

Introduction

- Several contextual factors affect children's delay of gratification (DG), including the visibility of rewards (Mischel & Ebbeson, 1970), and trust in the experimenter (Michaelson & Munakata, 2016). However, relatively little is known about how mood states affect DG.
- Some classic studies found that children aged 3 to 11 years delayed gratification less when in a negative mood, and more when in a positive mood, compared to either the opposite valence or a control (Moore et al., 1976; Yates et al., 1981).
- However, a recent direct replication failed to find any effect of positive mood on DG (Turnbull & Carroll, 2016).
- We aimed to conceptually replicate the effect of positive and negative mood states on DG in a contemporary sample.

Method

Participants

148 British children (80 female) aged 7 to 10 years old participated.

Design

Children were assigned to one of three conditions: positive mood ($N=63$), negative mood ($N=59$) or control ($N=26$). In experimental conditions children watched either a positive or negative video. In the control condition, children only completed the delay choice task.

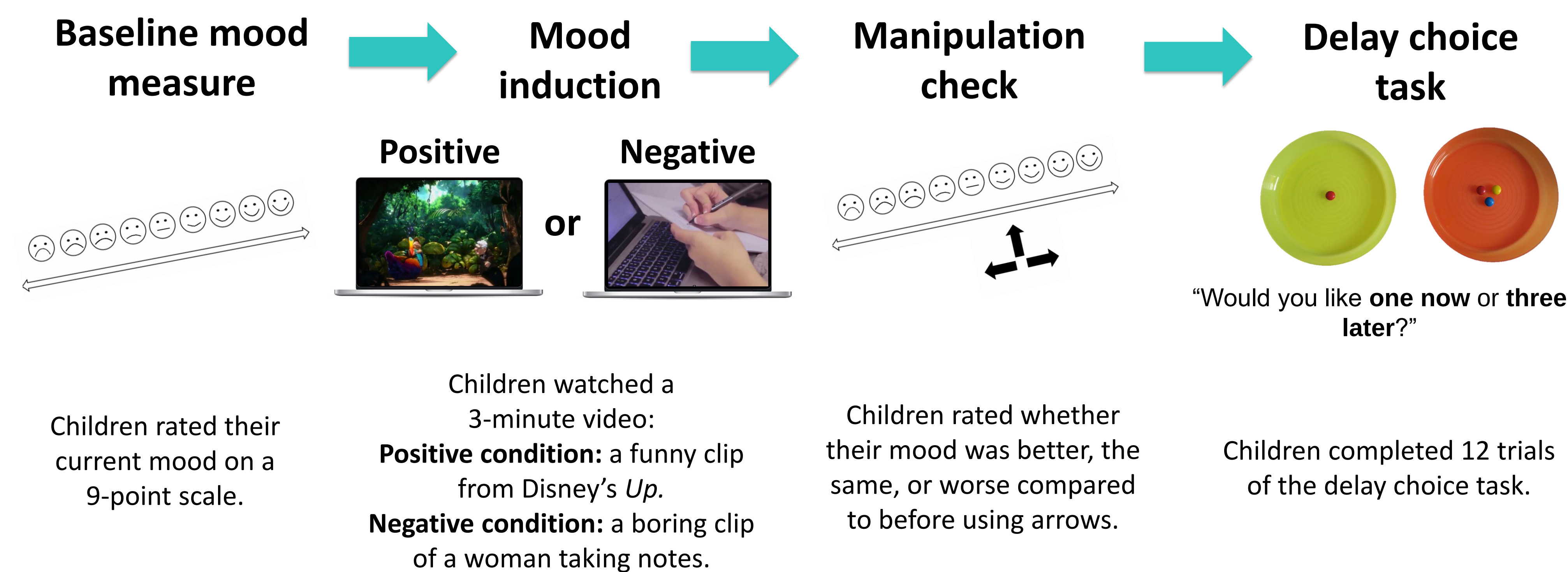
Mood manipulation check

Children in experimental conditions reported their mood at baseline on a 9-point scale from very unhappy to very happy. After the mood induction, children reported whether they felt worse, the same or better than before (see Weisberg & Beck, 2012).

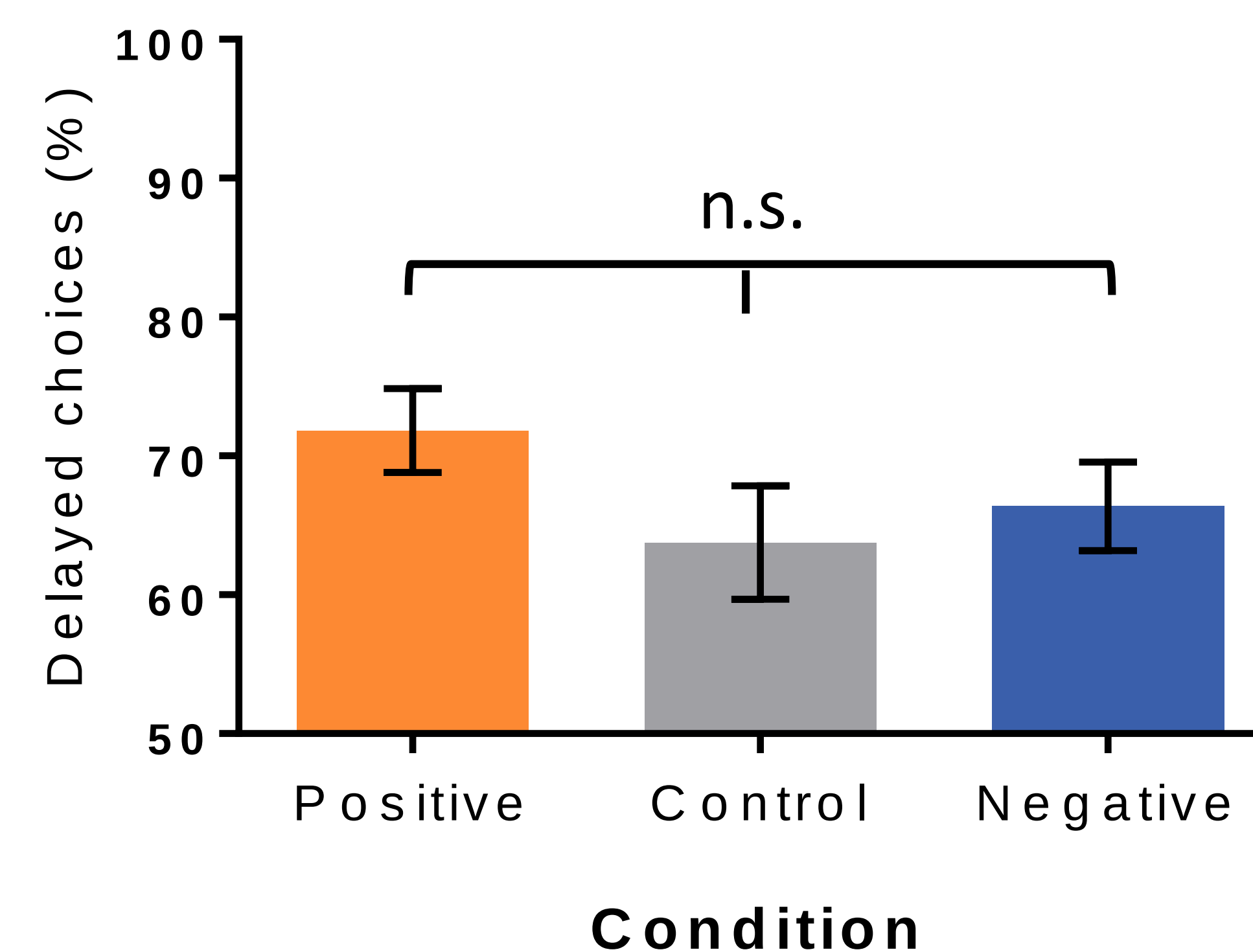
Delay of gratification measure

In the delay choice task, children chose between one piece of candy now or more tomorrow. Twelve trials were made by crossing 3 contingencies (1 now vs. 2 later, 1 now vs. 3 later, and 1 now vs. 4 later) with 4 types of candy (e.g. M&Ms, Skittles). The key outcome was the proportion of delayed choices.

Procedure



Results



The mood manipulation was effective

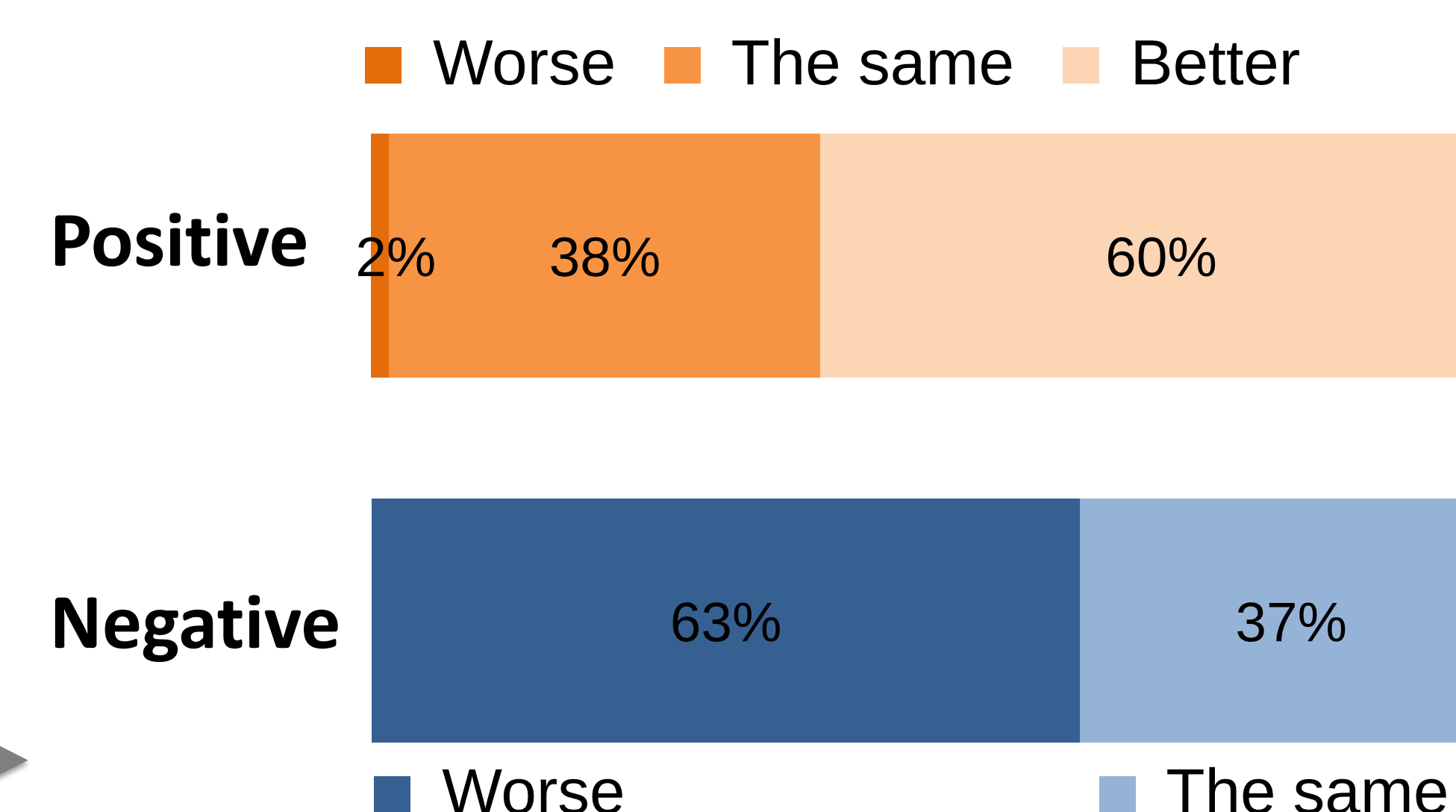
Children in the positive condition more frequently rated their mood as better after the mood induction, and children in the negative condition more frequently rated their mood as worse after the mood induction ($\chi^2(2, N = 122) = 72.14, p < .001$).

Figure 2. Mood ratings in the manipulation check as a function of condition.

There was no effect of mood on delay of gratification

Children across conditions were equally as likely to make delayed choices after controlling for age and gender ($F(2,145) = 1.36, p = .26, \eta^2 = .019$). Excluding experimental children for whom the mood induction was ineffective (remaining $N = 101$) did not change the result ($p = .44$).

Figure 1. Proportion of children selecting the delayed choice as a function of condition. Error bars show the standard error.



Conclusion

- There was no effect of mood valence on children's preferences to delay gratification.
- This was a second failure to replicate any effect of present mood state on DG from previous research (e.g. Moore et al, 1976).
- Therefore effects of mood valence on delaying of gratification are not robust across paradigms, populations or testing contexts.
- In future work, we aim to augment the mood induction to determine whether a more intense mood induction has any impact on delay choice. We also plan to investigate whether mood affects a different facet of self-control, namely procrastination.

References

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