

Desires influence 4- to 6-year-old children's probabilistic judgments

Adrienne Wenté

University of California, Berkeley

Mariel Goddu

University of California, Berkeley

Elyanah Posner

University of California, Berkeley

Teresa Garcia

University of California, Berkeley

María Fernández Flecha

Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú

Alison Gopnik

University of California, Berkeley

Abstract: Research on wishful thinking suggests that desires bias adult's probability judgments. Previous research has yet to explore if this extends to young children. In Experiment 1, 260 4- and 6-year-olds in the U.S. and Peru played a card game, where selecting a desirable card was unlikely. In Experiment 2, 200 4- to 6-year-old children were shown a bag of plastic eggs; a few contained desirable prizes. Children were asked to make predictions about what card / egg would be randomly selected. Answers were compared to control conditions in which probability was comparable, but children had no reason to desire a specific outcome. In control conditions, children tended to state that the majority card/ egg would be selected. In the experimental conditions, children were more likely to state that the desirable (and improbable) card/ egg would be selected. Results suggest that a desire bias extends to children as young as 4.