Counterintuitive Age Trends, Dual Processing, and the Development of Irrationality—Or, Obesity is Contagious, but What Does One Catch?

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Results from a variety of studies indicate that children sometimes surprise us by outperforming adults on cognitive, judgment, and decision-making tasks. In this presentation, I present data from two new studies that add to these counterintuitive age trends. The first study is focused on age trends in the obesity stereotypes of Latino- and Caucasian-American children and adolescents. The second study involved use of eight identically flavored beverages and examination of how an “illness” prime and endorsements by obese and non-obese children affect the perceived taste of 7-11 year-olds. The findings raise a number of issues, such as: Is rationality really bound by information processing constraints? Why, under some conditions, does the size of the normative/descriptive gap increase with age? Why does the tendency to base judgments on implicit or intuitive processing increase with age? The ultimate hope of this presentation is to engage the interests of dual-process theorists such that the take more seriously the need to understand the developmental antecedents of the non-normative thoughts and behaviors often seen in adults.