

The Development of Social Stereotyping in 3- to 6-Year-Olds: Stereotype Content Across Social Groups and Age Effects.

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Introduction

- Preschoolers tend to stereotype peers with certain physical and non-physical characteristics (e.g., obesity and physical handicaps: Sigelman, 1991; accents: Kinzler, Dejesus & Spelke, 2009).
- No single study has examined children's stereotyping of multiple stigmatized groups. Thus, it is unclear how specific beliefs about these groups vary and change with age. Also, little is known about which specific negative attributions are associated with different peer groups and how these attributions change with age.
- The present study examined 3- to 6-year-old's attributions about overweight peers, peers with accents, and peers with physical disabilities.

Method

- Fifty-three participants rated four hypothetical peers (i.e., overweight, accent, physical disability and typical) on a number of behaviors that were representative of four different traits: **dumb/smart, unfriendly/friendly, weak/strong, and greedy/generous.**

Sample Description

"This is Jason. He is a chubby boy. He weighs a lot. He is heavier than skinny and thin kids. He is chubby."

- Next, children decided if the character would engage in a number of behaviors (e.g., "Does Jason smile at other people a lot? Yes or no?"). Then, children decided how sure they were (i.e., "Not so sure, kind of sure, or very sure").
- This protocol was repeated for all 4 characters. Each response received a score from 1 to 6 (1 = No & Not so sure, to 5 = Yes & Very sure). All items for a single trait were averaged, resulting in a mean score from 1 to 6 for each trait.

Results

- A series of 2 (age group: 3- to 4-year-olds and 5- to 6-year-olds; between-subjects variable) x 4 (story: overweight, accent, physical disability, and control; within-subjects variable) mixed ANOVAs were conducted on children's mean trait ratings. Separate analyses were conducted for each trait (i.e., dumb, friendly, weak, and generous).
- Dumb** (e.g., "Does it take a long time before Jamie can learn something new and do it on his own?")
 - A marginal interaction between story and age $F(3, 50) = 2.56, p = .06$, indicated that older children rated the overweight character higher on "dumb" behaviors as compared to the control character, $p's < .05$, but there was no difference for younger children (see Figure 1).
- Friendly** (e.g., "Does Jamie like talking to make new friends?")
 - A marginal interaction between story and age, $F(3, 50) = 2.56, p = .06$, indicated that older children rated the character with an accent significantly lower on "friendly" behaviors as compared to the control character, $p's < .05$, but there was no difference for younger children (see Figure 2).
- Weak** (e.g., "Do you think Jamie cannot lift things that are very heavy?")
 - All participants perceived the overweight character and the character with a physical disability as marginally more "weak" than the control character, $F(3, 50) = 2.56, p = .06$, post hoc $p's < .05$ (see Figure 3).
- Generous** (e.g., "Do you think Jamie would share his lunch with someone who forgot theirs today?")
 - There was no significant main effect of story or age, and no interaction between the two variables (see Figure 3).

Figure 4. Mean "Greedy" trait rating by story and age

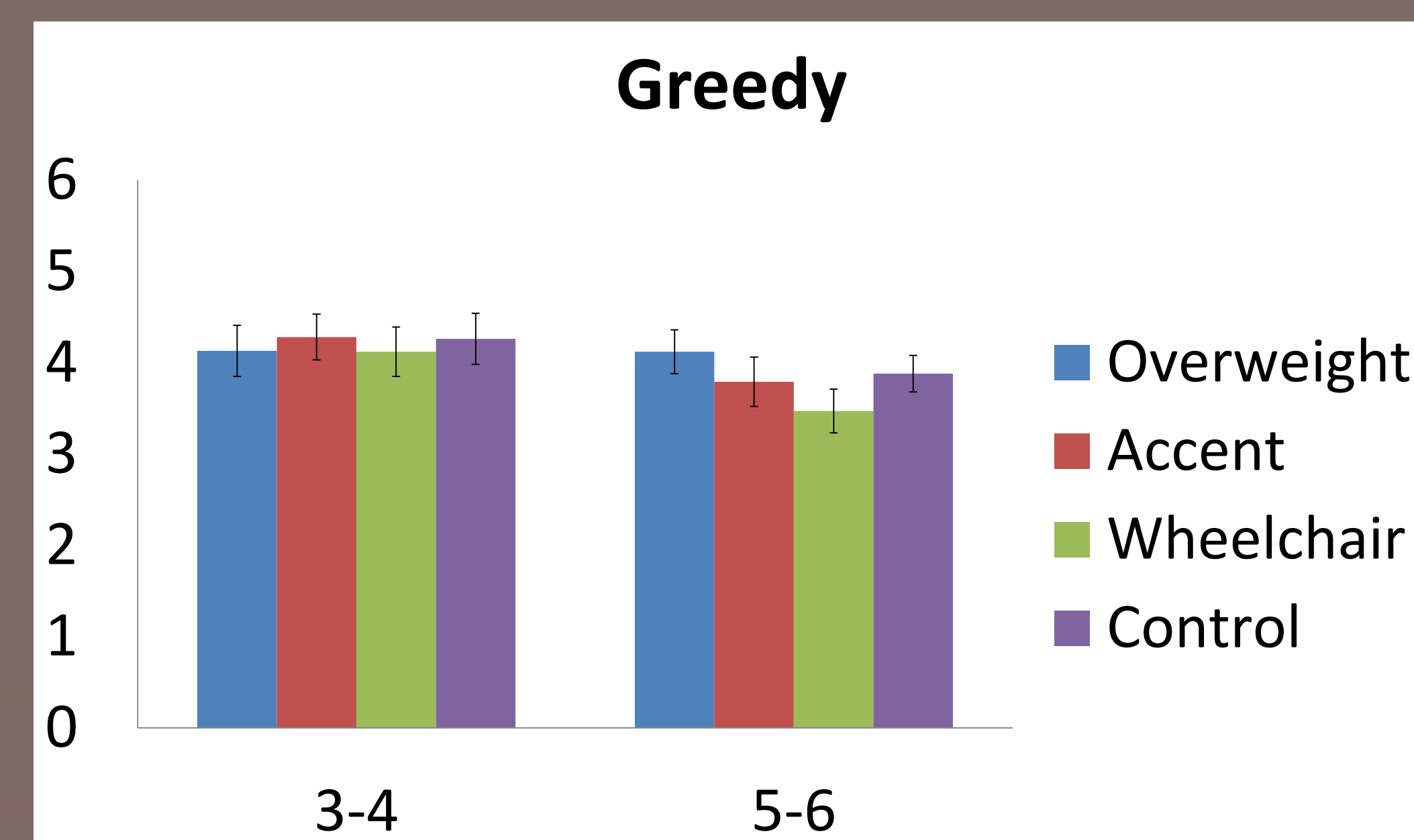


Figure 1. Mean "Dumb" trait rating by story and age

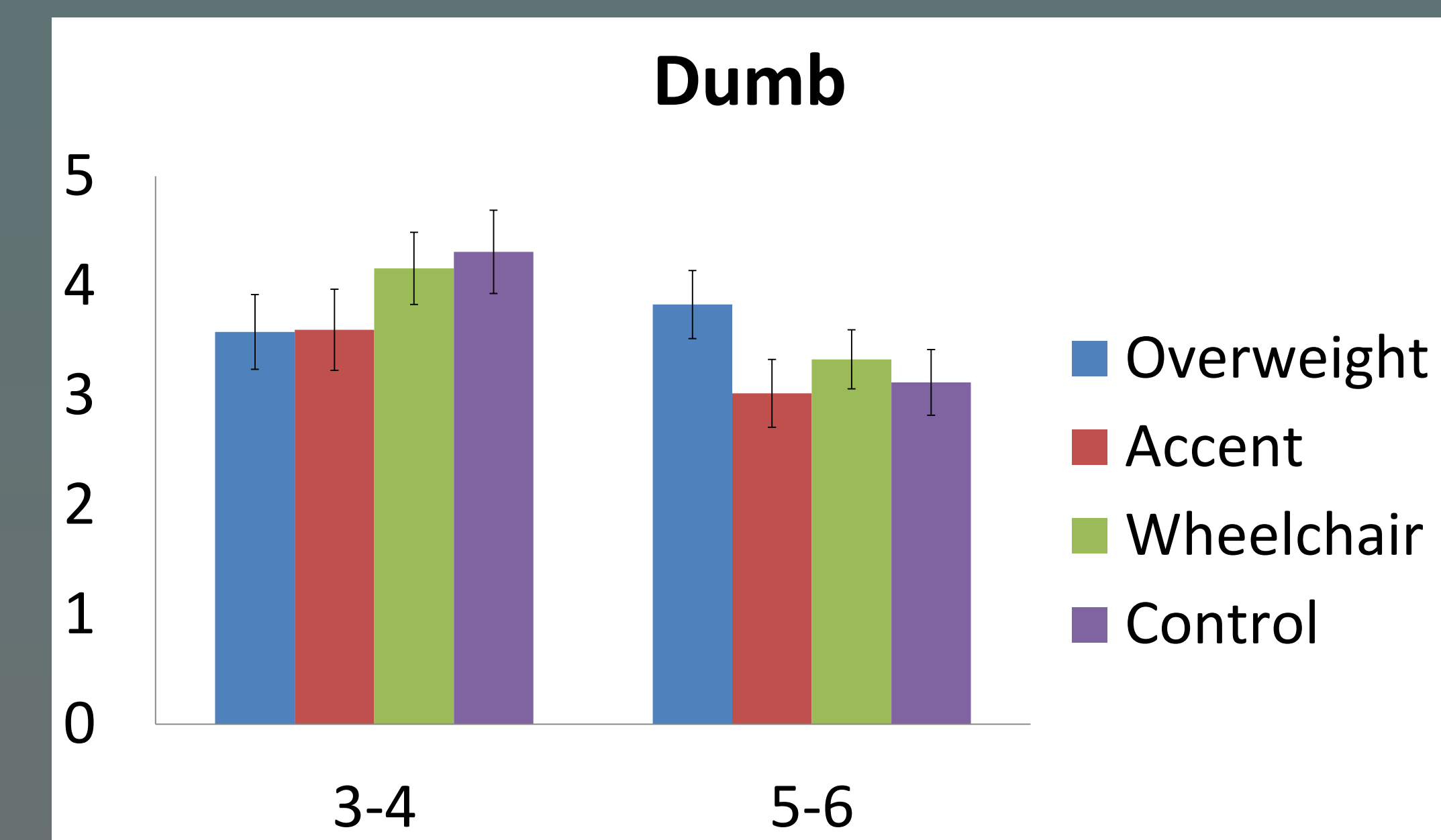


Figure 2. Mean "Friendly" trait rating by story and age

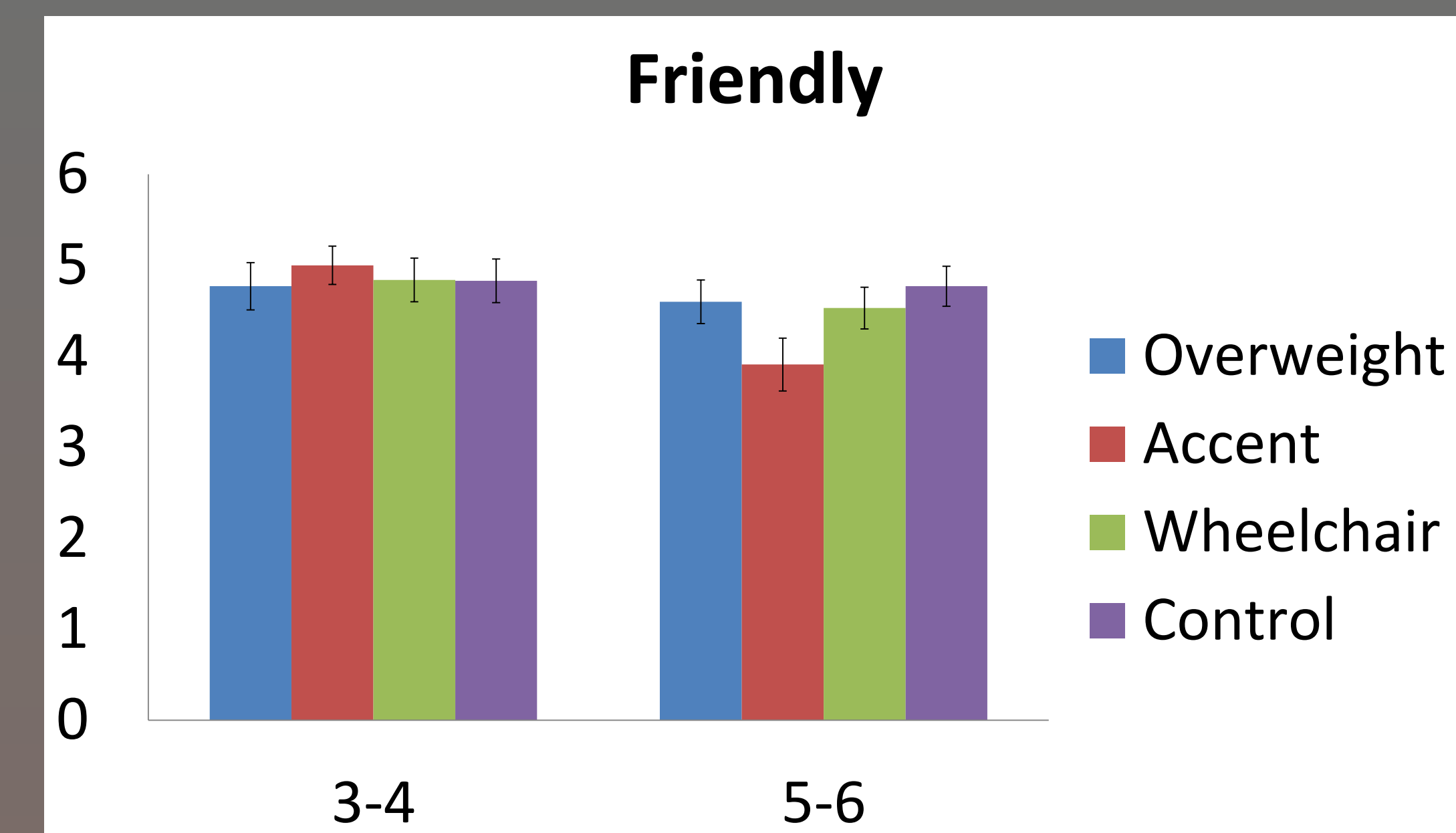
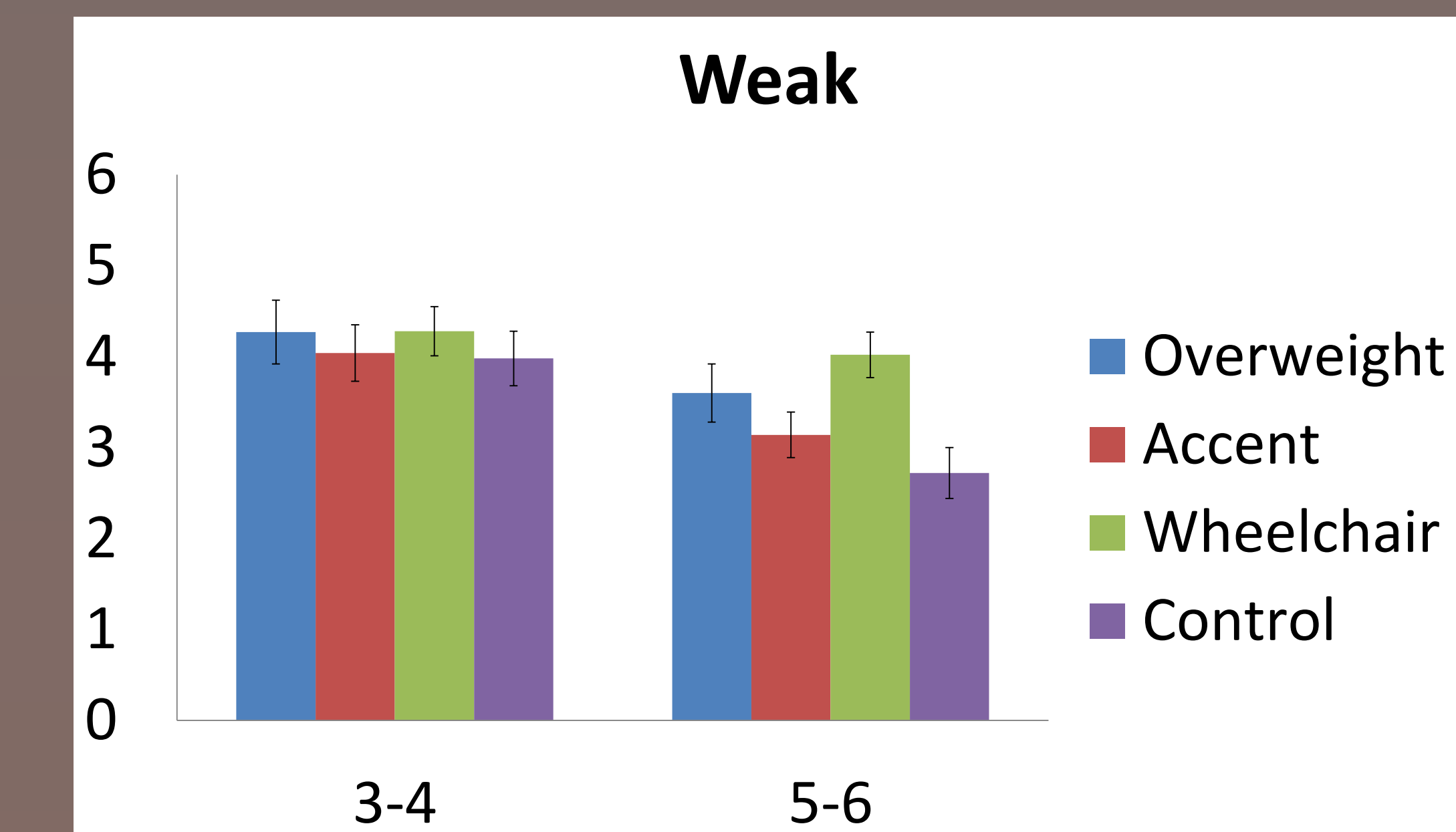


Figure 3. Mean "Weak" trait rating by story and age



Conclusions

- The current findings reveal that children's negative peer views are specific to certain traits and behaviors based on the group in question.
- Younger children's stereotypes may be focused more on physical differences (e.g., overweight and physically disabled peers perceived as weak).
- Older children begin to attribute additional negative traits to other groups (e.g., peers with accents perceived as less friendly).
- Interventions may be more successful and less time consuming if they focus on influencing children's negative group-specific beliefs.

References

- Kinzler, K. D., Shutts, K., Dejesus, J., & Spelke, E. S. (2009). Accent trumps race in guiding children's social preferences. *Social Cognition*, 27(4), 623-634. doi:10.1521/soco.2009.27.4.623
- Sigelman, C. K. (1991). The effect of causal information on peer perceptions of children with physical problems. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 12(2), 237-253. doi:10.1016/0193-3973(91)90014-U

