Did Joey Get the Last Piece of Cake?: Social Competence, Social Understanding and Suggestibility in 3-to 5-year-old Children

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Introduction

Suggestibility:
- The degree to which children's encoding, storage, retrieval, and reporting of events can be influenced by a range of social and psychological factors (Ceci & Bruck, 1993)
- In 5-to 7- year old children there was a bimodal distribution of suggestibility; children were completely suggestible or not suggestible at all (Uhl et al. 2016)
- IQ, vocabulary, theory of mind and executive function are cognitive factors that contribute to children's suggestibility (Gudjonsson, 2003; Kulkofsky, 2010; Chae & Ceci, 2005; Karpinksi & Scullin, 2009)

Social Competence:
- Children's ability to recognize their social strengths and weaknesses and handle social interactions effectively
- Tested using modified Pictorial Scale of Perceived Social Competence (Harter & Pike, 1984)
- Children with higher general acceptance were more suggestible (Chae & Ceci, 2005)

Social Understanding
- Children's ability to comprehend and make judgements about social situations
- Testing using \modified Children's Social Comprehension Scale (Knopp, 2019)
- Social understanding did not predict suggestibility in 5-to 7-year-old children (Uhl et al. 2016)

Purpose: To determine if social factors, including social competence and social understanding predict suggestibility in 3- to 5-year-old children
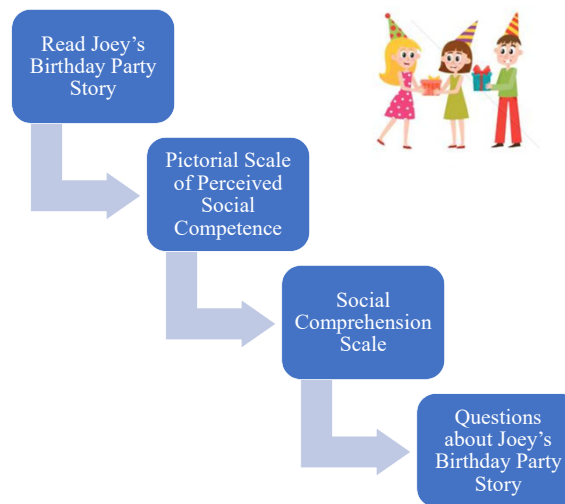
Research Questions:
1. Is there a bimodal distribution of suggestibility in children under age 5?
2. Do social understanding and social competence predict suggestibility?

Method

Participants:
- 50 children ages 3- to 5-years-old (M age = 50.98 months; SD = 7.32; 27 girls)
- From local early childhood education programs around Waterville, ME

Discussion

- The study did not replicate the bimodal distribution of suggestibility scores with a younger age group
- Younger children say "Yes" to more misleading questions than older children, indicating greater suggestibility
  - Consistent with Gudjonsson et al. (2016)
- No connection between social understanding, social competence and suggestibility, suggesting that social factors may not predict suggestibility
  - Consistent with Uhl et al. (2016)
- Children's susceptibility to misleading questions influences their reliability as eyewitnesses

Acknowledgements

Results

- Girls showed higher social understanding scores than boys t (48) = 2.41, p = .020
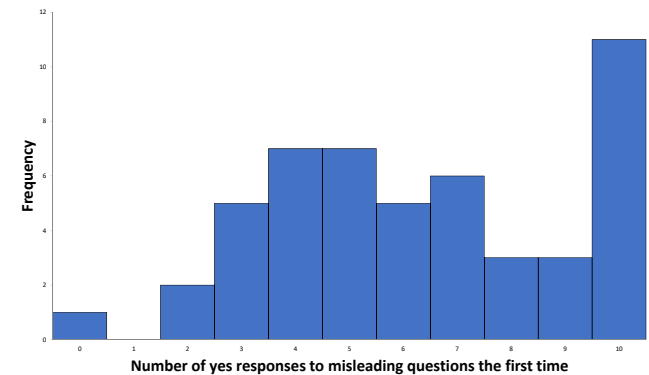- Age in months was the only significant predictor of yield, F (1, 48) = 7.42, p = .009, adjusted R^2 = .12

Table 1
Pearson correlations between all major variables and suggestibility

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Social Comprehension	_				
2. Social Understanding	-.22	_			
3. Yield	-.05	.04	_		
4. Shift	.14	-.14	.03	_	
5. Total Suggestibility	.07	-.07	-.04	.67**	_
6. Age in months	-.09	-.22	.04	-.37**	.09

*p<0.05, **p<0.01