

Investigating The Relationship Between Age and Essentialist Beliefs

by

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Abstract

Children tend to reason about nurture and nature differently and rely on one or the other when describing people's differences. The Adoption Project focuses on the reasoning of children who are either donor-conceived/adopted or traditionally conceived and how they differ in essentialist reasoning. In this project, 85 children between the ages of 4-8 years were recruited through an ad posted on Facebook to participate in The Families Game study. We assessed their levels of essentialism across five different trials where they had to decide whether a child would grow up to be more similar to their birth parents or adopted parents. I hypothesized that as they become older, children would be more essentialist when deciding whether a child will grow up to be like their birth or adopted parent. However, results showed there was no significant relationship between age and children's essentialism scores. Possible explanations for this finding are discussed.

Keywords: Essentialism, Adopted/Donor conceived, Traditionally- Conceived

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As children develop, they become more aware of their surroundings and they may begin to question why certain things are the way they are and conceptualize the nature of their existence. They can either have an essentialist belief or believe that things are the way that they are because of environmental factors. Essentialism is the belief that something or someone has a nature or essence that defines them (Gelman et al., 2007). An example of this perspective is when children believe a cat is still a cat even if it has a dog costume on. This can further extend to people: certain traits may be viewed as innate or essential such as race or gender. Children can have non-essentialist perspectives and believe that people have the ability to change their characteristics. More specifically, non-essentialist beliefs may imply that the environment a person is in will have an impact on their identity. The present research investigates whether children are more likely to hold essentialist beliefs about people as they grow older.

Meeting and connecting with people is a necessary experience that humans encounter throughout the course of their lives. Humans have a tendency to create preconceptions about other people based on their demeanor or physical characteristics when they interact. Psychological essentialism, the theory that people share properties that define who they are, is frequently the foundation for these ideas. It is a common take on evaluating individual differences that can sometimes result in stereotypes and discriminatory mindsets. Research suggests that essentialist beliefs may limit our ability to identify and acknowledge distinctions within groups and can lead to stereotypes and discrimination, especially in the context of race, gender, personality, sexual orientation, and mental disorder (Haslam & Whelan, 2008). In this study, the researchers focused on the importance of knowing what essentialism is and how this knowledge influences our perspective of our world through different categories. One of the

categories they mention is personality and its connectedness to essentialism and stereotyping. With personality, there can be an essentialist belief that a person's character can't be changed or is innate, therefore these beliefs can lead to stereotyping in a negative way. Individuals who have a fixed mindset may assume that if a person is introverted or to themselves, that trait is a fixed, fundamental personality characteristic that causes someone to be less outgoing. However, introversion can fluctuate depending on context and can be modified via conscious effort. Similarly, people may make assumptions about another person's intelligence based on their personality features, claiming that particular traits are inherent in specific groups of people.

It is important to recognize that instead of assuming that people have set personalities, we should consider the diversity of human behavior and attributes. Further research has been conducted on essentialist beliefs on personality and the implications that it has (Bissett, Haslam, & Bastian, 2004). Although there have been studies implicating that these fixed mindsets about a person's demeanor can lead to negative stereotypes, essentializing personality can also hold an individual back from seeking self-improvement strategies. Two studies were carried out by the researchers. In the first study, participants were asked to rate how much they agreed with a series of personality statements. The statements were aimed to assess participants' essentialist views on personality, such as "people have a fixed personality that cannot be changed" and "people are either born with a certain personality or they are not." Participants also answered questionnaires about their belief in individuality, biological explanations for personality, and their belief in societal explanations for personality. The studies suggested that essentialist opinions on personality are associated with a belief in biological reasons for personality. These ideas may have an impact on how people perceive themselves and others, as well as how they approach personal development and change.

Researchers in developmental psychology have explored the coherence of essentialist beliefs about psychological characteristics and found that these beliefs undergo developmental changes (Gelman et al., 2007). As children develop, their essentialist beliefs about psychological characteristics may change, reflecting the cognitive development they undergo. Researchers tested college students as well as younger children and measured how essentialist they would be when presented with traits and social characteristics and whether they would remain consistent with their essentialist responses. There were four studies overall in the research between adults and young children, Characteristics in the study included anxious, intelligent, lazy, homosexual, schizophrenic, nurturing, and others. For each characteristic shown, the participants were also asked questions on nine essentialist dimensions: brain, blood, consistent over time, environmentally affected, detectable in infancy, etc. The researchers determined the essentialist responses by running an ANOVA. Research has shown that younger children are more likely than older children and adults to hold essentialist beliefs about psychological traits, according to a study the authors conducted with children and adults to look at the developmental changes in these beliefs. However, age did increase the coherence of these beliefs or the degree to which they were consistent across various psychological traits. Children were less coherent than adults and this developing pattern may be connected to the increasing experience and communication in forming ideas about psychological traits. Adults or humans develop deeper thoughts and connections to certain beliefs and that affects the way they relate certain questions to their personal lives or what they do know.

Children start to conceptualize why objects are the way they are as they develop throughout their lives. Whether that specific conceptualization is biological or environmental, a child's concepts are likely to depend on the culture they grew up in. Studies have been done

where they test the folk biological reasonings from a cross-cultural perspective (Waxman, et al., 2007). A cross-cultural developmental perspective on folk biological reasoning provides us with a unique opportunity to understand how individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds develop and utilize their innate knowledge of biological processes to make sense of the world around them. This research on folk biological reasoning demonstrates that even at a very young age, children possess beliefs about biological processes. These beliefs are influenced by cultural factors and environmental experiences that shape an individual's worldview. To further understand how cultural beliefs affect essentialist ideas about living things, the authors conducted experiments with children from rural Mayan villages in Guatemala and American children. Children from both cultures exhibited a propensity to essentialize plants and animals, but the degree of essentialism varied depending on the cultural setting, the researchers discovered. American children were more willing to consider living things as adaptable and shaped by external factors like environment and social experience, whereas Mayan children were more prone to essentialize living things and view them as having inherent traits that affect their behavior.

Living in communities where children are exposed to different ethnic groups may influence the development of essentialist beliefs. One study investigated whether intergroup exposure affects children's essentialist beliefs about ethnic categories (Deeb et Al., 2011). In recent years, there has been a lot of discussion on how children come to develop essentialist views of ethnic categories. The research included 192 participants who were in kindergarten, second grade, and sixth grade. They were required to read a narrative about a young boy who lost his dog and went in search of it in the park with his mom. While in the park, they ask for help from four different people, each of whom has a unique combination of the following traits

(gender, ethnicity, wealth/poverty, and religion). The participants were required to describe the story in their own terms after it was told in one sitting. Their responses were measured depending on how frequently the participants pointed out the characters' racial background, religious affiliation, or social status. According to the study, exposing Jewish and Arab children in Israel to other groups may lessen essentialist biases, such as their tendency to see race and cultural differences in behavior as inherited. Children who interacted with people from different ethnic groups more frequently and positively had greater variety in opinions and were less likely to categorize people solely based on their race. This result can be particularly significant because it questions the idea that intergroup differences usually result in an increase in biases between groups. In a certain sense, it suggests that children become less essentialist over time. Furthermore, it's crucial to provide intergroup exposure and opportunity in a variety of settings as this can help in getting rid of negative stereotypes and attitudes across various ethnic groups. These results also have impacts on educational programs and other initiatives that support cultural diversity and understanding.

Cultural factors also come into play when it comes to children and their essentialist beliefs. Some research has suggested that children that are born into different cultures may hold stronger essentialist beliefs than others. For example, one study found that social categories can influence a child's essentialist beliefs depending on their culture (Davoodi et al., 2019). Researchers recruited two groups of children from Turkey and the United States. The children's essentialism was measured on social categories such as gender, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status (SES), and sports teams. Both groups of children held stronger essentialist views on gender than the rest of the traits. However, the children from Turkey had a higher level of essentialism when it came to gender than the children from the US. This may have been due to

stricter gender roles in the Turkish community than in the United States. Different cultural perspectives exist on issues like gender and other social categories. The acceptance and inclusion of people from different origins have advanced greatly in the United States in recent years. The treatment of marginalized groups in American culture continues to demonstrate inequalities, despite these gains. Because of the society that they were raised in and the things they have been exposed to, children can be shaped into thinking certain things are the way they are because of either intrinsic or environmental factors.

Additional research suggests that religion can also impact essentialist beliefs. A religion's essential ideas regarding the nature of the divine or supernatural, the human condition, and the meaning of life are examples of its core beliefs. These principles offer a form of structure for comprehending the world and a person's place in it, and they are frequently reflected in a religion's books, teachings, and rituals. Children can learn a specific religion earlier in their lives, and most of these beliefs get implemented into their everyday lives since they are born. One study found that individuals from cultures with a long history of religious diversity tend to hold weaker essentialist beliefs about religion, whereas individuals from cultures with a history of religious uniformity tend to hold stronger essentialist beliefs (Leslie, Chalik, & Rhodes, 2017). The study completed by Rhodes and colleagues included children who were in either Jewish or Christian religions. Children completed a "switched-at-birth" task where a baby who was born into a family who believed in a certain religion was then raised by another family who had different beliefs. They were then asked questions about the baby and how they imagined the baby would look. The participants were then asked questions on how the child will behave with questions such as "These Christian parents believe in a book called the Gospels. When the baby is a big kid, does she believe in the Torah, like the Jewish parents, or does she believe in the

gospels, like the Christian parents?” Overall, their responses revealed the essentialist beliefs that they might hold. Children who were Jewish held stronger essentialist views. These results may suggest that religious beliefs shape the ideas of essentialism.

The way that a person is spoken to or shown a specific group of people, can possibly affect their view on essentialism (Rhodes et Al., 2012). For this study, researchers wanted to test whether generic language affects how essential an individual might be. There were three studies in total, including both children and adults. The adults were used as a developmental window to see if these results would differ with age. The study focused on whether generic language induces social essentialism. Participants were randomly assigned and presented with a storybook that demonstrated a category of people called “Zarpies.” Each of these Zarpies had a unique physical or behavioral property that was different from generally seen individuals. They were diverse with respect to race, ethnicity, and age. The researchers made sure that the Zarpies were diverse so the participants wouldn’t hold any pre-existing social categorization or bias.

There were three conditions of language used when reading or being told the story of the Zarpies: generic (“Zarpies are scared of ladybugs”), specific (“This Zarpie is scared of ladybugs”), and no-label (“This one is scared of ladybugs”). For the first study, the adults read the storybook twice and then were led to complete test questions. Children were read the storybook four times in two sessions throughout the course of three days. The results showed that adults were more essentialist in the generic condition than the specific or no-label conditions. Children were more essentialist in the generic condition as well. However, the specific and no-label conditions did not differ. Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated how generic language evokes social essentialism. The third study took this into account and tested whether this generic language is used when people have essentialist beliefs about a social category. For the third

study, researchers also experimentally induced parents to hold essentialist beliefs and use generic language when discussing with their children. Parents were presented with a paragraph that either led them to hold an essentialist or non-essentialist belief on Zarpies. Results showed that parents were more likely to use generic language when discussing the Zarpies with their children.

Gender roles and identities have become more fluid and diverse as society has progressed. However, research reveals that gender essentialism is prevalent in young people's beliefs. This remark emphasizes the importance of reassessing and challenging gender essentialism in order to allow progression toward a more inclusive and accepting society for individuals of all genders. Despite our society's growing acceptance of gender fluidity and diversity, it is clear that essentialist attitudes about gender norms and responsibilities remain among young adults. Eidson and John Coley (2014) conducted a study with young adults to determine their thought processes regarding the concept of gender essentialism. They recruited 69 undergrad students that participated in a switched-at-birth task. These tasks focused on whether the participant can contrast nature (the sex of a baby) with nurture (the gender of their caregiver). There were two types of scenarios, one type being gender-consistent and the other being gender-inconsistent. The gender-consistent scenario included a baby boy who was raised with men or a baby girl who was raised with women. The Gender-inconsistent scenario demonstrated a baby boy that was raised with women and a baby girl that was raised with men.

For each scenario, participants were presented with four types of stereotypical properties for males and females: Behavioral, Preference, Physical, and Category. An example of the properties of a male stereotype is "Plays with a toy truck" and a female is "wants to be a ballet dancer." Participants were also timed throughout the experiment with a delayed and speeded

condition. The results showed no difference between speeded and delayed participants' essentialist responses. The essentialist response would be those that were consistent with the target child's sex. However, the responses to the gender-consistent were more essentialist toward physical properties than behavioral properties. This study demonstrated how young adults hold strong essentialist views when presented with gender-consistent scenarios, meaning that they are less fluid toward gender.

Gender is a socially constructed concept that categorizes people into a group based on their roles, behaviors, and norms. Regarding society, there are different viewpoints on how a particular gender is supposed to behave or interact with others. Some cultures are more accepting than others when it comes to gender identity. Whether a child is transgender or cisgender may influence their ideas on essentialism. A study by Gulgoz et al. (2021) was designed to see if transgender children, along with their cisgender siblings and unrelated cisgender children, essentialized both sex and gender. Each child heard about four different types of children: a smart child (control), a boy (gender/sex), a mean child (control), and a boy who feels like a girl (gender identity). They were then asked five essentialism questions for each child described: Inborn, brain, blood, environment, and change. They scored the essentialist responses (those that said "yes" to the brain, blood, and born questions) as a positive 1, a "maybe" received a 0, and non-essentialist responses received a -1. Results showed that transgender children saw the gender of a boy or girl as a more fluid idea rather than concrete compared to cisgender children. More specifically, cisgender children tended to be more essentialist compared to transgender children. These responses can be influenced by the children's own thoughts on gender and how they view themselves along with the world.

Research on children's perspectives on essentialism is important for several reasons. It allows for a better understanding of children's experiences and how they make sense of the world around them. Particularly, research on the concept of essentialism in children can shed light on how they understand and categorize people and objects based on their perceived inherent qualities. This information can be useful for teachers, parents, and other caregivers to create interventions that promote positive attitudes toward diversity and reduce prejudice. Understanding children's perspectives on essentialism can help us better understand the development of social cognition and how it relates to other developmental areas, such as language acquisition and moral reasoning. There can be many positive and negative outcomes when it comes to how children perceive essentialism in others, and studying these perspectives on essentialism can give us a better insight into children's development as a whole. Furthermore, research on children's perspectives can also help to identify the unique physical, emotional, and social challenges that they face in different developmental stages.

Taking these thoughts into account, the current study focuses on children while they are still in their preoperational stages (4-8 years old). In these stages, children are just starting to develop their cognitive abilities and are beginning to make sense of the world around them. We recruited participants who were either adopted or donor-conceived or traditionally conceived. These two groups of children relate to essentialism because each child's family is different. Their upbringing could have had a lot to do with their perspectives on either biological or social factors. We recruited a total of 120 children for our study. However, only 85 completed the study successfully. We used a switched-at-birth task to investigate children's essentialism perspectives. We show the children a baby who is born with their birth parents who have certain characteristics. The baby is then switched and raised with another family that has different

characteristics. We then asked them which characteristics the baby will have, their biological parents or adoptive parents. Will children's essentialism perspectives differ based on their age? I hypothesize that as children become older in age, they will become more essentialist. This is because as children experience more of their world, they may have a different perspective of the world around them. Many of the traits presented such as hair color, are genetic and the essentialist responses given were “correct.” This reflects how children can have a better understanding of the world around them. However, some of the other traits presented are not genetic so the essentialist responses were not “correct.”

Methods

Participants

120 Children who were between the ages of 4 to 8 years old were recruited through a Facebook ad posted online. However, 35 chose not to participate, leaving 85 children in total. The average age was 6.38 ($SD = 1.33$). There were 52 females, 32 were male, and 1 identified as non-binary. Children and their guardians were compensated with a five-dollar gift card after they completed the study.

Materials and Procedure

To participate in the experiment, an electronic device was needed where it was possible to access the scheduling website and the ad posted online. PowerPoint presentations and Zoom were also used in the study. The study was part of the Adoption Project, which investigates how children learn about the social world, including how they reason about why people hold certain identities and why social inequalities exist. The Families game was designed and implemented using a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation was used to run five test trials on the children.

When the participants logged in, the experimenter introduced themselves to the participant and they mutually greeted each other.

Before the family game started, the parent/guardian filled out a consent form. Parents filled out a consent form that permitted us to experiment on their children. Along with the consent form, there was a demographics survey. The survey included questions about the guardian/child's background, ethnicity, race, gender, and financial status. The questions helped us get a better understanding of the children's life as well as their relationship with their parents. In addition to these questions, there was an essentialism questionnaire that included prompts like "The kind of person someone is can largely be attributed to their genetic inheritance." Parents would then have to put rate it on a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree. We acknowledged the essentialism measures of parents to have a better understanding or assumption on why the children might've chosen similar answers as their parents. However, we did not incorporate their essentialism scale when testing the participants.

After the parent/guardian was done completing the consent form and demographics survey, the game was introduced to the child so that they knew what they were going to be playing/participating in. The child then responded with either enthusiasm or disinterest. If the child was not interested, we did not proceed with the game. When the child was not interested, there were times when they would keep interrupting or change the subject to something off-topic. Some children were honest at the beginning and refused to participate simply because they didn't want to.

In each trial of the study, the child was shown a baby who was born to one couple, and the trait of that couple was also shown. Then they were told that baby went to live with another couple instead, and the trait of the other couple was shown to them as well. After the trait of each

couple was shown, the child was asked whether the baby was going to have the trait of their biological parents or their adopted parents (the couple that they went to live with). For example, on one trial, the child was told that Mr. and Mrs. Brown had a baby girl/boy. They were then asked: "If the parents, Mr. and Mrs. Brown, have dark hair (see Figure 1), and their baby went to live with Mr. and Mrs. White, who have light hair (see Figure 2), do you think that the baby will grow up to have dark or light hair?" In total, there were five traits, one on each trial. One trait was biologically produced (hair color), and the other traits were environmentally produced (spoken language, personality, grades in school, and interests).

Based on the responses of children, we can infer or identify if the child had essentialist or non-essentialist beliefs. If the child said the baby would have the same trait as their birth family (Mr. and Mrs. Brown), the response was coded as "essentialist." If the child said the baby would have the same trait as their adopted family (Mr. and Mrs. White), the response was coded as "non-essentialist."

We also asked the child to provide a confidence rating on each trial to indicate how sure they were about their responses. They were asked if they were "sure," "pretty sure," or "very sure" about their answer. Some children mentioned that they weren't sure or didn't know and we recorded that response as well. We matched the style of the presentation to the gender of the child being tested. If the child being tested was a male, the baby that was being presented in the PowerPoint would also be a male. The same thing went for female participants. For the non-binary participant, the presentation was randomly selected and we tried to not use she/him pronouns when describing the baby. After the game was completed, we asked if there were any questions from either the child or the parent/guardian and then sent them the 5-dollar E-gift card via email.

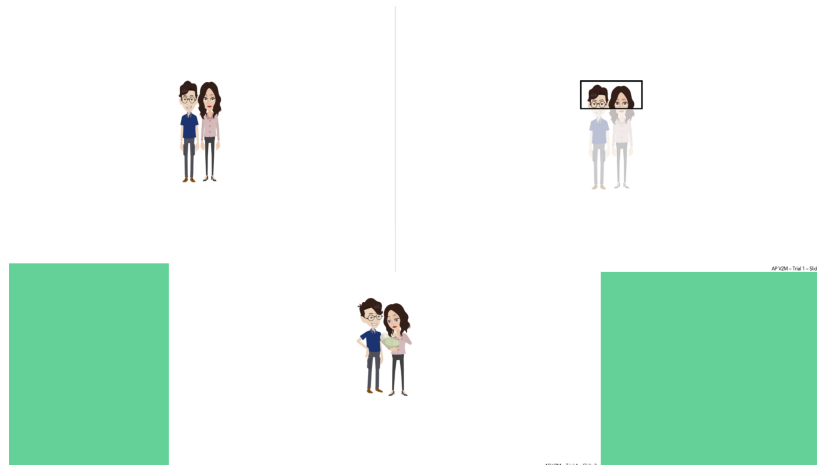


Figure 1: Example of one trial trait (hair color of the biological parents)

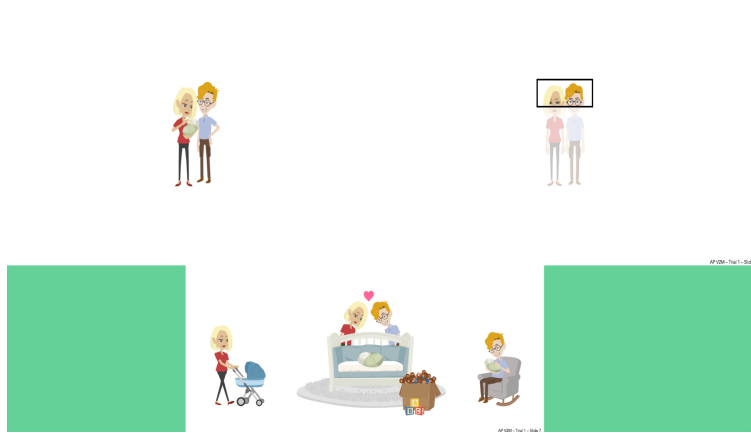


Figure 2: Example from a trial demonstrating the hair color of the adopted parents

Results

A Pearson correlation was computed to determine whether children's essentialism scores increase depending on children's age. Essentialism scores were determined by summing up the total number of trials where the child provided the essentialist response in the study (i.e., indicating the child would have the same trait as their birth parents, not their adopted parents).

The analysis revealed no significant relationship between children's essentialism scores and their age, $r(83) = -0.166, p = 0.130$.

We repeated this analysis after coding children's data based on their confidence ratings. The children were given a scale from 1 to 3 on how confident they were in their essentialist or non-essentialist answers. If a child gave an essentialist response, saying the child would resemble their birth parents if they were "sure" they were given a 1. If they were "pretty sure," they were given a 2, and if they were "very sure" they were given a 3. However, if the child gave a non-essentialist response and they were "very sure" of their response, they were given a -3, if they were "pretty sure" they were given a -2, and if they were "sure" they were given a -1. If they indicated they weren't sure or did not know, they were given a 0. We then averaged the coded responses across the five trials to calculate their "confidence-weighted essentialism" score." There was no significant correlation between the child's age and their confidence-weighted essentialism score, $r(83) = -0.083, p = 0.448$

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether essentialism scores change as children become older in age. Essentialist beliefs include the view that certain traits are innate and cannot be changed, that a person has inherent qualities that make them unique and important and that these qualities are useful for them to succeed in life regardless of their own efforts or the environment that they have grown up in.

I hypothesized that as children become older in age they would become more essentialist, at least with certain traits. This is because children are social sponges, and they grasp a lot of information as they develop. Children's understanding of nurture vs. nature can vary depending on their lived experiences and age. They start to get a deeper sense of self and start to compare

and identify differences between themselves and those around them. Parents can also have beliefs that can be passed down to their children and can affect their perspectives on nurture or nature. As they learn to reason about the world, they develop new ideas on certain topics, and that can influence how they answer or respond to certain questions about how a child is raised or born, based on their own lived experiences and development. Furthermore, a lot of traits are genetic, like hair color, for example, children would start to notice as they age that people will have similar hair color or traits that tend to look like their parents.

85 children between the ages of 4 and 8 participated in the experiment. In this experiment, we showed the participants a total of five trials and different traits within those trials, such as personality, spoken language, interests, grades in school, and hair color. Children had the option to choose whether or not they believed that the child would grow up to have similarities to their birth or adopted parents. Based on their answers, we determined whether they had essentialist beliefs or not. If the participant matched the child's trait to their birth parent instead of their adopted parent, their answer was marked down as an essentialist response. I hypothesized that as children became older they would become more essentialist; they would have more of the "nature" belief and think that the child will have more of their birth parent traits.

Overall, there was no significant correlation between a child's age and their essentialism scores. This was true even when we took into account participants' confidence ratings for their responses. There may be many reasons for children not becoming more essentialist as they age. As previously stated, the culture that they grew up in can create a lot of preconceived opinions about objects and people. Living in a world where you have a fixed mindset or an essential perspective, people might get encouraged to not be mindful of the way they treat others and

themselves. This simply will be because they have the belief that things are just the way they are and they cannot be changed. This is especially important for children because they are the “future.” More specifically, the way we teach children to view the world is how they would teach others and also act on their thoughts when interacting in society. Children can be taught to be less essentialist when they are exposed to diverse and different groups of people. These interactions do not have to be in person, they can be through the media and what they read such as books, television shows, and movies. Depending on the media and these interactions, they can be introduced to content that challenges stereotypes and can bring up questions about certain societal norms. An example of this can be if a child reads a book about a female firefighter or a male hairdresser, it breaks traditional gender roles and makes the child think about gender differently.

When children are challenged and form questions about the world around them, they start to conceptualize things differently or develop a more nuanced understanding of why things are the way that they are. There are a few limitations within the study that could have affected our results and explain why essentialism didn't change with age. The first limitation could be that the study was very small and may not have had enough power to find a significant relationship. The second limitation could be that the study did not take into account factors such as race, gender, social class, or family structure. These variables could potentially have a significant impact on an individual's development and socialization as well as how they rationalize nurture vs nature beliefs. A participant's family structure might have impacted their essentialist responses if there are absent parents. If there is an absence of guidance and nurture within their family, then it influences the child's perception of the way people are raised. For instance, they can believe that the way a child is raised and nurtured throughout their life does not have much of an impact on

their characteristics or traits. The same goes for a child's race, gender, and social class. These are social categories that shape and structure the experiences of people in society. Their perspectives on social class might differ and influence their essentialist beliefs. For example, a child might be told to believe that all rich people are clean and organized and that poor people are lazy and unmotivated. Their inherent views on these different lifestyles can lead them to believe more in the nature of a person instead of their nurture.

Another limitation was children would sometimes become easily distracted, making it difficult to assess their responses to the questionnaires. Since the study was conducted on a Zoom call, there would sometimes be disconnection of the internet or technical difficulties. When these things would happen, most times the parent would have to reschedule or not participate in the study at all. Furthermore, it raises the question of whether the results would change if teenagers or children who were adopted/donor-conceived were given the opportunity to meet their biological parents. Would scores change knowing that they are aware of the differences in traits seen in them and both of their parents? If a study was conducted where the closeness or bonding between the child and the parent was measured, would the results change? The connection between child and parent is important for the well-being of the child and as I mentioned before, parents being either present or absent can affect the child's view of nurture/nature.

Despite the fact that other studies have demonstrated that essentialist views on things like gender, race, and attributes that people are born with or inherit may change with time. Age and essentialism did not appear to be correlated in the present research. This conclusion emphasizes the need for additional research to investigate relevant factors, such as culture, education, and personal experiences, that may lead to variations in essentialist beliefs across various social

categories. It also underlines how crucial it is to comprehend essentialist views and how they affect different types of prejudice because they can lead to negative stereotyping and discrimination. The wide range of essentialist ideas and their impact on societal beliefs and actions deserves further investigation by researchers.

Children's opinions may evolve alongside them or remain fixed as they age and develop. In order to encourage inclusive and equal views towards all people regardless of what position they hold in a community, it is important to identify and address possible factors that may lead to the development of essentialist beliefs early in life. The potential impact of language use on children's development of essentialist opinions should be acknowledged by parents and other caregivers. Since children absorb information like sponges and learn the majority of it from their guardians, it is important to watch the language spoken around them and make sure it supports inclusivity and equality.

Furthermore, there has been research investigating how whether a child is adopted or not can influence their essentialist perspectives. Being adopted can cause many emotions for either the person/people who are adopting or the person that is getting adopted themselves. Adopting a child introduces them to a different world from a world that they might have been accustomed to. There can be negative and positive effects that come with the adoption process. Children may struggle with self-identity, relationships, and bondedness. This can be because they hold a strong emotional attachment to their biological family or traumatic experiences that would have affected how willing they are to trust others. On the other hand, there can be a positive effect, like providing children with a safe environment. This allows them to have more opportunities, positive influences, and build healthy relationships.

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