strongly linked to anti-gay attitudes (see also, Wood & Bartkowski, 2004).

To explain the link between attributions for sexual orientation and opposition to gay rights, scholars have focused on the power of attributions to guide sanctions toward the stigmatized (Crandall et al., 2001; Menec & Perry, 1998; Weiner, 1993, 1995; Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). Across a variety of groups (including gays and lesbians), attributing stigmas (such as disease, low social status, and unfavorable behaviors or life events) to controllable causes (such as choice) results in greater antipathy toward gays and lesbians, as well as rejection and punishment (for review, see Weiner, 1995). The notion is that when an individual or group is to blame for their own undesirable outcomes or behaviors, they do not deserve support, especially if these undesirable outcomes will persist across time (i.e., are stable). On the other hand, stigmas associated with uncontrollable causes (such as biology or environmental circumstances) elicit greater support because these individuals are perceived to be the victims of forces beyond their control (Weiner, 1993, 1995). Because preference for the same sex is still stigmatized in America, believing that sexual orientation is a lifestyle choice (a controllable cause) implies that gays and lesbians are responsible for what many see as deviant behavior and should be denied support and social benefits.

## Attributions or value violations?

A number of studies suggest that attributions for sexual orientation are fundamental in driving public opinion about gay rights, but other research highlights additional contributory factors (see e.g., Hegarty, 2002; Hegarty & Golden, 2008). Although the correlations between attributions and anti-gay attitudes are robust, manipulations of attributions for sexual orientation have failed to produce the predicted effects on these attitudes (Hegarty & Golden, 2008). This null result casts doubt on the traditional attribution-affect-behavior link when it comes to explaining attitudes toward gays and lesbians (cf. Weiner et al., 1988). If attributions are not the driving force behind anti-gay prejudice, then why have they continued to strongly predict attitudes toward gay rights policies? The powerful and consistent data associating attributions for sexual orientation to discrimination against gays and lesbians cannot be ignored. Clearly, attributions play a role in discrimination, but the nature of that role remains unclear.

Several researchers have proposed that attributions may be an expression of preexisting prejudices, as opposed to their source. For example, the justification-suppression model of prejudice (Crandall & Eshelman, 2003) claims that prejudices are primary, whereas attributions suggesting fault or blame (among other things) serve to justify their expression (see also Hegarty & Golden, 2008; Jost & Banaji, 1994).<sup>1</sup> The attributional model of stereotypes (Brandt & Reyna, 2010; Reyna, 2000; 2008) suggests that stereotypes imply causal information (directly or indirectly) that can guide reactions toward stigmatized groups. Both perspectives suggest that stereotypes and prejudice are the most robust predictors of discrimination, and that attributions serve as extensions and/or rationalizations of these prejudices. An analysis of several surveys using random sampling methods across time revealed that moral judgments and religiosity were the strongest predictors of attributions that sexual orientation is a choice (Lewis, 2009), which supports the notion that attributions might stem from prior beliefs and not the other way around. In other words, when it comes to evaluating social groups, attributions manifest from existing intergroup attitudes (like stereotypes and prejudice) and do not necessarily produce (nor, by extension, easily ameliorate) these attitudes.

The question remains open whether it is perceived control over one's sexual orientation *per se* that triggers discrimination (as attribution perspectives would suggest), or whether these causal attributions are simply vestiges of preexisting prejudices (e.g., stereotypes) that primarily drive attitudes specifically in the context of gay rights policies. We propose

<sup>1</sup>However, the justification-suppression model acknowledges that attributions for specific behaviors can produce prejudice in their own right when applied to novel groups for which there are no prior prejudices.

that attributions are expressions of existing stereotypes about the moral character of gays and lesbians and their ability or willingness to uphold important social values, that, when accounted for, will trump attributions in predicting opposition to policies intended to create more equitable circumstances for gays and lesbians. "Choice" matters, but we propose that the choice that matters most is the perception that a group chooses to violate the values of society and not the choice over one's sexual identity.

Furthermore, we propose that beliefs that gays and lesbians violate specific values will map onto denial of rights and privileges that reflect these values. For example, if a person believes that gays and lesbians undermine the traditional family, they should be particularly likely to oppose marriage and adoption rights for gays and lesbians compared to other types of rights. The prediction that discrimination will map onto particular beliefs about value violation would not easily fit an origins-attribution perspective alone. If discrimination is a function of attributions for the origins of sexual orientation, then once the attribution is made, we would expect it to affect treatment of gays and lesbians across the board (across all possible rights and privileges). Instead, we predict that discrimination will reflect specific beliefs about value violation.

## Value violations and prejudice

The notion that values, and the belief groups violate values in particular, play a prominent role in prejudice has a long history in social psychology (Allport, 1954; Biernat, Vescio, & Theno, 1996a; Callahan & Vescio, 2011; Katz & Hass, 1988; Feather, 1990; Skitka & Tetlock, 1993; Vescio & Biernat, 2003; for review, see Biernat, Vescio, Theno, & Crandall, 1996b). Values represent enduring preferences for particular states of existence or behavior and provide important standards for judging the self and others (Rohan, 2000; Rokeach, 1973, 1979; Schwartz, 1992, 1996). More important, values guide attitudes, including attitudes toward other groups. Individuals or groups seen as living up to, or upholding one's core values are treated positively; however, individuals or groups whose behavior, culture, or life outcomes are seen as antithetical to one's values are treated with prejudice and discrimination (Biernat et al., 1996b; Callahan & Vescio, 2011; Crandall et al., 2001; Henry & Reyna, 2007; Katz & Hass, 1988; Vescio & Biernat, 2003).

Value violations are especially potent predictors of prejudice when they are seen as under the volition of the violator (Crandall et al., 2001; Henry & Reyna, 2007). For example, anti-fat prejudice is highest when people both value thinness and hold overweight people responsible for their corpulence (Crandall et al., 2001). In America, anti-Black prejudice is higher when people both endorse American values of individualism and believe that Blacks are responsible for their lower status in society (Katz & Hass, 1988;

Sears, 1988; Sears & Henry, 2003). Whether a group is seen as upholding or violating values can be strongly determined by stereotypes of the group (Biernat et al., 1996a; Henry, Reyna, & Weiner, 2004; Reyna, Brandt, & Viki, 2009; Reyna, Henry, Korfmacher, & Tucker, 2006). Stereotypes that portray groups as lazy, antisocial, lacking self-restraint, and the like can collide with values that are designed to promote self-reliance, success, and social stability (e.g., protestant work ethic; family values). Groups whose members are stereotyped as violating values (referred to here as stereotypes of value violation) are particularly vulnerable to prejudice and discrimination (Henry et al., 2004; Reyna et al., 2006, 2009; Wetherell, Reyna, & Sadler, 2013).

The link between perceptions of value violation and prejudice toward gays and lesbians is robust (see Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 2008 for review). Research has linked anti-gay prejudice to endorsement of traditional values. Specifically, those who endorse traditional family values (e.g., Callahan & Vescio, 2011; Lehmillier, Law, & Tormala, 2010; Vescio & Biernat, 2003) or authoritarian values (Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993) or whose family values are made salient (Lehmillier et al., 2010; Vescio & Biernat, 2003) express higher levels of prejudice toward gays and lesbians. As with other stereotyped groups, anti-gay prejudice is particularly potent for those who believe that gays and lesbians violate these cherished values (e.g., Haddock et al., 1993; Henry & Reyna, 2007).

### **Value violations and attributions for sexual orientation**

When it comes to sexual orientation, beliefs that sexual orientation is controllable may often be conflated with beliefs that violating values associated with sexual orientation is controllable. Those who value the traditional family (e.g., marriage only between a man and a woman) might be more likely to believe that gays and lesbians intentionally flout this value (e.g., Callahan & Vescio, 2011; however, see Henry & Reyna, 2007). Although attributions for sexual orientation and stereotypes about value violation are likely correlated, there is reason to think they may be distinguishable and have unique effects on policy preference. For example, a person who believes that sexual orientation is not a choice (uncontrollable), but that the resulting behaviors undermine important social norms, may still oppose gay rights. Conversely, another person who believes that sexual orientation is chosen, but that gays and lesbians uphold important values might support gay rights (see Henry & Reyna, 2007). Because choice over value violating or upholding behavior can be conflated with choice to be gay or lesbian, attributions for sexual orientation may become intertwined with stereotypes that gays and lesbians violate important values, thereby collectively predicting policy attitudes

(Lewis, 2009; see also Herek, 1986 for a discussion of the value expressive function of heterosexism).

The challenge is to separate the unique contributions of stereotypes of value violations from attributions for the origins of sexual orientation in predicting gay rights policy attitudes. Although there has been extensive bodies of work examining attributions predicting policy attitudes and perceptions of value violations predicting policy attitudes (see above for review), few studies have attempted to disentangle these two constructs and their unique effects on gay rights policies. One such study used national surveys across time to show that demographics and value-oriented ideologies (religion and moral judgments) strongly predicted attributions for sexual orientation, but factors that relate to potential exposure to new knowledge about origins (e.g., scientific findings) had little effect on attributions (Lewis, 2009). These patterns suggest that attributions conform to existing moral and ideological positions and not the other way around (see also Hegarty, 2002). What remains to be seen is whether or not value violations in particular can account for the robust effects of attributions for sexual orientation on policy attitudes. In this paper, we examine the relationship between attributions for sexual orientation and attitudes toward gay rights policies. We propose that much of the effects of attributions on gay rights policy preferences can be accounted for by beliefs that gays and lesbians violate cherished values. Establishing this relationship can explain why attributions are so powerfully associated with attitudes toward gay rights policies.

### **Value violations and opposition to particular social policies**

Social and political policies are intimately related to societal values, and whether the beneficiaries are stereotyped as upholding or violating the values that the policies are designed to protect is one of the most powerful predictors of policy attitudes (Biernat et al., 1996b; Henry et al., 2004; Henry & Reyna, 2007; Reyna et al., 2006, 2009; Sears & Henry, 2003; Wetherell et al., 2013; see also Lakoff, 1996). These policy-specific value judgments predict whether or not people oppose policies designed to help a variety of groups, above and beyond other strong predictors of policy opposition including political ideology (Henry et al., 2004; Reyna et al., 2006; Sears & Henry, 2003), negative affect (Henry et al., 2004; Reyna et al., 2006), and perceptions that the group violates values unrelated to the policies in question (Henry & Reyna, 2007). For example, believing that welfare recipients violate values related to self-reliance best predicted opposition to welfare, but believing that welfare recipients violate family values was less relevant to welfare policy opposition (Henry & Reyna, 2007). Thus, stereotypes of value violation can transmit information about a group's standing

in relation to specific societal values, and these values are often linked to specific policies.

Similarly, gay rights policies are also linked to specific values. For example, marriage and adoption rights are related to beliefs about one's ability to uphold family values and protect children (Family Research Council, n.d.). Adherence to egalitarian ideals reflects fundamental, communal values often expressed as tolerance toward others (Braithwaite & Law, 1985; Katz & Hass, 1988). Successful integration and collaboration with heterosexuals in the workplace and military might be linked to one's ability to work well with heterosexuals, reflecting the value of tolerance. Conversely, self-discipline reflects an equally esteemed yet individualistic set of values (Braithwaite & Law, 1985; Katz & Hass, 1988; Schwartz, 1992), which may require one to control sexual urges to ensure respectful interactions with heterosexuals. We expect specific beliefs about value violations to map onto the specific gay rights policies that are most germane to those values.

## The current research

In the present research, we will examine the potency of both attributions about the origins of sexual orientation and beliefs about value violation on discrimination against gays and lesbians concurrently to assess which variables retain their predictive potency when taking their common variance into account. We test our predictions in two steps, in two studies, using both a student and community sample. First, we examine the potency of attributions to replicate the well-established finding that attributions predict attitudes toward gay rights policies. We predict that attributions of choice and instability will predict opposition to policies that benefit gays and lesbians. We will then demonstrate that the attributions-to-policy link is severely attenuated by concurrently examining beliefs that gays violate important values. In other words, believing gays and lesbians violate values will have unique potency to drive policy attitudes above and beyond any effects of attributions alone, and much of the power of attributions predicting policy is rooted in these stereotypes. We also predict that stereotypes related to specific value violations (violations of family values vs. of self-discipline vs. of tolerance) will predict discrimination in a distinct fashion: The belief that gays and lesbians violate family values will lead to decreased support for gay marriage and adoption, and the belief that gays and lesbians violate tolerance and self-discipline will lead to decreased support for gays in the military and in the workplace.

## Study 1

The aim of Study 1 was to establish the relationship between attributions, stereotypes that gays and lesbians violate values,

and opposition to gay rights policies in a sample of adults from the community. We also tested our hypotheses regarding the relationship between stereotypes about specific value violations and opposition to public policies aimed at protecting specific values.

## Study 1 method

### Participants and procedure

Participants were approached in public places in Chicago, Illinois and Pasadena, California<sup>2</sup> between December 2008 and December 2009. We surveyed the California sample 1 month after the passage of Proposition 8, the controversial measure that made gay marriage unconstitutional in the state.<sup>3</sup> The Chicago sample was collected in early mid-2009. According to a Gallup poll from 2009, 57% of Americans felt that gay marriage should be illegal, 44% opposed gay/lesbian adoption, and 26% opposed gays and lesbians serving openly in the military. There were no data available regarding perceptions of employment rights.

Participants were asked if they would like to complete a survey on marriage and sexuality. In total, 90 participants completed the survey (46 men, 43 women, 1 no report;  $M_{\text{age}} = 37$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 15.45$ ). Participants came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (but were mostly White:  $n = 55$  White; 15 Latino/a; 3 Black; 4 Asian; 2 Native American; 8 multiracial; 2 other; 1 did not report) as well as education backgrounds ( $n = 24$  high school diplomas; 5 associates degrees; 11 bachelor's degrees; 6 master's degrees; 3 PhDs; 1 no degree).<sup>4</sup> The sample identified as mostly politically moderate. On a scale from 1 to 7 (1 = *very liberal*, 7 = *very conservative*) the mean was 4.04 ( $SD = 1.59$ ).

### Measures

The measures used in this study were collected in the order presented below.

### Attributions

The item "Homosexuality is a lifestyle choice; people choose to be homosexual" was used to measure attributions of choice. The item "A person's homosexuality is something that cannot be changed" was used to measure attributions of

<sup>2</sup>Out of all of the comparisons, only one significant effect emerged involving location (an interaction between attributions of stability and location), so we collapsed our analyses across both samples.

<sup>3</sup>On November 4, 2008, voters approved, by a margin of 52% to 48%, a measure (Proposition 8) that defined marriage as one man and one woman, thereby excluding same-sex couples (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.).

<sup>4</sup>We included a measure of education in the California survey; however, we did not measure education in the Chicago survey. There were no other measures reflecting socioeconomic status or its correlates in either survey.

stability. Both items were measured on the same 7-point scale with the anchors *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (7).

### Stereotypes of value violations

We measured stereotypes that gays and lesbians violate three values that have been previously examined in the values literature and that could be relevant to stereotypes about gays and lesbians: traditional family values (Amato, 1988; also called “tradition” by Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004), self-discipline (Braithwaite & Law, 1985; Schwartz, 1992), and tolerance (Braithwaite & Law, 1985; similar to “egalitarian” values, Katz & Hass, 1988). For the purpose of this research, items were developed to measure these values in the particular context of gays and lesbians. All of the value violation items were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*. Violations of traditional family values were measured with six items: “Typically gay men and lesbians do not uphold the value of mature love (e.g., deep emotional and spiritual intimacy),” “Typically gay men and lesbians do not uphold the value of family security (e.g., safety for loved ones),” “Typically, gay men and lesbians do not uphold the value of traditional sexual moral standards (e.g., monogamy, abstinence or sexual restraint before marriage/long-term commitment),” “Typically, gay men and lesbians do not uphold traditional family values,” “Typically, gay men and lesbians do not uphold the value of following a religious faith conscientiously,”<sup>5</sup> and “Typically, gay men and lesbians do not uphold the value of respect for traditions (e.g., preservation of time-honored customs).” These six items were averaged together to create a reliable scale ( $\alpha = .93$ ).<sup>6</sup>

The violation of the value of self-discipline was measured with the item, “Typically gay men and lesbians do not uphold the value of self-discipline (e.g., self-restraint, resistance to temptation).” The violation of values of tolerance was measured with two items: “Typically, gay men and lesbians do not uphold the value of working in harmony with others” and “Typically, gay men and lesbians do not uphold the value of being tolerant to others.” These items were averaged together to create a reliable scale ( $r = .75, p < .001$ ).

### Public policy

We measured participants’ support or opposition to four different realms of public policy related to gays and lesbians.

<sup>5</sup>Overall patterns were the same without including the religious faith item in the traditional family values scale.

<sup>6</sup>Because the California sample was tested immediately following the passage of Proposition 8, we included extra items assessing violations of family values and marriage policies to better understand attitudes toward gay marriage.

Support for gays and lesbians’ military service was measured with the item “Gay men and lesbians should be allowed to serve openly in the military.” This item was measured on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*. We reverse coded this scale to reflect greater opposition to open military service.

Support for laws that make it illegal for employers to discriminate against gays and lesbians based on sexual orientation was measured with the item “Should it be illegal for employers to discriminate against gay men and lesbians, or should employers be given the right to not hire people because of their sexual orientation?” This item ranged from (1) “*it should be illegal to discriminate against gays and lesbians*” to (7) “*employers should have the right to NOT hire gays and lesbians*.”

Support for gays and lesbians’ right to adopt children was measured with two items: “A loving gay couple should be allowed to jointly adopt one or more children” and “A loving lesbian couple should be allowed to jointly adopt one or more children.” These two items were averaged together to create a reliable scale ( $r = .96, p < .001$ ). These items were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*. We reverse coded this scale to reflect greater opposition to gay and lesbian adoption.

Two items were used to measure support for same-sex marriage and civil unions. The first item read, “Imagine that for the next elections, there is a ballot measure that would legalize same-sex ‘civil unions’ that would allow same-sex couples all the same legal benefits of heterosexual married couples. How would you vote for such an amendment?” This item was measured on a seven point scale ranging from 1 = “definitely vote against same-sex civil unions” to 7 = “definitely vote for same-sex civil unions.” The second item read, “Imagine that for the next elections, there is a ballot measure that would legalize same-sex marriage and would allow same-sex married couples all the same benefits of heterosexual married couples. How would you vote for such an amendment?” This item ranged from 1 = “*definitely vote against legalizing gay marriage*” to 7 = “*definitely vote for legalizing gay marriage*.” These two items were averaged together to create a reliable scale ( $r = .76, p < .001$ ), and reverse coded to reflect opposition to gay marriage.

## Study 1 results and discussion

To test the study hypotheses that stereotypes of value violation would be more powerful predictors of discrimination against gays and lesbians than attributions, and would account for much of the power of attributions to predict policy, we ran multiple regression models to examine the effects of attributions and stereotypes of value violation on policy opposition. In order to replicate prior research showing an association between attributions for sexual orien-

**Table 1** Study 1: Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Choice	—								
2. Stability	-.47***	—							
3. Family values violations	.58***	-.64***	—						
4. Tolerance violations	.65***	-.43***	.75***	—					
5. Self-discipline violations	.52***	-.60***	.80***	.64***	—				
6. Gay marriage opp.	.56***	-.61***	.79***	.64***	.69***	—			
7. Gay adoption opp.	.53***	-.64***	.74***	.58***	.63***	.76***	—		
8. Military service opp.	.41***	-.35***	.58***	.63***	.38***	.47***	.46***	—	
9. Job discrimination	.22*	-.21	.32***	.47***	.29**	.34**	.20*	.42***	—
Mean	3.52	4.16	3.50	2.69	3.07	3.79	3.52	2.84	2.34
Standard deviation	2.23	2.21	1.86	1.64	2.06	2.37	2.32	2.28	2.10

Note. \**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001. All *n* > 75.

**Table 2** Study 1: Regression Models Using Attributions and Values to Predict Four Public Policies

	Marriage				Adoption				Military				Job discrim.			
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>
Attributions models																
Choice	.35	.10	.32	<.001	.26	.10	.25	.01	.40	.12	.38	<.001	.11	.12	.11	.39
Stability	-.54	.10	-.50	<.001	-.58	.10	-.56	<.001	-.22	.12	-.21	.08	-.18	.12	-.19	.16
<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup> Model1	.50***				.51***				.26***				.07+			
Attributions and values models																
Choice	.07	.10	.06	.51	.09	.11	.08	.45	.08	.13	.07	.55	-.20	.14	.22	.15
Stability	-.23	.10	-.21	.03	-.34	.11	-.33	.002	-.10	.13	-.09	.46	-.12	.14	-.13	.39
Family values	.59	.18	.46	.002	.51	.20	.42	.02	.54	.23	.43	.03	-.18	.25	-.17	.46
Tolerance	.14	.18	.09	.45	.08	.19	.06	.66	.64	.23	.43	.01	.81	.24	.62	<.001
Self-discipline	.13	.14	.11	.34	.01	.15	.01	.97	-.39	.17	-.34	.03	.07	.18	.07	.69
<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup> Model2	.68***				.62***				.47***				.23***			
$\Delta r^2$	.18***				.10***				.21***				.17**			

Note. +*p* < .10. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

tation and attitudes toward policies, we first included all attribution items simultaneously in each model to predict opposition to each policy. We ran four such models, one model for each policy. We then added stereotypes of value violation into the models, along with attributions, to test the extent to which attributions were still predictive of policy opposition while taking value violations into account. In total, we ran eight models: four models with only attributions predicting opposition to each policy individually and four models with both attributions and stereotypes of value violations predicting opposition to each policy (see Table 1 for bivariate correlations between all study variables, and Table 2 for all Study 1 regression models).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Because of the high intercorrelations between the value violation items, we re-ran the analysis controlling for common variance. Specifically, we ran an analysis in both studies using structural equation modeling in which we used a latent factor to remove the common variance between the value violations items, and allowed for the intercorrelations between this latent factor and all

In the models including only attributions, attributions of choice predicted greater opposition to marriage and adoption rights, as well as open military service. The more people perceived sexual orientation to be a choice, the more they opposed gay rights policies. Attributions of stability negatively predicted opposition to marriage and adoption rights. Thus, the less stable sexual orientation was perceived to be (i.e., the more it is seen as changeable over time), the more participants opposed gay rights policies.

When we added stereotypes of value violation into the models, attributions of choice lost their predictive potency, and the predictive power of stability attributions on support for marriage, adoption, and military service was attenuated. Stereotypes that gays and lesbians violate family values

attribution items. All the attribution items and value violations items were allowed to predict each policy. The overall pattern of results was the same as those in the regression models for both samples, so we chose to present the multiple regression results for simplicity and clarity in presentation.

predicted opposition to marriage, adoption, and military service. Violations of tolerance predicted opposition to military service and increased support for job discrimination. Perceived violations of self-discipline lead to decreased opposition for military service.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, the results of Study 1 provide broad support for our hypothesis that stereotypes of value violations would account for much of the effects of attributions of choice and stability on opposition to gay rights policy. Attributions of choice no longer held any predictive force when accounting for stereotypes that gays and lesbians violate important values. This lends support for our proposition that, when it comes to gay rights policies, people are less concerned about the origins of sexual orientation and more concerned about what behavioral choice means in terms of cherished values. Choice over being gay is less relevant than choice to eschew social standards of behavior. Attributions of stability continued to predict policies even when controlling for value violations, but these effects were attenuated by the inclusion of these stereotypes. This suggests that although stereotypes of value violation might be more relevant than choice when it comes to gay rights, issues of stability remain relevant. We will revisit this in more detail in the general discussion.

Furthermore, stereotypes that gays and lesbians violate specific values map onto policies that relate to those values. Stereotypes that gays and lesbians violate traditional family values predicted opposition to marriage and adoption. Violations of tolerance were the strongest predictors of job discrimination. Opposition to gays and lesbians serving openly in the military was the most complex form of policy opposition in the sense that violations of family values and tolerance positively predicted opposition, but violations of self-discipline negatively predicted opposition.

The results of Study 1 are compelling, but they have their limitations. We did not measure the full range of possible attributions for the origins of sexual orientation, so we cannot tell whether or not the effects of other attributions, such as the belief that gay and lesbians are born with their orientation or the belief that sexual orientation is a result of upbringing, might play a stronger role in predicting gay rights policy attitudes. Prior research suggests that attributions for sexual orientation can be complex. For example, several researchers have identified at least three important, culturally pervasive attributions for sexual orientation—genetics/biology; parenting/upbringing; lifestyle choice (Jayaratne et al., 2006, 2009; Wood & Bartkowski, 2004). In Study 2, we remedied this shortcoming by measuring a

wider range of attributions for sexual orientation, and tested whether or not they retain their predictive potency when taking into account the effects of stereotypes that gays and lesbians violate values.

## Study 2 method

### Participants and procedure

Participants were undergraduate students who completed the study in exchange for partial course credit. After choosing to be in the study, participants were directed to an online survey where they completed all of the measures. In total, 347 participants completed the survey (94 men, 252 women, 1 failed to report;  $M_{age} = 20$ ,  $SD_{age} = 2.57$ ). Participants were primarily White (67%) and Latino/a (14%). We used the same scale to measure political orientation as used in Study 1. This sample identified as mostly liberal ( $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ).

### Measures

#### Attributions

Several items assessed attributions for the origins of sexual orientation: “People are born with their sexual orientation” (birth); “People become homosexual because of the way they were brought up” (upbringing); “Homosexuality is a lifestyle choice; people choose to be homosexual” (choice). Finally, two items were used to measure stability attributions: “A person’s homosexuality is something that cannot be changed” and “A person’s homosexuality can be cured (reverse coded).” These two items were averaged together to create a reliable scale ( $r = .65$ ,  $p < .001$ ). All of the items were measured on the same 7-point scale as the attribution items in Study 1 (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*).

#### Stereotypes of value violations

Value violations were measured with the same items and on the same scale as Study 1. The measures of the violation of traditional family values ( $\alpha = .94$ ) and self-discipline ( $r = .79$ ) produced reliable scales.

#### Public policy

We measured participants’ opposition to the same policies as in Study 1. Support for military service was measured with the same reverse coded item as in Study 1.

Support for job discrimination was measured with two items. The first item was the same item used in Study 1. The second item read “There are certain professions where gay men and lesbians do not belong” and was measured on a scale

<sup>8</sup>This pattern of results does not match the bivariate correlation between violations of self-discipline and open military service (which is significant and positive). The negative beta might be due to the way the variance is parsed in this analysis. This pattern does not replicate in Study 2.

**Table 3** Study 2: Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Choice	—										
2. Birth	-.74***	—									
3. Upbringing	.52***	-.40***	—								
4. Stability	-.70***	.66***	-.45***	—							
5. Family values violations	.47***	-.40***	.37***	-.56***	—						
6. Tolerance violations	.46***	-.35***	.32***	-.51***	.77***	—					
7. Self-discipline violations	.48***	-.40***	.38***	-.61***	.85***	.80***	—				
8. Gay marriage opp.	.53***	-.49***	.38***	-.66***	.77***	.67***	.74***	—			
9. Gay adoption opp.	.47***	-.37***	.35***	-.57***	.74***	.64***	.71***	.78***	—		
10. Military service opp.	.26***	-.25***	.24***	-.26***	.38***	.44***	.43***	.40***	.39***	—	
11. Job discrimination	.37***	-.26***	.33***	-.39***	.50***	.58***	.53***	.54***	.52***	.47***	—
Mean	3.02	4.92	2.84	5.64	2.37	1.82	2.01	2.69	2.34	2.42	2.09
Standard deviation	2.02	1.90	1.74	1.56	1.56	1.25	1.48	1.84	1.82	1.86	1.43

Note. \*\*\* $p < .001$ . All  $n > 326$ .

ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*;  $r = .38$ ,  $p < .001$ ).<sup>9</sup>

Opposition to adoption was measured with the same two items as those used in Study 1 ( $r = .93$ ,  $p < .001$ ), reverse coded.

Five items were used to measure opposition to same-sex marriage.<sup>10</sup> The items read: "Legislators are currently proposing a constitutional amendment that will define marriage as something that can exist only between a man and a woman. How would you vote on this constitutional amendment?" This item was measured on a scale ranging from (1) "*definitely vote against the constitutional amendment*" to (7) "*definitely vote for the constitutional amendment*." The second item read: "Imagine that for the next elections, there is a ballot measure that would legalize same-sex marriage and would allow same-sex married couples all the same benefits of heterosexual married couples. How would you vote for such a measure?" This item was measured on a scale ranging from (1) "*definitely vote against legalizing gay marriage*" to (7) "*definitely vote for legalizing gay marriage*." The third item read, "It's really just silly that same-sex marriages are illegal in this country (reversed)" and was measured on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (7) *strongly agree*. The last two items read "In general, how do you feel about same-sex 'civil unions'?" and "In general, how do you feel about same-sex

marriage?" These last two items were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from (1) *strongly oppose* to (7) *strongly support*. These five items were averaged together to create a reliable scale ( $\alpha = .94$ ) and reverse coded to reflect opposition to same-sex marriage.

## Study 2 results and discussion

The data analysis strategy in Study 2 was identical to Study 1. We ran separate multiple regression models for each measure of policy opposition, in which we included only attributions in the first set of models, and then added stereotypes of value violation along with attributions in the second set of models (See Table 3 for bivariate correlations using the Study 2 variables, and Table 4 for all regression results from Study 2).

Using only attributions to predict each individual instance of policy opposition, attributions of choice predicted increased support for job discrimination. Attributions of upbringing predicted increased opposition to adoption rights and open military service, and increased support for job discrimination. Attributions that sexual orientation is determined at birth were not predictive of policy opposition. Finally, attributions of stability predicted support for gay marriage and adoption, and decreased support for job discrimination, once again suggesting that the less stable (i.e., more changeable) people perceive sexual orientation, the more they discriminate against gays and lesbians.

We then added stereotypes of value violation into the models along with attributions. The inclusion of value violations eliminated, or reduced the effects of attributions of choice (replicating Study 1) and upbringing on policy opposition. As with Study 1, attributions of stability remained predictive of opposition to gay marriage and adoption, although its effect diminished with the inclusion of value violations.

<sup>9</sup>We included this item because we wanted to capture agreement with the idea that job discrimination against gays and lesbians may be justifiable in certain professions. This is consistent with national surveys that have asked about the justifiability of discriminating against gays and lesbians in certain professions (e.g., Gallup poll 2005). We also ran each item as a separate dependent variable, and the results were very similar using the individual items.

<sup>10</sup>Because this study was conducted immediately after the passage of Proposition 8 in California and during a time when other states were considering similar bans on same-sex marriage, we included additional items to assess attitudes toward same-sex marriage and civil unions.

**Table 4** Study 2: Regression Models Using Attributions and Values to Predict Four Public Policies

	Marriage				Adoption				Military				Job discrim.			
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>
Attributions only models																
Choice	.06	.06	.06	.36	.10	.07	.11	.16	.05	.08	.05	.58	.13	.06	.19	.03
Upbringing	.07	.05	.07	.17	.14	.06	.14	.02	.14	.07	.14	.04	.11	.05	.13	.04
Birth	-.02	.06	-.02	.81	.08	.07	.09	.23	-.10	.08	-.10	.23	.08	.06	.10	.21
Stability	-.69	.07	-.58	<.001	-.56	.08	-.48	<.001	-.10	.10	-.09	.29	-.26	.07	-.28	<.001
<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup> Model 1	.46***				.33***				.09***				.20***			
Attributions and values models																
Choice	-.01	.05	-.01	.81	.02	.05	.02	.74	-.02	.08	-.03	.75	.06	.05	.09	.26
Upbringing	.01	.04	.01	.80	.07	.05	.07	.10	.11	.06	.10	.09	.08	.05	.10	.07
Birth	-.05	.05	-.05	.28	.05	.05	.05	.40	-.14	.08	-.14	.07	.04	.05	.05	.50
Stability	-.32	.06	-.28	<.001	-.20	.07	-.17	.01	.15	.10	.13	.12	-.05	.07	-.05	.51
Family values	.44	.08	.37	<.001	.43	.08	.36	<.001	.05	.12	.04	.71	.005	.08	.01	.96
Tolerance	.10	.08	.07	.21	.12	.09	.08	.19	.36	.13	.25	.01	.48	.09	.42	<.001
Self-discipline	.24	.09	.19	.006	.29	.10	.24	.003	.22	.14	.18	.11	.10	.10	.10	.30
<i>r</i> <sup>2</sup> Model 2	.69***				.60***				.22***				.37***			
$\Delta r^2$	.23***				.27***				.13***				.18***			

Note. \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Value violations were the strongest predictors of policy opposition overall. Violations of family values predicted opposition to adoption rights and marriage. Violations of tolerance predicted job discrimination, and violations of self-discipline predicted opposition to both gay marriage and adoption.

In Study 2, we were able to further investigate the role of beliefs about the origins of sexual orientation on policy attitudes by including more attribution options: attributions of choice, upbringing, and birth. The results of Study 2 once again reinforce our predictions. Attributions lost most of their predictive potency after stereotypes of value violations were included. This was especially the case for attributions of choice and upbringing, implying that any power these attributions have in predicting policy is due to their association with beliefs that gays and lesbians violate values. Value violations remained the strongest predictors of policy opposition. As with Study 1, stability retained some unique predictive power.

Also consistent with predictions, specific value violations mapped onto related policies. Replicating Study 1, stereotypes that gays and lesbians violate traditional family values predicted opposition to gay marriage and adoption, and stereotypes that they violate tolerance predicted discrimination in the workplace. Unlike Study 1, neither attributions nor values predicted opposition to gays and lesbians serving openly in the military. This issue may not be as controversial in our student sample who likely grew up under Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policies allowing gays and lesbians to serve in the military. Overall, these patterns suggest that the belief that gays and lesbians violate values that public policies

are intended to protect predict opposition to granting gays and lesbians the rights associated with these policies.

## General discussion

The role of attributions in driving opposition to policies benefiting gays and lesbians has received considerable attention from social scientists, leading to myriad evidence suggesting a consistent relationship between attributions for sexual orientation and opposition to gay rights. In the present research, we propose that the correlation between attributions for sexual orientation and anti-gay discrimination might be driven by preexisting stereotypes or beliefs that imply attributional information. Specifically, we propose that opposition to gay rights policies has less to do with beliefs about whether one chooses to be gay, but rather by beliefs that gays and lesbians violate important social codes of conduct. We suggest that these stereotypes about gays and lesbians upholding or violating important social values are the more important determinant of discrimination than choice over sexual identity. These stereotypes may imply certain attributions regarding sexual orientation—undermining important values via same-sex behaviors may imply choice over the origins or persistence of one's sexual orientation (e.g., Brandt & Reyna, 2010; Lewis, 2009; Reyna, 2008). This association between stereotypes and attributions can create and perpetuate a robust correlation between attributions and discrimination. When these stereotypes are accounted for, the effects of attributions on discrimination, particularly attributions related to choice, should disappear.

Our hypotheses were largely supported across two studies, using two different samples. First, we replicated the relationship between attributions for sexual orientation and opposition to gay rights policies. Specifically, to the degree that one believed that sexual orientation was chosen and unstable (Studies 1 and 2), and/or was not determined at birth or rooted in upbringing (Study 2), people were more opposed to gay rights policies and more supportive of anti-gay discrimination. These patterns replicated previous research suggesting that attributing sexual orientation to forces within a person's control (Aguero, Bloch, & Byrne, 1984), or believing that sexual orientation can be changed (Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2002; Hegarty & Pratto, 2001) predicted greater intolerance toward gays and lesbians.

Once stereotypes regarding value violations were accounted for, the relationships between attributions and opposition to gay rights either disappeared entirely or were attenuated. This supports the proposition that stereotypes that a group violates values may be driving the associations between attributions and opposition to gay rights. This is consistent with previous theorizing that group-based attributions might be either vestiges of (Brandt & Reyna, 2010; Hegarty & Golden, 2008; Lewis, 2009; Reyna, 2000, 2008) or rationalizations for (Crandall & Eshelman, 2003; Jost & Banaji, 1994) preexisting stereotypes and prejudices.

When it comes to making group-based attributions for behaviors or outcomes, people often rely on stereotypes to inform causal ascriptions (Brandt & Reyna, 2010; Hamilton, 1979; Jackson, Sullivan, & Hodge, 1993; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Lewis, 2009; Reyna, 2000, 2008; Wittenbrink, Gist, & Hilton, 1997). For example, if people stereotype gays and lesbians as violating important values via their sexual behavior, they may be more likely to assume that gays and lesbians choose this lifestyle or, if sexual orientation is the product of upbringing, that they choose not to change. In support for these ideas, the attributions most attenuated by the inclusion of stereotypes were those related to choice and upbringing. The belief that sexual orientation can be changed (defined here as "instability") was also significantly related to stereotypes that gays and lesbians violate values.

These findings add an important perspective to the literature on anti-gay prejudice and discrimination. The link between attributions for sexual orientation and opposition to gay rights is well established, as is the relationship between beliefs that gays and lesbians violate values and anti-gay prejudice. What is less established is the interrelationship between these powerful predictors of gay rights policies. The present research provides a critical piece to the puzzle, showing that these are not independent determinants of anti-gay attitudes, but rather beliefs about value violation can imply information about the nature of sexual orientation, or leverage these attributions in support of these prejudices.

Attributions for sexual orientation can develop over time to fit with existing ideologies and knowledge structures to form coherent and logically consistent worldviews (Lewis, 2009). We explicitly test this possibility by showing that much of the power of attributions is rooted in beliefs about the moral decisions and behaviors of gays and lesbians.

### Stability of sexual orientation

Although the effects of stability were attenuated by the inclusion of value violations in our models, it is notable that stability was the only attribution for sexual orientation that remained significant once the value violation/discrimination link was accounted for. Stability is the one attributional dimension relevant to values that is less about the origins of sexual orientation and more about the ability to change one's sexual orientation and the behaviors associated with it (Weiner, 1985). Although much of the emphasis to date on the effects of attributions for sexual orientation has been on the controllability of sexual orientation (i.e., is sexual orientation something you are born with or choose), when one examines public discourse surrounding sexual orientation, a more important issue might be whether or not sexual orientation can change, regardless of its origins (Hegarty, 2002; Hegarty & Pratto, 2001).

If one adopts the belief that sexual orientation is mutable, he or she may be more likely to hold gays and lesbians responsible for bringing their sexual behaviors in line with the status quo. For example, people might be born gay (uncontrollable), but if they could change their sexual orientation through willpower or therapy, society may still hold them responsible for continuing to live a gay lifestyle. In the present research, we find that both stereotypes of value violation, as well as beliefs about whether one can change their sexual orientation, are the strongest predictors of opposition to gay rights policies, reinforcing the notion that blaming gays and lesbians for behaviors that go against society is more important for driving public opinion about gay rights policies than are beliefs about where their sexual orientation originated.

This finding has important implications for essentialist thinking about sexual orientation. When one perceives sexual orientation in essentialist terms (i.e., as immutable and stable), they are more supportive of gay rights (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001). Indeed, the Civil Rights Amendment of 1964 enshrines "immutable" classes of persons as deserving protection under the law. Although this has traditionally referred to race and gender, believing that sexual orientation might be immutable can have important consequences for the legal protections of gay and lesbians, and certainly predicts people's attitudes toward extending rights to gays and lesbians as shown here. However, essentialist thinking about sexual orientation can also have legal and philosophical drawbacks. If civil rights are fought between the extremes of

essentialist versus constructivist perspectives about identity, free will and choice over personal identity could be compromised (for discussion, see Halley, 1994; Sheldon, Pfeffer, Jayaratne, Feldbaum, & Petty, 2007).

### Value violations map onto policies

Another important finding from this research is the nuanced relationship between stereotypes of value violation and gay rights policies. The concerns surrounding each policy and its potential effect on society is somewhat different. Prior research has demonstrated that policy opposition is driven by the belief that policy beneficiaries violate values that specific policies are designed to protect or promote (Henry & Reyna, 2007; Wetherell et al., 2013). In the present study, the perception that gays and lesbians violate specific values predicted opposition to policies that were most germane to those values. The belief that gays and lesbians undermine traditional family values and lack self-discipline predicted opposition to gay marriage and adoption, but not discrimination in the workplace. On the other hand, believing that gays and lesbians are intolerant toward those who are not like them predicted support for discrimination in the workplace, but not marriage or adoption rights.

Support for open military service was less consistent. Those in the community associated open military service with all three values; however, students only associated opposition to military service with violations of tolerance. These inconsistencies might be generational. Students grew up in a world where gays and lesbians are known to serve in the military (although not openly) so whether or not service men and women could be open about their sexual orientation might not be associated with values for students as it was for adults in the community.

The implications of these findings are relevant for theory on value violations and prejudice. These findings suggest that value expressions of prejudice are not monolithic but rather are nuanced and particular to the context. Believing that gays and lesbians violate a particular value might only be seen as threatening in particular contexts. If one believes that gays and lesbians do not adhere to conventional family values or structures, this might be very relevant for child adoption policies, but irrelevant to decisions about whether or not to hire a gay person as an accountant. These value-based prejudices might be more bounded than previously thought (see also Biernat et al., 1996a). Similar patterns have emerged with other groups (welfare recipients; Henry & Reyna, 2007), suggesting this phenomenon extends beyond gays and lesbians. More research is needed comparing values and contexts simultaneously to fully understand when and how values map onto issues relevant to the target group in question and to the social context under consideration.

### Limitations and future directions

The present studies add to a growing body of research calling into question the effect of attributions for sexual orientation on opposition to gay rights policies. However, there are a number of questions that remain unaddressed. First, the present work focuses on stereotypes about the degree to which gays and lesbians uphold or violate values. We chose these stereotypes because prior work has shown that stereotypes pertaining to value violations might wield unique potency when it comes to predicting group-based policies. Although the relationship between beliefs that gays and lesbians violate traditional values and opposition to gay marriage has been explored in previous research (see introduction for review), no studies have examined the interrelationship between multiple values and opposition to specific policies designed to benefit gays and lesbians. Furthermore, this association has never been explored in the context of attributions and gay rights. Given the consistently strong association between attributions and policy attitudes and the association between attributions and stereotypes (such as stereotypes of value violations), attributions could have accounted for stereotypes and not the other way around.

Based on the current evidence that stereotypes of value violation account for the effects of attributions on policy opposition, further research should explore this relationship in more detail. For example, what does it mean that gays and lesbians violate traditional values? Is this stereotype rooted in something about their behaviors, values, or perceivers' attitudes about gays and lesbians in general? It would also be interesting to compare what value violation means in terms of different policies. Lacking self-discipline in the context of serving openly in the military might mean something very different than lacking self-discipline in the context of parenting. By understanding these stereotypes in more detail, we might be better able to develop interventions that chip away at these specific fears.

Another issue that has been central in research examining stereotypes and attributions is the degree to which attributions manifest from stereotypes (i.e., they are implied by stereotypes and are thus perpetuated by stereotypes), or serve to legitimize them (by repackaging stereotypes in socially acceptable terms). The present research cannot definitively uncover the causal sequence. Although some scholars suggest that the relationship between attributions and stereotypes can account for both possibilities (Lewis, 2009; Reyna, 2008), given the central role that origins of sexual orientation seems to be playing in legal and social battlegrounds over gay rights, it is important to better understand the exact relationship between these belief systems in the context of gay rights.

Finally, many of the items used in the present research were single items that were adapted from prior research on value

violations and prejudice in order to fit a gay rights context. Because some of these items were developed and/or modified for this survey in particular, they have not received rigorous construct validity testing in the context of perceptions of gays and lesbians. It would be important to replicate these findings using more established measures.

## Conclusions

The fight over policies that benefit gays and lesbians in the United States, such as marriage and adoption rights, the right to a workplace free of discrimination, and the ability to serve openly in the military, has been slow. Although tangible progress has been made with regard to gay rights, these victories are often paired with great costs or setbacks. The U.S. military's DADT policy banning gays and lesbians from serving openly in the military resulted in the discharge of 13,000 service men and women (Bender, 2009) before it was finally repealed. As of 2011, seven states now recognize same-sex marriage; however, since 2000, the number of states adopting constitutional amendments *banning* same-sex marriage has gone from 2 to 30. National surveys also reflect this ambivalence. According to Gallup polls, although many Americans support equal rights for gays and lesbians in the abstract, a majority still oppose specific policies such as those granting marriage or adoption rights (as reported in Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2008).

Social scientists from a variety of disciplines have identified attributions for the origin of sexual orientation as central to

debates about gay rights, wherein biological attributions promote more equal treatment of gays and lesbians in contrast to attributions that sexual orientation is chosen. Some scholars have even gone so far as to suggest that attributions of biology (birth) be taught in schools to promote greater tolerance toward gays and lesbians (Good, Hafner, & Peebles, 2000). The results from the present study contribute to a small, but growing body of work suggesting that attributions for sexual orientation may be a consequence of existing prejudices rather than the cause of them. When it comes to supporting gay rights policies, believing that gays and lesbians uphold versus violate cherished social values appears to be of greater consequence. This suggests a very different avenue for intervention. Rather than touting evidence of the biological nature of sexual orientation, perhaps social scientists should put just as much time, if not more, touting the discipline and bravery of our gay and lesbian service men and women, highlighting their loving and devoted partnerships, and emphasizing the nurturing care with which they raise their children. Perhaps only when people believe that gays and lesbians support and uphold the values of society will the benefits of its policies be granted.

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