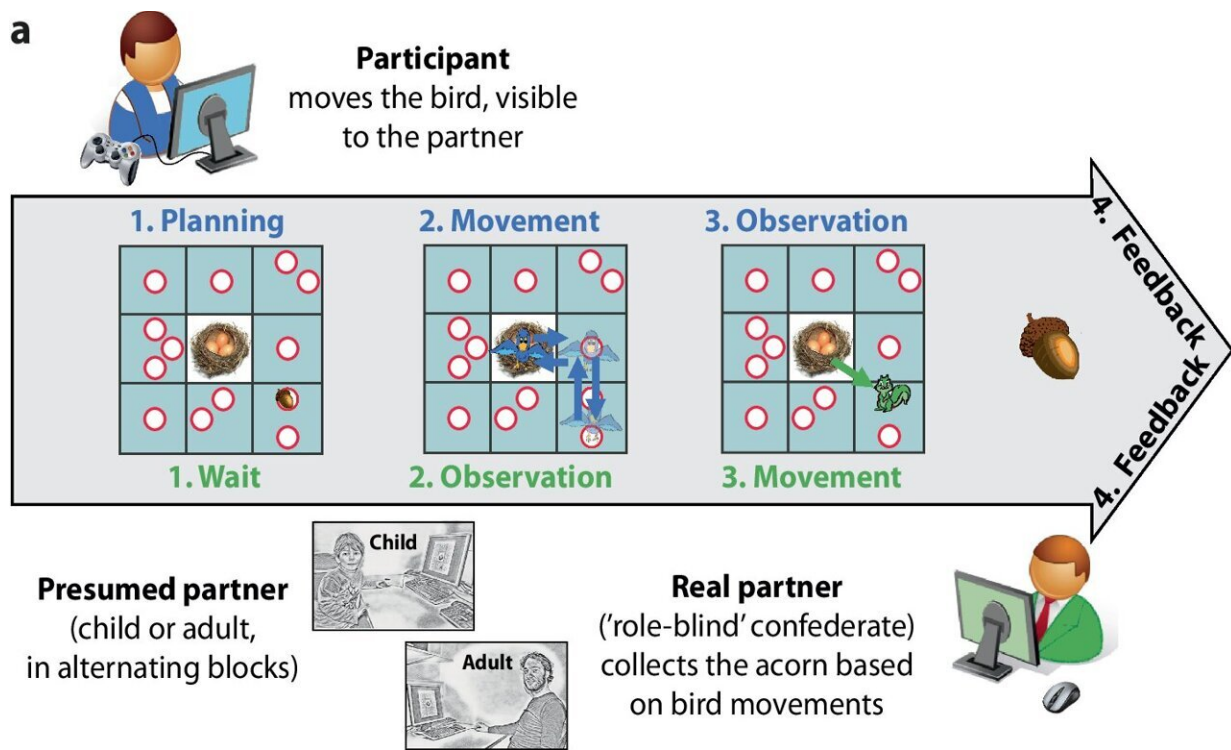


# Early exposure to diverse faces helps babies overcome prejudices later in life, study suggests

September 3 2024



Nonverbal communication game and stereotype-driven adjustments. Credit: *npj Science of Learning* (2024). DOI: 10.1038/s41539-024-00262-6

Babies who have more diverse social contacts in the first years of their

life can get over their prejudices more easily by the age of 17. That's according to [research](#) published in *npj Science of Learning* by neuroscientist Saskia Koch of Radboud University.

When people have stereotypes in their minds, it can influence their behavior. Koch says, "When you make an assumption about the person sitting across from you, it can influence how you interact with that person. Think about the difference between how you would talk to a child or an adult."

For her research, Koch used data from the Nijmegen [longitudinal study](#). In this study, [young people](#) are followed from infancy. Teenagers still participating in that study were given a new task, but first they looked at how often they went to [day care](#) as [babies](#).

"We assumed that children who went to day care more often had more diverse social contacts: they saw different nannies, but also met different children, from all walks of life." Then, as 17-year-olds, the same children were given the task of playing a game.

In the game, they had to play together with another person they could not see. Both players had the goal of locating an object on a gameboard. Only the 17-year-old knew where the object was. Without communicating verbally, the 17-year-olds had to make this location clear to the other.

Koch said, "They had to come up with communicative patterns that would help the other person find the object. This could, for example, be done by making certain movements."

For one game, the 17-year-olds were told they were playing with a 5-year-old and for another [game](#) they learned they were dealing with an adult, while in reality it was the same person each time. Initially, the

17-year-olds adjusted their communicative patterns when they thought they were interacting with the child by placing more emphasis on their movements.

How quickly they abandoned this pattern depended on how much time they spent in day care.

Koch said, "We saw that 17-year-olds who had come into contact with many different people as infants were more likely to get over a stereotype. They did not linger long in the idea that they were playing with a child, by moving more slowly. They found out in the interaction that the 'child' was also very good and relied more often on that interaction. They then based their play on that."

According to the researcher, this means that babies who have had more diverse social interactions can more easily let go of a [stereotype](#) later in life. They are more sensitive to social interaction and can more quickly let go of the image they have in their minds of their peers.

Koch concludes, "Gaining many diverse social experiences early in life allows us to adapt better to the needs of our partners in [social interaction](#)."

**More information:** Saskia B. J. Koch et al, Integrating stereotypes and factual evidence in interpersonal communication, *npj Science of Learning* (2024). [DOI: 10.1038/s41539-024-00262-6](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41539-024-00262-6)

Provided by Radboud University

Citation: Early exposure to diverse faces helps babies overcome prejudices later in life, study suggests (2024, September 3) retrieved 5 September 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2024-09-early-exposure-diverse-babies-prejudices.html>

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