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CHILDREN'S GENDER STEREOTYPES AND SCIENCE LEARNING

Daniel Lagoni, Gavin Rackoff, and Mia Shoshany

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Recent research has demonstrated that children as young as five years old hold the stereotype that males are more competent than females in the field of science. Our study tested whether 3- to 8-year-old children apply this stereotype when judging the credibility of scientific claims made by men and women. In the first phase of the study, children heard a man and a woman present pairs of opposing testimonies about toys and science, and indicated which testimony from each pair they thought was right. Boys and girls were expected to endorse testimonies from the male informant more frequently when learning about science than when learning about toys. When accounting for the influence of children's age, there was a significant interaction between children's gender and the subject of informants' testimonies. The data suggested that girls endorsed the male informant's testimonies more frequently when learning about science than when learning about toys. Furthermore, as girls' ages increased, they were more likely to endorse the testimony of the male informant when learning about science. The first phase of the study provided initial evidence that gender stereotypes affect girls' judgments of the credibility of scientific claims throughout early childhood. The second phase of our study is currently exploring whether 4- to 8-year-old children rely more strongly on gender stereotypes when informants are introduced as "scientists." We expect that both boys and girls will endorse the male scientist's testimonies significantly more frequently when learning about science than when learning about toys. We also expect that this pattern will increase with age.