

# The role of affect in fantasy-reality judgments: looking at real, near-real and make-believe entities

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## Introduction

Distinguishing between what is real and what is not, namely the fantasy-reality distinction, is an important skill that develops throughout early childhood and adults are considered to have formed a ‘perfect’ distinction between the two (Woolley, 1997). The standard task involves the child sorting real and make-believe entities into categories of ‘real’ and ‘make-believe’ (Sharon and Woolley, 2004). The current study examines the role of affect in entity categorisation, as previous research has shown that children are more likely to categorise make-believe events as real when they are positive than when they are negative (Carrick and Quas, 2006).

## Method

- Participants: 30 3-4-year-olds, 22 5-6-year-olds, 15 7-8-year-olds and 25 adults. Adults were included in the current study to test if they have a ‘perfect’ fantasy-reality distinction.
- Materials: Three groups of eight entities (real/make-believe/near real) were selected: real (human TV presenters), near-real (e.g., a character played by a real human actor, as opposed to a cartoon) and make-believe (drawn or animated human characters). Within the make-believe and near-real categories, four entities were positive (e.g., Peter Pan) and four were negative (e.g., Cruella De Vil).



- Procedure: Participants were asked to place entities into categories of real, make-believe and not sure. They also were asked why they placed the entity into the category and how that entity made them feel using a face scale.

## Research questions and results

- Research question 1: Do typically developing 3-8-year-old children and adults improve with age in their ability to correctly categorise real, make-believe and near-real entities? Tested by 4 (age group) x 3 (entity type) mixed ANOVA.
- We found that across groups, participants were significantly better at categorising real and make-believe entities compared to near-real entities however all three entity groups improved with age (Figure 1).

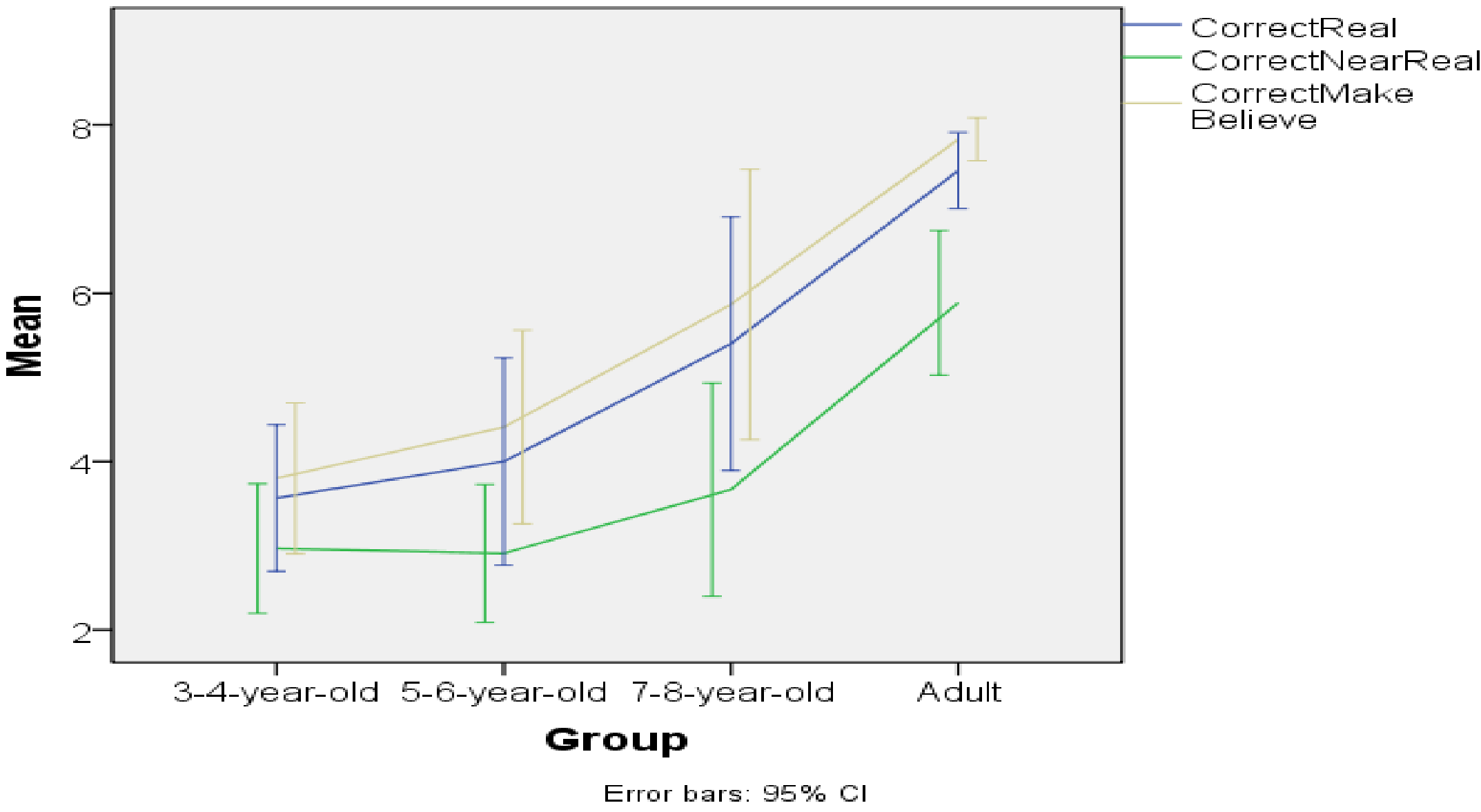


Figure 1: Mean scores for real, near-real and make-believe entities correctly categorised

- Research question 2: Does affect bias categorisation of make-believe and near-real entities in typically developing 3-8-year-old children and adults? Tested by 4 (age group) x 2 (positive or negative affect) mixed ANOVA.
- 3-4-year-olds made significantly more errors by categorising positive make-believe/near-real entities as real compared to negative make-believe/near-real entities (Figure 2). This was seen in 5-6-year-olds however only for make-believe entities.

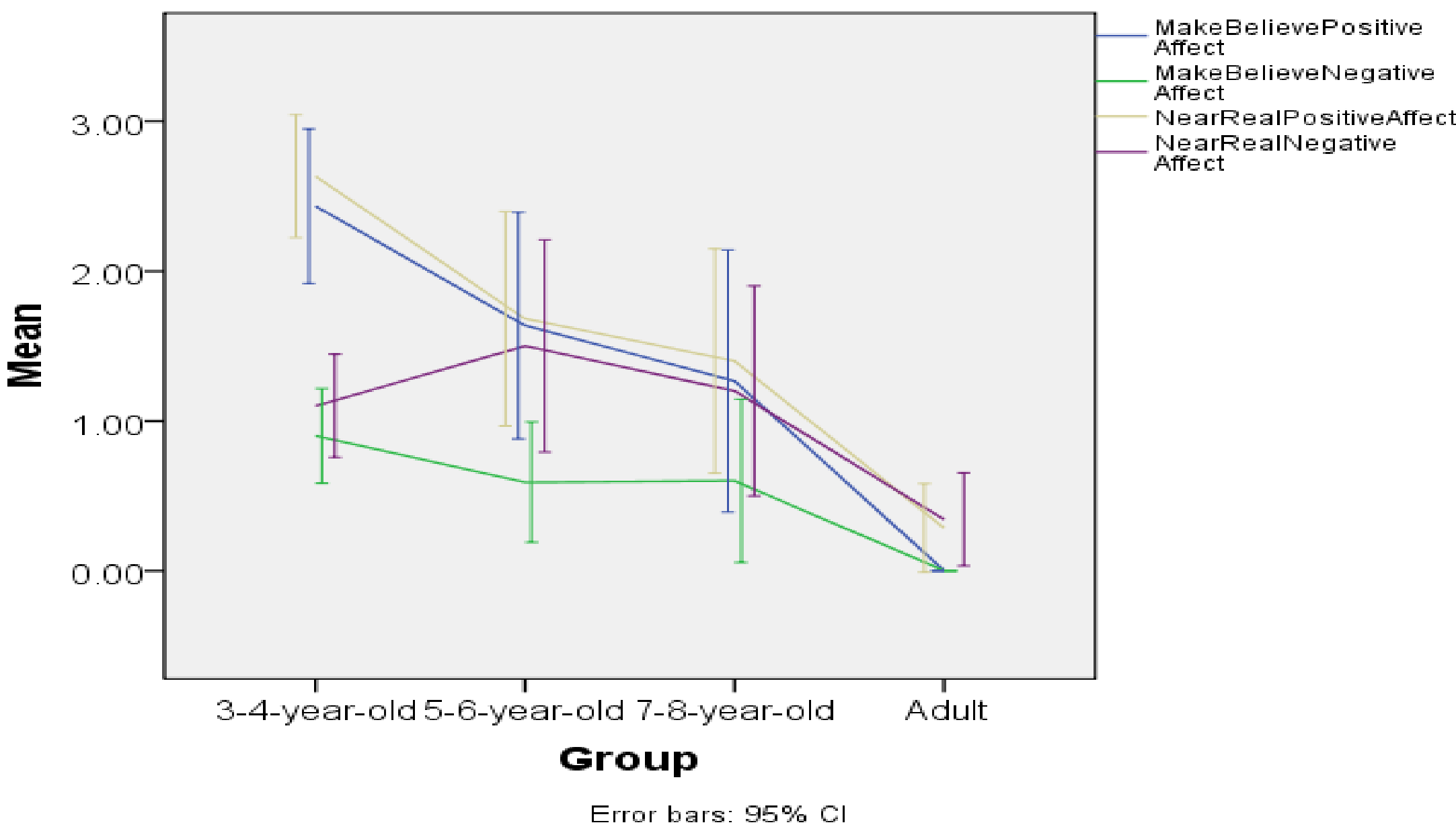


Figure 2: Mean scores for (positive/negative affect laden) make-believe and near-real entities incorrectly categorised as real

- These findings suggest that affect can influence fantasy-reality judgments and highlight the potential role of affect in children's critical thinking and decision making.

### References

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