Discussion Questions: March 26

Anna

*Judgments of the Lucky Across Development and Culture*

Throughout the course I have been interested to know how children perceive others and whom they prefer (for information, for example). This is interesting because it began to get to more social aspects of the impressions children form of others.

How do you know that when children chose the unlucky/intentionally bad persons sibling was more likely to perform a bad action intentionally, this was not just because children pay attention more to negative events? Not just because they were forced to choose? How do we know this is an internal bias that is occurring? (brought up in Study 5).

I don’t necessarily like an assumption they made in experiment 5 that if a child used the “exactly the same” response on all of the items, they were excluded from the analysis because it is assumed they did not understand the task. However, this may not be the case… maybe they did understand the task and realized that there is no baring for such a judgement, but he or she did not perform the task the way the researchers wanted him or her to. What do the results look like with these subjects included?

*Children’s Evaluation of Sources of Information About Traits.*

I am wondering if it is possible to examine this in a younger group of children. The authors argue for their choice of using 6-7 and 10-11 year olds, which is understandable, although it would be interesting to see what pattern of results could be found in a younger group of children. The task may have to change to be more in line with the capacities of younger children. How might this be accomplished?

- For example, perhaps younger children could do this task but they don’t necessarily have the verbal ability to express themselves as to why they chose the answers they did
- Could this be done not using self-reports?

Lizzy

*Olson et al (2008)*

1) I’m not a fan of many of these studies being forced choice, considering the correct answer in many cases, particularly for the judgments of the lucky, is "I don't know" or something similar. I feel like in this study forcing people to make a choice is pretty design characterstickey; it's forcing them to make associations between attributes they may not have done so spontaneously. I think a more powerful measure would be to give them the option of picking either agent or both like they did for the younger children (though I recognize this causes its own problems). At least with the option of choosing
both we could get a sense of whether kids really want to make a choice between the two responses. Also, it's weird that they noticed the force-choice confound with the youngest kids but not for the older kids.

2) In Study 1 the examples of intentional bad actions are highly related. They are: "This is John. John stole a cookie from his brother" for the learning phase and "On Sunday, one of these children got into a fight. Which child got into a fight?" for the test phase. I'm going to take it on faith that these kinds of highly related events didn't appear in the same trials during the actual execution of the study, but since it's not mentioned in the procedure I have to wonder about them.

3) In Study 3, why on earth would you just throw away the answers of the kids who are only picking one side and not talk about it? I get that kids might not want to participate but can we be confident that they aren't just choosing a side because they don't know how to answer the question in the absence of the correct answer (which is "I don't know")? If you throw in the "I don't know" and counterbalance the side it appears on and they STILL only pick one side then sure, throw out their data because they aren't doing the task, but without that it seems like one of the only options available to a kid who doesn't know how to answer the questions.

4) Why were the evaluative contagion studies done so differently? In the American version they used siblings, people who are genetically similar to the actors, while in the Japanese version they used groups, no genetic similarity. I feel like that could be the reason why the effect sizes for the American group in the intentional good vs intentional bad condition were so much larger, particularly if we assume that indeed American children are more susceptible to evaluate people based on traits rather than the situations they're in.

5) Reading these studies, I'm starting to think that I might also show a preference for the lucky. Has this been done with adults? I'm pretty sure the researchers would expect the opposite to occur in adults based on the belief in a just world theory (which I only sort of understand), but I really wouldn't be surprised if I showed the exact same tendencies as the children did in these tasks, simply due to similar valences. In the absence of meaningful data to actually answer the questions properly, I could see myself getting caught up in "what feels right" which would be to associate good actions with good feelings (the lucky), and vice versa.

**Heyman & Legare (2005)**

1) Again with the forced-choice! Study 3 is asking a brand new set of questions that might not have a yes or no answer. I'm looking specifically at the question about lying, that looks like "do you think that people might lie about how ________ (nervous, smart, honest, outgoing) they are". I see a potential confound with this method as I'm unsure that most people would call 'socially accepted/encouraged massaging of the truth' actual lying. If we as a group implicitly demand that people present themselves in a positive light, when a group member does just that, possibly at
the expense of sharing the complete reality, is that really a lie? Does the term "lie" really capture what's happening here? A lie implies that there's an intention to mislead, but if you believe that everyone in your group can piece together reality even when you're slightly misrepresenting it because you're doing so according to rules that everyone is supposed to know, it doesn't really feel like deceit anymore, does it? If you think about it this way, forcing kids to decide definitively if "people lie about how smart they are" isn't really fair. They're probably not being truthful, but they're might not be lying either, it's somewhere in between. Maybe an appropriate analogy might be asking a pro hockey player if they think the sport is sometimes too violent; maybe a little, but that's just part of the game.

2) The results of this study make me think of the Gricean Maxim studies we've looked at, particularly the ones that show that young kids have trouble with identifying irrelevant answers. I wonder if there's a common mechanism contributing to these results. My guess is keeping track of other peoples' states, like keeping track of everything that another person knows and reconstructing their state so they can critically evaluate their responses to questions, but obviously that's incredibly vague.

Enda

* Olson, Dunham, Banaji, Spelke, & Dweck, 2008:*

Well-designed as it is, the study has several methodological problems that are worth noting. First, social judgments in daily life are mostly based on a wealth of knowledge about the target person. In the present study, however, only one piece of information (one fact) was provided for each target. The valence of the fact was either positive or negative, and children had to make a judgment based solely on that piece of information, which was lacking and misleading. People tend to make more rational and accurate judgments when they have different sources of information. Arguably, children could have shown less preference for the lucky if they had gotten more information about the target person.

Second, the procedures of the tasks were long and monotonous. As a result, children might lose interest and answer questions carelessly. For instance, the structures of the 16 trials in Study 3 were all the same. In each trial, children had to learn 4 names and 2 stories. It turned out that 10 of the children in the study always picked the same side of the screen. Also, many children failed to complete the task, suggesting that they were bored and inattentive. If the answers were given in a careless manner, the reliability of the tests should be questioned.

Third, as the authors had pointed out, the use of forced choice task could be problematic - children were forced to choose between two inaccurate options. They could have made more rational judgments had they gotten more choices. To solve this problem, Experiment 5 added a third alternative: “They’re exactly the same.” But the wording of this option could still be problematic: “exactly the same” is a very narrow range. Children might find this option too strict and thus inaccurate.
Future studies can further investigate the mechanisms underlying the developmental trajectory of the effect. Why does the preference for the lucky increase with age? Is this related to the development of executive functions? How do people overcome this bias and eventually learn to judge others based on intentional actions rather than random events? Inquiries into these questions will be meaningful.

**Anthea**

Do children’s perception of “luck” change depending on whether it is something considered to be universally desirable (e.g., resource based) or if it is specific to the person? (e.g., one person may consider it lucky to run into a particular celebrity on the street, but another person may not care).

For self-reports that improve social desirability, it makes sense that children may rely less on self-reports of individuals as they get older. However, what about evaluative traits that are not self-enhancing? Are children more likely to believe someone’s self-report if they claim to have an undesirable evaluative trait since it would be unlikely that someone would lie about being unintelligent etc. However, would children then believe that this person is more honest?

**Patrick**

My questions about that article have more to do with underlying theory and interpretation. I'm not sure Immanent Justice is the appropriate model for their un/lucky tests, because IJ implies some (unnamed) justice-maintenance system which causes rectification or "punishment", whereas their model is much closer to "affective tagging" they describe later. Another view is that children understand that events influence mood and behavior. Why wouldn't a child quickly learn that if mommy (or anyone) had a bad (unlucky) experience, she might be less nice than if she had a good luck? That seems a much simpler explanation for many of their outcomes. Study 7 (w/Japanese) might suggest otherwise, though.

Just World theory seems also to involve dissonance or meaning-maintenance, but that wasn't discussed. That they asked (p15) "Which brother helped" really confounds the issue, because by using the past tense, the implication is that the adult knows an existing reality the child can only guess at, so conformity pressure interferes. It would be interesting to use a behavioral DV, like asking the child to show which brother will help

The Heyman & Legare paper basically identifies that kids start to understand socially-desirable responding (SDR) by age 10. But since that can be an individual difference, I wonder how understanding and use of SDR develops. They discuss that a bit at the end, but there are gaps - do kids practice SDR before they see it in others?
Siba

*For Judgments of the lucky across development and culture:*

I wonder how children would predict good/ bad behaviour from lucky versus unlucky characters if they are given a 'both are likely to behave in a good/bad manner' option. That is, I wonder if the structure of the question affected children's choices in that part of the study.

*For Children’s Evaluation of Sources of Information About Traits:*

I wonder if 6 and 7 year olds will be more critical of self-report when a study is structured in a more goal-oriented frame. For example, if children are told that they have to delegate a difficult task to somebody that has to be 'very smart' in order to complete it, and then children are asked how they would find out if an individual is really smart. Would children be more likely to choose methods other than self-report to investigate if an individual is 'really' smart? Does a goal-oriented framework affect performance in these tasks?