

Children's naïve theories of popularity and social influence

Do children believe that popular people wield social influence?

- Across a wide range of societies, people copy high-status others¹, and children copy popular kids².
- As young as 8-years-old, children recognize this copying in their schools³.
- But popular kids have confounding traits which could also drive copying.
 - Attractiveness⁴
 - Social intelligence⁵
 - Wealth^{6,7}
- Thus, it is unclear if this copying is connected to popularity, in and of itself.
- We use novel characters to strip away these confounds, and even pit them against popularity. Do children still think others will copy these popular kids?

General Discussion

- By age 7, children think popular people wield social influence — believing that others will copy popular kids.
 - This belief strengthened with age (Study 1 Wald $X^2 = 3.35^\dagger$ | Study 2 Wald $X^2 = 8.43^{**}$ | Study 3 $\beta = 0.24^{**}$).
- Even children 7+ who wanted to be rich believed others would copy popular kids.
- Children do not see high social status as a monolith—they also believe rich kids have their own advantages.
- Open questions include:
 - Motivations for copying popular kids
 - The extent of popular kids' influence

Study 1 ($N = 60$): Are popular people influential?

Popular

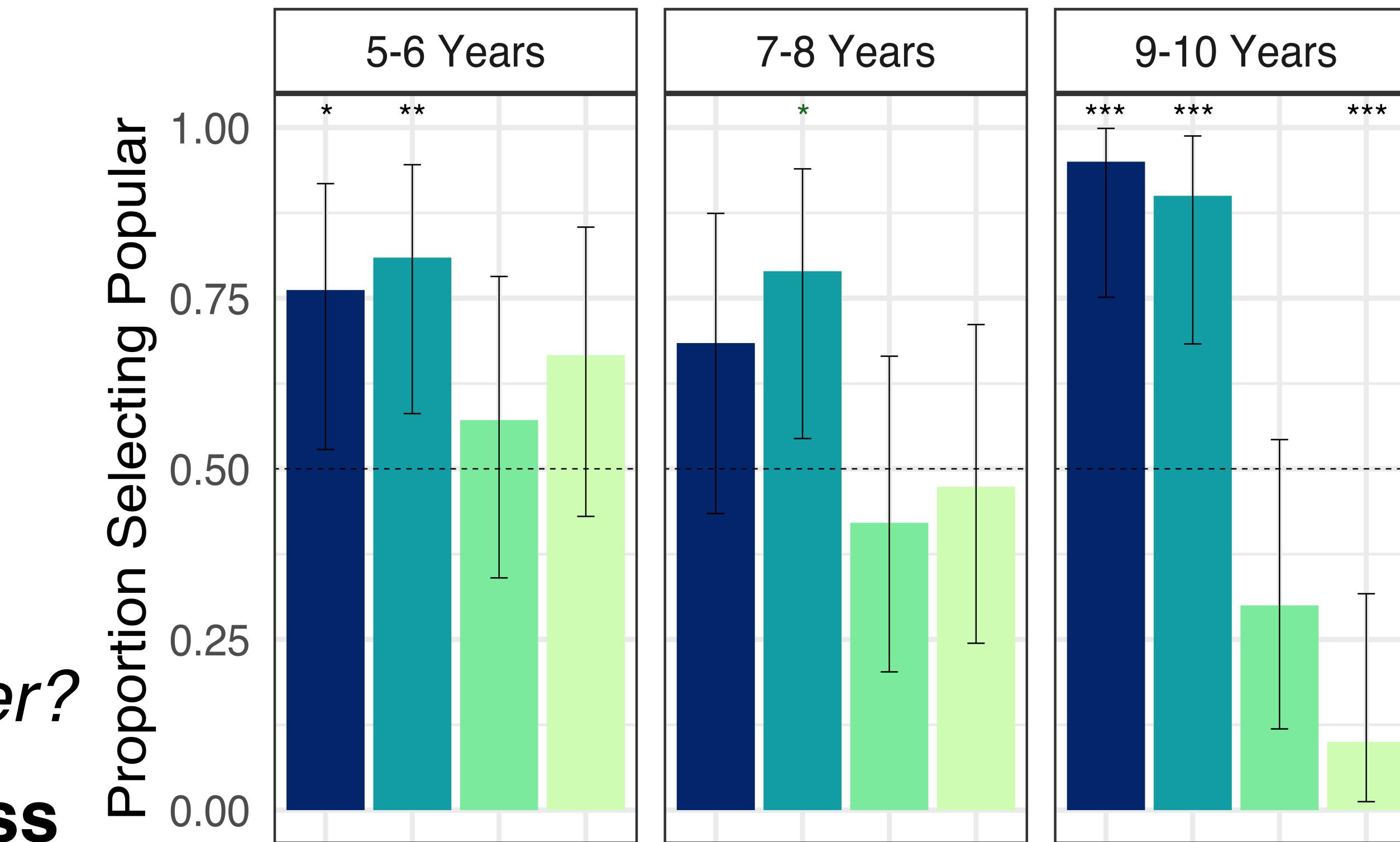
*Jordan is the coolest kid in class and is super popular.
Jordan is not a fast runner.*

Fast

*Terry is the fastest runner in class and runs super speedy.
Terry is not a cool kid.*

Who do you think...

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|-----------|
| All the kids in the class copy? | Is rich and has more money? | Is smarter? | Is nicer? |
| Social Influence | Wealth | Intelligence | Niceness |



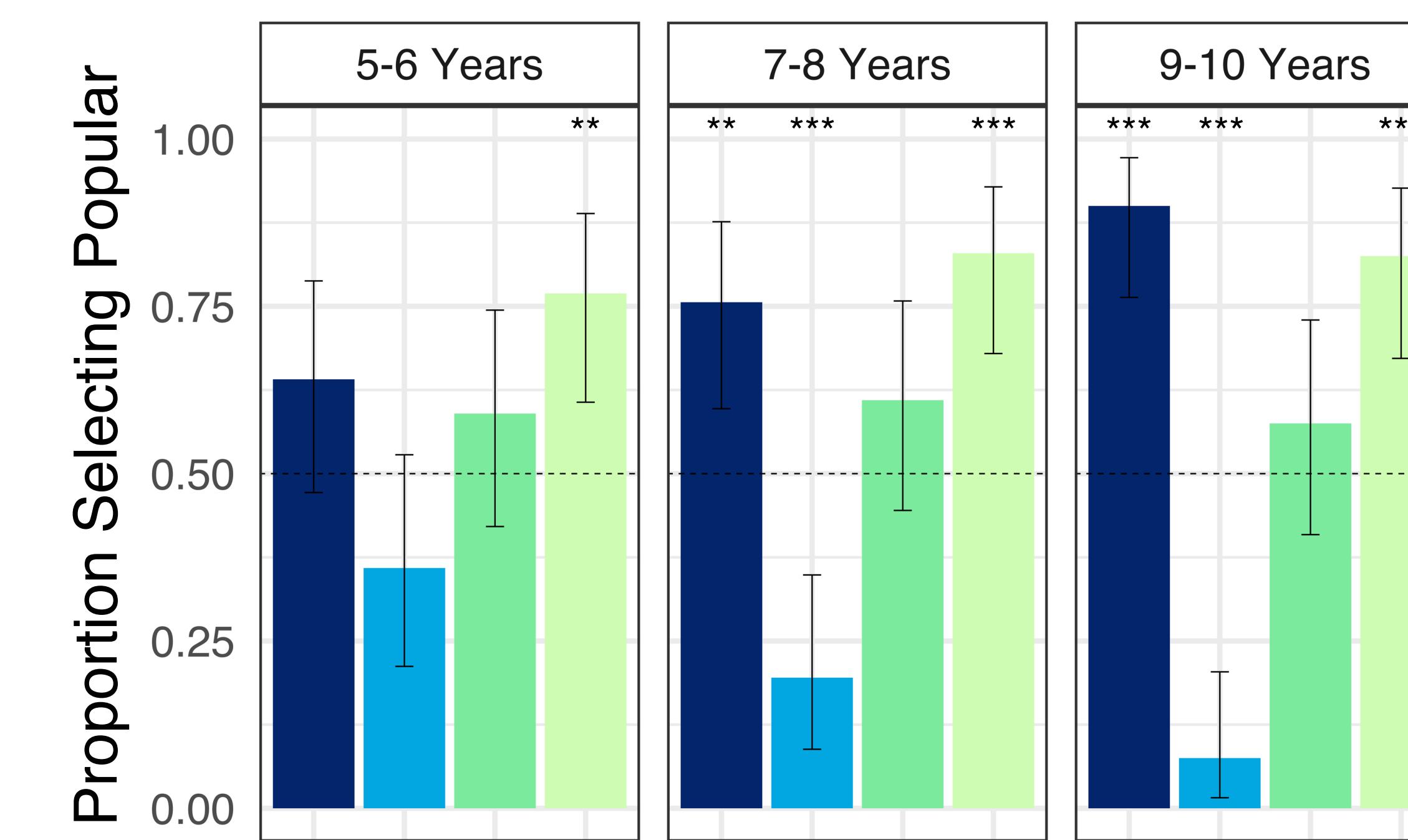
Study 2 & 3 (N 's = 120):

Are popular people more influential than other high-status people?

Study 2: Popular vs Rich I Forced Choice

Who do you think...

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Has an easier life? | Terry is the richest kid in class and has a lot of money. |
| Privilege | |



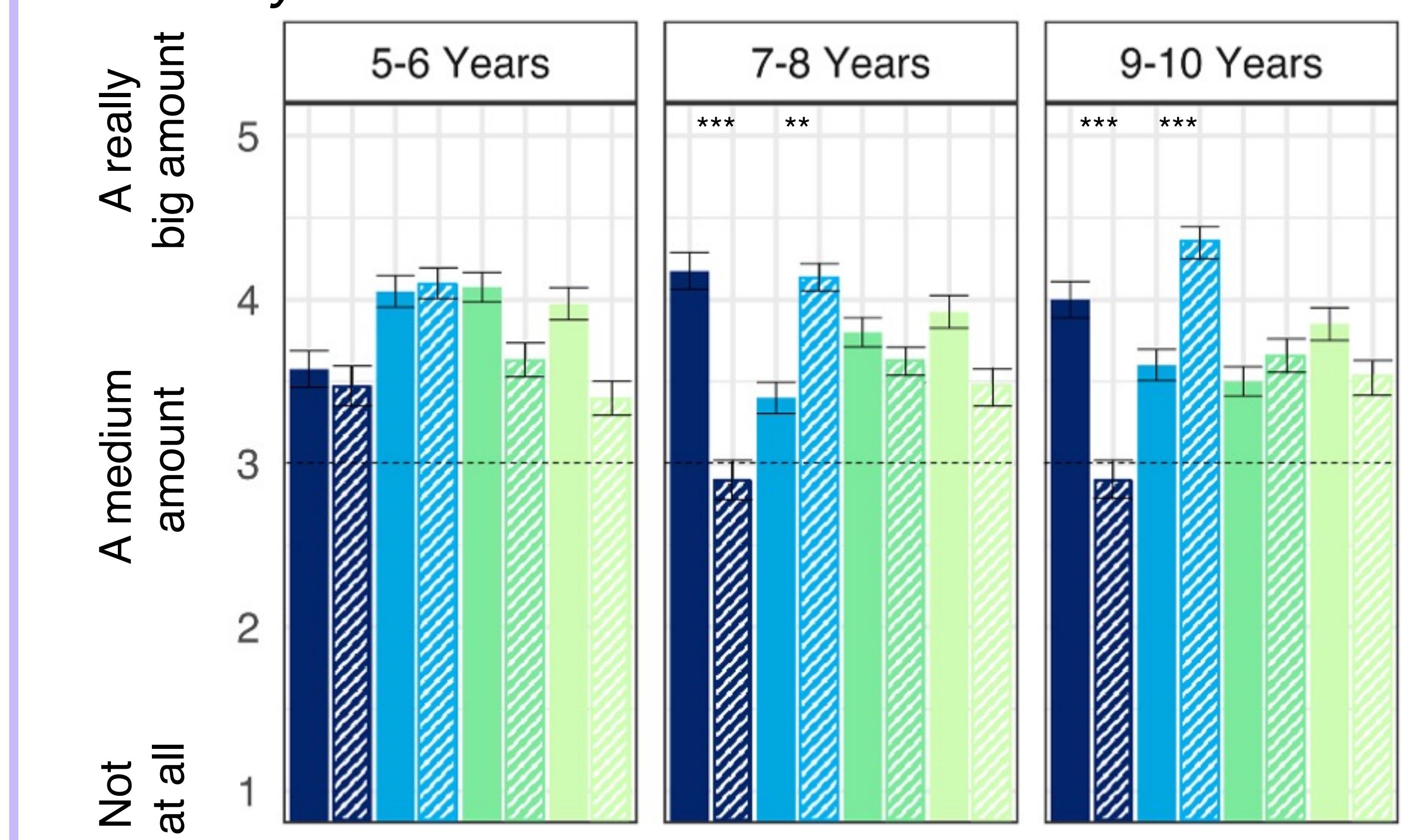
Study 3: Popular vs Rich I Non-Forced Choice

Example: How smart is Jordan?

Rich

← + Terry is not a cool kid.

Popular Rich



Children were also asked if they would rather be popular or rich. Their responses were evenly divided and did not correlate with any measures.

Acknowledgments, References, & Notes

Thank you to the UChicago DIBS Lab and participating families! [1] Henrich & Gil-White, 2001 [2] Sandstrom, 2011 [3] Lease et al., 2020 [4] Closson et al., 2009 [5] Meijs et al., 2010 [6] Shutts et al., 2016 [7] Yee et al., 2022 Studies 1 and 2 error bars = 95% CI. Study 3 error bars = SE.