Who's Right? Children's Use of Local and Global Information in Decision Making

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Introduction

- Children tend to agree with the majority when learning new information from a group of informants (i.e., consensus; Corriveau, Fusaro, & Harris, 2009). However, sometimes information comes from multiple groups of informants that provide conflicting consensus information.
- In these cases, other group dimensions, such as representativeness, can influence informant choice (Zell & Alicke, 2010). Local groups (e.g., 5 kids) are smaller, less representative, and less informative than global groups (e.g., 50 kids).
- Main Questions: Do children understand that when two groups have conflicting opinions, they should endorse the larger group's opinion? How does this understanding develop with age?
- The current study examined 5- to 8-year-olds' use of local/global information in judging novel toys. We also manipulated the information valence (i.e., positive or negative).

Method

A 2 (Age: 5- to 6-year-olds, 7- to 8-year-olds) X 2 (Consensus Information: local positive/global negative, local negative/global positive) mixed design was used with consensus information as a within-subjects variable.

Participants were told about two novel toys, a Dax and a Flicket, supposedly created by the experimenter.

Then, they were given bogus consensus information from two groups of children: a local group (i.e., 5 kids from that day) and a global group (i.e., 50 kids from the past week).

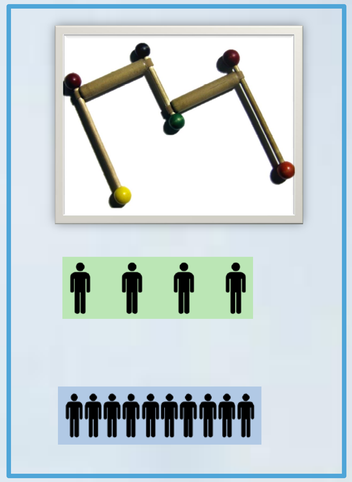
The consensus information of the two groups always conflicted. Thus ,children heard about a local group who's majority liked the Dax and a global group who's majority liked the Flicket.

After receiving the consensus information, participants decided which group was correct about each toy: the local group (coded as 0) or the global group (coded as 1).

Results

- A Generalized Estimating Equation (GEE) was used to analyze the data with age in months and consensus information type as predictors of children's group choice.
- Older children were more likely than younger children to select the global consensus group as correct, $\beta = -.57$ *Wald* $\chi^2 = 4.31$, $p < .05$
- There was no effect of information valence on children's selections of which group was correct.

Local Positive Global Negative



Local Negative Global Positive

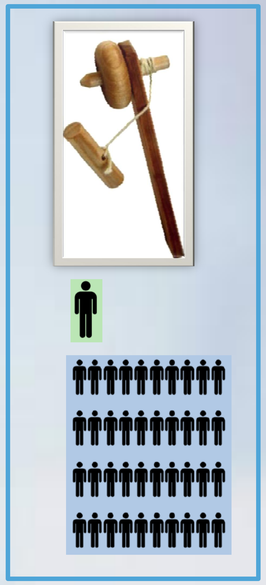
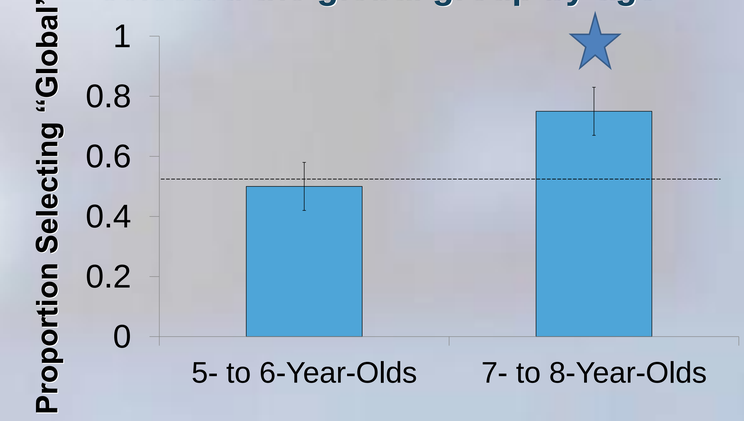


Figure 1. Proportion of children that selected the global group by age



Discussion

- The current findings reveal age-related changes in children's use of local/global group characteristics in reasoning about conflicting information.
- Five- to 6-year-olds may not be able to reason appropriately about these conflicting sources of information because the task requires high cognitive demands**,** such as working memory and statistical reasoning.
- Adults show systematic biases in local/global reasoning about social comparison information in a performance domain versus non-performance domain (Zell & Alicke, 2010).
- Although older children in the current study correctly used global information, they may show a bias for local information when it relates to their personal performance. Younger children responded at chance and are not likely to understand local/global information even in a performance domain. In this case, younger children may focus instead on the valence of the information to inform their self-evaluations.

References

Corriveau, K. H., Fusaro, M., & Harris, P. L. (2009). Going with the flow: Preschoolers prefer nondissenters as informants. *Psychological Science*, *20*(3), 372-377. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02291.x

Zell, E., & Alicke, M. D. (2010). The local dominance effect in self-evaluation: Evidence and explanations. *Personality And Social Psychology Review, 14*(4), 368-384. doi:10.1177/108886831036614