

Assessing Two Dimensions of Gender Essentialism in Monolingual and Bilingual Adults

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Abstract: Psychological essentialism is the belief that members of a category share deep, underlying commonalities. Previous evidence suggests that essentialism is stronger for masculine than feminine properties and more evident in monolingual than bilingual children. Here, we investigated essentialism of gender by monolingual and bilingual adults, focusing on two distinct dimensions of essentialism: naturalness (regarding categories as natural kinds) and entitativity (regarding categories as homogeneous groups). Participants indicated their agreement with statements assessing beliefs about men and women on these two dimensions. The results replicated previous work showing that men are essentialized more than women, but revealed that this effect may be specific to the entitativity dimension. We also found that, compared to monolinguals, bilinguals were less likely to essentialize gender in terms of naturalness. Our findings converge with previous research highlighting the bidimensionality of essentialism and suggest that early effects of language experience on essentialist beliefs may persist into adulthood.