

Simplicity preferences in young childrens decision-making

Rebecca Canale

University of Rochester, Rochester, New York, United States

George Loewenstein

Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States

Celeste Kidd

University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, California, United States

Abstract

Classic theories of multi-attribute choice typically assume that preferences are an additive function of attribute values. However recent work (Evers et al.) demonstrates a preference for simplicity that can violate the most basic assumptions and predictions of conventional models. For example, a set of 7 colored pencils that are all unique colors are preferred over a set of 8 colored pencils with one redundant color. This preferential choice, however, cannot be explained by the utility of consumption itself. Does this preference emerge as a result of adults substantial experience with such sets in the world (e.g., through shopping or organizing ones possessions), or is this preference present much earlier? Does the preference for simplicity, in fact, facilitate cognitive encoding? We investigate these questions through a series of experiments conducted with children in an effort to understand the emergence of this simplicity bias, and its connection to the development of working memory.