

Children's Evaluations of Ingroup and Outgroup Members Following Accusations of Wrongdoing



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Introduction

Background

- Children are commonly involved in competitive activities, such as sports and contests, and misunderstandings between teams and players can occur as a result of different interpretations of intentions
- Previous research has shown that group identity is used in children's interpretations of ambiguous situations (McGlothlin & Killen, 2010)
- This study investigates children's understanding about intentions and fairness

Research Question

- Does the group identity of children affect their interpretation of ambiguous situations when there is an accusation of misconduct?

Method

Participants

- 137 participants (4-10 year-olds) recruited from Mid-Atlantic, middle to upper-middle income families
- Evenly split by gender and ethnically diverse (69% European American, 17% African American, 11% Hispanic, and 9% Asian American)

Procedure

- Participants assigned to the Red or Blue team
- Participants witnessed ambiguous situations in which a rule could have been violated or maintained in a competition setting
- A character accuses another character of misconduct

Measures

- Participants assessed the ambiguous situation before the claim of misconduct
- Participants assessed the ambiguous situation after hearing the claim of misconduct

Design

- The Red and Blue teams compete in a vegetable growing contest
- "The first rule is: each team can only give their plants ONE cup of plant food each day to grow their watermelons!"
- After watching both teams feed their plants, a Blue team member is seen in an ambiguous situation and the Red team claims they cheated



- Participants evaluate the ambiguous situation: "Was is OK/not OK for Sam to do what she did?"
- Participants hear the claim of misconduct
- Participants evaluate the ambiguous situation again: "Was is OK/not OK for Sam to do what she did?"

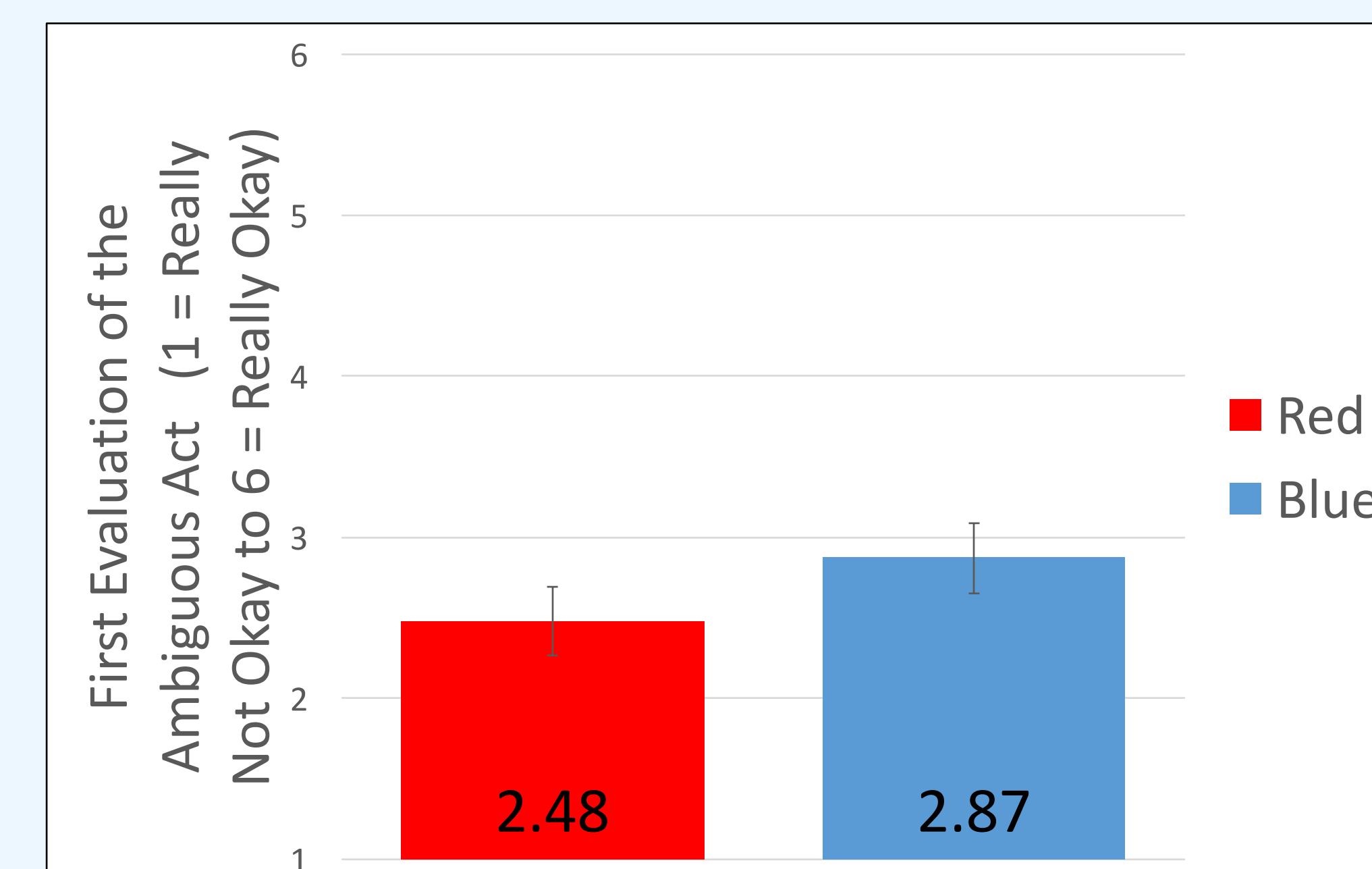
Results

- Before hearing the claim, participants on the Red team did not evaluate the ambiguous situation as worse than participants on the Blue team ($p=.199$)
- After hearing the claim, participants on the Red team did evaluate the ambiguous situation as worse than participants on the Blue team ($p=.001$)

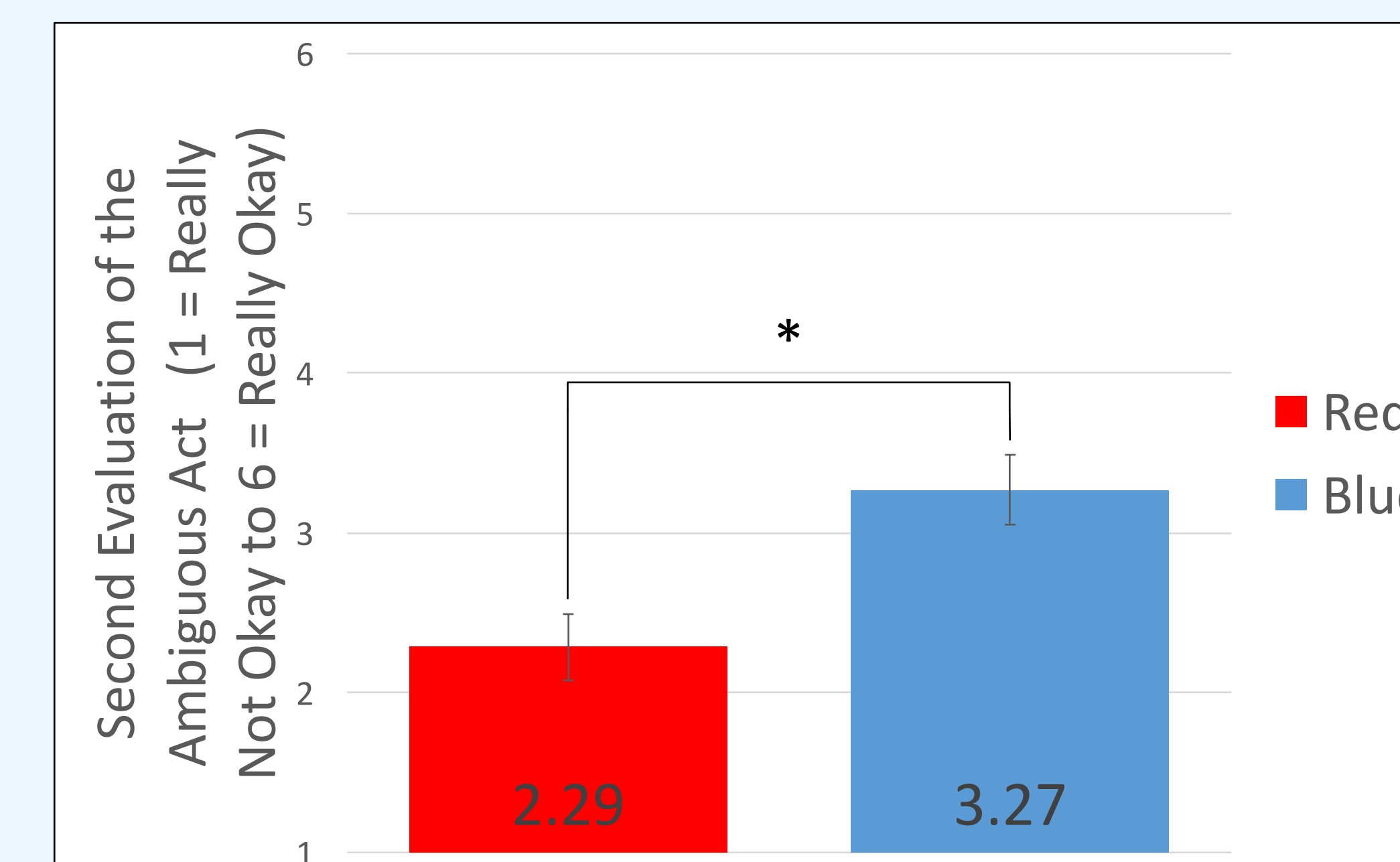
Discussion

- Following the cheating accusation, there was a divergence of evaluations based on team membership in which the Blue team interpreted the act of their teammate as significantly more acceptable than the opposing Red team.
- This is in line with previous work on the influence of competitive contexts on the saliency of group membership (McGuire, Rutland, & Nesdale, 2015).
- These findings also suggest that intergroup conflict in a competitive context strengthens team identification and acceptance and should be investigated in future research.

Assessment of Ambiguous Situation Before Claim



Assessment of Ambiguous Situation After Claim



References

- McGlothlin, H., & Killen, M. (2010). How social experience is related to children's intergroup attitudes. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 40, 625-634. doi:10.1002/ejsp.733
- McGuire, L., Rutland, A., & Nesdale, D. (2015). Peer group norms and accountability moderate the effect of school norms on children's intergroup attitudes. *Child Development*, 86(4), 1290-1297. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12388>