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, β = .57 Wald χ² = 4.31, p < .05
- There was no effect of information valence on children’s selections of which group was correct.

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.
- 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