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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

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Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7fc5x8d9

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Publication Date

2023

Peer reviewed

Children use disagreement to infer what happened

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Abstract

Children often need to rely on other people's testimony to figure out what happened. One challenge in learning from others is that people can disagree in their interpretations of what happened. The present research examined how children ages 7 to 11 use disagreement to make inferences about past social events. Specifically, when there is no reason to question the reliability of either informant, can children use disagreement to infer that an ambiguous social event occurred? Experiment 1 (N = 52) found that children are indeed more likely to infer that an ambiguous social event occurred after learning that people disagreed (versus agreed) about what happened and that this ability strengthens with age. Experiment 2 (n = 43; data collection ongoing) examines how children make this inference. We predict that children's ability to reason about what would cause disagreement is critical to make inferences from disagreement about what happened.