

Children's understanding of others' social preferences based on various dimensions of shared similarities

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In daily interactions, we make decisions about who to befriend and who to avoid. Shared similarities are an important factor in shaping this decision (Sunnafrank, 1983). Previous research has suggested children can use individual similarities to understand others' social interactions, but it is unclear how different dimensions of similarity affect social preferences. This study seeks to examine children's understanding of others' social interactions based on shared similarities across three dimensions: Language, Preference, and Behavior. Children aged 4 to 7 were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions and watched videos including a Target and two additional actors. The Target exhibited a shared similarity with only one of the actors (spoke the same language, preferred the same toy, or performed the same behavior). Children were then asked to identify which actor the Target wanted to play with, and which actor shared similarities with the Target. Preliminary data showed children successfully identified which individuals shared similarities. Further, children were best able to infer social preferences of others through shared language. The completion of this study will shed more light on the conceptualization of social preference, and the roles that various dimensions of interpersonal similarities play in this understanding.

Diversity Statement

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Our study investigates how children infer the social preferences of others through shared similarity cues. These cues include language, preferences, and behaviors; all of which are influenced by an individual's culture, environment, economic standing, personal identity, and unique life experience. Through the identification of the factors that impact social liking, we begin to further understand how social inclusion and social exclusion develop and occur. Furthermore, by examining the varying degrees of influence exerted by these factors on a child's social inclusion and exclusion, and by extension, social biases and prejudice, we hope to contribute to the development of environments that strengthen a child's perception of social inclusion and belonging.