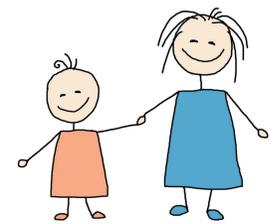


The Effect of Interviewer Rapport Building on Children's Credulity Toward Misinformation

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Introduction

In recent years, an increasing number of children have served as testifiers in legal contexts (Cashmore & Parkinson, 2014).

Efforts have been made to increase the validity of children's statements. Currently, the leading child forensic interviewing protocol recommends that interviewers should attempt to build rapport with children both prior to and during an interview (Lamb et al., 2007).

It is assumed that rapport development would decrease children's anxiety and increase their willingness to accurately disclose event details. That said, there has been limited empirical evidence in support of this recommendation (Saywitz et al., 2015).

The present research sought to explore the impact of interviewer rapport building on preschoolers' credulity toward misinformation in a laboratory setting.

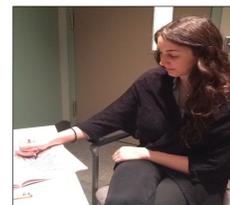
Supportive Condition:

- Open body posture
- Good eye-contact
- Not fidgeting
- Leaning toward child
- Smiling at the child
- Commenting on the child's skills
- Colored clothing
- Saying the child's name



Neutral Condition:

- Closed body posture
- Limited eye-contact
- Fidgeting
- Leaning away from child
- Not smiling at the child
- Talking about one-self
- Dark clothing
- Not saying the child's name



Discussion

Consistent with previous findings, after the interviewer attempted to build rapport with them, children were less credulous and more likely to provide spontaneous corrections of the interviewer's misleading statements during an interview. It also appeared that children acted with greater credulity when asked to report details that were more finite or contextual in nature (e.g., object characteristics) rather than concrete or salient (e.g., object identity).

The results support the leading recommendation that rapport development may decrease young children's suggestibility to misleading information.

- The interviewer's rapport-building behaviors might lead children to feel less nervous about the interview and more comfortable with the interviewer, which in turn might contribute to children's confidence in resisting misinformation and/or responding spontaneously.
- Past research shows that poor interviewing tactics (e.g., asking closed or leading questions) may increase the likelihood of children providing inaccurate testimony (Teoh & Lamb, 2013), whereas more coherent/complete statements from children at onset are associated with less suggestive questioning (Battin et al., 2012). Based on these findings, children's spontaneous corrections of the interviewer's misleading statements might serve to decrease the likelihood of the interviewer asking leading questions in the first place.

Future research is needed to examine whether the above-mentioned impact of interviewer rapport building on children's suggestibility can be applied to real-world forensic settings.

Method

Participants: 4- to 5-year-old children ($N = 44$)

- Supportive condition ($n = 22$; $M = 4.5$ years, $SD = 6.8$ months)
- Neutral condition ($n = 22$; $M = 4.9$ years, $SD = 6.7$ months)

Research Design: 2 (trial type: *Identity* vs. *Characteristic*, within-subjects) x 2 (condition: *Supportive* vs. *Neutral interviewer*, between-subjects) mixed design

Procedure:

- Children were introduced to 3 different objects and their associated characteristics.
- Next, children spent time with either a supportive or a neutral interviewer (coloring a picture together).
- Afterwards, the interviewer provided misinformation about the identities and characteristics of the 3 objects.



We recorded whether children agreed with the interviewer (i.e., being credulous) or went with their own firsthand observations when asked to **recall** each object's *identity* and its associated *characteristic*, as well as their **spontaneous corrections** of the interviewer's misleading statements.

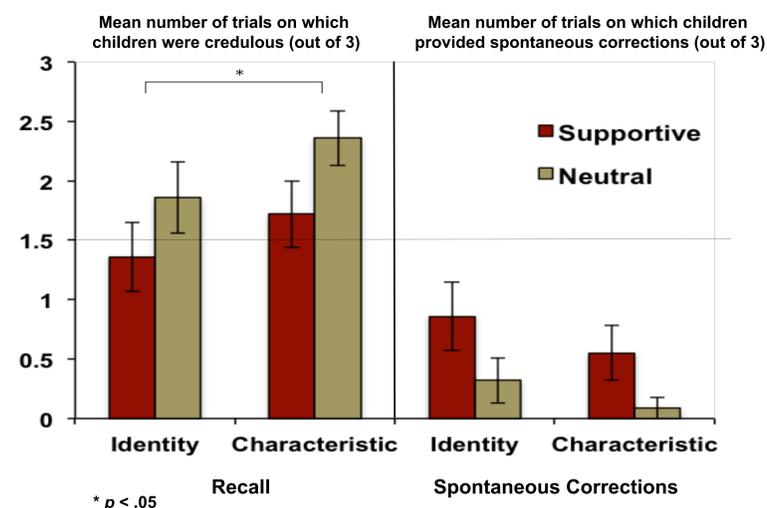
Results

Recall:

- Children were less likely to be credulous in the Supportive condition than in the Neutral condition, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 3.29, p = .07$.
- A significant main effect of trial type was observed, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 5.97, p = .02$. Children were more credulous when labeling the object's associated *characteristic* than its *identity*.

Spontaneous Corrections:

- Children provided more spontaneous corrections (1) in the Supportive condition than in the Neutral condition, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 2.96, p = .08$, and (2) for the object *identity* than its associated *characteristic*, Wald $\chi^2(1) = 2.95, p = .05$.



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