



EVALUATING INFORMANTS: DOES THE POSITIVITY BIAS EXTEND TO NEUTRAL INFORMANTS?



Asheley R. Landrum, Amelia D. Pflaum, Rachel A. Williams, L. Renee Jonason, & Candice M. Mills

SCHOOL OF BEHAVIORAL AND BRAIN SCIENCES, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT DALLAS

INTRODUCTION

- Preschoolers default to trust testimony, which can be problematic given that not all sources are equally likely to provide reliably accurate information (e.g., Jaswal, Croft, Setia, & Cole, 2010).
- When presented with information regarding whether sources have expertise and are nice or mean, previous research suggests that children prefer to trust the nice informant over the mean one, even when the nice one does not have expertise (Landrum, Mills, & Johnston, in press).
- How do children evaluate informants who are not clearly nice or clearly mean?**
- Is it possible that children may assume neutral informants are nice by default, given that it takes a lot more evidence for children to see someone as nice than as mean (Boseovski & Lee, 2008)?

Research Questions

- Will children view a neutral informant as being nice, mean, or somewhere in between the two?
- Will children attribute general knowledge to a neutral informant?
- Will children attribute expertise to a neutral informant?

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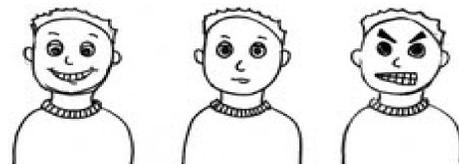
STUDY DESIGN

Participants

N = 48 children (27 females) recruited from local schools

METHOD

Children were introduced to three informants varying in benevolence. For each condition, one informant was also a bird expert while the others were non-experts:



Benevolence of Informants:

Nice Informant:

"This person is always nice. He gives presents to his friends and family, he always shares, and he really cares about other people's feelings."

Neutral Informant:

"This person is sometimes nice and sometimes mean. Sometimes he shares and sometimes he doesn't. Sometimes he gives presents and sometimes he steals presents. Sometimes he cares about other people's feelings and sometimes he doesn't care."

Mean Informant:

"This person is always mean. He steals presents from his friends and his family, he never shares, and he doesn't care about other people's feelings."

Expertise of Informants:

Bird Expert:

"This person knows a lot about birds. He knows what food they eat, how big they can grow, and even how many babies they can have."

Non-Expert:

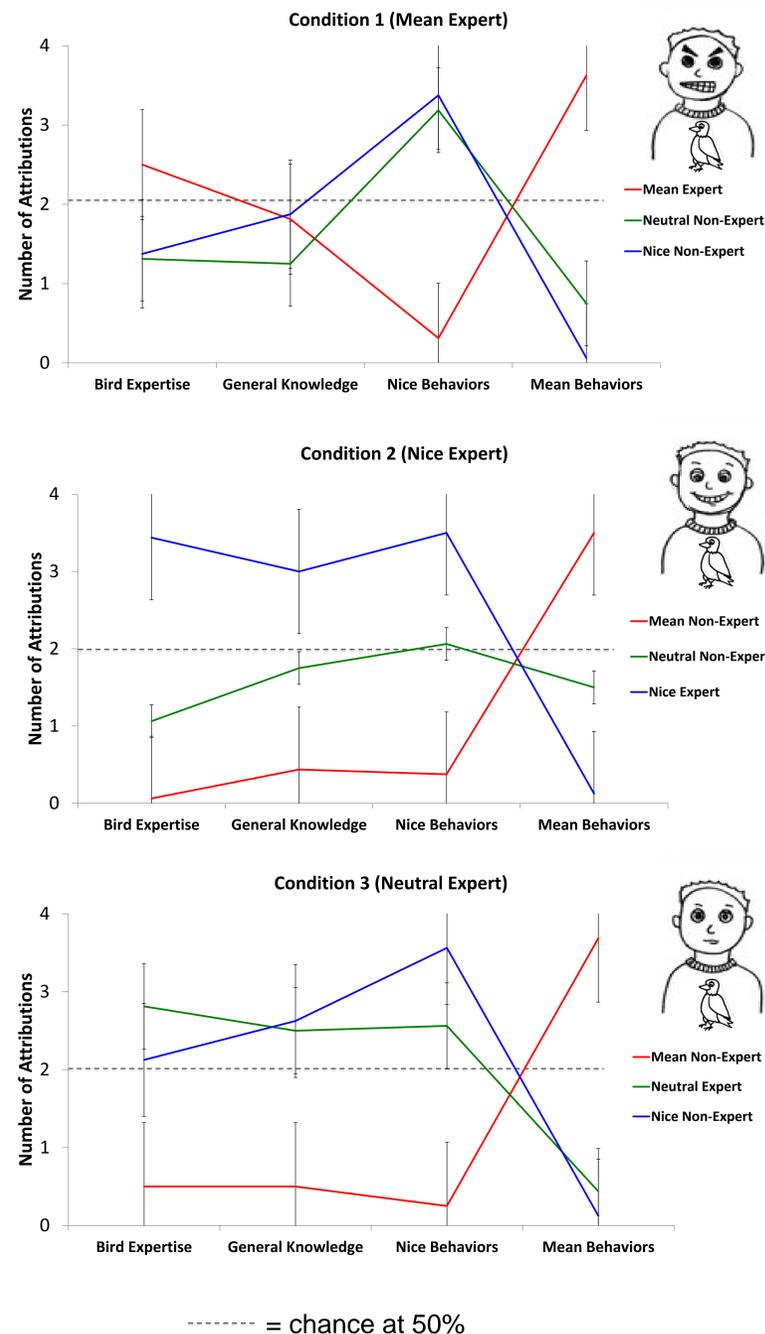
"This person doesn't know anything about birds. He doesn't know what food they eat, how big they can grow, or even how many babies they can have."



After meeting the informants, children were asked if each informant had knowledge in a certain category or would behave in a certain way. Four categories of questions were used (4 items in each category):

- Bird Knowledge:** Some people might know how many bones a turkey has.
- General Knowledge:** Some people might know why the grass is green.
- Nice Behavior:** Some people might share their drink with someone who doesn't have a drink.
- Mean Behavior:** Some people might break someone's phone on purpose

RESULTS



CONCLUSIONS

- Neutrality appeared to be best understood by children when the nice informant was the expert (Condition 2); otherwise, children rated the neutral informant similarly to the nice one. In Condition 2, the nice informant was also the expert (two good qualities), and the mean informant was a non-expert (two bad qualities). This seemed to make it easier for children to recognize that the neutral informant was somewhere in between the other two.
- Children were at chance when disclosing how much general knowledge the neutral informant was likely to have, which could be due to the descriptions of "sometimes nice and sometimes mean." Children may have interpreted this to indicate that the neutral informant "sometimes knows things and sometimes doesn't know."
- Children attributed the most expertise to the neutral informant when the neutral informant was labeled an expert (Condition 3). However, they still attributed some expertise to the neutral informant when he was not labeled an expert.

References

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For more information contact
amelia.pflaum@utdallas.edu