

Ameliorative projects, psychological essentialism, and the power of nouns

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Ameliorative projects design and propagate new linguistic content for some expressions we use for political or social justice purposes. These projects are often driven by an anti-essentialist agenda: they aim to debunk the idea that social categories such as “woman”, “man”, or “race” are constituted by natural essences. But critics argue that nouns tend to trigger essentialist thinking. And because ameliorative projects typically retain nouns, it is argued that these projects cannot achieve their anti-essentialist goals. In response, I argue that the psychological effects of noun use tend to support, rather than hinder, the anti-essentialist goals of ameliorators.

KEYWORDS

ameliorative projects, anti-essentialism, conceptual engineering, kinds, nouns, psychological essentialism

1 | INTRODUCTION

Conceptual engineers seek to critically assess and, where necessary, advocate improvements in our linguistic and mental resources.¹ While conceptual engineering has arguably always been part of philosophical and scientific theorizing, there is a relatively recent trend to apply conceptual engineering in the social domain. Rather than descriptively analyzing concepts or empirically investigating the kinds that these concepts are tracking, such “ameliorative

¹See Isaac et al. (2022) or Koch et al. (2023) for recent overviews.

projects” consider whether the concepts we use are “effective tools to accomplish our (legitimate) [political or social; SK] purposes”, and if not, try to identify “what concepts would serve these purposes better” (Haslanger, 2000, p. 33). Ameliorative projects have been proposed for our concepts of *gender* and *race* (Haslanger, 2000), *misogyny* (Manne, 2017), *sexual orientation* (Dembroff, 2016), and *pornography* (Kania, 2012), among others. Many ameliorative projects have an anti-essentialist agenda. They aim to counter essentialist thinking by proposing concepts that make explicit that the category in question is a social construction.

Conceptual engineering in general, and ameliorative projects in particular, are popular, but they also face challenges. Here I will address a challenge rooted in empirical investigations of the linguistic side of psychological essentialism. Psychological essentialism is the view that people represent certain categories as having an underlying essence that unifies category members and is causally responsible for their typical characteristics and behaviors (e.g., Neufeld, 2022). Existing studies show that we tend to essentialize natural kinds such as *water*, *elm tree*, or *gold*, but also many social kinds such as *man*, *woman* or *Black* (to varying degrees). Psycholinguistic data also suggest that some linguistic vehicles are particularly prone to elicit essentialist thinking. This has long been argued for generic constructions such as “mosquitoes carry the West Nile virus” (e.g., Leslie, 2017); more recently, philosophers have argued that it holds for nouns in general (Neufeld, 2019; Ritchie, 2021a, 2021b). On this view, there is an “essentializing power” (Neufeld, 2020, p. 712) to nouns—when a noun is used, we “infer that there is more to being an F than just being F” (Ritchie, 2021a, p. 475).

The challenge from psychological essentialism is as follows. Anti-essentialist ameliorative projects often target the meaning (or conventionalized usage, or associated concept)² of nouns used to refer to essentialized social groups, such as “man”, “woman”, or “Black”. But since the use of nouns is poised to trigger essentializing inferences of the very sort the ameliorator seeks to discard, the continued use of nouns stands in the way of achieving their anti-essentialist aims. As Ritchie succinctly puts it: “Even if ... the antiessentialist ameliorative project is successful, we will continue to essentialize” (Ritchie, 2021a, p. 480). If valid, this challenge would put a big question mark over the currently popular methodology of ameliorative projects and conceptual engineering in general.

This paper develops a response to the challenge from psychological essentialism on behalf of the ameliorator. First, I take up and flesh out an important yet often overlooked distinction between two related but (somewhat) independent assumptions: the kind assumption and the essence assumption. Second, I use recent psychological data to argue, contra authors like Ritchie and Neufeld, that whether or not nominal constructions (inside and outside of generics) trigger the essence assumption is a matter of semantics rather than syntax: when the ascribed property is biological, a statement supports essentializing the category in question; when it is instead cultural, it does not. Finally, I argue that ameliorative projects with an anti-essentialist bent typically seek to debunk the essence assumption but are consistent with—or even sympathetic to—the kind assumption. As a result, there is no conflict between advocating anti-essentialist ameliorative projects on the one hand and maintaining the use of nouns on the other. Quite the contrary: At least in many cases, the psychological effects of noun use play into the hands of anti-essentialist ameliorators.

²Whether ameliorative projects target meanings, conventionalized usages or concepts will not matter for the argument to follow. I will phrase my points in terms of meanings. See the papers cited in fn. 1 for recent discussions.

2 | ANTI-ESSENTIALIST AMELIORATIVE PROJECTS AND THE CHALLENGE FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL ESSENTIALISM

Ameliorative projects are conceptual engineering projects that involve (a) designing new conceptual or linguistic content, (b) advocating for the use of these contents in relevant domains, and (c) doing (a) and (b) for the purpose of achieving political or social justice aims.³ So understood, ameliorative projects form a subclass of conceptual engineering more generally. They contrast with eliminativist projects (e.g., Appiah, 1996 on *race*, or Machery, 2009 on *concepts*), on the one hand, and with the design of new conceptual or linguistic content for aims that are neither political nor social justice related (e.g., Scharp, 2013 on *truth*, or Nado, 2021 on *knowledge*), on the other. Anti-essentialist ameliorative projects are a kind of ameliorative projects, in which the political or social justice aims mentioned in (c) requires combating the idea that the category in question is unified by an intrinsic essence.

A paradigm example of an anti-essentialist ameliorative project is Sally Haslanger's classic work on *race* and *gender* (Haslanger, 2000, 2012). With respect to *gender*, Haslanger follows three guiding principles: (i) Gender categories are defined in terms of social positioning; (ii) they are defined hierarchically within a broader context of oppressive relations; (iii) sexual difference functions as the physical marker to distinguish men from women (Haslanger, 2000, p. 39). On the resulting account, belonging to a certain gender is not a matter of actually possessing certain bodily features; nor is it a result of having a certain gender identity. Rather, it is to occupy a node (of oppression or privilege) within a social hierarchy in virtue of one's imagined bodily features. In designing and advocating for such gender concepts, Haslanger aims to undermine the idea that there are intrinsic essential features that determine membership to a certain gender.

To understand the alleged problem with anti-essentialist ameliorative projects, we first need to address psychological essentialism. Psychological essentialism is standardly characterized as the view that humans represent some categories as kinds with unobservable underlying essences that determine kind membership and that are causally responsible for their typical attributes and behaviors (Gelman, 2004; Neufeld, 2022). Categories that are represented in this way are characterized by their *cohesiveness*, *inductive potential*, *informativeness*, *relatively stable membership*, and their role in certain forms of *explanation* (Gelman, 2003; Markman, 1989; Prasada et al., 2012). This being said, research in cognitive science suggests that psychological essentialism is a rather complex and heterogeneous phenomenon. Not all categories are “essentialized” the same way or to the same degree, and the exact contours of psychological essentialism vary, among other factors, between ages, cultures and educational levels (Olivola & Machery, 2014) (more on this below).

Next, we need to consider the connection between psychological essentialism and the use of nouns. Many philosophers and cognitive scientists argue that nouns have an “essentializing power” (Neufeld, 2020, p. 712). This power has been described in different ways. Gelman (2004) makes the comparative claim that “[c]ount nouns imply that a category is relatively more stable and consistent over time and contexts than adjectives or verbal phrases” (p. 407). Ritchie (2021a) sees a direct connection between noun usage and psychological essentialism, when she writes that “the use of nouns encourages representational essentialist thinking” (p. 475). And Neufeld (2019) argues that properties that are described via nouns are communicated to be “vital to the person's identity and [allow] for a variety of inductions” (p. 22). I will critically

³I take this understanding to be in line with Ritchie (2021a, pp. 462–463).

assess these claims in the next section. Now let us examine (some of) the evidence in favor of this connection between noun usage and psychological essentialism.

The distinctive effect of noun usage is most vivid if we compare sentence constructions using predicate nominals with similar constructions using predicate adjectives. For example, Markman and Smith ran studies in which they showed participants pairs like the following:

- (1) John is liberal.
- (2) John is a liberal.

The experimenters then asked which of these statements was a stronger or more powerful statement about the person and what they thought accounted for this difference. Statements using predicate nominals such as (2) were chosen far more often than statements involving predicate adjectives. Participants reported that the adjective seemed to pick out just “one trait of the individual”, whereas the noun “implies [that the trait is] a major part of his life” (Markman, 1989, p. 123).

Gelman and Heyman (1999, pp. 489–493) obtained similar results using novel predicate nominals. They found that children took a trait to be more persistent and resilient when expressed through a nominal, as in (4) below:

- (3) Rose eats carrots whenever she can.
- (4) Rose is a carrot-eater.⁴

Ritchie argues that this point is strengthened by linguistic data. For example, when asked “Is Linnea a blonde?”, one can answer “Well, she is blonde, but I wouldn’t say she is *a* blonde”, thus implying that there is more to being a blonde than being blonde. Similarly, people typically judge that sentences involving predicating an adjective of a subject while, in the same breath, denying that the nominal holds of them are felicitous, as in “George is conservative, but not *a* conservative” (Ritchie, 2021a, p. 474). All of this is to show that predicate nominals, and nouns in general, communicate more than that the individual in question has a certain property. They also encourage “essentializing inferences” of the following general form: “Fs share further traits that are explanatory and stable” (p. 475).

We can now formulate the challenge from psychological essentialism. Reconsider Haslanger’s ameliorative project concerning gender. Haslanger proposes that gender be viewed as a matter of hierarchical social positioning. Part of her goal is to undermine the idea that belonging to a certain gender is anything like a natural kind, or even a matter of biological essence. Now, according to the challenge from psychological essentialism, Haslanger’s agenda is undermined by her continued usage of nouns like “woman” and “man”. If we continue to use these nouns to classify people, the very anti-essentialist agenda that Haslanger pursues is countervailed by the essentializing inferences that these nouns support. Ritchie: “Even if ... the antiessentialist ameliorative project is successful”, we will “fall back into essentialism’s clutches” (Ritchie, 2021a, p. 480). Needless to say, this challenge generalizes to other anti-essentialist ameliorative projects.⁵

⁴Ritchie (2021b) replicated Gelman and Heyman’s results using entirely new and invented expressions such as “dax”.

⁵Ritchie (2021a, pp. 483–486) considers several ways how anti-essentialist ameliorators might try to mitigate the problem of re-essentialization. Since I will argue that the problem that Ritchie tries to mitigate does not exist to begin with, I will not consider them here.

3 | ESSENCES, KINDS, AND NOUNS

Ritchie (2021a) concludes that “[n]ouns and their conceptual correlates are poised to elicit essentializing inferences in ways that affect whether an ameliorative project can meet anti-essentialist aims” (p. 488). I use this section and the next to argue against this conclusion. In this section, I take up an important but underappreciated distinction between a kind assumption and an essence assumption to argue that while the evidence reviewed above supports the idea that noun usage triggers the former, it does not support the idea that it triggers the latter. I will then discuss additional recent evidence suggesting that nouns do *not* actually trigger the essence assumption. In the next section, I argue that anti-essentialist ameliorative projects may typically embrace the kind assumption.

Gelman (2004) introduces a distinction that is often overlooked in the literature on psychological essentialism, but that will be crucial for the argument to follow. She writes:

[P]sychological essentialism appears to have two related although separable assumptions: (a) a kind assumption, that people treat certain categories as richly structured ‘kinds’ with clusters of correlated properties; and (b) an essence assumption, that people believe a category has an underlying property (essence) that cannot be observed directly but that causes the observable qualities that category members share (p. 408).

Existing studies with children and adults suggest that if something is viewed as a kind, then it is seen as being cohesive, as having inductive potential, as having relatively stable membership, as being informative, and as figuring in certain forms of explanation (Gelman, 2003; Markman, 1989; Prasada et al., 2012). By contrast, the essence component of psychological essentialism comprises a place-holder structure (Medin & Ortony, 1989): We often believe that something has an underlying essence without knowing what this essence consists in, and we sometimes update our beliefs about what the essence is.

The relation between the kind component and the essence component remains a point of discussion in the literature (e.g., Haslam et al., 2000, 2004; Noyes & Dunham, 2019; Yzerbyt et al., 2001). Some philosophers and cognitive scientists have argued that the kind component is not always (or even necessarily) accompanied by the essence component: “In some cases, people may think that a kind has a deeper essence, but in other cases, they see a category as constituting a kind without believing in any corresponding essence” (Ritchie & Knobe, 2020, p. 140; see also Ritchie, 2021a, p. 466). This is intuitively correct. Just because a category constitutes a kind, this does not automatically mean that all its instances share an underlying essence (Stevens, 2000). The essence assumption, on the other hand, seems to imply the kind assumption. If all category members share an essential property that is causally responsible for (many of) its observable properties, then the category in question will *ipso facto* constitute a kind with clusters of correlated properties. To ease the discussion, let us say that a category is *k-essentialized* iff it is perceived as a kind, and it is *e-essentialized* iff it is perceived as having an underlying essence.

Distinguishing between *k-essentializing* and *e-essentializing* raises the question of which of them is triggered by the use of nominal constructions such as “John is a liberal” or “Rose is a carrot-eater”. There is good evidence of a connection between noun usage and *k-essentializing*. As psychologist Susan Gelman says, “count nouns imply that a category is relatively more stable and consistent over time and contexts than adjectives or verbal phrases” (Gelman, 2004, p. 407).

The studies reported by Ritchie reveal that when someone says, “Rose is a carrot-eater” rather than “Rose eats carrots whenever she can”, carrot-eating is seen as more persistent and resilient. Self-reports of participants confronted with the pair “John is a liberal” versus “John is liberal” also suggest that the nominal construction causes people to give more weight to the trait in question. Contrast and cancellation data further support the idea that nominal constructions k-essentialize in a way that their adjectival counterparts do not.

But is there also a connection between noun use and e-essentializing? The findings described above do not show it.⁶ However, very recent research has sought to disentangle the effects of noun usage (and especially generic statements) on k-essentializing and e-essentializing. This research suggests that while noun usage has a significant effect on k-essentializing (and on people’s propensity to generalize a given trait), it has no significant effect on e-essentializing (Noyes & Keil, 2019; Hoicka et al., 2021; see Neufeld et al., *forthcoming* for a review). Instead, whether or not a given statement affects e-essentializing is a matter of content rather than linguistic form: Generic statements lead to e-essentializing only when they carry biological content (Noyes & Keil, 2019). Let me briefly summarize two recent findings in this area.

In a study reported in Noyes and Keil (2019), participants were presented with generic statements containing invented categories such as “Vawns” or “Zorpies”. The experimenters manipulated whether the generic statement attributed a biological property or instead a cultural one (e.g., “Vawns have freckles on their feet” vs. “Vawns believe the sun is their god”). Participants were then asked to rate their agreement with statements used as proxies for k-essentializing and e-essentializing respectively. The kind-measure included the statements:

- (1) Underneath superficial similarities and differences, all Vawns are basically the same.
- (2) Individual Vawns have very little in common. (Reverse-coded)
- (3) If someone tells you a fact about an individual Vawn, that fact is very likely true of other Vawns as well.
- (4) For some properties that Vawns have, it makes sense to say: “This person has that property because it is a Vawn”.

Their essence-measure included the statements:

- (1) Vawns have internal or microscopic properties that cause their characteristic appearance and behavior.
- (2) The category Vawn was invented by people. (Reverse-coded)
- (3) The boundary between the category Vawn and non-Vawn is something decided by people. (Reverse-coded)
- (4) A Vawn can never change into a non-Vawn.

Consistent with previous research, it was found that “generics (vs. specifics) greatly increased the kind assumption when either biological ... or cultural properties ... were used” (Noyes & Keil, 2019, p. 20356). However, “generics nonsignificantly *reduced* the essence assumption

⁶Interestingly, there are some passages suggesting that Ritchie (2021a) agrees, for example, when she writes that “[t]he general form of essentializing inferences allows for significant variability. It does not require that ... one posit a biological essence. Rather, it requires that nouns are used for categories that are represented as kinds with shared, stable, and explanatory features” (p. 476). However, this important qualification is then lost when she concludes that “ameliorative projects that involve nouns fall back into essentialism’s clutches” (p. 480).

when cultural properties were used ... but greatly *increased* the essence assumption when biological properties were used” (Noyes & Keil, 2019). On the basis of these and further studies, the authors conclude that “[t]alking about social categories with generics, and even talking about social categories explicitly as kinds, does not induce essentialism at default” (p. 20358).

Similar results were obtained by Hoicka et al. (2021). They investigated whether generics trigger essentializing (rather than generalizing) more than other high-prevalence quantified sentences (such as “many” or “most”). To test this, they presented both children and adults with small children’s books about Zarpies, featuring pictures of Zarpies and text about them. Different groups saw different version of this book – one in which generics were used to describe Zarpies, others in which sentences containing either “most”, “many”, “some”, or “this” were used. Participants were then asked questions about *heritance* (e.g., whether a Zarpie child who was adopted by a non-Zarpie mother would behave in the same way as the Zarpie mother or the adoptive mother), *novel property induction* (e.g., whether a new Zarpie who has a novel property is used as an inductive basis for whether yet other Zarpies have the same property), and about *explanation* (why a Zarpie did something). They were also asked additional control questions aimed at generalizing from familiar properties rather than essentializing. Responses were coded for whether they count as essentializing or generalizing.

The results indicate that while both generics and other high-prevalence quantified sentences lead people to generalize, neither generics nor other quantified sentences lead them to e-essentialize. When participants (both children and adults) heard statements about novel social categories, such as “Zarpies love to eat flowers” and “Most Zarpies love to eat flowers”, they inferred that a new Zarpie would also love to eat flowers. However, hearing either of these statements did not lead participants to believe that, for example, a Zarpie child raised in a different environment would be more likely to enjoy eating flowers. Again, these results show that neither nouns, nor even nouns that occur in generic or high-prevalence quantified sentences by themselves lead to e-essentializing.

Neufeld et al. (forthcoming) note that when it comes to debates about the components of psychological essentialism, much depends on how these components are operationalized in empirical work. Since there is no universally agreed upon way to do this, philosophical implications drawn from empirical data in this area must be particularly cautious. In light of this, one might wonder whether the measures used in Noyes and Keil (2019) and Hoicka et al. (2021) really track what I have described in this paper as k-essentializing and e-essentializing respectively.

In my view, Noyes and Keil’s (2019) kind and essence measures correspond fairly well (though perhaps not perfectly) to what I have labeled k- and e-essentializing. The kind measure tracks features such as commonality, inductive potential, and explanatory power; the essence measure tracks whether Vawns share (immutable and human-independent) internal physical properties that make them Vawns and causally explain their appearance and behavior. Hoicka et al.’s (2021) operationalization of essentializing appears to mix elements of k-essentializing and e-essentializing. For example, *novel property induction* belongs to k-essentializing, whereas *heritance* belongs to e-essentializing. But for present purposes, this conflation is unproblematic. My purpose is to argue that noun use does *not* trigger e-essentialization, not to establish that it *does* trigger k-essentialization. Nevertheless, I agree with Neufeld and colleagues that operationalizations are crucial in this area, and that more studies are needed before definitive conclusions can be drawn.

What does all of this teach us about the connection between noun use and e-essentializing? Judging from the current state of research, it appears that nouns do not possess an

“essentializing power”: There is no established connection between noun usage and e-essentializing. Of course, this does not mean that people do not e-essentialize certain categories. Most people probably assume that there is a biological essence to being a squirrel, an elm tree, or a chimpanzee. People also often e-essentialize human categories, such as being White or Black or male. But the available evidence suggests that neither in these cases nor in others is people’s tendency to e-essentialize categories due to noun usage. We use nouns to refer to all sorts of things, including squirrels and elm trees, but also police officers, basketball players, point guards, or presidents. But we e-essentialize only a fraction of these categories. Mere word forms (such as nouns) or grammatical constructions (such as generics) do not e-essentialize. What is needed in addition are essentialist background beliefs on the part of the receiver, or that the message conveyed has biological content.⁷

4 | KINDS AND ANTI-ESSENTIALIST AMELIORATIVE PROJECTS

This leaves us with the question of whether the tendency of nouns to trigger the kind assumption (to k-essentialize) is already in tension with the pursuit of an anti-essentialist agenda. As I will argue in this section, there are good reasons to think that k-essentializing is largely unproblematic, even for anti-essentialist ameliorators. In many cases, the opposite is true: Ameliorators *want* to communicate that the category in question constitutes a kind rather than a mere collection of things (there are exceptions to this; see below).

To warm up to this idea, let us begin with a famous project in conceptual re-engineering that does *not* have an anti-essentialist agenda. In the context of defending the extended-mind-hypothesis, Clark and Chalmers propose to revise the meaning and use of “belief” to include information stored on external devices, as long as it is easily and reliably accessible. They motivate this project as follows: “By using the ‘belief’ notion in a wider way, it picks out something more akin to a natural kind. The notion becomes deeper and more unified, and is more useful in explanation” (Clark & Chalmers, 1998, p. 14). The research reviewed above suggests that nouns like “belief” k-essentialize, that is, that they give the impression that the category in question is a kind whose members share stable and explanatory features. Does this stand in the way of Clark and Chalmers’ conceptual engineering project? Arguably the opposite: Since Clark and Chalmers *actually believe* that the extended mind sense of “belief” picks out an explanatory (natural) kind, they will welcome it if their choice of terminology supports this assumption in their target audience.⁸

This point generalizes to many other exercises in conceptual re-engineering. Philosophers who engage in this activity typically aim to steer our conceptual and linguistic resources in the

⁷Note that some of the categories targeted by anti-essentialist ameliorators correlate with biological properties. For example, even those who deny the existence of racial or gender-specific essences might still accept that race and gender correlate with biological properties that render true generics (or at least some quantified sentences signaling high proportions) such as “Blacks have darker skin color than Whites” or “Men are often taller than women”. In light of the findings presented above, the prevalence of such statements in ordinary discourse might provide an obstacle to anti-essentialist ameliorative projects concerning race or gender. Note, however, that to the extent that this happens it is not a problem of noun usage, but a problem of mistaking correlation for causation. Rather than refraining from using nouns, this problem is more effectively addressed by insisting on the difference between correlation and causation and by stressing that race and gender are not biological categories after all.

⁸See Koch (2024) for a full defense of this view.

direction of proper kinds that allow for useful generalizations and explanations. This aspect plays a major role in so-called Carnapian explications, where a concept's "fruitfulness"—its aptitude for formulating general laws—is the main criterion of success (Carnap, 1950). Similar considerations can be found in more recent works on conceptual engineering. Sarah Sawyer, for instance, claims that "[i]f the revisionary analysis is correct and accepted, the effect is to bring the extension of the linguistic meaning of a term in line with the extension of the concept it expresses (i.e., in line with the relevant subject matter)" (Sawyer, 2020, p. 391).

Ameliorative projects, even those guided by an anti-essentialist agenda, are no different in this regard. For example, revisionary political constructionists about race argue that race should be understood in terms of hierarchically structured social positions. Their main argument for this claim is that, by understanding "race" along these lines, "race" designates something that has explanatory value (Ludwig, 2020, p. 494). Haslanger, herself a proponent of political constructionism about race, endorses this very understanding of anti-essentialist ameliorative projects. In her view, "[t]he point [of an ameliorative project], roughly, is to shift our understanding of a category so we recognize the real basis for the unity of its members" (Haslanger, 2006, p. 90); or, as she puts it elsewhere, "[w]e expose what kind we are simultaneously tracking and creating" (Haslanger, 2020, p. 242). In the case of anti-essentialist ameliorative projects, we shift our understanding of a category so we recognize that the basis for the unity of its members is social rather than natural. In Haslanger's words, we "aim to 'debunk' the ordinary assumption that the categories are natural, by revealing the more accurate social basis of the classification" (Haslanger, 2006, p. 89).

Even though anti-essentialist ameliorative projects seek to undermine the idea that the category in question is unified by a (biological) essence, nevertheless they aim to define it with a close eye on its explanatory power and on what is "the real" or "more accurate" basis for the unity of its members. If this is true, then even anti-essentialist ameliorators typically think of the categories they define as kinds with shared stable and explanatory properties. To be sure, there are exceptions to this. For example, in the debate about the metaphysics of gender, some philosophers hold a "gender identity first" view, according to which gender should be viewed as being determined by gender identity.⁹ Depending on how one thinks of gender identity, this view might imply that belonging to a certain gender does not come with any relatively stable and explanatory properties, but is instead rather fluid, unstable and contextual. But in most other cases, including Haslanger's influential work on race and gender, anti-essentialist ameliorative projects are fully compatible with the kind assumption. In such cases, these projects seek to undermine e-essentializing but may embrace k-essentializing.

5 | CONCLUSION

To derive a response to the challenge from psychological essentialism, all we have to do is put the results from the two previous sections together. As I have argued in Section 3, the available evidence suggest that the continued use of nouns might contribute to k-essentializing, but not to e-essentializing; and as I have argued in Section 4, anti-essentialist ameliorators aim to combat e-essentializing, but they may typically embrace k-essentializing. (There are exceptions to this, hence "typically.") So, while it is true that anti-essentialist ameliorators aim to combat essentializing, and it might also be true that continued noun use perpetuates what Ritchie calls

⁹For a recent overview, see Rach Cosker-Rowland (2023).

“essentializing inferences,” these two senses of “essentializing” do not match up. Therefore, contrary to the challenge from psychological essentialism, there is not typically a tension between continued noun usage and pursuing anti-essentialist ameliorative projects. Quite the contrary: In many cases, the psychological effects of noun use tend to support, rather than hinder, the anti-essentialist goals of ameliorators.

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There is no data available.

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