Sometimes Hesitancy is Key:
Effects of Moral Deliberations on Children's Interpretation of Credibility Cues

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Introduction

Children often treat confident individuals as more credible sources of information [1-5]. Yet, confidence may differentially signify credibility depending upon the type (or domain) of knowledge. For example,

- When dealing with factual information (e.g., name of novel object), confident responses indicate greater credibility.
- However, when deliberating about moral issues, hesitancy may reflect a deeper level of thoughtfulness, and therefore credibility.

This study investigated children's credibility judgments of individuals who differed in the level of confidence (confident vs. hesitant) in two domains of knowledge (factual, moral).

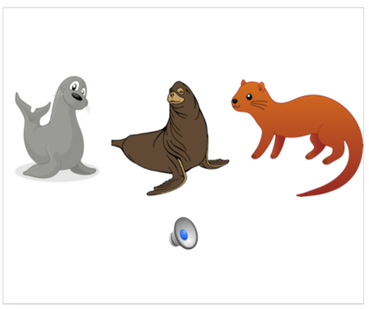
Method

Participants (*N*=44)
6 – 8 years (*M*=7.02, *SD*=.67)
52.3% male

2 x 2 Design
Participants heard either a **confident or hesitant** model make either **factual or moral** claims.

Conditions

		Domain	
		Factual	Moral
Level of Confidence	Confident	Confident / Factual	Confident / Moral
	Hesitant	Hesitant / Factual	Hesitant / Moral



Sample Factual: Which of these animals is the only one that has no blubber?

Sample Moral: A seal, sea otter, and sea lion are all really hungry, but there is only one piece of shrimp left. Who should get the food?

Sample Confident Model: Not the sea lion, not the seal. The otter! Definitely the otter.

Sample Hesitant Model: Maybe the sea lion, maybe the seal, maybe the otter... Ok I guess the otter.

Measures

Across 8 trials, children rated the model on a 4-point scale (0=not at all, 1=a little, 2=a medium amount, 3=a lot) in terms of:

- Model's level of confidence **(confidence)**
- How much they liked her **(liking)**
- How smart she is **(smartness)**
- How much they agreed with her answer **(agreement)**

Results

Children judged the **confident model higher in the factual domain**, whereas they judged the **hesitant model higher in the moral domain** on ratings of smartness and answer agreement.

Interaction effects between Domain (Factual, Moral) and Level of Confidence (Confident, Hesitant) on smartness judgments and agreement with model's answer.
Error bars = 95% confidence intervals

A 2 (confident, hesitant) x 2 (factual, moral) ANOVA indicated **Significant main effects** of:

- **Confidence level** (Confident>Hesitant) on ratings of confidence, liking, and smartness (*p*s < .05)
- **Domain** (Factual>Moral) on ratings of agreement (*p*=.002)

Significant interactions between domain and level of confidence on:

- **smartness** ($F(1, 40)=11.379$, $p=.002$, $\eta^2=.22$)
- **agreement** ($F(1, 40)=12.178$, $p=.001$, $\eta^2=.23$)

(Note: Marginally significant interactions were found on children's ratings of liking ($F(1, 40)=3.661$, $p=.06$, $\eta^2=.08$) and confidence ($F(1, 40)=3.311$, $p=.08$, $\eta^2=.08$).)

Conclusions & Future Directions

Children differentially interpret confidence as a cue to one's credibility depending on the domain. That is, children preferred the confident individual when learning factual information, whereas they preferred the hesitant individual when considering moral decisions.

For moral deliberations, hesitancy may be interpreted as thoughtfulness, whereas confidence may be interpreted as overconfidence or a rush to judgment.

These findings further indicate children's active role in examining others' credibility. Children do not blindly use a behavior (i.e., confidence) as an indicator of credibility, rather they critically evaluate one's trustworthiness given the context.

Follow-up research will evaluate the emergence and developmental trajectory of children's sensitivity to confidence across domains, as well as children's underlying reasons for their preference for hesitancy in moral deliberations.

References

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