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Cue Validity, Feature Salience, and the Development of Inductive Inference

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Abstract

Young children can generalize properties to novel stimuli, but the mechanism underlying these early inductions is still debated. Some researchers argue that from an early age induction relies on category information and undergoes little development, while others believe that early induction is similarity-based, and the use of categories emerges over time. This present study brings new evidence to the debate by exploring the kinds of features 4-year-old children and adults (N = 123) rely on in their induction. Our results indicate that induction undergoes dramatic development: young children tend to rely on salient features when performing induction, whereas adults rely primarily on category information. We argue that the reported findings present evidence challenging category-based accounts of early induction, while supporting similarity-based accounts.