

Learning from and about others: when reasoning about testimony, children consider both where it came from, and what others believe about its source

Rosie Aboody^{a,b}, Sami R. Yousif^c, Sarah Joo^d, Mark Sheskin^e, & Frank C. Keil^f

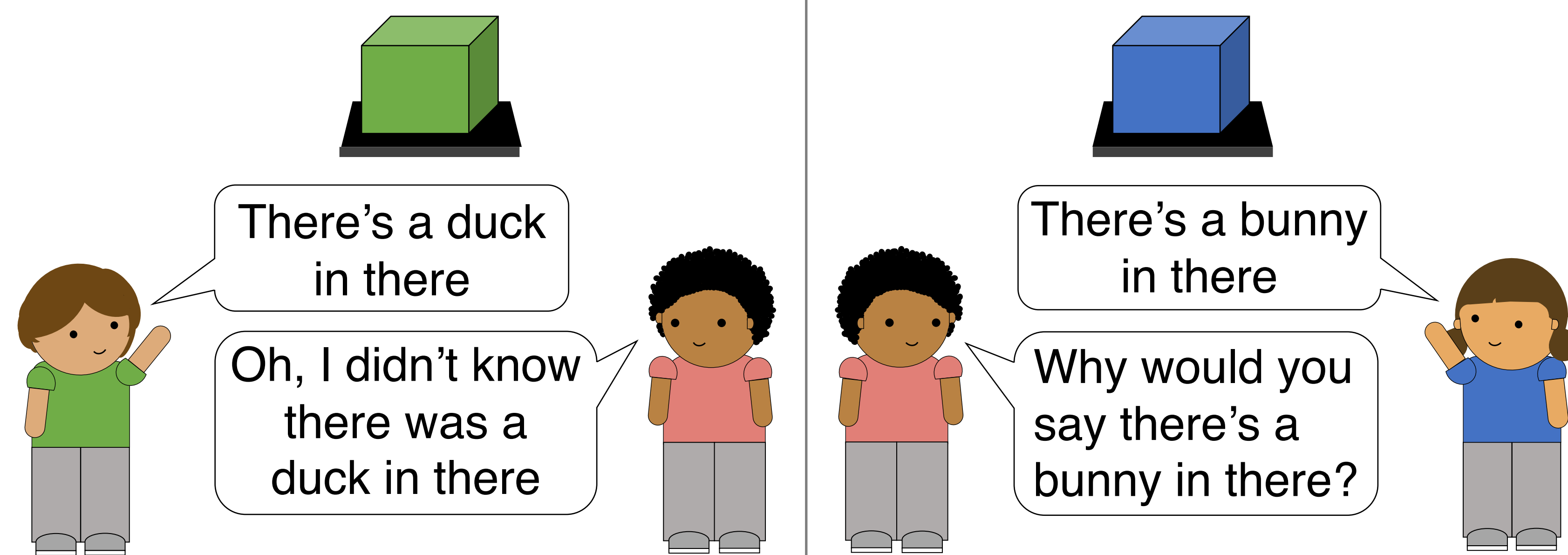
^a MIT, ^b Harvard University, ^c University of Pennsylvania, ^d Princeton University, ^e Minerva University, ^f Yale University

Introduction

- We often witness others' interactions as a 3rd party. An ability to make epistemic inferences from these interactions could be a critical component of our social cognition.
- However, little research has investigated how children learn about others (and the world) from observing others' interactions.
- Do 4- to 6-year-olds notice whom *others believe*, and infer the epistemic causes behind doubt? Do adults form their *own* beliefs by observing whom others trust?

Procedure

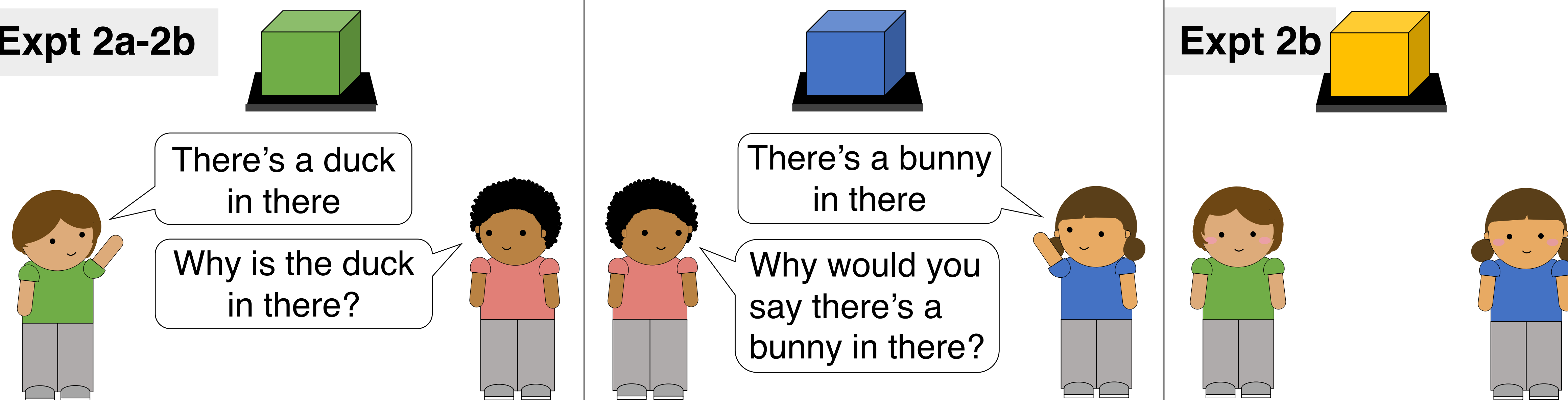
Experiment 1: Sam (pink) wants to know what's in the boxes. Each agent tells him what's in a box. Sam *accepts* one agent's testimony, and *questions* the other's.



Expt 1 test q: Sam thinks one of these friends is wrong. Which friend is wrong?

Experiment 2a-2b (adults): More tightly controlled, contrasting an *information-seeking* and a *pointed* question.

Expt 2a-2b

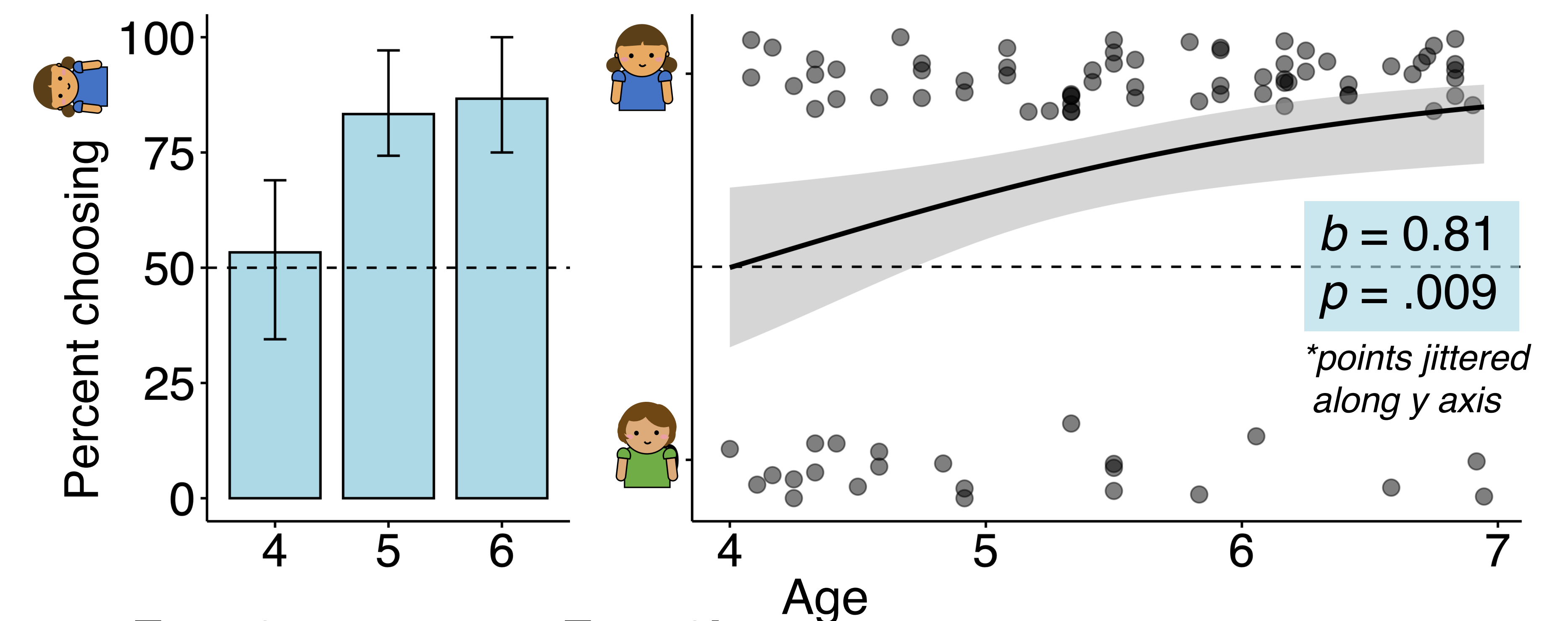


Expt 2a test q: Sam thinks one of these friends is wrong. Which friend is wrong?

Expt 2b test q: To find out what's in the yellow box, you can ask one person what's there. Who do you want to ask?

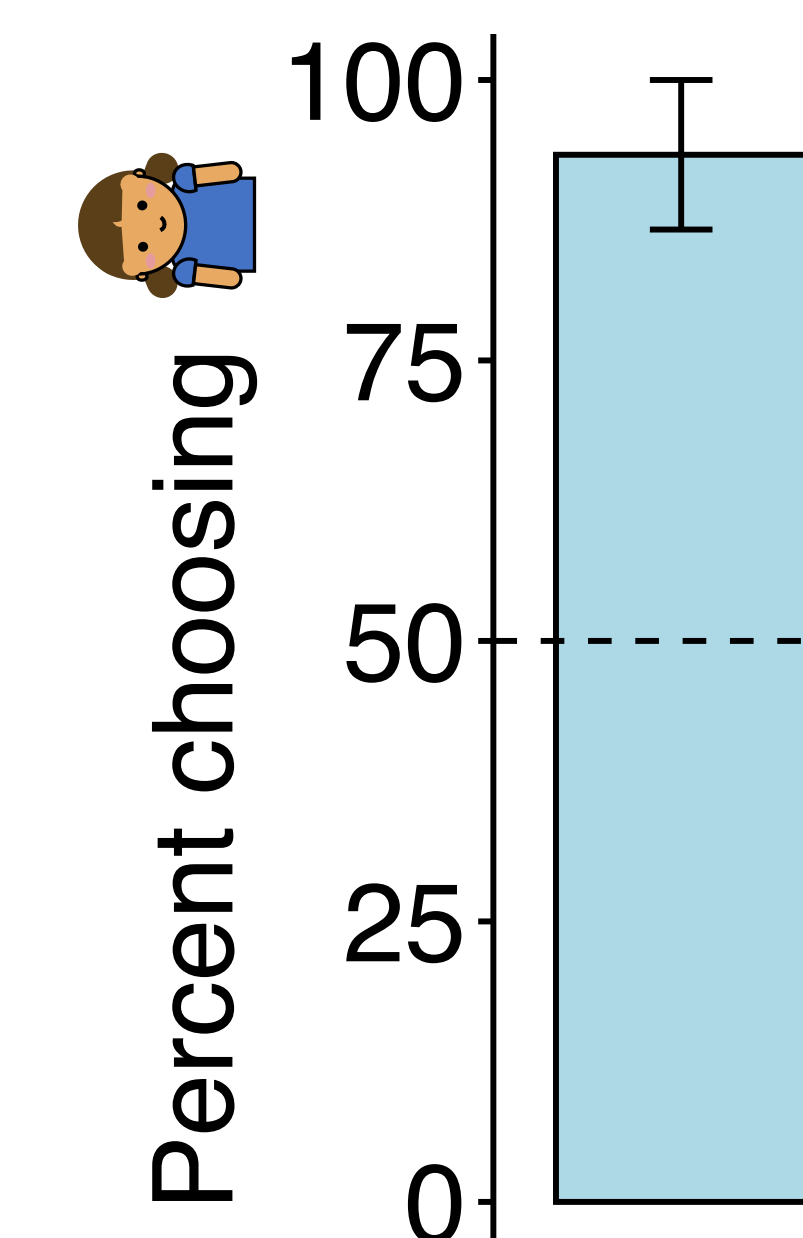
Results

Expt 1: Sam thinks one of these friends is wrong. Who's wrong? (n=90)



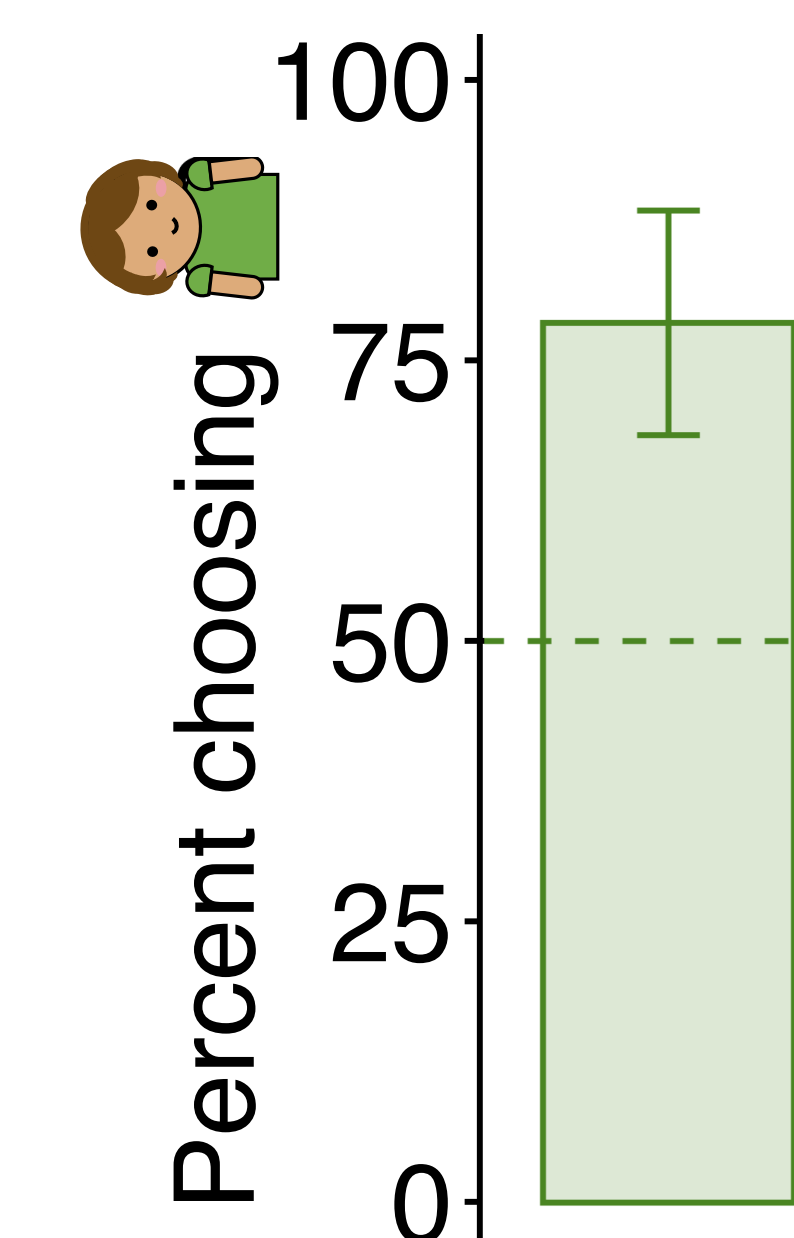
Expt 2a:

Who does Sam think is wrong?



Expt 2b:

Who do *you* want to learn from?



- 5yo's inferred Sam's belief over each informants' knowledge.
- 4yo's did not.
- In a more tightly-controlled paradigm, adults also inferred who Sam disbelieved (Expt 2a), and avoided learning from this informant (Expt 2b)

General Discussion

- From age 5, kids notice whom others trust, inferring that an agent disbelieves an informant he pointedly questions
- Adults make the same inference in a more tightly controlled setting, but also infer a person who was disbelieved may *in fact* be ignorant.
- This opens a new area of research, investigating how we learn about others and the world from observing interactions as a 3rd party.
- It also opens an important question: can we distinguish disbelief that arises from true evidence of epistemic incompetence vs. bias? What are our underlying assumptions over the reasons for others' distrust?