

Mood Effects on Children's Judgments of Stigmatized Groups: Happiness Increases Positive Attributions and Helpfulness Predictions

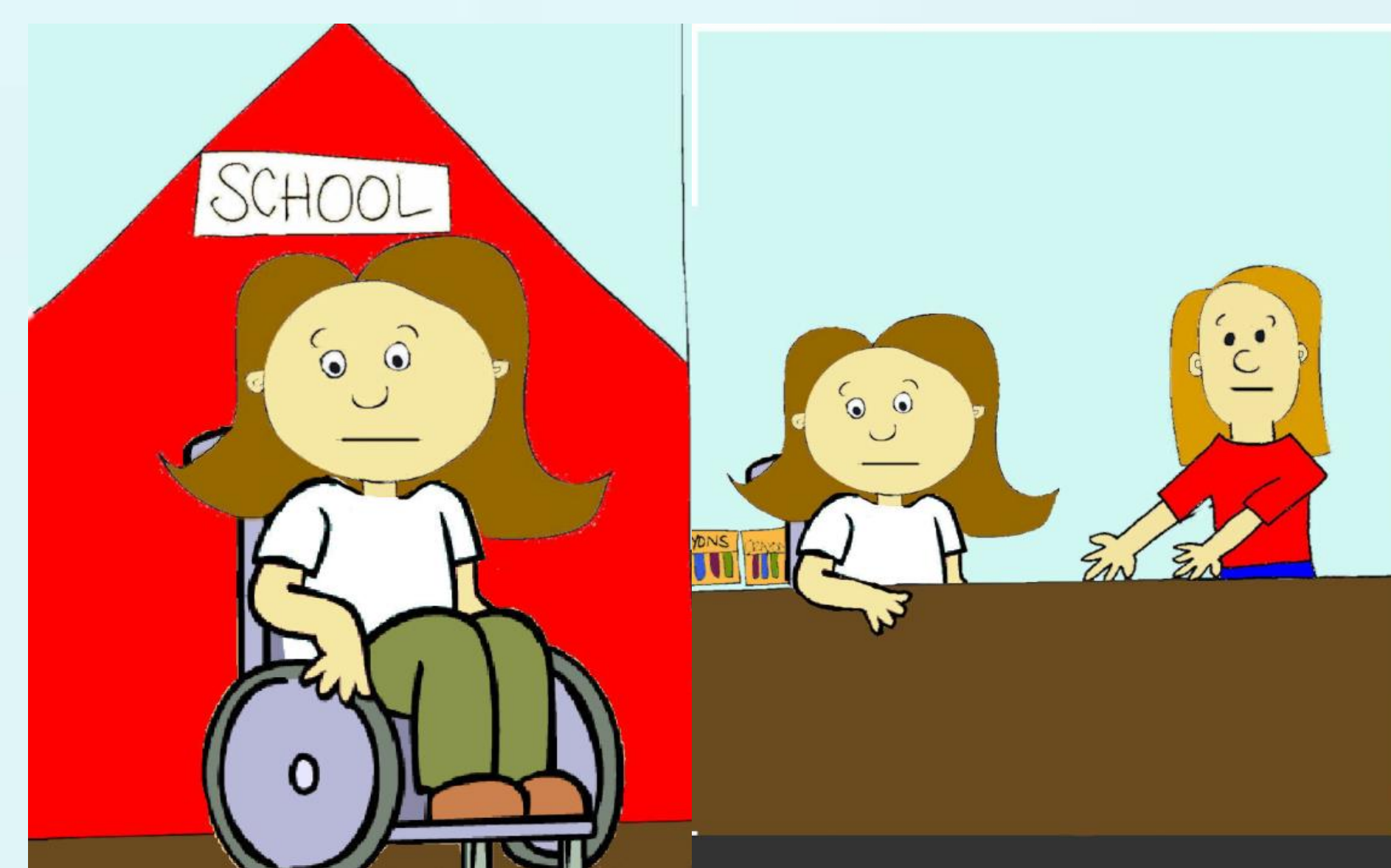
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Introduction

- Children's peer-to-peer interactions occur in an emotional context (e.g., disagreements; excitement). Thus, it is essential to investigate how emotions relate to social information processing (SIP).
- When SIP goes awry, it can result in stereotyping (e.g., obesity, Sigelman, 1991; accents, Kinzler, Shutts, Dejesus & Spelke, 2009).
- In adults, positive moods increase stereotyping via heuristic processing, whereas negative moods decrease stereotyping via systematic processing (Ashby, Isen & Turken, 1999).
- The present study examined the impact of mood on children's judgments of socially stigmatized peers, as little is known about mood effects on SIP in childhood.

Methods

Forty-seven 5- to 6-year-olds were induced into a positive or negative mood via self-generated imagery (i.e., "Can you think of something that makes you happy/sad?"), whereas children simply counted in a neutral condition. Participants then heard three stories, each about an actor (i.e., overweight, accent, and typical/control) who had the opportunity to help a recipient



Sample Story

"This is Allison. She uses a wheelchair. She has to use a wheelchair because she can't walk like the other kids in class. Allison is at school right now and it's playtime. Allison decides to color a picture. Marie, another girl in the class, wants to color a picture too. Marie asks Allison if she will share her crayons."

Methods

Children were asked the following questions, adapted from Boseovski and Lee (2006).

•Behavioral Prediction: "What do you think happens next in the story?"

- "Will not help" was scored as 0 and "Help" was scored as 1, and

•Trait attributions: "What kind of girl/boy is [actor]?"

- Negative attributions (i.e., "Mean") were scored as 0 and positive or neutral responses (i.e., "Nice" or "Not nice or mean") were scored as 1.

•Friendship Endorsement: "Would you want to be friends with [the actor]?"

- "No" was scored as 0 and "Yes" was scored as 1, and

Results

Data were analyzed using 3 (mood: positive, negative, neutral; between-subjects) x 3 (story type: overweight, accent, and control; within-subjects) mixed ANOVAs for each of the three dependent variables.

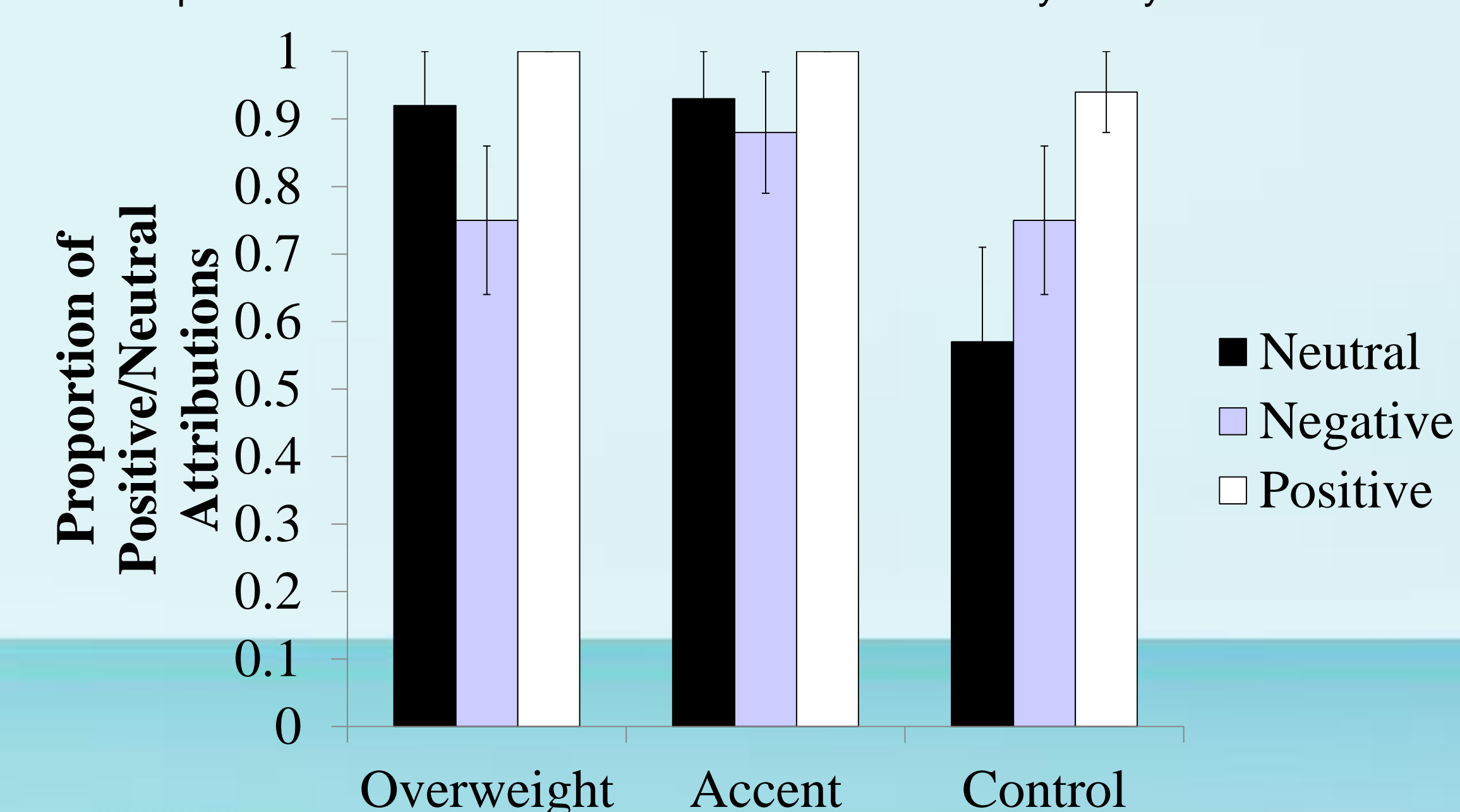
Trait Attributions

- Attributions about the actor with an accent were significantly more positive than those about other story actors, $F(2, 43) = 7.27, p < .01, ps < .05$.

- Positive mood induction resulted in greater positive/neutral attributions than negative and neutral moods, $F(2, 43) = 2.62, p = .08$, follow up $ps < .05$.

- There was a significant mood x story interaction, $F(4, 43) = 2.92, p = .03$. Mood effects were obtained only for stories about overweight and control characters ($ps < .05$; see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Proportion of "Nice/Not Nice or Mean" Attributions by Story and Mood Condition



Results Cont'd

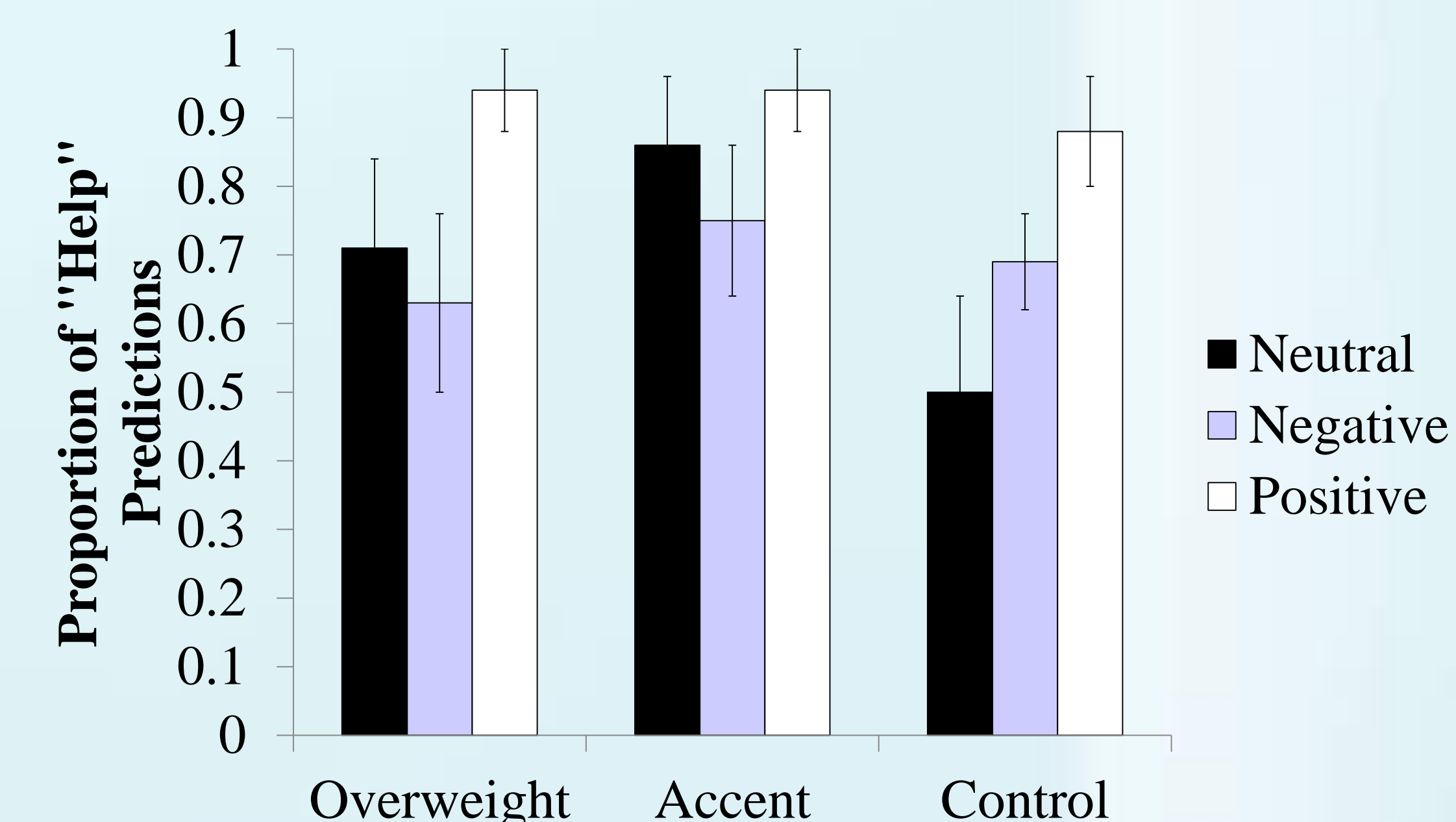
Behavioral Predictions

- There was a marginally significant effect of mood whereby positive mood resulted in greater "help" predictions, $F(2, 45) = 2.84, p = .07$.
- Children made significantly more "help" predictions in the accent story as compared to other stories, $F(2, 44) = 3.18, p = .05$ (see Figure 2).

Friendship Endorsements

- Children in the positive (versus neutral or negative) moods were marginally more likely to endorse befriending actors, $F(2, 41) = 2.66, p = .08$

Figure 1. Proportion of "Help" Predictions by Story and Mood Condition



Discussion

- Contrary to findings with adults, positive mood generally increased the positivity of children's social judgments.
- This may reflect the characteristic positivity bias in social judgments seen in young children (i.e., favorable view of others irrespective of evidence; Boseovski & Lee, 2008). For children, positivity may be the most salient heuristic available in SIP.
- Alternatively, positive moods increase altruism in children, but not adults (Underwood, Froming, & Moore, 1977). Therefore, these findings may reflect an increase in children's expression of altruism when in positive moods.



References

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