STUDY SUMMARY

Study Title and Target Age Range: Children’s evaluations and explanations for novel group stereotype endorsements and violations. Ages 4-13

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Brief Overview of Research Goals/Research Questions:

From an early age, children use social categories to make inferences about others (Baron & Banaji, 2006; Hirschfeld, 1996). For instance, children use information about another person’s gender to infer what kind of activities they like (Diesendruck et al., 2013), and they use information about a person’s race to infer what kind of friendship patterns they will engage in (Shutts et al., 2013). Recent work shows that children still make inferences on the basis of social category information even when the social category is unfamiliar to them (e.g., Flurps and Zases) (Rhodes, 2012). For instance, Rhodes (2012) shows that children expect novel groups to protect and work with their own members. However, one open question is if children expect novel group characters to engage in the same [stereotypical] patterns of behavior, and if so, how they evaluate and explain instances when a group member endorses or violates the behavior. Such research stands to further our understanding of children’s intuitions regarding group behaviors.

The overall goal of this research study is to examine how children reason about novel group (e.g., fictional characters) stereotypes. Specifically, we ask: 1) How do children evaluate stereotype endorsement and violations? 2) How do children explain stereotype endorsement and violations? 3) How do these evaluations and explanations change throughout development?

Brief Summary of Research Procedure: Tasks and assessments will be geared towards assessing children’s reasoning towards novel group stereotypes. Children will be shown images of two groups of fictional cartoon characters (i.e., Hibbles and Glerks). Each group will be presented as engaging in a specific activity (i.e., Hibbles eat orange berries, whereas Glerks eat green berries). Then, children will be shown individual characters who either engage in a same-group activity (e.g., Look, this Hibble is eating orange berries) or an other-group activity (e.g., Look, this Hibble is eating green berries). We will then ask child whether it is good or bad for the character to engage in the same- or other-group activity. We will then ask children to explain their reasoning, which we will record via an audio recorded. This task will examine children’s
reasoning about individuals who endorse or violate the typical behavior of the group. All data will be analyzed using SPSS. The primary analyses will consist of bivariate correlations, analyses of covariance (ANCOVA), and multiple regressions.

**Brief Summary of Hypotheses:** We predict that children will positively evaluate a fictional character who behaves in accordance with a group behavior (stereotype endorsement), and that they will negatively evaluate a fictional character who behaves in discordance with a group behavior (stereotype violation), 2) children will appeal to group-based and individual-based reasoning when explaining why certain behavior are OK or not OK, and 3) with age, children will become more likely to reason that all behaviors are OK.

**Implications of Research:** Understanding how children reason about stereotypes can inform the development of early education programs aimed at reducing prejudice and outgroup biases between and within social groups. Because previous research has explored these issues with regard to experience based categories, such as gender and race, this study stands to further our understanding of children’s cognitive intuitions toward group stereotypes more generally (novel groups).