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Desires influence 4- to 6-year-old children's probabilistic judgments

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Abstract: Research on wishful thinking suggests that desires bias adult's probability judgments. Previous research has yet to explore if this extends to young children. In Experiment 1, 260 4- and 6-year-olds in the U.S. and Peru played a card game, where selecting a desirable card was unlikely. In Experiment 2, 200 4- to 6-year-old children were shown a bag of plastic eggs; a few contained desirable prizes. Children were asked to make predictions about what card / egg would be randomly selected. Answers were compared to control conditions in which probability was comparable, but children had no reason to desire a specific outcome. In control conditions, children tended to state that the majority card/ egg would be selected. In the experimental conditions, children were more likely to state that the desirable (and improbable) card/ egg would be selected. Results suggest that a desire bias extends to children as young as 4.