

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 their level of confidence (confident vs. hesitant) in two domains of knowledge (factual vs. moral).

Method

Participants: $N = 96$, 3–8 years ($M = 5.5$; 51% female) in three age groups: 3-4, 5-6, and 7-8 years.

Design	Domain	Confidence
	Factual or Moral	Confident and Hesitant

Procedure



Sample Questions

Factual Domain

Which of these animals is the only one that has no tomas?

Moral Domain

These animals are all really hungry, but there is only one piece of shrimp left. Who should get the food?

Sample Responses

Confident Speaker	Hesitant Speaker
“Not the sea lion, not the seal, “Maybe the sea lion, maybe the the otter! Definitely the otter.”	seal, maybe the otter....Okay, I guess the otter.”

Measures

After each model’s response, children were asked:

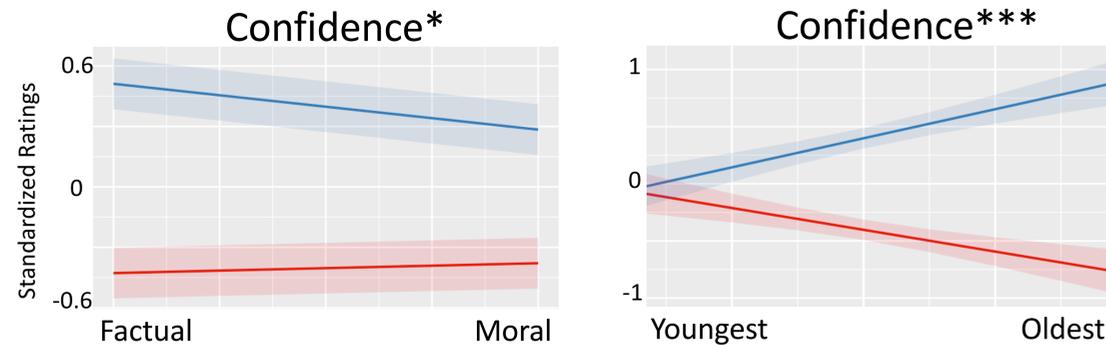
- How sure was she? (**confidence**)
- How much did you like her? (**likability**)
- How smart is she? (**smartness**)
- How much did you agree with her answer? (**agreement**)

Children responded using 4-point scale

0 = Not At All, 1 = A Little Bit, 2 = A Medium Amount, 3 = A Lot

Results

1. Overall, **the confident model was rated higher on confidence.**
 - a. However, models were rated **more similarly in the moral domain.**
 - b. Models were rated **more similarly by younger children.**



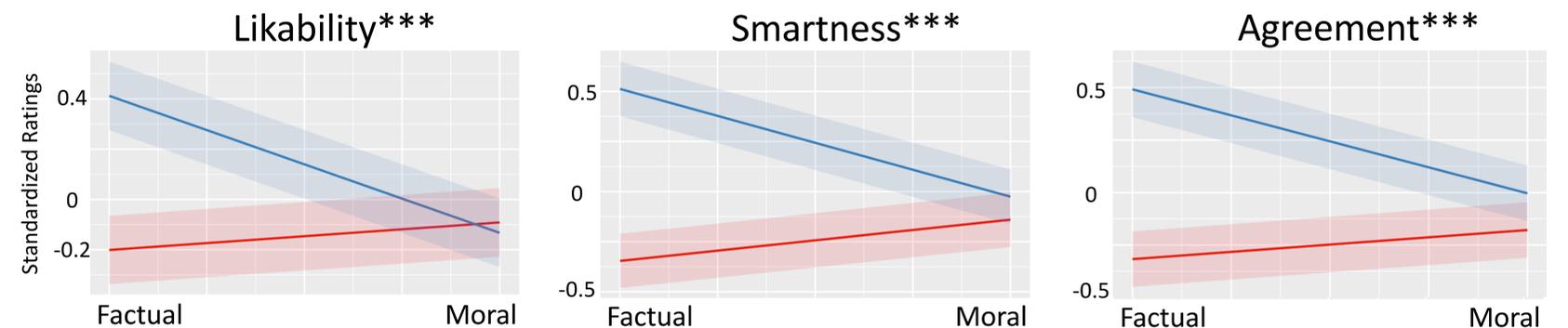
These results were obtained using Mixed Effects Modeling with condition, model, and age in months as fixed effects and trial as a random effect.

Key

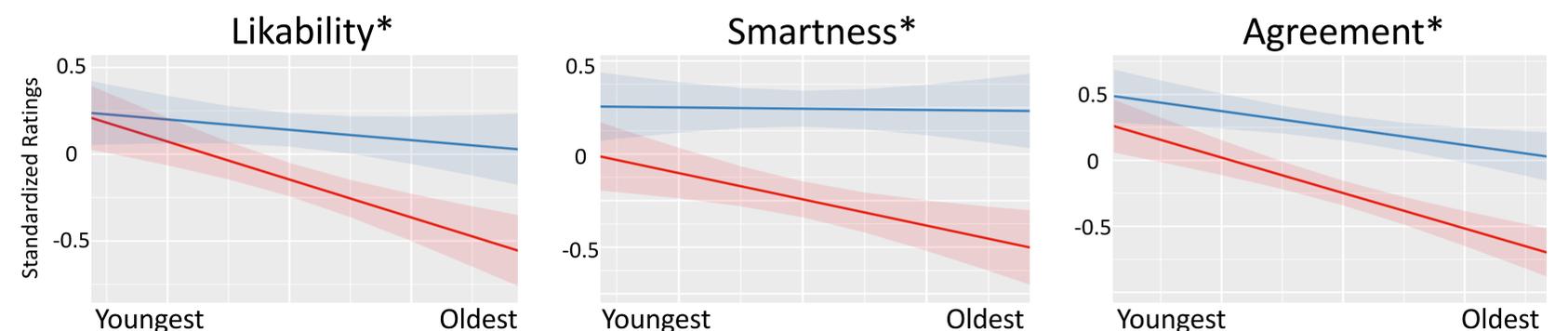
Model	Significance
— Hesitant	* $p \leq .05$
— Confident	** $p \leq .01$
	*** $p \leq .001$

Shaded areas reflect confidence intervals

2. Children rated the **confident model higher** on likability, smartness, and agreement with her answer **when she responded to factual questions, but not moral deliberations.**



3. With age, children provided **lower overall ratings** and **more divergent ratings** of the models on:



Conclusions & Future Directions

The domain determines whether or not children interpret confidence as a cue to one’s credibility. That is, children preferred the confident individual when learning factual information, but not when deliberating about moral claims. For moral deliberations, confidence may be interpreted as overconfidence or a rush to judgment.

This research sheds light on the remarkable level of sophistication with which children are able to evaluate informants. Future studies could use a forced-choice design wherein children hear conflicting responses from a confident and a hesitant speaker and must choose between the two. Future studies could also see whether children are wary of confident models in all ambiguous situations or if the moral domain is unique.

References

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Acknowledgements: This research was supported by a UM Grant Program Small Grant (No. 325453) to R.S. Special thanks to Adam Baimel, Ph.D. for assistance with analyses.

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