

# Why *Did* the Chicken Cross the Road?: Humor, Intentionality, and Fantasy in Children

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## Introduction

- The development of humor requires the ability to distinguish fantasy from reality and the ability to recognize incongruities<sup>1,2</sup>.
- Children are sensitive to the intentions of others and are able to make judgments based on this knowledge<sup>2,3</sup>.

## Hypotheses

- **Improbable** events will be chosen as funnier than impossible and realistic
- Preferred joke type will reflect **cognitive mastery** and age
- **Jokes** will be paired more frequently with **essential** errors, strengthening with age

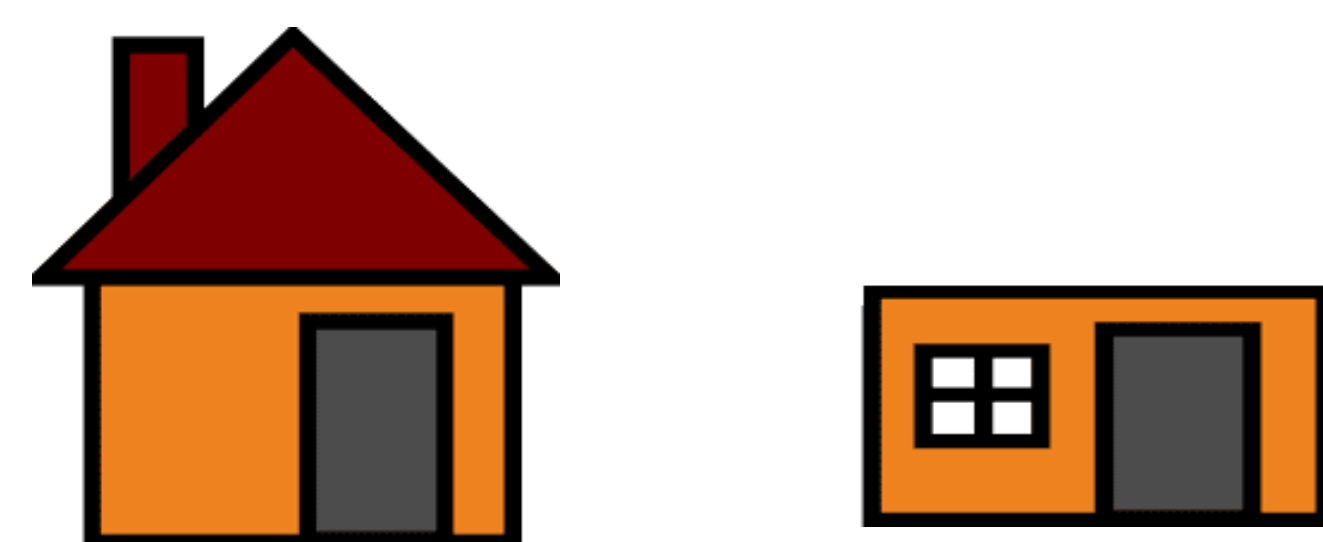
## Methods

### Participant Characteristics

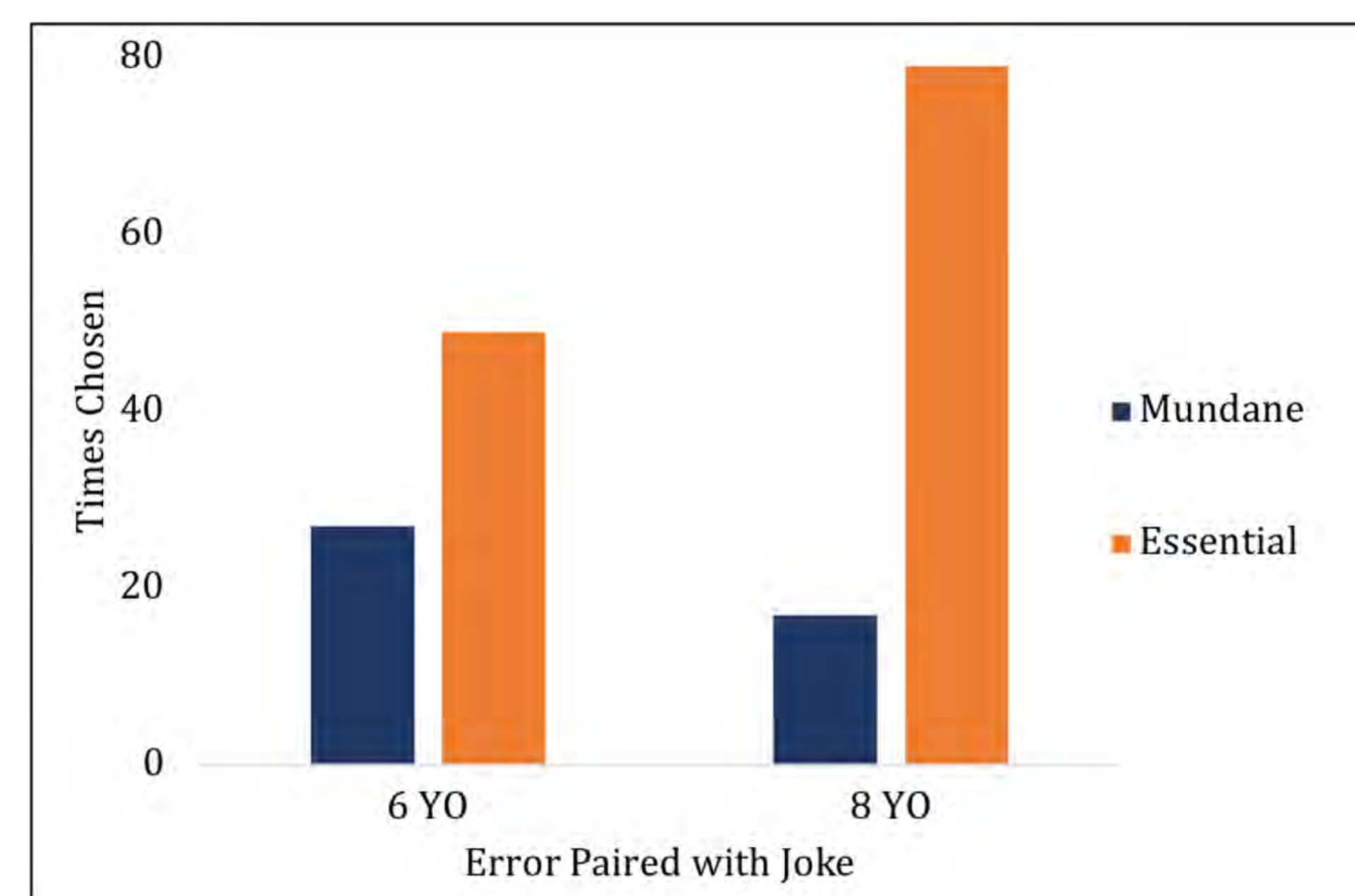
- 19 6 Year-Olds
- 24 8 Year-Olds
- 53% Female
- Demographics
- 56% White
- 19% Hispanic
- 16% Mixed or Other
- 9% Asian

## Intention Stories

**Methods:** Four vignettes; One child makes a joke, one makes a mistake; Participant pairs mundane error or essential error



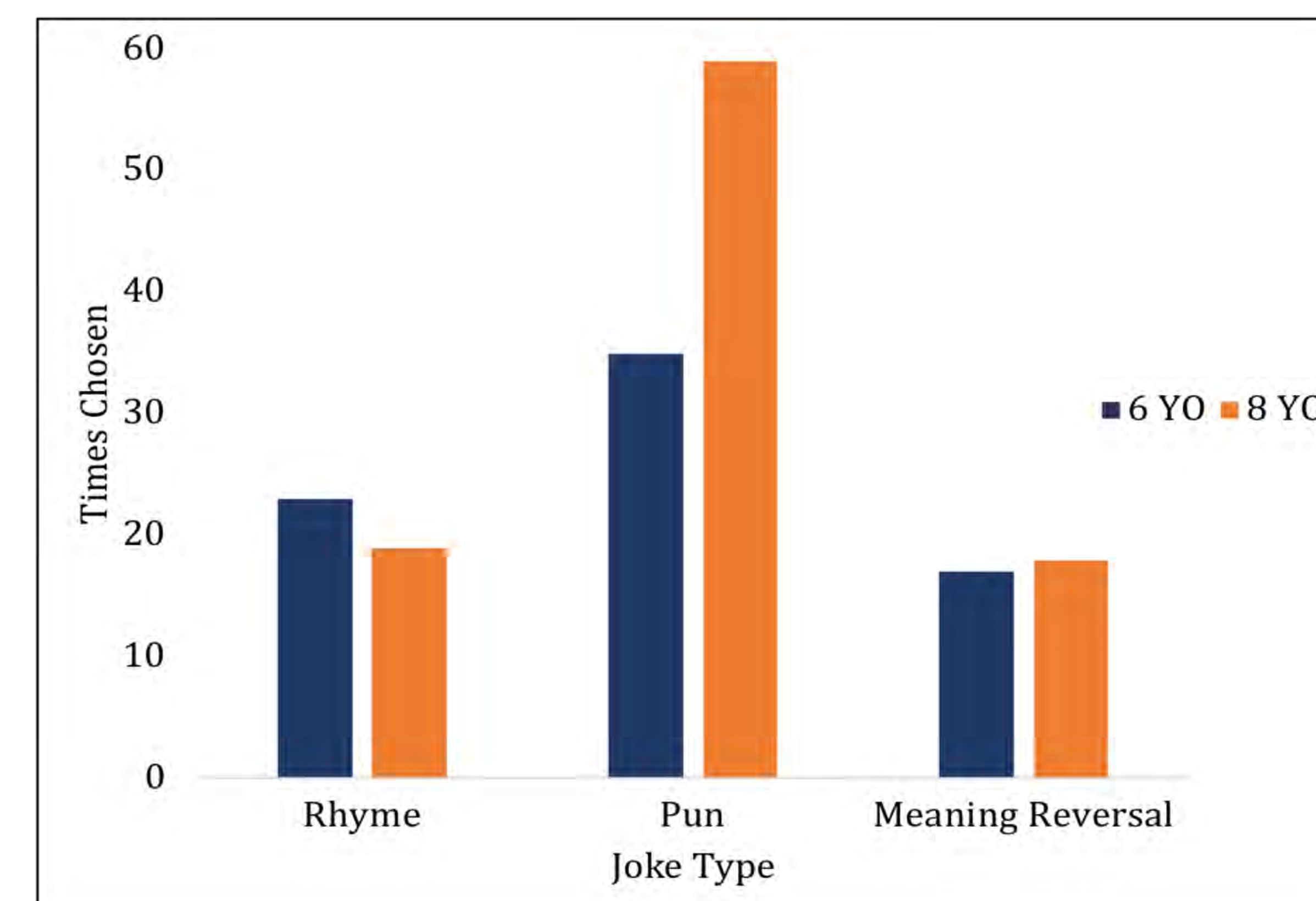
**Results:** Jokes were paired with essential errors more frequently than mundane errors, a trend that strengthened with age.



## Joke Book

**Methods:** Rhymes, Puns, Meaning Reversal sets; 3 jokes, participant picks one to keep

**Results:** Puns were chosen most frequently for both ages, with similar frequencies for Rhymes and Meaning Reversals. 6 year-olds chose slightly more rhymes than 8 year-olds.



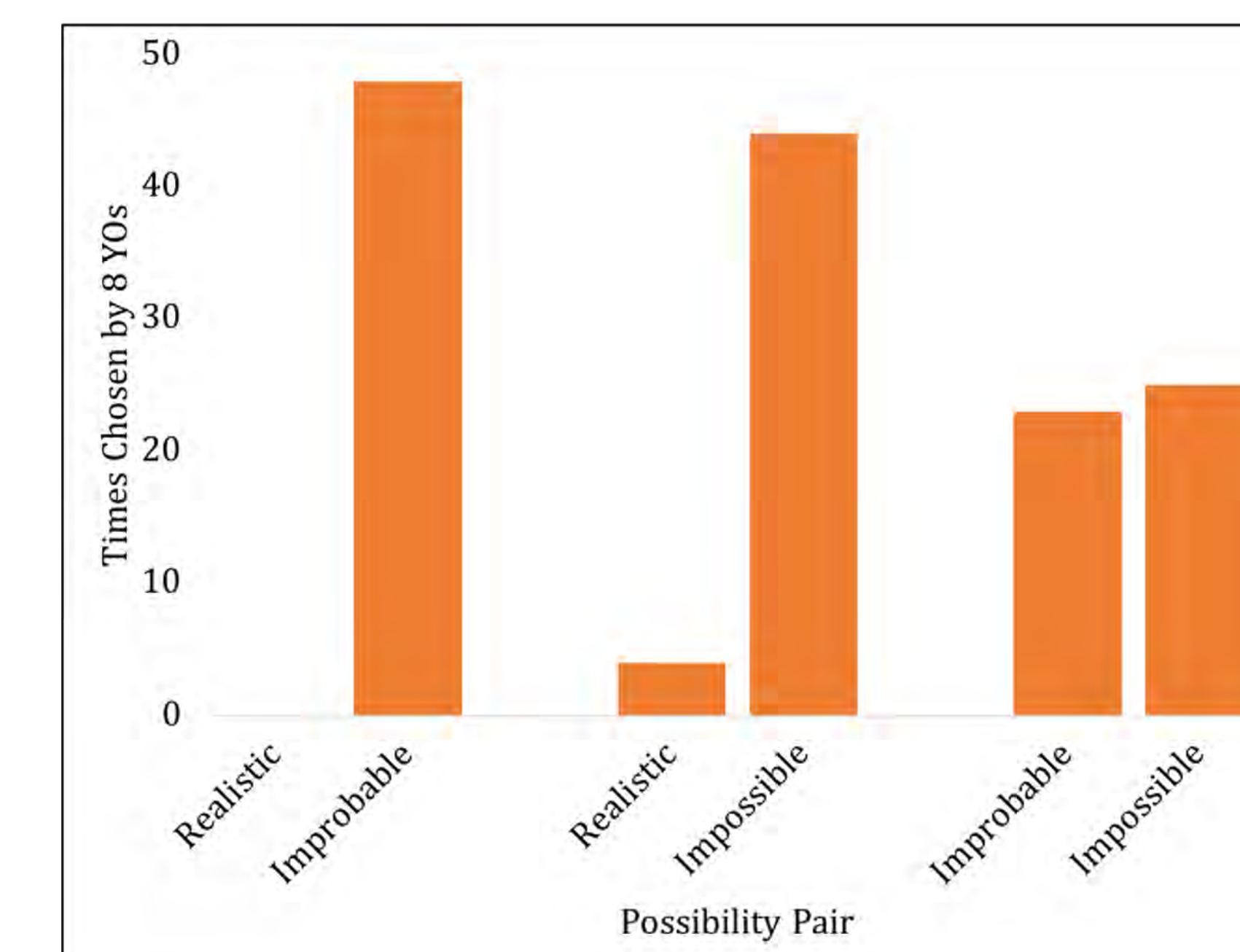
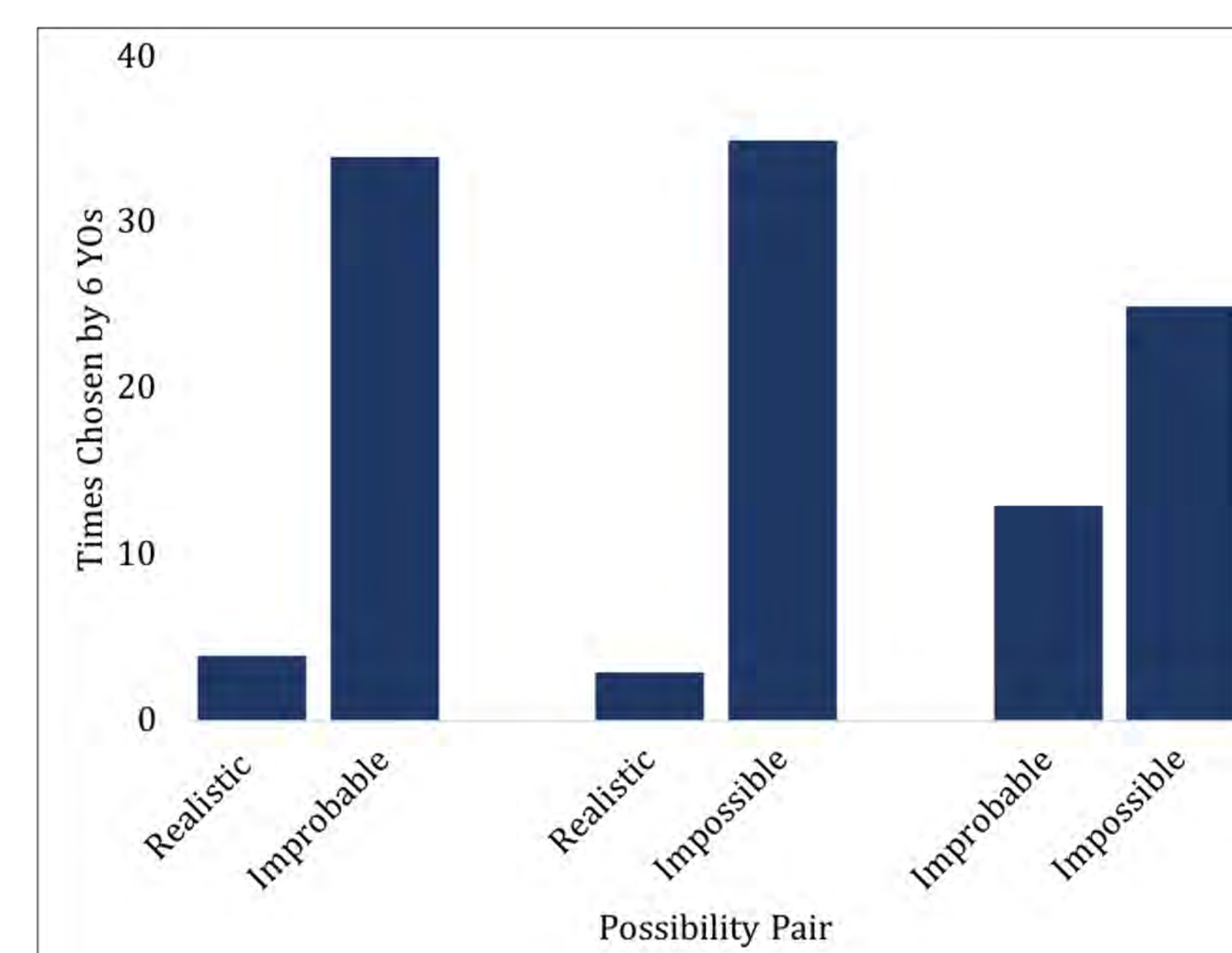
## Level of Possibility Story

**Methods:** Create-Your-Own-Adventure

Children chose funniest ending:

Realistic vs. Improbable vs. Impossible

**Results:** Improbable and Impossible events were chosen over Realistic. 6 year-olds favor Impossible over Improbable, while 8 year-olds show no preference.



## Summary

- Improbable and Impossible event endings are funnier than Realistic endings, and there is little difference between Improbable and Impossible
- Puns are rated as the funniest type of joke among both age groups; Rhymes and Meaning Reversal show no significant difference
- Essential errors are paired with jokes more frequently than mistakes, strengthening with age

## Conclusions

- Any change from reality, slight or extreme, is funnier than a realistic event
- Rhymes may be too simple and Meaning Reversal too complex for both 6 and 8 year-olds
- Children understand the nuances involved with jokes and mistakes, as well as intention's role in humor, which develops and refines with age

## Acknowledgements

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## References

- <sup>1</sup>Airenti, G. (2016). Playing with expectations: A contextual view of humor development. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7.
- <sup>2</sup>Hoicka, E., Butcher, J., Malla, F., & Harris, P. L. (2017). Humor and preschoolers' trust: Sensitivity to changing intentions. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 154, 113-130.
- <sup>3</sup>Hoicka, E., & Gattis, M. (2008). Do the wrong thing: How toddlers tell a joke from a mistake. *Cognitive Development*, 23(1), 180-190.