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Title

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Permalink

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Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 45(45)

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Publication Date

2023

Peer reviewed

The Impact of Social Inclusion vs. Exclusion on Subsequent Social Cognition Abilities in Younger and Older Adults

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Abstract

The ability to represent and reason about other people's perspectives ('social cognition', or 'Theory of Mind' [ToM]) plays an important role in daily life. It is not currently clear how different types of interaction may impact subsequent perspective taking, and whether this differs with age. Here, we examine how experiences of social inclusion vs. social exclusion (manipulated using the Cyberball task) influence later perspective-taking efficiency, in younger (19-30 years; N = 100; M = 24.69) and older (65-80 years; N = 100; M = 69.63) participants. As expected, significant age differences were found in perspective-taking abilities, with younger participants out-performing older participants. This was specific to false-belief trials, with no difference in memory trials performance. Counter to hypothesized, no interaction between impact of social experience (inclusion vs. exclusion) and age was found, indicating that both younger and older adults are similarly impacted by social experiences. Implications will be discussed.