Children's Expectations for Ritual Performance and Cooperation

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Background

- Rituals are a pervasive feature of human social groups, ranging from elaborate religious ceremonies to rites of passage, to blowing out candles on a birthday cake.
- Rituals are prescribed by social norms, causally opaque, deliberate and symbolic actions.[1-4]
- Rituals serve proposed functions to identify group members, demonstrate group commitment, facilitate cooperation, and maintain group cohesion.[5-6]
- Though ritual participation increases children's affiliation with in-group members[7], there is little work examining the impact of ritual on children's group cognition and behavior.

Research Questions

- **Do children use ritual performance as a cue to cooperativeness?**
  - Do they expect someone who performs a ritual well to be a better group member?
    - Share resources with the group
    - Be included by the group
  - Do they evaluate someone who performs a ritual well more positively and prefer to interact with them?
    - Attribute more positive behaviors
    - Attribute less negative behaviors
    - Preferable play partner

References

[1] Hove & Risen, 2009. *Social Cognition*. [2] Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010. *Evolution & Human Behavior*. [3] Legare & Souza, 2012. *Cognition*. [4] Sorenson, 2007. *A Cognitive Theory of Magic*. [5] Legare & Watson-Jones, 2016. *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*. [6] Watson-Jones & Legare, 2016. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. [7] Wen, Herrmann, & Legare, 2015. *Evolution & Human Behavior*.
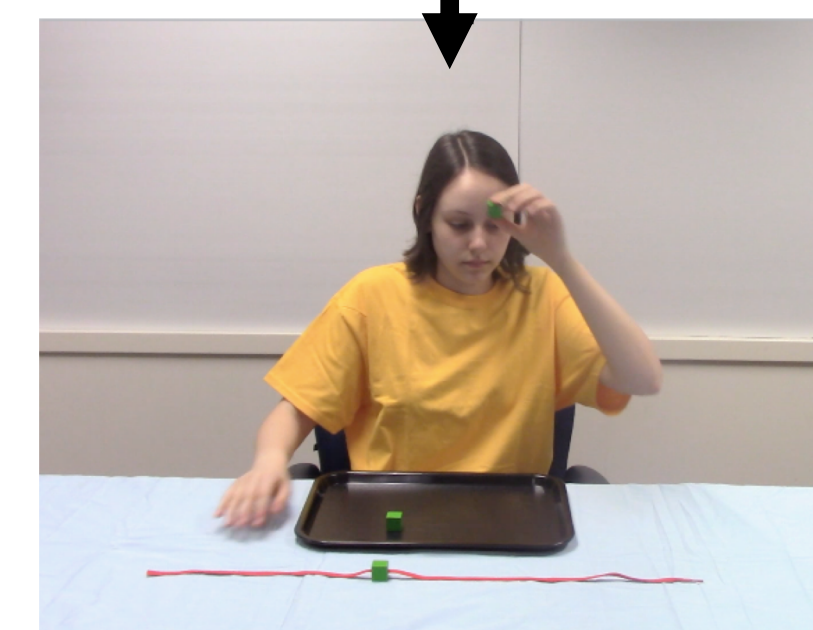
Acknowledgments

Method

- Participants: N = 75 5-9-year-olds

Group Introduction — Introduced to *"Ferpies"* who wear *"tomas"*
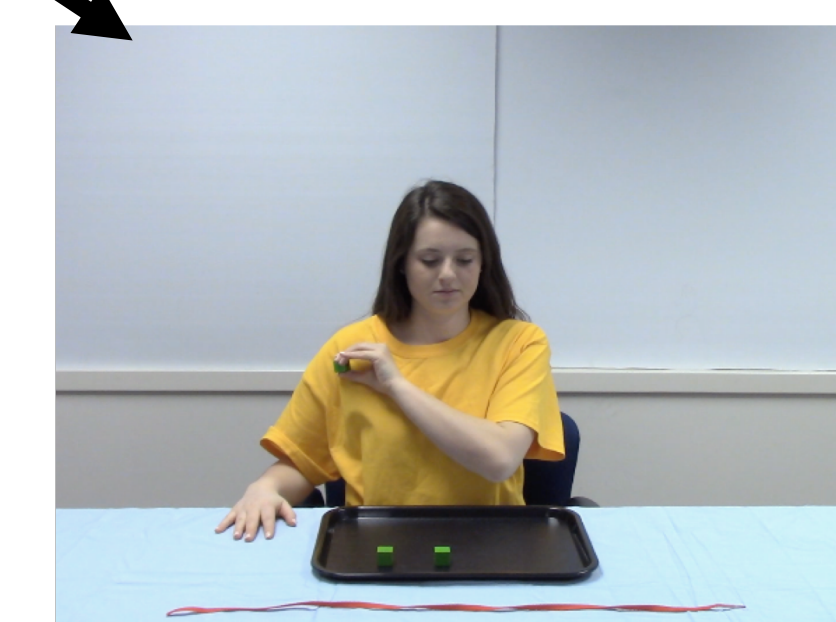
Ritual Expert — *"This is Elizabeth. She's a Ferpie. She's going to show you how to make a toma."*

High Competency   **Low Competency**

Forced Choice Task

Measure	Example
1. **Expectations for generosity**	*Who will share a snack with another Ferpie?*
2. **Expectations for inclusion**	*If the Ferpies were making a sports team, who would they pick to be on their team?*
3. **Preferred play partner**	*Who would you rather play a game with?*
4. **Positive attributions**	*Who made cookies for all of their friends?*
5. **Negative attributions**	*Who made a mess and didn't clean up?*

Resource Allocation Task

Olivia   Sally

Does Sally give none, some, or all of her cookies to the Ferpie cookie sale?
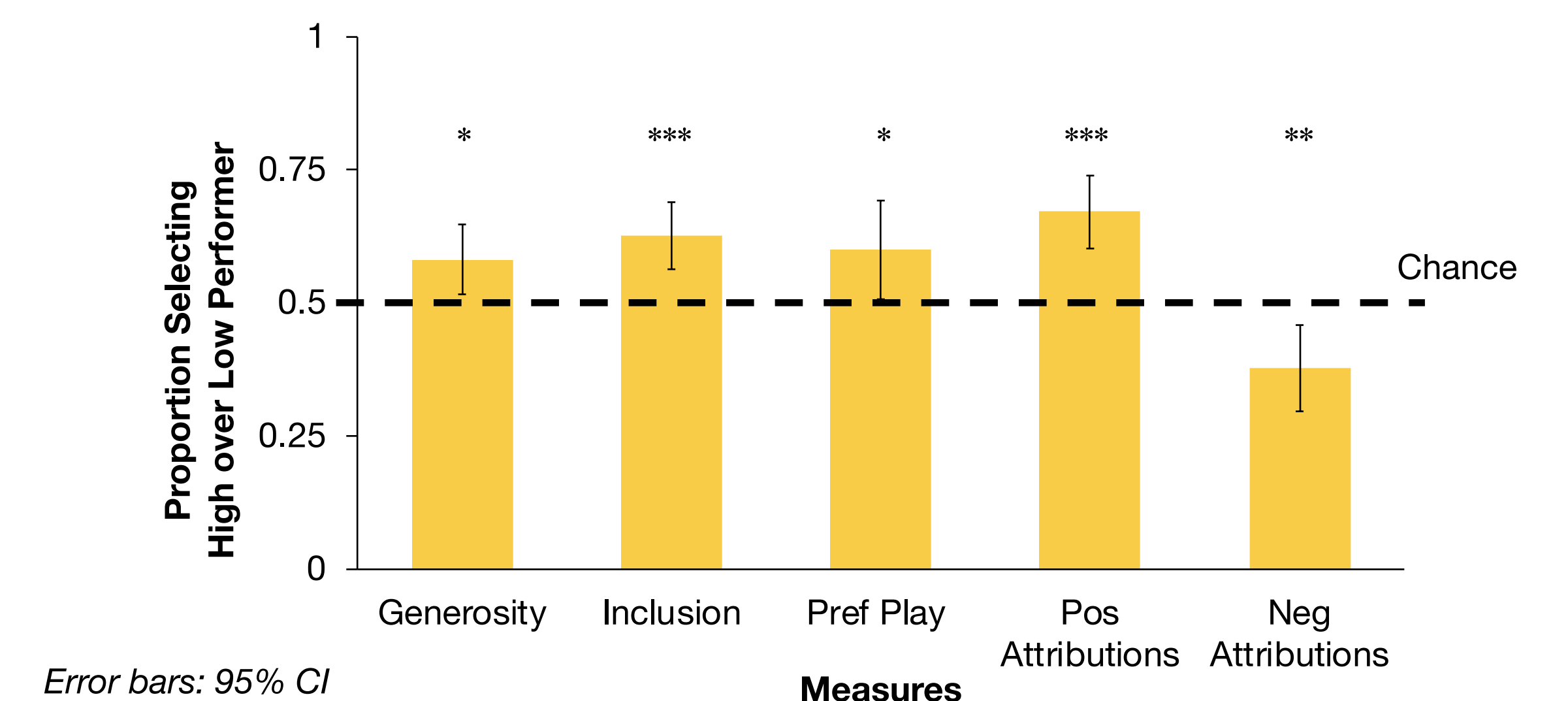
COOKIES FOR SALE

Results

Forced Choice Task

Error bars: 95% CI

- Children's evaluation of the high competency performer:
  1. Will **share resources** with the group. $t(74)=2.50$, $p = .015$, $d = 0.29$
  2. Will be **included** by the group. $t(74)=4.01$, $p <.001$, $d = 0.46$
  3. Is a **preferable** play partner. $t(74)=2.15$, $p = .035$, $d = 0.25$
  4. More **positive** attributions. $t(74)=4.98$, $p <.001$, $d = 0.57$
  5. Fewer **negative** attributions. $t(74)=-3.00$, $p = .004$, $d = 0.35$

Resource Allocation Task
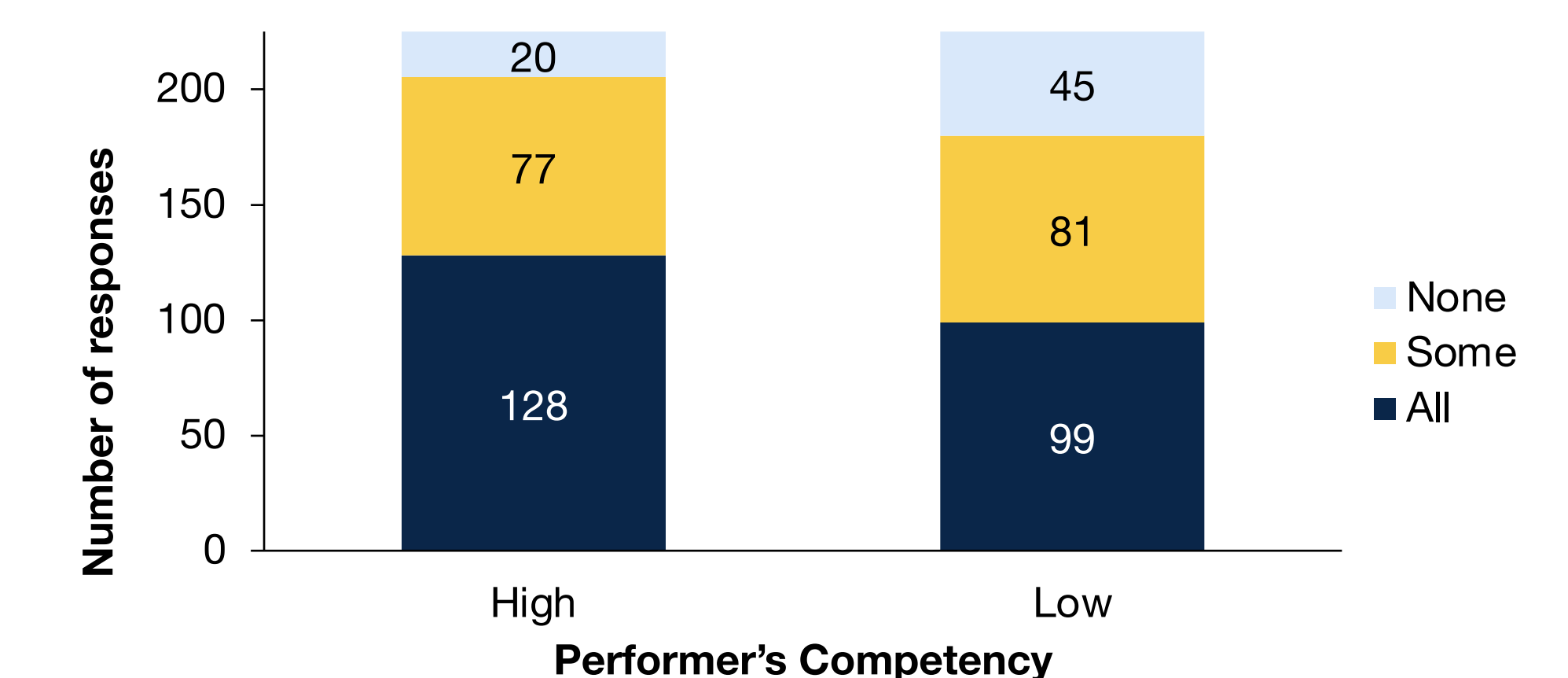
- Children expect the high competency performer to be **more generous** than low competency performers. $\chi^2(2, N=75)=13.42$, $p=.001$
- Standardized residuals show children expected the high competency performer to **give all** of their resources (1.36) and less likely to **give none** of their resources (-2.19).

Discussion

- Children use ritual performance as a marker of cooperation.
- They expect someone who performs a ritual well to be a better group member, evaluate them more positively, and prefer to interact with them.
- In an ongoing study, we test whether children differentiate competency in ritual vs. instrumental learning.