



Child Development Labs
at the University of Virginia

“At Least She Said Something”: Children Prefer Inaccurate Over Ignorant Informants

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Introduction

- Preschoolers prefer novel information from previously accurate informants over previously wrong or ignorant ones (Koenig & Harris, 2005).
- They expect an ignorant individual to guess incorrectly (rather than at chance levels) when making a choice between two alternatives (Ruffman, 1996; but see Friedman & Petrashek, 2009).
- If children equate ignorant with inaccurate speakers, they should endorse their novel information at equal rates. Alternatively, children may prefer a historically inaccurate speaker because she seemed to be a more helpful collaborator.
- We asked if **4- and 5-year-olds (n = 96)** preferred novel information from a previously inaccurate labeler or an ignorant one (Study 1), if they knew that the inaccurate speaker's labels were indeed wrong (Study 2), and if the perceived helpfulness of the speaker influenced their preferences (Study 3).

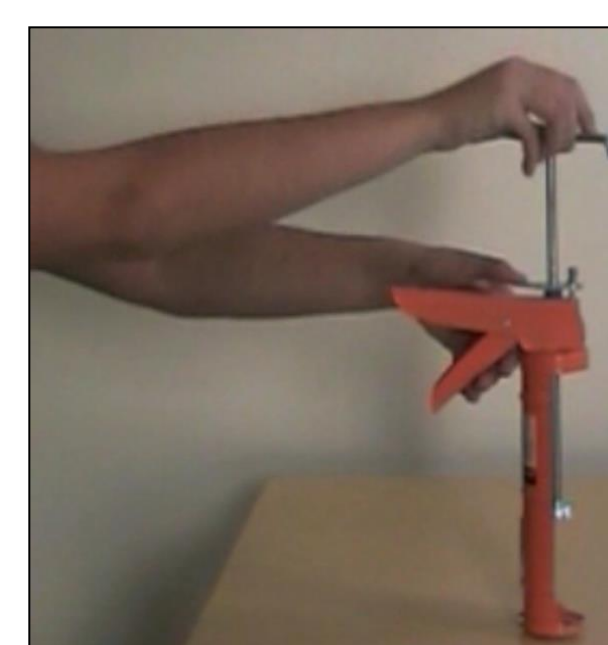
Conclusions

- 4- and 5-year-olds did not equate ignorance with inaccuracy: they initially preferred a speaker they knew was wrong, preferred her novel information later, and claimed she knew more about the objects she had just labeled incorrectly compared to an ignorant speaker (*unless she was also helpful*).
- Children view those who make the effort to respond in some helpful way, even if incorrect, more favorably. This suggests that effort can overshadow ignorance and inaccuracy.

Method

4 Object Trials

Study 2



Do you know what
this is called?

Is it a ball?

4 Induction Trials

Ignorant

Studies 1 & 2

Study 3



“I don't know
what this is
called.”

“I don't know what
this is called.
We can look it up
in a book.”

Inaccurate



“I know what
this is called.
It's a ball.”

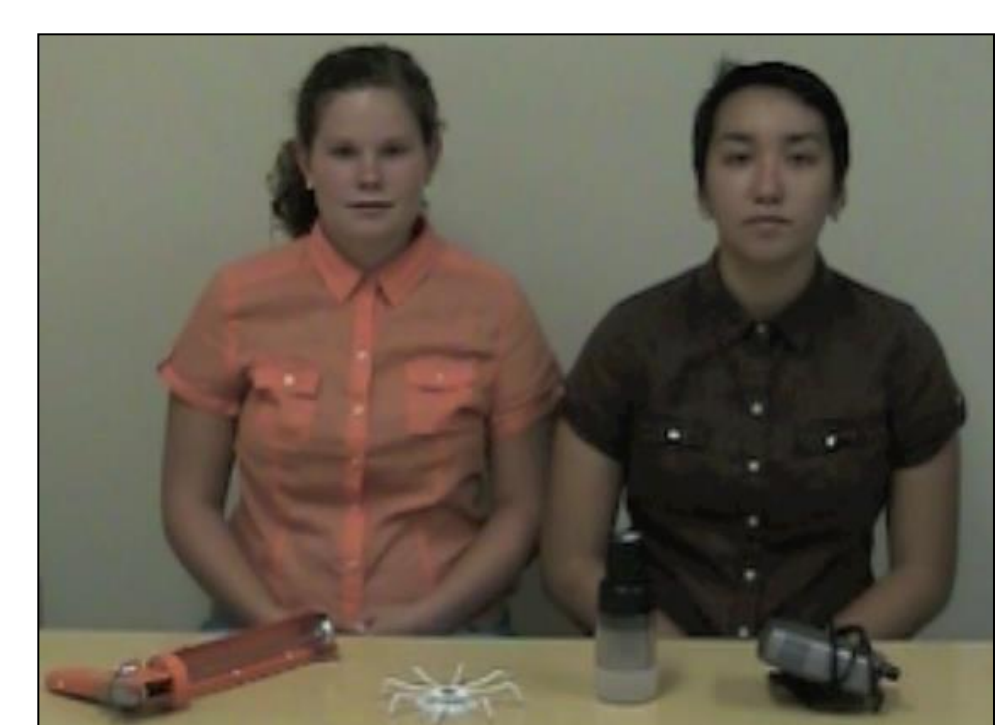
“I know what
this is called.
It's a ball.”

Who is saying the right thing?

4 Test Trials



Who is saying the right thing?



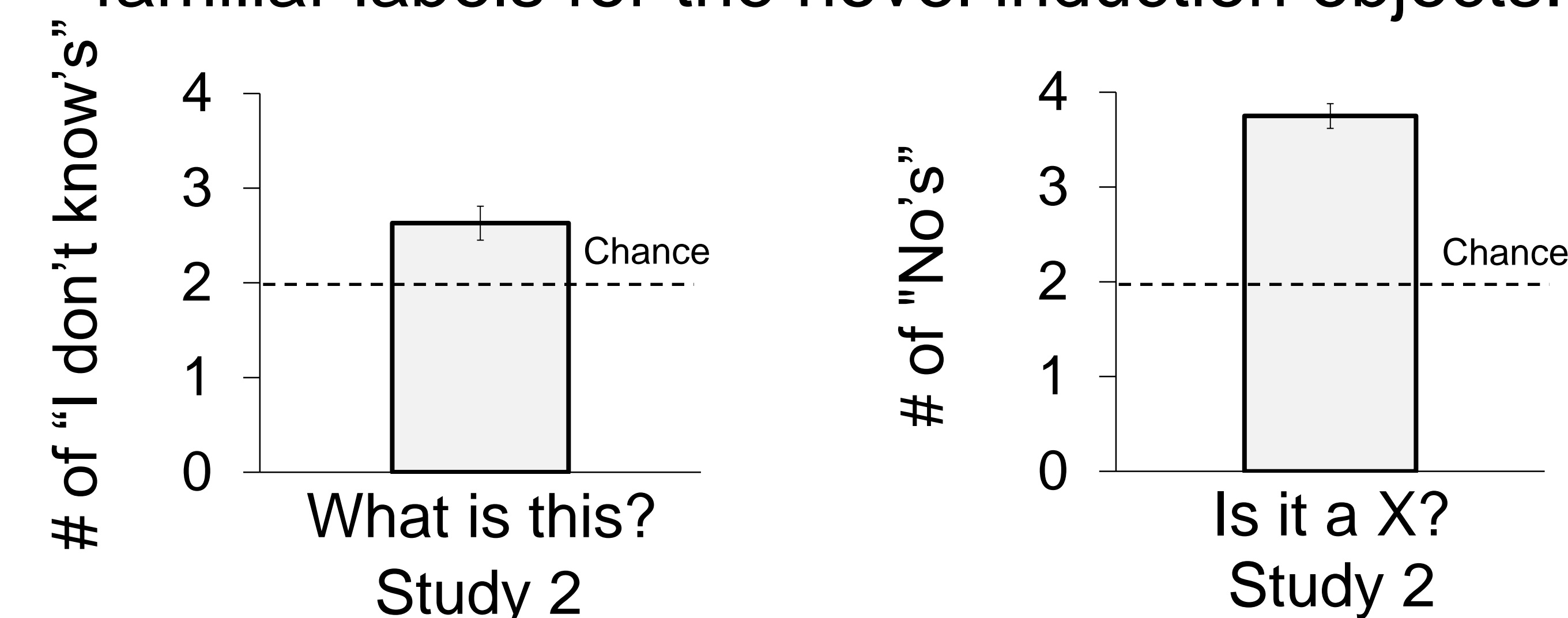
Explicit Judgment

Who was better at telling me what
these were called?

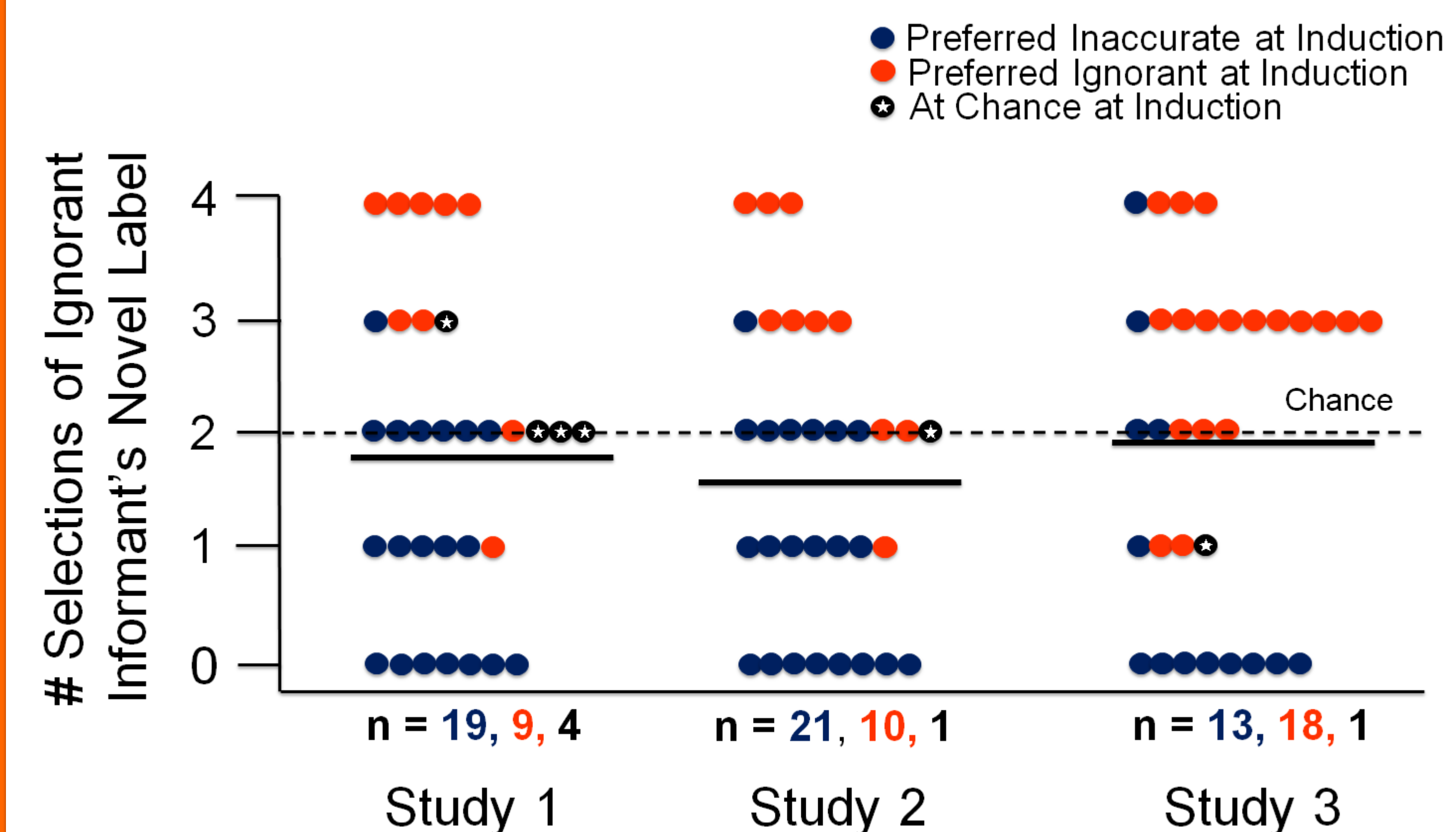
Who knows the most about these
things?

Results

Children admitted ignorance but rejected the familiar labels for the novel induction objects.



Even so, most children preferred the Inaccurate speaker, unless the Ignorant one was also helpful.



References

- Friedman, O. & Petrashek, A.R. (2009). Children do not follow the rule “ignorance means getting it wrong”. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 102 (1), 114-121.
- Koenig, M. & Harris, P.L. (2005). Preschoolers mistrust ignorant and inaccurate speakers. *Child Development*, 76, 1261-1277.
- Ruffman, T. (1996). Do Children Understand the Mind by Means of Simulation or a Theory? Evidence From Their Understanding of Inference. *Mind & Language*, 11(4), 388-414.

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