



“He only changed his answer because they shouted at him”: children use affective cues to distinguish between genuine and forced consensus

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Motivation

Like many species, people often treat **consensus** as evidence that a judgment is accurate. However, the most consensus can actually reveal is a **shared influence** on individual informants' judgments. That influence may be truth-conducive or truth-distorting. So how do we decide when consensus is reliable?

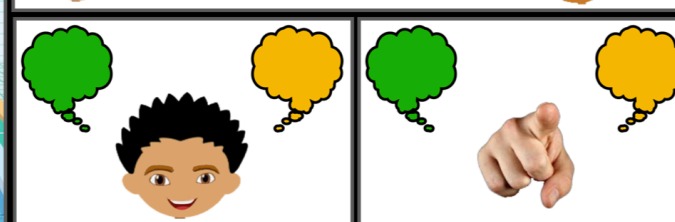
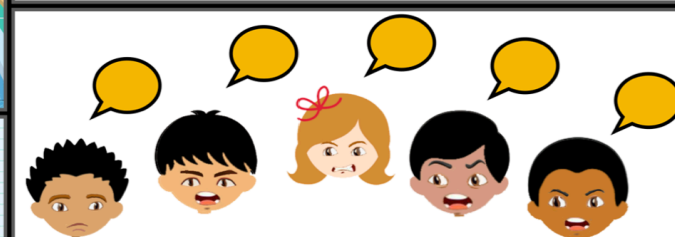
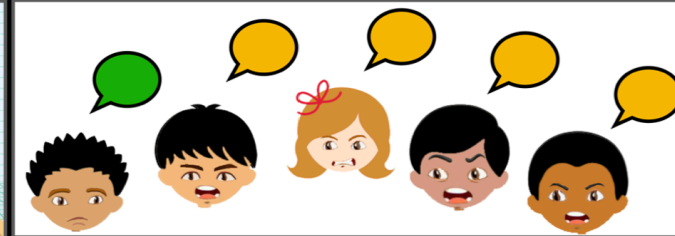
Learners may need to reason about whether consensus is evidence of evidence (e.g., informants' perceptual access or expertise), or evidence of groupthink (e.g., vulnerability to peer pressure).

To the extent that affective cues like **anger** and **surprise** signal informants' evaluations of each others' beliefs, they may help people reason about consensus by suggesting whether consensus is **genuine** or **forced** (Richardson & Keil, 2021). Here, we examine the developmental origins of this reasoning by asking children to infer (A) what a **protagonist “really thinks”** after other informants **talk with** or **shout at** him, and (B) what **they themselves think** the correct answer is. Since young children often treat an informant's **benevolence** as a stronger cue to reliability than competence, we also manipulate **informants'** access to evidence across Exps 1-2 to evaluate children's reasoning about how informants reason about evidence.

Exp 1: Memory



Exp 2: Testimony



Procedure (Anger Trial)

“Jack’s classmates all said that the fish in the **yellow** box was the sea lions’ favorite kind. But Jack said the **green** box had the sea lions’ favorite kind of fish.”

But the other students were very [**angry** / **surprised**] that Jack answered **green**. But after the other people all [**shouted at** / **talked with**] Jack, Jack changed his answer to **yellow** too.

So, does Jack **really think** the **green** box has the sea lions favorite fish, or does he really think the **yellow** box does?

And what do **you** think: is the sea lions’ favorite fish really in the **green** box, or is it really in the **yellow** box?

Summary

In both experiments, all ages inferred that Jack was less likely to change his belief after the group **shouted angrily** than after they **expressed surprise**.

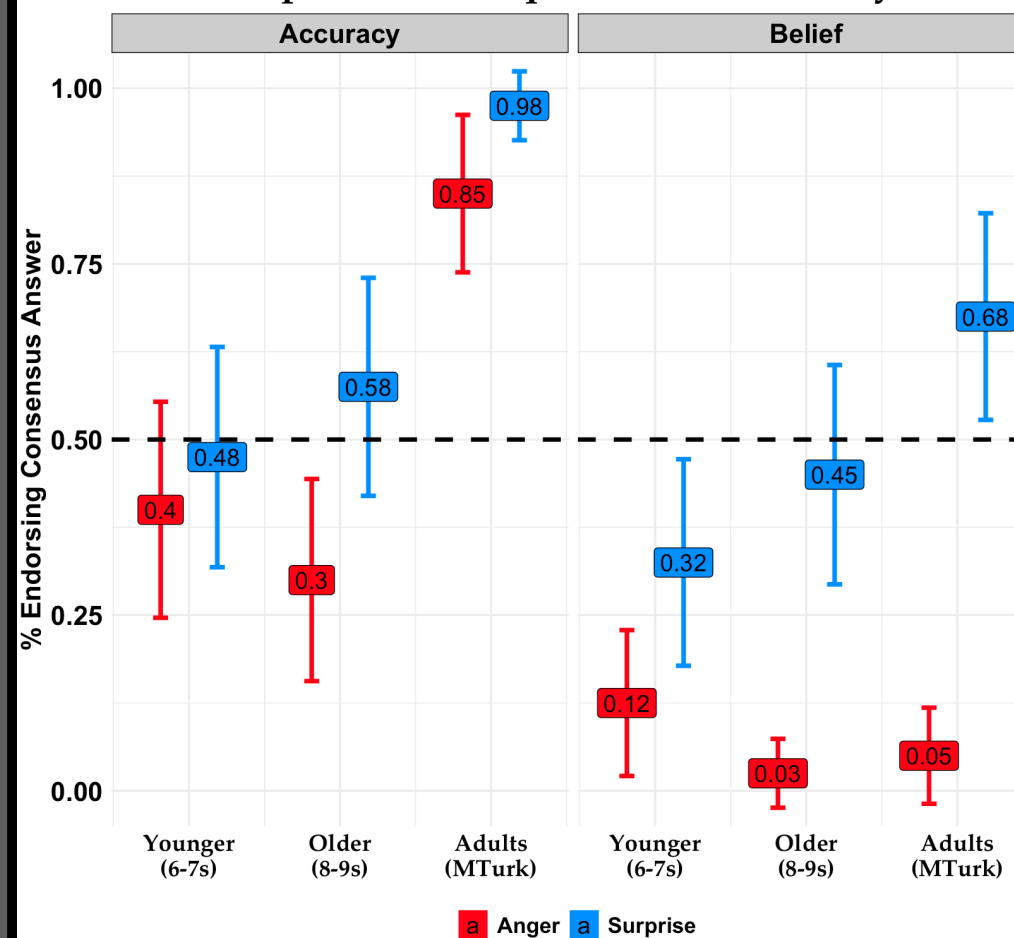
In both experiments, adults accepted Jack’s belief change in the **surprise** trial, but children doubted that he had genuinely converted in both **surprise** and **anger** trials.

All ages trusted a consensus that had seen the answer over Jack’s response (Exp 2), but only adults trusted the consensus when both Jack and the consensus were relying on memory (Exp 1).

Children’s responses in Exp 1 suggest that they relied on Jack’s beliefs to infer accuracy instead of relying on the consensus cue: children in Exp 1 who inferred that Jack had genuinely converted were twice as likely to say that the consensus was correct than incorrect; meanwhile, children who doubted Jack’s conversion were more likely to infer that his original answer was correct, despite the 4-to-1 consensus against it.

Results: Reasoning About Forced & Genuine Consensus

Experiment 1: Equal Access (Memory)



Experiment 2: Unequal Access (Testimony)

