

# Children's Selective Trust : Consideration of Disability Status and Expertise

Ashlee Monaghan, Alice Van Stalduinen, Candace Lapan

Department of Psychology, Wingate University

## Introduction

A wealth of literature demonstrates that even preschoolers are selective in choosing people to trust for new information, considering a variety of informant characteristics such as prior reliability and expertise (Marble & Boseovski, 2020). However, children are also impacted by biases in the informant selection such that they are more likely to choose individuals from their in-group rather than their out-group (Corriveau, et al, 2013).

In particular, children show a lack of trust in informants who have physical disabilities. This bias appears to be so strong that it even overrides children's preference for previously reliable informants (Jaffer & Ma, 2015). No literature has yet examined whether children's negative perceptions of individuals with disabilities would also override children's established sensitivity to expertise.

## Objectives

The current study examined 3- to 11-year-olds' trust of individuals with and without disabilities in various contexts, some of which the informant with the disability would plausibly have greater expertise.

Modeled after Jaffer & Ma (2015), we investigated who children endorsed as correct about a variety of facts and actions. Importantly, we also investigated facts and actions for which a person with disabilities would have greater expertise than a person without a disability. For example, knowledge about how a wheelchair works.

We expected that younger children would endorse the individual without a disability more than the informant with a disability, regardless of context. Conversely, we expected older children to distinguish between contexts and endorse the individual with a physical disability more often in contexts in which they were an expert.

## Methods

Three-to-11-year olds (N = 53) completed the study with a trained research assistant. Stimuli were presented on an iPad.

The study employed a 2 (Age: 3- to 6-year-olds vs. 7- to 11-year-olds) x 4 (Context: Disability relevant action, disability irrelevant action, disability relevant fact, disability irrelevant fact) design with age as a between-subjects variable and context as a within-subjects variable.

All children heard 2 trials of testimony from informants (matched to participant gender) in the 4 contexts. Selection of the informant with a disability was coded as 1 and selection of the informant without a disability was coded as 0. Thus, each context has a possible range of 0-2.

For each trial, children were given testimony from each informant and asked to endorse one as correct.

**Sample Trial:** "Do you know how wheelchair racing is done? One of them knows better. Let's see what they say. Adam thinks that wheelchair racing is done on a track. Brandon thinks that wheelchair racing is done on a road. Which do you think is right?"

**Figure 1.**  
Sample Male Trial Stimuli

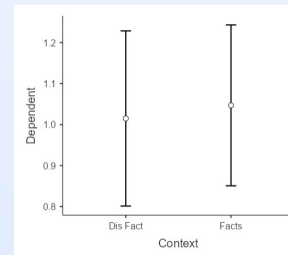


Context	Topic
Disability Irrelevant Action	How swing dancing is done
Disability Irrelevant Fact	When hair grows fastest
Disability Relevant Action	How wheelchair racing is done
Disability Relevant Fact	What type of wheelchair is most expensive

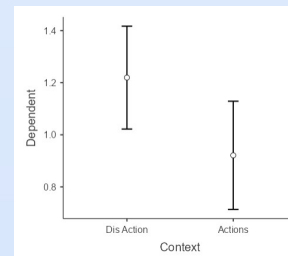
## Results

There were no significant main effects or interactions with age in any of the following analyses.

A series of repeated measures ANOVAs examined the differences between contexts and potential age effects. There was no significant difference in children's endorsement of testimony about facts,  $F(1, 51) = 0.03, p = 0.84, \eta_p^2 = 0.00$ . Children responded at chance about disability irrelevant facts,  $t(52) = 0.60, p = 0.55, d = .08$ , and the disability relevant facts,  $t(52) = 0.36, p = 0.72, d = .05$ .



There was a significant difference in children's endorsement of testimony about actions,  $F(1, 51) = 4.35, p = 0.04, \eta_p^2 = 0.08$ . Children responded at chance about disability irrelevant actions,  $t(52) = -0.75, p = 0.46, d = .10$ , but children responded significantly above chance about disability relevant actions,  $t(52) = 2.54, p = 0.01, d = .35$ .



## Conclusions

The current findings indicate that children are not biased against informants with physical disabilities in all contexts. Conversely, in some cases, they privilege individuals with disabilities in contexts where they may have meaningful relevant experience.

Surprisingly, the current study did not demonstrate age effects. This may be due to the current small sample size. Furthermore, it was unexpected that children did not demonstrate an overall bias against individuals with disabilities in their informant selection. A couple of relevant factors may be at play including the limited sample size across ages. This bias is more commonly documented in preschoolers rather than those in middle childhood. Additionally, may be necessary to use more sensitive or implicit measures to document biases in older children who are more sensitive to self-presentational norms.

## References

- Corriveau, K. H., Kinzler, K. D., & Harris, P. L. (2013). Accuracy trumps accent in children's endorsement of object labels. *Developmental Psychology, 49*(3), 470-479. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030604>
- Jaffer, S., & Ma, L. (2015). Preschoolers show less trust in physically disabled or obese informants. *Frontiers in Psychology, 5*. <https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01524>
- Marble, K. E., & Boseovski, J. J. (2020). Content counts: A trait and moral reasoning framework for children's selective social learning. *Advances in Child Development and Behavior, 58*, 95-136. <https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.acdb.2020.01.004>

## Digital Copy

For a digital copy of this poster, please use the following QR code.



## Acknowledgements

We thank Connor Cook, Emani Davis, Princess Harts for their assistance with data collection. Additionally, we thank the parents and children that participated in the current study.