Preschoolers track and socially evaluate social includers and excluders
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### Introduction

Social exclusion leads to negative consequences throughout development. To combat the effects of exclusion, young children engage in strategies to increase feelings of belonging, like imitating others and attending to their intentions (Watson-Jones, R. E., Whitehouse, H. & Legare, H. C., 2016). While children behave in ways that promote social connection, it is unclear how excluded children chose whom to interact with next.

Two cognitive processes, tracking the identities of others and evaluating them, may underly children’s social partner choices. This study examined children’s abilities to track and evaluate social exclusion, young children engage in strategies to increase feelings of belonging, like imitating others and attending to their intentions (Watson-Jones, R. E., Whitehouse, H. & Legare, H. C., 2016). While children behave in ways that promote social connection, it is unclear how excluded children chose whom to interact with next.

### Methods

#### Participants

Study 1: 32 4-year-olds (19 f)

Study 2: 68 participants successfully passed the memory check

No significant results found

- Children might not remember being excluded
- 19 participants consistently chose the includer as a better sharer

#### Test Measures

- **Study 1**
  - Social evaluation
    - “Who is meaner?” ✓
    - “Who is nicer?” ✓
    - “Who is a better sharer?” ✓
    - “Who has more friends?” ✓

- **Resource allocation**
  - Distribute 3 stickers ✓

- **3rd-party suggestion**
  - “Who should Horsey play with?” ✓

- **Memory check (always last)**
  - “Who played with you more?”

#### Future Directions

To our surprise, nearly a third of children did not accurately report who played with them more. Perhaps some children interpreted the memory check (“who played with you more?”) differently. They may have considered themselves to have “played with” excluding mice even when they were not directly involved in the game.

The presented work has demonstrated that social tracking issues still exist. Simplification of exclusion tasks may better facilitate tracking, especially for younger ages. One way this could be achieved is by reducing the memory tasks required of children.

Additionally, the lack of significant findings for 6-year-olds in this study was surprising. One possible explanation might be that the puppets were not perceived as people, rather as characters. Future studies might attempt a Cyberball simulation with peers rather than puppets in order to gain buy-in from 6-year-olds.