**Introduction**

Researchers have increasingly begun to focus on the dual questions of what information is at the core of early artifact representations and to what extent this information changes over development.

Some researchers argue that adults and even young children represent information about an object’s “designed function” (e.g. the use intended by the designer) as central to artifact representation (e.g. Diserenduck, Markson & Bloom, 2003; Casler & Kelemen, 2007).

Others have stressed the importance of shared conventional use (Siegal & Callanan, 2007) and non-accidental use (Matan & Carey, 2001).

Whilst others researchers propose that any non-accidental use might form the core property of artifact representations, even those occurring just once by just one social agent (Truwax, Krasnow, Woods & German, 2006).

Furthermore, German & Johnson (2002) showed a dissociation between deciding the kind to which an item belonged (categorization) versus deciding what an item is for (function judgement).

**Materials and Procedure**

**Conventional Condition:** In this condition design was pitted against convention by telling participants in which novel artifacts were designed by A for X but now used by everybody for Y.

**Idiosyncratic Condition:** In this condition design was pitted against idiosyncratic function by telling participants stories about artifacts that were designed by A for X but now used by B for Y.

**Experiment 1**

**Method**

Participants

40 adults (mean age 23 years, range 18-25), 40 4-year-olds (mean age 4-6, range 4-1 to 4-9) and 40 6-year-olds (mean age 6-3, range 5-7 to 6-8) were randomly assigned to either a conventional function condition or an idiosyncratic function condition.

Results & Discussion

A 2 x 3 ANOVA revealed main effects of age group (F(1,120) = 13.22, p < 0.0001) and age group (F(1,120) = 2.58, p < 0.005). Analysis of each condition against chance indicated that adults selected the category based on design in both idiosyncratic and conventional conditions. In the Idiosyncratic function condition, children selected the category of the object based on the intended use. In the case of Conventional function condition, children were split between the two candidate functions.

**Experiment 2**

**Method**

Participants

40 adults (mean age 22.4 years, range 18-23), 40 4-year-olds (mean age 4-5, range 4-0 to 4-9), and 40 6-year-olds (mean age 6-2, range 5-8 to 6-8) were randomly assigned to either the conventional function condition or the idiosyncratic function condition.

**Materials and procedure**

Children's Understanding of Object Function: Design or Convention?

Margaret Anne Defeyter, Northumbria University

BPS Developmental Psychology Section Conference

**References**


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