



The role of audience familiarity and activity outcome in children's understanding of disclaimers

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Disclaimers are used prior to expected poor performance to protect the individual from being evaluated negatively by the audience (Lee *et al.*, 1999, *Personality and Individual Differences*, 26, 701). In this study, 8-, 11-, and 14-year-olds ($N = 147$) heard stories of a protagonist telling a familiar or unfamiliar peer that they did not think that they would perform well today, followed by either no disclaimer or a disclaimer and the activity outcome. Children judged how the audience would rate the protagonist's typical performance and character, and judged their response motivation. Children judged that familiar audiences would be more positive about typical performance and character than unfamiliar audiences; this varied depending on disclaimer use and participant sex. Further, children's typical performance judgements were more positive when the outcome was negative if a disclaimer was offered, with older children recognizing the self-presentational motivation in these conditions. Results are explored in relation to children's understanding of disclaimers.

Statement of contribution

What is already known on this subject?

- By 10 years, children understand the mitigating function of a disclaimer.
- Audience characteristics (age and familiarity) affect children's self-presentation judgements.
- Children have difficulty understanding why someone would disclose negative information of the self.

What the present study adds

- From 11 years showed an understanding of the self-presentational (SP) function of disclaimers.
- The disclaimer's mitigating function was only found when the activity outcome was negative.
- More positive judgements with familiar peers, but more SP justifications with unfamiliar peers.

Self-presentation tactics are devices used to manage the impressions that observers may form of an actor (Goffman, 1959) and are therefore a fundamental process from which an individual can establish and defend one's identity in their social environment (Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995). There are assertive tactics that are used to establish a positive identity and defensive tactics that are used to defend one's identity from negative social evaluation when one believes that his or her identity is in danger of being modified

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negatively (Lee, Quigley, Nesler, Corbett, & Tedeschi, 1999; Watling & Banerjee, 2012); both may be of paramount importance to create or maintain desired impressions when audience expectations are unsatisfied or when social norms are breached. In this study, we focus on children's understanding of disclaimers – a prospective statement offered when individuals believe that they will not perform or behave well and would like their audience to think that they are typically better than their performance or behaviour on this occasion (Lee *et al.*, 1999; e.g., 'I'm not going to do well today because last night I tripped and hurt my foot'). Much research has focused on children's understanding of self-presentation when the audience was unfamiliar (e.g., Aloise-Young, 1993; Banerjee, 2000; Kloo & Kain, 2016; Watling & Banerjee, 2007a, 2007b), possibly given the role of self-presentation in the creation of a public image; however, defensive tactics can be used to maintain an already created impression (Lee *et al.*, 1999). This is the first study to explore if children's judgements of the audiences' perceptions will differ depending on the familiarity of the audiences with the protagonists.

A secondary aim is to explore if children's judgements differ depending on the activity outcome. Watling and Banerjee's (2012) preliminary work on disclaimers did not provide outcome information, so it is unclear what performance assumptions children may have been making. El-Alayli, Myers, Petersen, and Lystad (2008) found that through offering a disclaimer, one makes characteristics of the self-salient, resulting in participants being more likely to attend to the outcome when making judgements. Outcome information may influence children's understanding of why an individual may disclose negative information about the self prior to an activity. From 6 years, children expect that individuals are more likely to disclose positive than negative information about the self (Heyman, Fu & Lee, 2007), but will consider both context and motives when evaluating others' self-descriptions (Gee & Heyman, 2007). Children may demonstrate a better understanding (and possibly earlier than Watling & Banerjee found) for why negative anticipated performance was disclosed prior to an event when the outcome is negative. Further, when the outcome is positive, children may be more likely to view the disclaimer as an attempt to downplay their impending performance and believe that the individual was aiming to be modest. This study explores children's understanding of the motivations for disclaimers and if they always see these motivations as a defensive, as opposed to an assertive, self-presentational strategy.

Children's understanding of defensive self-presentation tactics

To date, researchers have primarily focused on children's understanding of assertive self-presentation (e.g., modesty, ingratiation, self-promotion), which are used to create a positive social image of the self. Once an identity is established, children may be more motivated to maintain and defend it from negative social evaluations by using defensive self-presentational tactics (Watling & Banerjee, 2012). Researchers have explored children's understanding of excuses, apologies (e.g., Banerjee, Bennett, & Luke, 2010; Darby & Schlenker, 1989), and disclaimers (Bennett, 1990; Watling & Banerjee, 2012), all which can be used for their mitigating function (i.e., reduce the likelihood of punishment), and for self-presentational motives (i.e., reduce negative social evaluation following poor performance or conduct). In fact, excuses and apologies reduce the probability that the audience will blame and punish an actor (Cody & McLaughlin, 1990) and that they will form negative evaluations of the actor (Darby & Schlenker, 1989). These findings were supported by Banerjee *et al.* (2010), where 4- to 9-year-olds judged that

punishment should be less severe and that transgressors would be evaluated more positively when an excuse or apology was offered.

Children's understanding of disclaimers

Similar to the aforementioned findings, Bennett (1990) found that when a disclaimer was offered before a negative outcome (e.g., protagonist offers a disclaimer that s/he is not good at washing dishes and then breaks one), 46% of 8-year-olds and 79% of 11-year-olds referred to the disclaimer when recommending punishment; but, only the 11-year-olds recommended a less severe punishment. Therefore, 8-year-olds attend to the disclaimer but they do not incorporate this into their judgements, unlike the 11-year-olds.

Importantly, little is known about children's understanding of the function of disclaimers as a self-presentational tactic (having an impact on how the individual's identity is evaluated). A successful outcome after offering a disclaimer would be that the audience's evaluation of self has not been negatively influenced and therefore has mitigated the potential threat to the person's public identity. Watling and Banerjee (2012) explored 8- to 14-year-olds judgements of how the audience would rate the protagonist's imminent performance ('how well will [the audience] think \times will do today') and typical performance ('how well will [the audience] think that \times normally does on [the activity]') after a disclaimer was offered or not. Ten-year-olds recognized the self-presentational function of disclaimers – when a disclaimer was offered imminent performance was rated lower and typical performance was rated higher than when no disclaimer was offered – indicating that when a disclaimer is offered imminent performance should be perceived as not relevant when evaluating typical performance. We expect to replicate earlier findings with regard to age, whereby children from 10 years will judge typical performance higher when a disclaimer is offered. Further, we will advance our understanding of how disclaimers may impact children's judgements through manipulating the outcome. We expect that when the outcome is positive, children will be more positive overall, but that when the outcome is negative, children will judge typical performance higher when a disclaimer is offered than not offered.

To demonstrate an understanding of disclaimers as a self-presentational tactic, children must demonstrate an understanding of the motivation for using the disclaimer (i.e., to make the audience think his/her typical performance is greater than today's). Given children are generally unfamiliar with the idea of stating negative information about the self to others (Heyman, Fu, & Lee, 2007) and may have difficulty explaining why a protagonist discloses something negative about the self, we provided children with possible motivations based on previous work for why a protagonist used a particular statement (Banerjee, 2000; Kloo & Kain, 2016; Watling & Banerjee, 2007a, 2007b). We expect that with age, children will identify more self-presentational justifications to explain the protagonists' disclosure (e.g., Banerjee, 2000; Watling & Banerjee, 2007a, 2007b). Importantly, the type of self-presentational justification may differ depending on outcome: When the outcome is negative and a disclaimer has been offered, we expect that children will be more likely to identify the disclaimer self-presentational motivation than when the outcome is positive. In fact, it may be possible that when the outcome is positive that the disclaimer is identified as an attempt to downplay impending performance (protagonist being modest).

In addition to performance judgements, this study assesses the impact of the disclaimer on social character judgements (niceness rating). Eight-year-olds judge a

modest or ingratiating protagonist as nicer than an immodest or self-promoting protagonist (Banerjee, 2000; Watling & Banerjee, 2007a, 2007b). Further, adults rate protagonists more negatively when a disclaimer is followed by evidence of the disclaimed trait (e.g., claims not to be arrogant, but then offers an arrogant statement; El-Alayli *et al.*, 2008). If, as with adults, the disclaimer highlights the negative performance expectation, it may be that children will characterize the protagonist more negatively than when no disclaimer is offered, regardless of outcome. Alternatively, when a disclaimer is offered and the outcome is negative, children may judge the protagonist more positively as the actions would be congruent with the statement, and when the outcome is positive, they may judge the protagonist more negatively as it is incongruent with the statement.

Influences of audience familiarity

Self-presentation is affected by who the audience is (Tice *et al.*, 1995). Both modesty and ingratiation are understood earlier when the audience is a peer than adult, possibly due to first learning these (the social value) within a peer context (Watling & Banerjee, 2007a, 2007b). As the goal of a defensive tactic is to maintain an already created impression (Hewitt & Stokes, 1975), indicating familiarity with the other, we expect it will be better understood when the audience is familiar. Further, we know children are more positive about disclosing negative information to familiar than unfamiliar peers (Hicks, Liu, & Heyman, 2015), and 6-year-olds are more likely to use flattery when the audience is familiar than unfamiliar (Fu & Lee, 2007). We therefore expect that children will be more positive in their judgements when the audience is familiar than unfamiliar; and, we expect that when a disclaimer is used, the effects hypothesized above for disclaimers and outcome will be more pronounced within familiar audiences.

Hypotheses

Our hypotheses are focused around our three key manipulations (disclaimer offered or not, familiar or unfamiliar audience, and outcome positive or negative). Firstly, from 11 years children will have an understanding of disclaimers (both the mitigating function and the self-presentational motivation of the disclaimer), in particular when the outcome is negative. Secondly, children will be more positive in their judgements of familiar peers than unfamiliar peers, particularly when the outcome is negative and a disclaimer is offered. Thirdly, we expect that children's understanding of disclaimers will be strongest when the audience is a familiar peer and the outcome is negative (i.e., performance judgements will be higher, and they will choose more disclaimer motivations as a justification for the protagonists' statements).

Methods

Participants

Children were recruited from one primary and two secondary schools in south-east England (81 eight- to 9-year-olds, 93 eleven- to 12-year-olds, and 47 fourteen- to 15-year-olds). An additional 33 fourteen- to 15-year-olds were recruited, but due to computer failure were unable to complete the task. Using the index of multiple deprivation (higher decile = less deprivation, range 1–10), the primary school was in decile 7 ($n = 81$), and the two secondary schools were in decile 7 ($n = 113$) and 9 ($n = 27$; Department for

Communities and Local Government, 2015). Given the imbalanced sample, to allow for robust analyses, we had SPSS randomly select 50 eight-year-olds and 50 eleven-year-olds (Note: The findings presented below were the same when using the full sample).

The final sample ($N = 147$) included 50 eight- to 9-year-olds ($M = 8.78$ years, $SD = 0.30$, 24 males), 50 eleven- to 12-year-olds ($M = 11.13$ years, $SD = 0.31$, 26 males) and 47 fourteen- to 15-year-olds ($M = 14.15$ years, $SD = 0.48$, 17 males). Full ethical approval was provided by the Psychology Department ethics committee.

Materials

The task was presented on Windows computers using multimedia presentation LiveCode Software (LiveCode 5.0.1), to simultaneously present stories with sound, the cartoon-styled picture illustrations, written display of the story and questions, and recorded responses in a text file. Children heard instructions and stories through headphones and responded using the mouse.

The disclaimer task, adapted from Watling and Banerjee (2012), consisted of eight stories: three sports-related, three academic-related, and two entertainment-related. Each story had three elements that could be manipulated: disclaimer present or absent, audience familiar or not, and outcome positive or negative (see Appendix for an example story with a break down for each possible combination). Eight versions were developed to control for story type and manipulations, ensuring that for each story, every combination of the above factors was accounted for, and to ensure that of the eight stories, half had a disclaimer and half had no disclaimer, half had a familiar peer and half an unfamiliar peer, and half had a positive outcome and half a negative outcome. Two sets of stories were developed so that participants were presented with stories containing characters matched to their sex.

Children were presented with eight stories; each story had a protagonist being asked by either a familiar peer or unfamiliar peer how well they thought that they would perform on a given activity that day. Familiar peers were referred to as either 'one of her/his good friends', 'her/his best friend', or 'one of her/his really good friends in her/his school' and unfamiliar peers were referred to as referred to as either 'a girl/boy s/he did not know', 'a new girl/boy', or 'one of the other girls/boys from her/his school who [protagonist] did not know'. In every story, the participant hears that the protagonist does not think that s/he will do well on the activity that day, followed by the protagonist telling the peer that s/he would not do well on the day; in the disclaimer stores, this is followed by a reason for why they may not do well on the day. The story concludes with a statement on the outcome of that day's performance that was either positive or negative.

Following each story, children were asked to make three judgements: (1) typical performance judgement (how well will [the peer] think that [the protagonist] normally does when s/he . . .); (2) character judgement (how nice will [the peer] think that [the protagonist] is); (3) motivation judgement (before s/he [insert activity] today, when [the peer] asked . . . why does [the protagonist] say. . .). Note that a question on the appropriateness of the disclosure statement was piloted (asked at the end of the judgements), but was not of interest for this study so is not presented here.

Using the coding scheme previously used with 6- to 10-year-olds from Banerjee (2000), six possible motivations were developed, reflecting the types of justifications children offered for other self-presentational tactics, including three possible choices related to social evaluation, with a modest option (e.g., 'Jane did not want her to think she was being boastful'), a disclaimer-ability option (e.g., 'Jane wanted her to think that

she normally plays tennis better than today'), and a disclaimer-disposition (e.g., 'Jane did not want her to think that she was normally clumsy'); two possible choices related to telling the truth, with a lie option (e.g., 'Jane really expected that she would run well in the race today') and a truth option (e.g., 'Jane really expected that she would not run well in the race today'); one choice related to the other's feeling (e.g., 'Jane did not want to upset her'). Individuals selected the motivation that they thought best explained the protagonist's statement.

Scoring

Children made typical performance and character judgements on a 100-point visual analogue scale (higher scores reflect more positive judgements). Given our interest in children's understanding of disclaimers, we focused our analyses on the mean frequency of disclaimer justifications chosen (across the two types of disclaimer manipulations; range 0–1). Additionally, as we anticipated that children may interpret the disclaimer as being offered to downplay one's ability, we used the mean frequency of modest justifications chosen (range 0–1). Together (collapsed across familiarity and outcome), the frequency of disclaimer and modest justifications (range 0–4) reflected children's beliefs of the protagonists having self-presentational motivations.

Design and procedure

Children were sat at individual computers in the school's computer suite in groups of 15–30. The study was explained, and children had the opportunity to ask questions and then were asked to give verbal assent if they were happy to participate. The study lasted approximately 20 min. The eight versions of stories were block randomized by sex. Stories within each version, and the order of justification within each story, were randomized to appear in different orders for each participant. Participants were thanked at the end of the study and were given the opportunity to ask questions.

Results

Analysis

Three mixed analysis of variances (ANOVAs), one for each dependent variable, were completed to assess how children's judgements differed depending on the within participants variables of tactic usage (disclaimer, no disclaimer), familiarity of peer (familiar, unfamiliar) and story outcome (positive, negative) and the between-participant variables of age (8, 11, 14 years) and sex (male, female). Our dependent variables were the children's (1) typical performance judgements; (2) character judgements; and (3) justification explanations. Given our interest was focussed on how children understood disclaimers, only the significant interactions which included tactic use are reported. Interactions were broken down within the ANOVA using simple effects analyses with Bonferroni corrections applied to control for multiple comparisons.

Typical performance judgement

There were significant main effects (see Table 1): tactic usage, $F(1, 139) = 6.56, p = .012, \eta_p^2 = .05$, with higher judgements when a disclaimer was offered than not offered;

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for each independent variable by dependent variable

	Typical performance judgement M (SE)	Character judgement M (SE)	Self-presentation justification M (SE)
Tactic usage			
Disclaimer	65.59 (1.28)	63.94 (1.24)	0.25 (0.01)
No disclaimer	62.07 (1.20)	65.13 (1.33)	0.26 (0.01)
Audience familiarity			
Familiar peer	65.99 (1.22)	67.54 (1.30)	0.24 (0.01)
Unfamiliar peer	61.67 (1.30)	61.53 (1.29)	0.27 (0.01)
Activity outcome			
Positive	74.58 (1.46)	65.69 (1.41)	0.28 (0.01)
Negative	53.08 (1.42)	63.38 (1.39)	0.23 (0.01)
Age group			
8 years	63.19 (1.22)	69.39 (1.90)	0.21 (0.02)
11 years	65.13 (1.73)	63.74 (1.88)	0.29 (0.02)
14 years	63.16 (1.89)	60.47 (2.06)	0.26 (0.02)
Sex			
Males	61.01 (1.54)	62.40 (1.49)	0.27 (0.01)
Females	66.65 (1.54)	66.67 (1.68)	0.24 (0.01)

audience familiarity, $F(1, 139) = 8.99, p = .003, \eta_p^2 = .06$, with higher judgements made when the audience was familiar than unfamiliar; outcome, $F(1, 139) = 114.49, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .45$, with higher judgements made when the outcome was positive than negative; and sex, $F(1, 139) = 7.47, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .05$, with higher judgements made by females than males. There was no significant main effect of age, $F < 1$. There was an interaction of tactic usage by age, $F(1, 139) = 3.91, p = .022, \eta_p^2 = .05$, whereby only the 11-year-olds made higher judgements when a disclaimer was offered than not offered, $F(1, 139) = 13.79, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$ (F s < 1 for the other two age groups; see Figure 1).

As expected, there was an interaction of tactic usage by outcome, $F(1, 139) = 7.57, p = .007, \eta_p^2 = .05$, whereby when the outcome was negative, judgements were higher when a disclaimer was used than not used, $F(1, 139) = 12.21, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$ ($F < 1$ for positive outcome; see Figure 2). In addition to the above, there was an interaction between tactic usage, familiarity, and sex, $F(1, 139) = 3.90, p = .050, \eta_p^2 = .03$, with females offering higher judgements than males only when a disclaimer was used in front of a familiar peer, $F(1, 139) = 12.49, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$ (see Figure 3).

Character judgement

There were significant main effects (see Table 1): audience familiarity, $F(1, 139) = 20.89, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$, with familiar peers being judged as nicer than unfamiliar peers; and age group, $F(2, 139) = 5.29, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .07$, where 8-year-olds were more positive than 14-year-olds, but 11-year-olds were equally positive to the other two age groups. There were no significant main effects of tactic usage, outcome, or sex, all p s $> .050$. An interaction of tactic usage and sex, $F(1, 139) = 4.09, p = .045, \eta_p^2 = .03$, was qualified by a three-way interaction (see below).

There were 2 three-way interactions. First, an interaction between familiarity, tactic usage, and sex, $F(1, 139) = 4.13, p = .044, \eta_p^2 = .03$, showed that higher judgements were

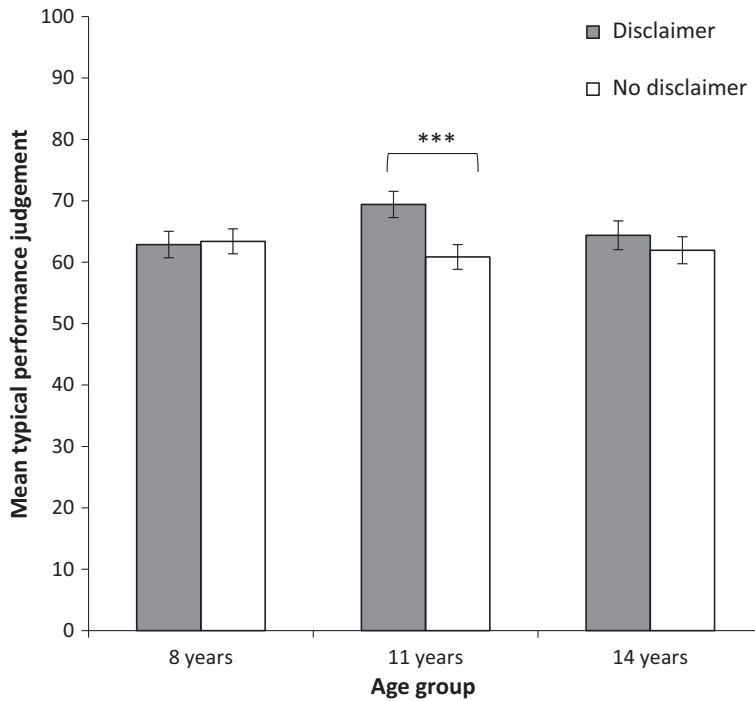


Figure 1. Mean typical performance judgement with SE bars for each age group when a disclaimer was offered or was not offered. *** $p < .001$.

made when the audience was familiar than unfamiliar by the males only when no disclaimer was offered, $F(1, 139) = 18.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$ (when a disclaimer was offered, $F < 1$), and by females both when a disclaimer was offered and not offered, $F(1, 139) = 7.22$, $p = .008$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$ and $F(1, 139) = 5.027$, $p = .027$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, respectively (see Figure 4). Second, an interaction between familiarity, tactic usage, and age, $F(2, 139) = 3.52$, $p = .032$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$ (see Figure 5), showed that higher judgements were made when no disclaimer was offered than when offered by the 11-year-olds when the peer was familiar, $F(1, 139) = 5.80$, $p = .017$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, and by the 14-year-olds when the peer was unfamiliar, $F(1, 139) = 4.18$, $p = .043$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$.

Self-presentational justifications

To establish what children understand about disclaimer use as a self-presentational tactic, in this analyses the dependent variable was the mean frequency of self-presentational responses chosen, with the additional repeated independent variable of justification type (modest and disclaimer, with the two disclaimer choices combined). See Table 2 for a summary of chosen justifications.

There were significant main effects (see Table 1): audience familiarity, $F(1, 139) = 5.96$, $p = .016$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, with more self-presentational responses chosen when the peer was unfamiliar than familiar; outcome, $F(1, 139) = 8.93$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, with more self-presentational responses chosen when the outcome was positive than negative; age group, $F(2, 139) = 8.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$, where the 11-year-olds choose more self-presentation responses than the 8-year-olds ($p < .001$), but the 14-year-olds did not differ

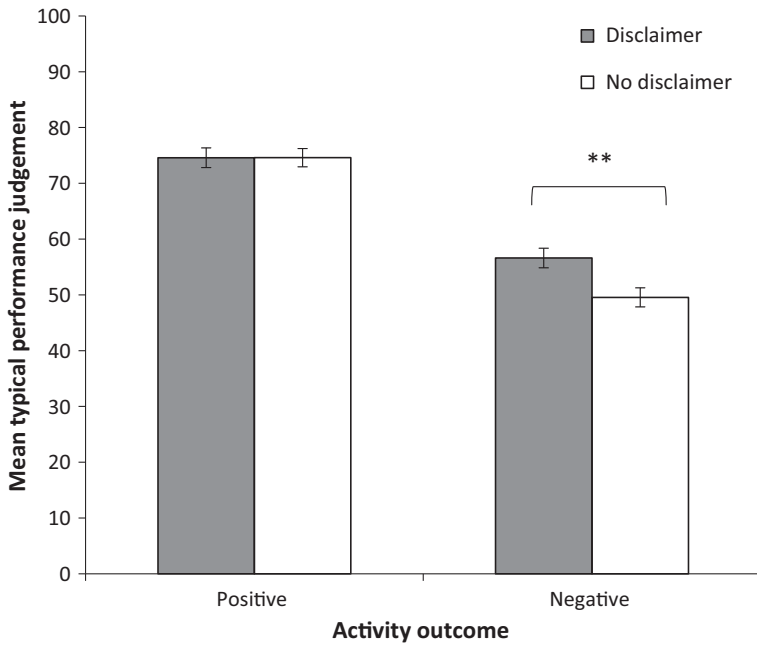


Figure 2. Mean typical performance judgement with SE bars for positive and negative outcome when a disclaimer was offered or was not offered. $**p = .001$.

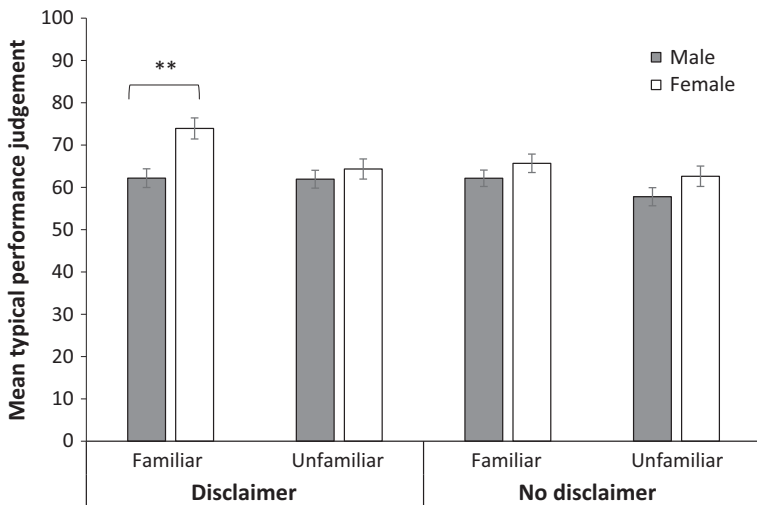


Figure 3. Mean typical performance judgement with SE bars for males and females when the peer was familiar or unfamiliar, when a disclaimer was offered or was not offered. $**p = .001$.

from the two younger groups ($ps > .090$). There were no significant main effects of tactic usage or sex, $ps > .190$.

Importantly, there was a main effect of justification type, $F(1, 139) = 31.32, p < .001$, where more disclaimer justifications were chosen than modest justifications,

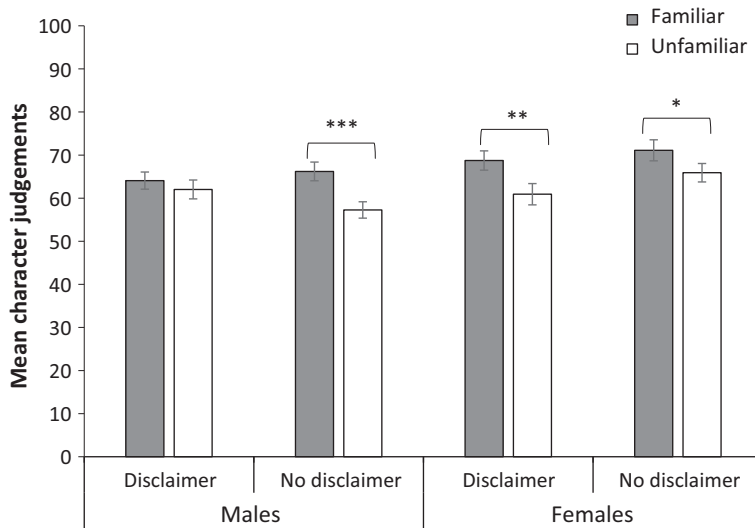


Figure 4. Mean character judgement with SE bars for males and females for familiar and unfamiliar peers when a disclaimer was offered or was not offered. * $p < .050$; ** $p < .010$; *** $p < .001$.

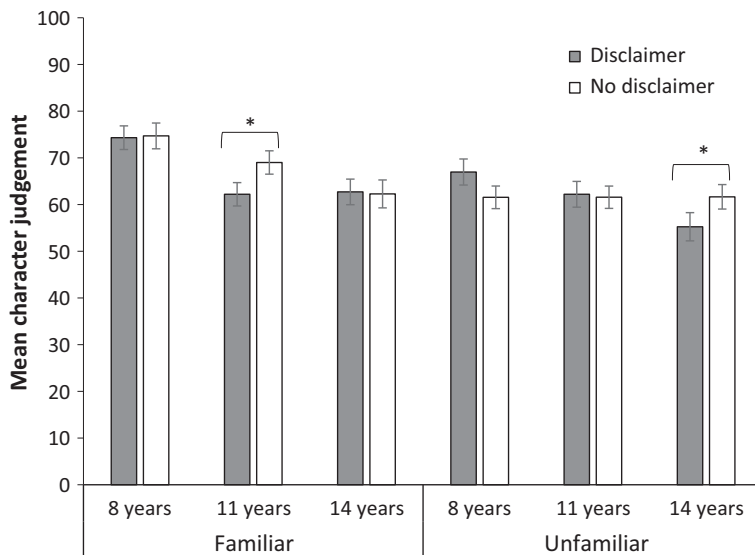


Figure 5. Mean character judgements with SE bars for each age group, when a disclaimer was offered or was not offered, when the audience was familiar and unfamiliar. * $p < .050$.

$M(SE) = 0.33(0.02)$ and $0.18(0.02)$, respectively. Also, there was an interaction of tactic usage by type of justification, $F(2, 139) = 5.05$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$ (see Figure 6), whereby more modest justifications were chosen when no disclaimer was offered than offered, $F(1, 139) = 9.07$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, but the number of disclaimer justifications did not differ depending on tactic usage, $p > .100$.

A three-way interaction was found between tactic usage, outcome, and age, $F(2, 139) = 15.84$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$ (see Figure 7). When a disclaimer was offered

Table 2. Mean (SD) number of self-presentational justification responses for each age group when a disclaimer was and was not used (range 0–4; collapsed across familiarity)

	Disclaimer-ability	Disclaimer-dispositional	Modest	Truth	Lie	Other's feelings
8-year-olds (n = 50)						
No disclaimer	0.66 (0.82)	0.54 (0.71)	0.44 (0.61)	1.46 (1.15)	0.36 (0.69)	0.64 (0.61)
Disclaimer	0.88 (0.92)	0.30 (0.46)	0.44 (0.61)	1.38 (1.24)	0.44 (0.64)	0.56 (0.73)
11-year-olds (n = 50)						
No disclaimer	0.94 (0.93)	0.40 (0.64)	1.12 (1.00)	1.14 (1.16)	0.22 (0.58)	0.16 (0.37)
Disclaimer	1.24 (1.17)	0.42 (0.61)	0.64 (0.85)	1.20 (1.12)	0.34 (0.56)	0.16 (0.37)
14-year-olds (n = 47)						
No disclaimer	0.91 (1.11)	0.35 (0.53)	0.98 (1.13)	1.35 (1.22)	0.30 (0.63)	0.11 (0.38)
Disclaimer	1.13 (1.07)	0.22 (0.47)	0.72 (0.98)	1.48 (1.15)	0.24 (0.57)	0.22 (0.51)

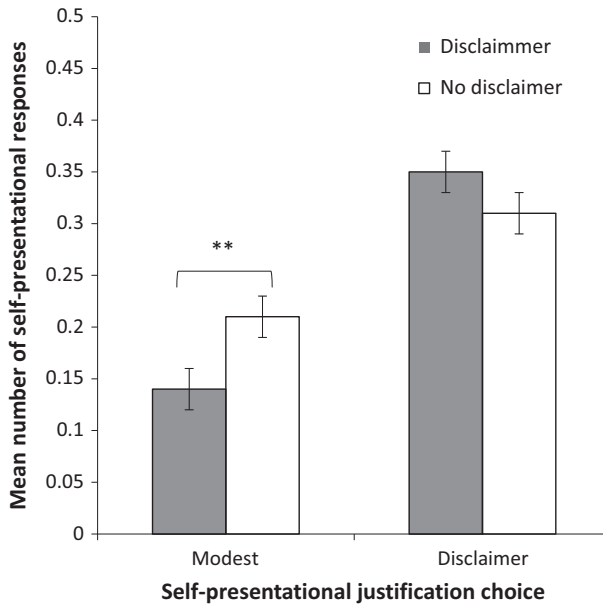


Figure 6. Mean number of modest and disclaimer self-presentational choice selections with SE bars when a disclaimer was offered or was not offered. $**p < .010$.

and the outcome was negative, there were differences between age groups, $F(2, 139) = 9.24, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$, with 8-year-olds choosing fewer self-presentational responses than the 11-year-olds and 14-year-olds, but no difference between the 11- and 14-year-olds. When no disclaimer was offered and the outcome was positive, there were differences between age groups, $F(2, 139) = 9.24, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .19$, with 8-year-olds choosing fewer self-presentational responses than 11- and 14-year-olds, but no difference between the 11- and 14-year-olds.

There was an interaction between tactic usage, outcome, and sex, $F(1, 139) = 8.74, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .06$ (see Figure 8). More self-presentational responses were chosen when the outcome was positive than negative by males when a disclaimer was offered,

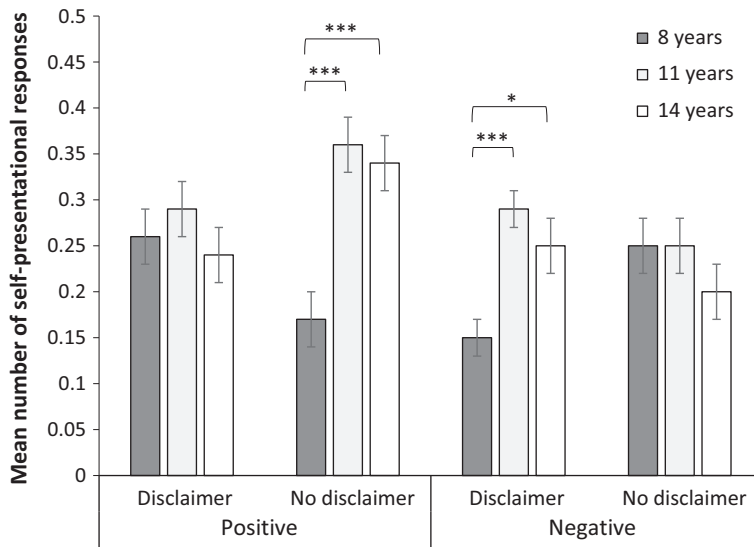


Figure 7. Mean number of self-presentational responses with SE bars given for each age group when a disclaimer was offered or was not offered, depending on activity outcome. * $p < .050$; *** $p < .001$.

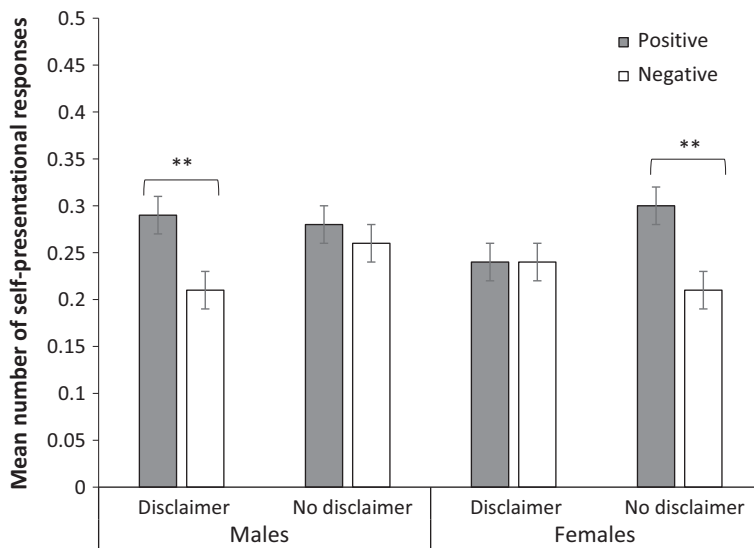


Figure 8. Mean number of self-presentational responses with SE bars for males and females when the outcome was positive and negative depending on if a disclaimer was offered or not offered. ** $p < .010$.

$F(1, 139) = 8.50, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .06$, and by females when no disclaimer was offered, $F(1, 139) = 9.09, p = .003, \eta_p^2 = .06$.

Discussion

This study advances our understanding of what factors children attend to when making judgements about others who use disclaimers; specifically, how judgements may differ

depending on audience familiarity and activity outcome. In line with previous work (Watling & Banerjee, 2012), children demonstrated that they understand the mitigating function of disclaimers by 11 years (i.e., higher typical performance judgements when a disclaimer was offered). Importantly, both audience familiarity and activity outcome influenced children's judgements about how the peer audience would rate the protagonist who disclosed negative information about anticipated future performance. We also, for the first time, found that children were able to recognize the social evaluative function of using the disclaimer.

Consistent with expectations, 11-year-olds judged that typical performance would be greater when a disclaimer was offered than not offered, supporting earlier work (Watling & Banerjee, 2012) that 11-year-olds but not 8-year-olds have developed an understanding of disclaimers as a self-presentational tactic. Further support comes from our findings that 8-year-olds chose fewer self-presentational justifications than the two older groups. However, unlike Watling and Banerjee's findings, the 14-year-olds in our study did not differentiate typical performance judgements depending on the type of disclosure; but, along with the 11-year-olds, they recognized that negative disclosure may have a self-presentational motivation, especially when the outcome was negative. Taken together, we propose that while children recognize the self-presentational motivation for offering a disclaimer statement, they do not necessarily see it as influencing judgements when presented with outcome information. In making the outcome of the activity salient, children may have focused on this information over and above considering if the protagonist offered an explanation for anticipated poor performance.

Consistent with research that past performance is considered when making future performance judgements (e.g., Stipek & Hoffman, 1980), children judged that future performance would be higher when the protagonist did well on the day than not well. Interestingly, older children were more likely than the 8-year-olds to choose a self-presentational motive in the positive outcome condition when a disclaimer was not offered, but in the negative outcome condition when a disclaimer was offered. These findings may reflect the ongoing development of self-presentation understanding and how children interpret their social worlds more generally or specifically in relation to negative disclosures.

This study showed that while children were more likely to choose disclaimer justifications, they did also choose modest justifications to explain negative disclosures. Interestingly, the frequency of choosing disclaimer justifications did not differ depending on whether the negative disclosure was followed by a disclaimer or not, but choosing modest justifications did (chosen more often when no disclaimer was offered). Modesty, downplaying of one's ability, is understood as a self-presentation tactic from 8 years (Banerjee, 2000; Watling & Banerjee, 2007a); modesty may be used prior to or following an event. Possibly, with increasing awareness of self-presentational motivations, when children do not understand why someone would disclose negative information of impending performance, and no reason is offered, older children may be more likely to judge the disclosure as modesty when the outcome is positive. This requires further investigation.

As hypothesized, children judged that familiar peers would be more positive in their judgements about the protagonist than the unfamiliar peers. This is not surprising as individuals are inclined to be overtly positive when judging the behaviour of friends (Leising, Gallrein, & Dufner, 2014) and tend to be more positive about disclosing negative information when in the company of familiar than unfamiliar peers (i.e., more supportive

environment; Hicks *et al.*, 2015). Interestingly, children were more likely to view the disclosure of negative anticipated performance (regardless if a disclaimer was offered) to unfamiliar peers than familiar peers as having self-presentational motivations. This at first appears in contrast to findings that adults are more likely to use self-presentational tactics with friends than strangers (e.g., Øverup & Neighbors, 2016; Tice *et al.*, 1995); however, it is possible that with age individuals do not see their use of self-presentation with friends as having a self-presentational motivation (i.e., social evaluation purpose), but rather having a social function (e.g., maintaining social harmony, not wanting to be caught exaggerating). Future research is needed to understand individuals' interpretation of their own self-presentational behaviours.

This work highlights the importance of exploring sex differences in children's understanding of self-presentation. While boys were more likely to perceive more self-presentational motivations when the outcome was positive following a disclaimer, girls were more likely to show this pattern when no disclaimer was offered. Further, when the audience was familiar, boys' character judgements were higher in the no disclaimer condition, while girls' character judgements did not differ depending on disclaimer condition. It could be that disclosure of negative performance is generally seen as more acceptable for girls than boys, in particular as a method to help others (Heyman *et al.*, 2007), so when no explanation is offered to support why one believes that s/he will perform poorly, it is viewed still as having a social evaluative motivation (managing their reputation). Importantly, children only heard stories with characters matching their own sex. As children enter adolescence, they begin to interact in more mixed-sex friendships (Feiring & Lewis, 1991); future research should explore how judgements and understanding of disclaimers (or self-presentation more widely) may differ when the protagonist and audience sexes differ.

Our findings demonstrate the complexity of decision-making that children take on when deciphering social behaviour and in managing their reputations. Children from 6 years are increasingly likely to spontaneously recognize that an ingratiating statement may have an ulterior motive (Thompson, Boggiano, Costanzo, Matter, & Ruble, 1995), which may contribute to the differences in judgements and explanations for offering a disclaimer, depending on outcome and familiarity. Further, we asked children why someone might disclose negative information; it is possible that by providing possible motivations, we cued children to identify motives for protagonists' disclosures (Banerjee & Yuill, 1999). Importantly, when provided with cues, older children were more likely to choose the self-presentational justifications, indicating their understanding of reputation management.

In the current study, children were explicitly told that the protagonist did not think they would do well today, information typically not given in real-life scenarios. This may have impacted children's choice of justification (e.g., may have believed motivation was modesty if the statement had not been included). Future research is needed to tease apart the influence of this statement. Further, the disclaimer offered a transient reason to expect poor performance, but the disclaimer motivational responses linked to ability (e.g., get audience to think character normally performs better) or trait (e.g., avoid being thought of as clumsy, lazy). We combined these two motivations as the interpretation could be related to children's past social experience or to how children reason about information disclosure. We need further research to understand what factors play a role in how children make justification judgements (e.g., attributions of others' success and failure; Johnston & Lee, 2005), but also how judgements may differ depending on different types of disclaimers used. For example, there may be differences in judgements when the

disclaimer refers to an unstable characteristic, as in this work (e.g., injury), than refers to a stable characteristic (e.g., clumsy).

Conclusion

Work in this area has tended to focus on early and middle childhood, but here we highlight the importance of examining self-presentation in late childhood. By 11 years, children understand both the mitigating function and the self-presentational motivation for using a disclaimer. While disclaimer use did not have a direct impact on how nice the character was judged, there were relevant interactions with familiarity, outcome, and sex. Interestingly, children choose both modest and disclaimer justifications, indicating that while disclaimers have traditionally been thought of as a defensive self-presentational tactic (e.g., Lee *et al.*, 1999), they may also be perceived as an assertive self-presentational tactic. Future research should focus on how the context may impact the understanding of self-presentational tactics, as well as how children understand their own use self-presentation.

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Appendix: Disclaimer task story example

Familiarity (unfamiliar, familiar)	Statement (no disclaimer, disclaimer)	Fixed text	Outcome (positive, negative)
<p>This is Jane. Jane was warming up for her run in the race today when <i>a girl she did not know</i> from another class went up to her and said ‘Jane, how well do you think you will do in the race today?’ Jane does not think she will do well in the race today and said to the girl, . . .</p>	<p>Not that well today. Not that well today because last night I tripped and hurt my foot.</p>	<p>The girl she did not know from another class watched Jane run in the race and saw that Jane. . .</p>	<p>Really well in today’s race. Not very well in today’s race. Really well in today’s race. Not very well in today’s race.</p>
<p>This is Jane. Jane was warming up for her run in the race today when <i>one of her good friends</i> from another class went up to her and said ‘Jane, how well do you think you will do in the race today?’ Jane does not think she will do well in the race today and said to the her good friend, . . .</p>	<p>Not that well today. Not that well today because last night I tripped and hurt my foot.</p>	<p>Her good friend from another class watched Jane run in the race and saw that Jane. . .</p>	<p>Really well in today’s race. Not very well in today’s race. Really well in today’s race. Not very well in today’s race.</p>