

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 excluders and includers.

Intro Phase



Mice pair 1



Mice pair 2

Practice Phase



Learn to play catch



Learn to give items

Games Phase



Inclusion



Exclusion

Test Phase



Study 1 - Mice present



Study 2 - Mice absent

Conclusions

Not all children remember being excluded, but those who successfully pass the memory check presented the following behaviors:

- Overall, children base evaluations on the inclusion or exclusion experienced
- When prompted, children also share their evaluations through the recommendation of the includer to a newly introduced character
- Only 4-year-olds also describe includers as better sharers
- Contrary to predictions, 6-year-old children's responses were not significant for any measure

Methods

Introductions

Children were introduced to two different sets of mice puppets

Practice Phase

Participants were taught how to "play catch" and allocate items to a pair of bear puppets

Games

(order counterbalanced)

Children played catch with each mouse pair. Each time, children received two throws and then...

Inclusion: ...the mice threw to both the child and each other for 30 more throws.

Exclusion: ...the mice threw to only each other for 30 more throws.

Test Measures

Study 1 Study 2

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?" | ✓ | ✓ |
|-----------------------------|---|---|

Results

Study 1

Participants
32 4-year-olds (19 f)

No significant results found

- Children might not remember being excluded

19 participants consistently chose the includer as a better sharer

Study 2

Participants
96 4-6-year-olds (50 f)

Overall, no significant results found.

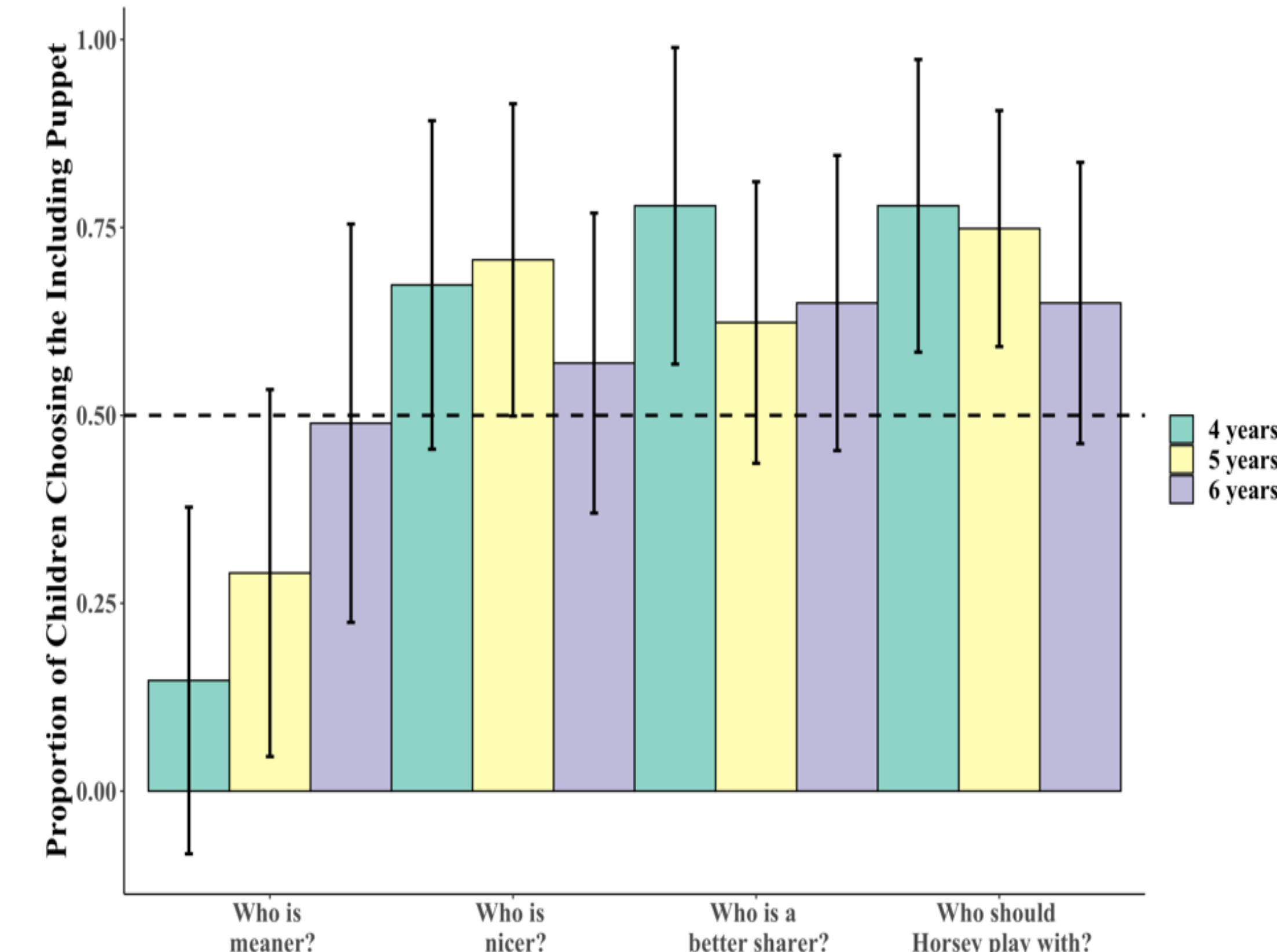
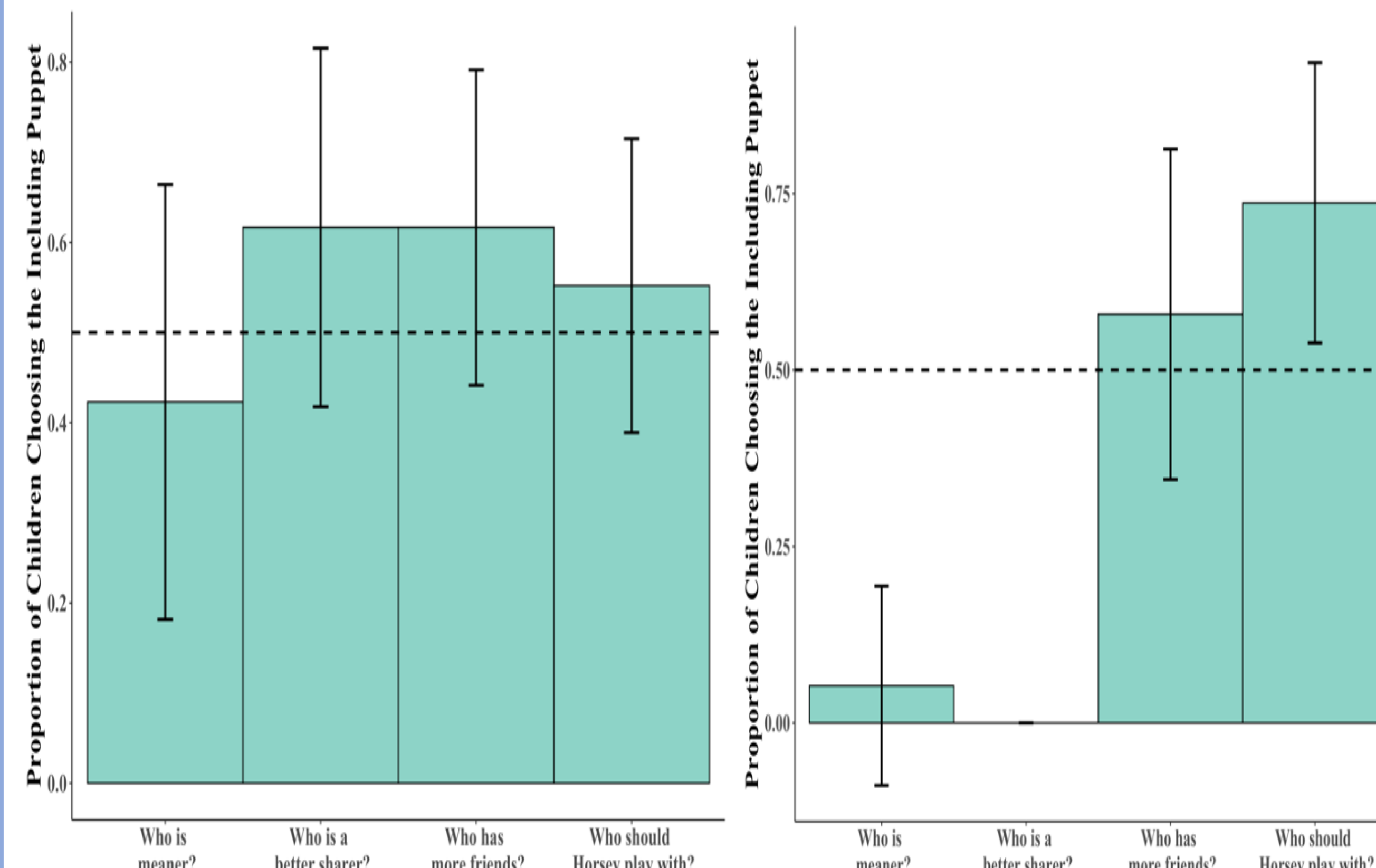
Prior to data collection: We planned to include only children who answered the memory check correctly in our sample

68 participants successfully passed the memory check

4-year-olds evaluated the excluder as meaner, the includer as a better sharer, and referred the includer greater than chance
5-year-olds referred the includer greater than chance
6-year-olds did not answer questions significantly

Overall Sample

Exploratory Analyses



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.