

Study looks at social exclusion on the playground

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(Medical Xpress)—Being the last one picked for the team, getting left out of the clique of cool girls, having no one to sit with at lunch... For children, social exclusion can impact everything from emotional well being to academic achievements.

But what does it mean for the [kids](#) doing the excluding? Is the cure a one-size-fits-all approach that requires kids to include others, regardless of the situation at hand? Not necessarily, says new research from a professor now at Concordia University.

Unlike previous studies where researchers created hypothetical situations and preselected the reasons for exclusion that kids could choose from, the Concordia study asked kids to talk about a time when they excluded a peer.

"Research that looks at kids' own point of view about [social exclusion](#) will help us do a better job of supporting their ability to successfully navigate these situations," says Holly Recchia, an assistant professor in Concordia's Department of Education and member of the Centre for Research in Human Development. She is first author of the study, conducted while she was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Utah.

The recent study published in the journal [Cognitive Development](#) shows that the experiences of exclusion for those doing the excluding are actually much more diverse than what previous studies have shown, and that a more nuanced approach is needed to encourage social inclusion.

This approach allowed Recchia and her colleagues at the University of Utah to form a broader picture of exclusion. The kids' [narratives](#) included not just reasons for exclusion but also why they judged their reasons to be good or bad. For example, "it was a bad reason because now his feelings are hurt" or "it was a good reason because I don't work well with her."

In some cases, children tried to numb their [negative feelings](#) about exclusion by ignoring a situation, while in others they spontaneously looked for an alternative to exclusion. In both cases, they had mixed feelings about whether their reasons were good or bad.

"It's the search for alternatives to exclusion that we want to encourage. The fact that children can do this spontaneously reflects children's awareness of their own capacity to behave differently in the future and can be an entry point for intervention," says Recchia.

The study also showed that the experience of exclusion changes as kids got older. Seven year-olds mostly reported uncontrollable circumstances and peer pressure as reasons for exclusion, depicting themselves as blameless. As the youngsters reached their teenage years, however, they showed more responsibility when they talked about excluding others, often reporting reasons that were within their control.

This information could help researchers come up with age-specific interventions. In the case of younger kids, the best approach is to help them take responsibility for their actions, which would encourage them to see what they could have done differently.

"The most useful interventions will be the ones that allow kids to weigh different goals, across different kinds of situations," says Recchia. "This flexibility would allow them to handle [exclusion](#) in ways that minimize harm to other people while still recognizing their own legitimate desires

and perspectives."

More information: [www.sciencedirect.com/science/ ...
ii/S0885201412000123](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0885201412000123)

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