

# Generalized response to rejection in social networks

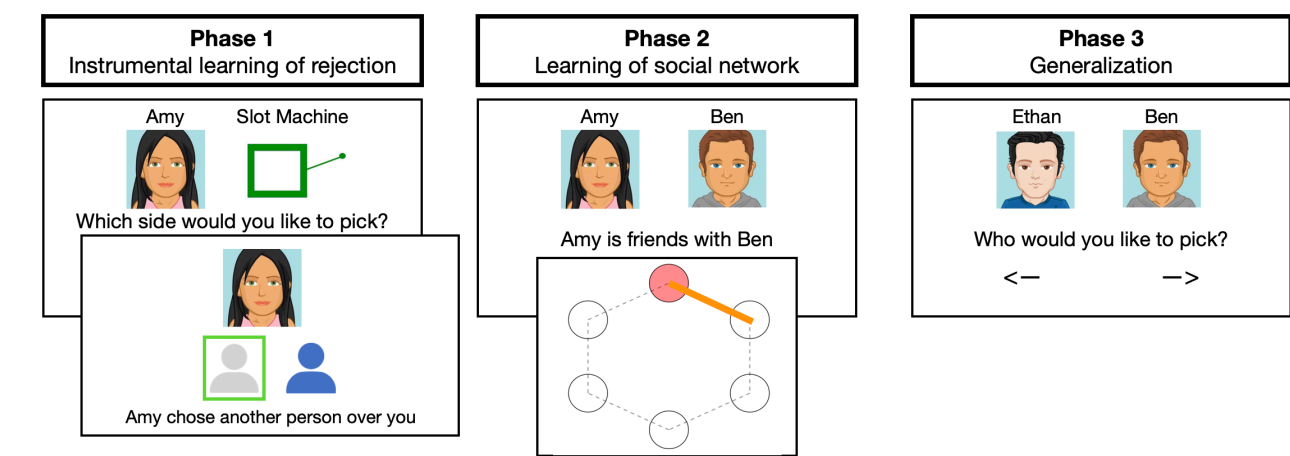
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## Intro

- Past research on social rejection (Eisenberger et al., 2003; Maner et al., 2007; Richman & Leary, 2009) mainly focused on isolated dyadic interactions, without considering the social network in which the agents are embedded.
- We examined how people respond to rejection in social networks. We hypothesize that **people will generalize rejection by avoiding people close to the rejector**.

## Methods



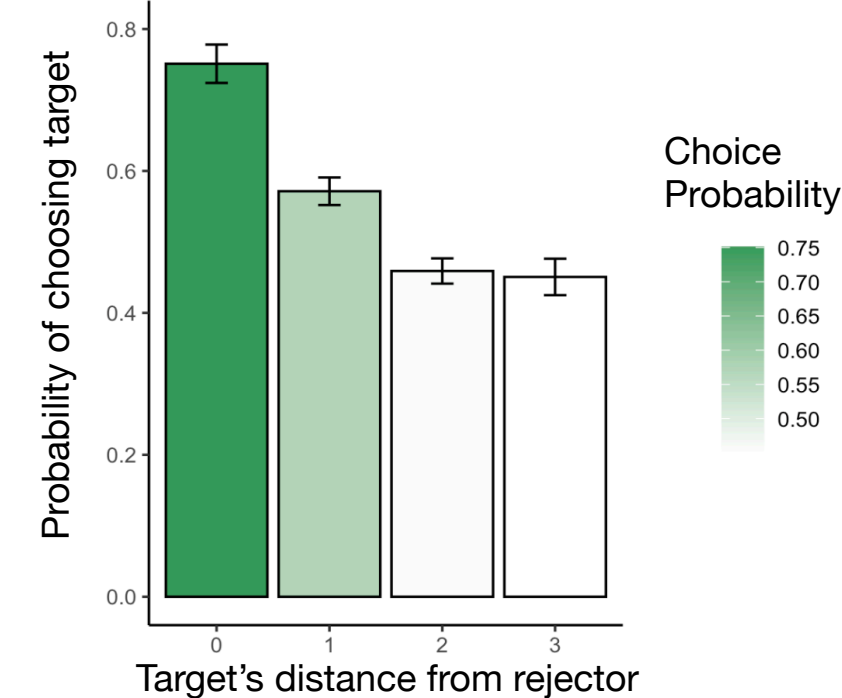
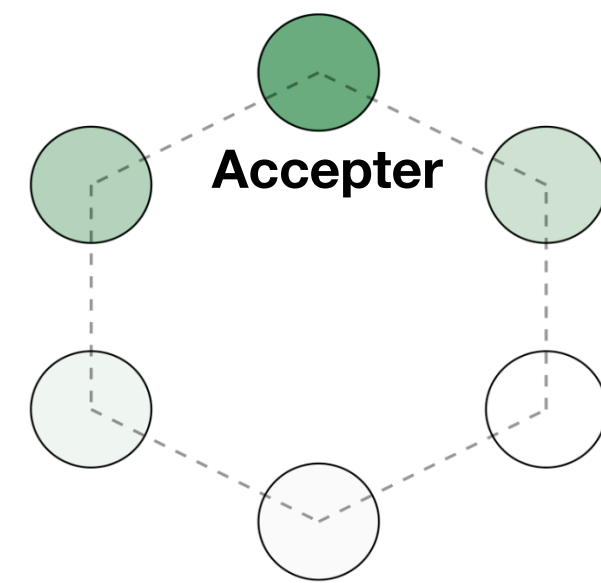
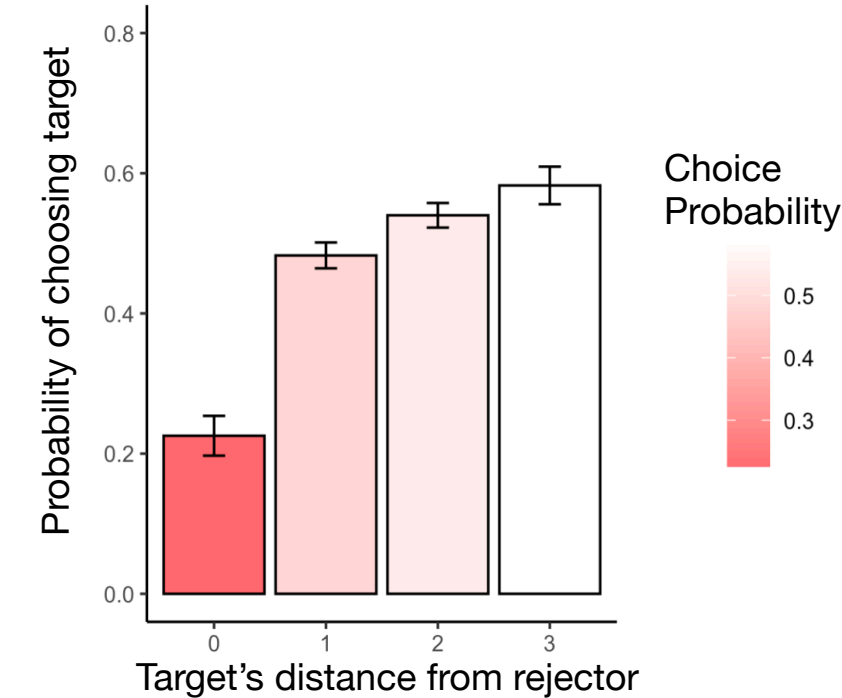
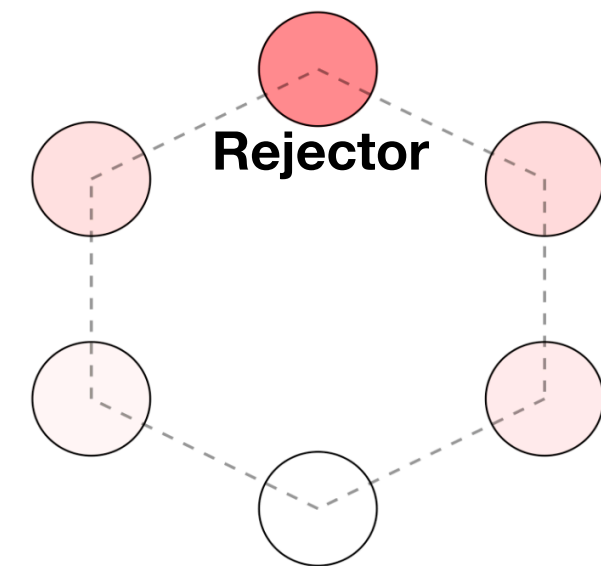
MTurkers completed survey in earlier session, expecting to be evaluated by a group of students ( $N = 153$ ).

- 1. Instrumental learning.** Participants learn about one member of a student group through an instrumental learning game (Cho & Hackel, *in press*). Depending on condition, the student tends to either **reject** or **accept** them in the game.
- 2. Network learning.** Then, participants learn the friendship relationships among the students (Dziura & Thompson, 2019). Students vary in terms of their distance from the rejector/accepter.
- 3. Generalization.** Finally, participants choose interaction partners without receiving feedback. We used mixed-effect regressions to predict the probability of choosing a target from their distance from the original rejector/accepter.

## Results

**We found evidence for generalization for both rejection and acceptance.**

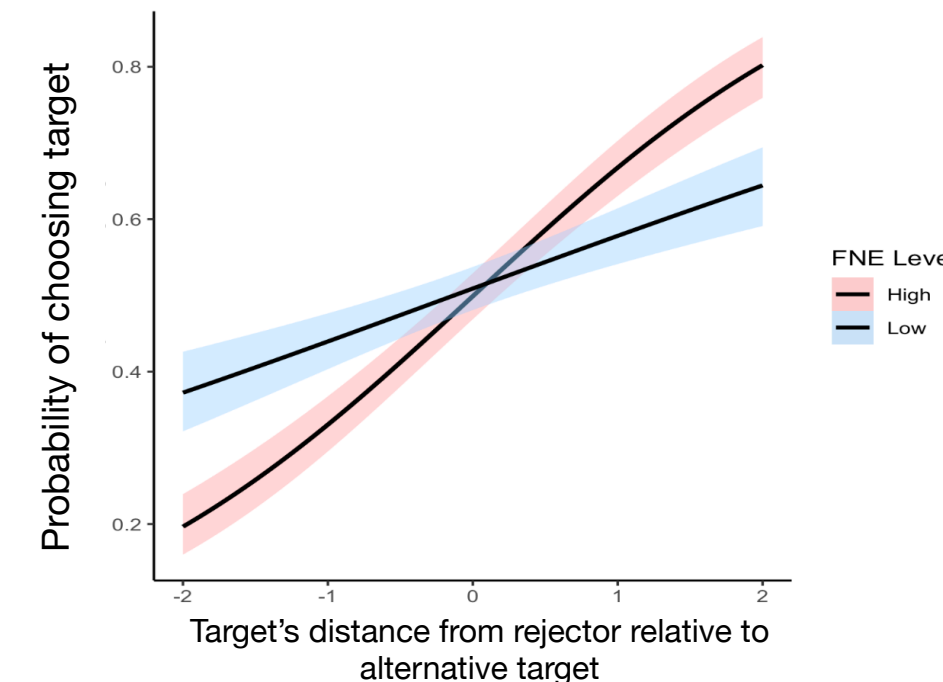
When choosing between two novel targets, participants are more likely to avoid those closer to the rejector ( $B = .28, p = .001$ ) and approach those closer to the acceptor ( $B = .39, p < .001$ ).



## Fear of negative evaluation moderates the effect of distance on avoidance.

Whether people avoid or reconnect with the rejector depends on fear of negative evaluation (FNE) (Maner et al., 2007).

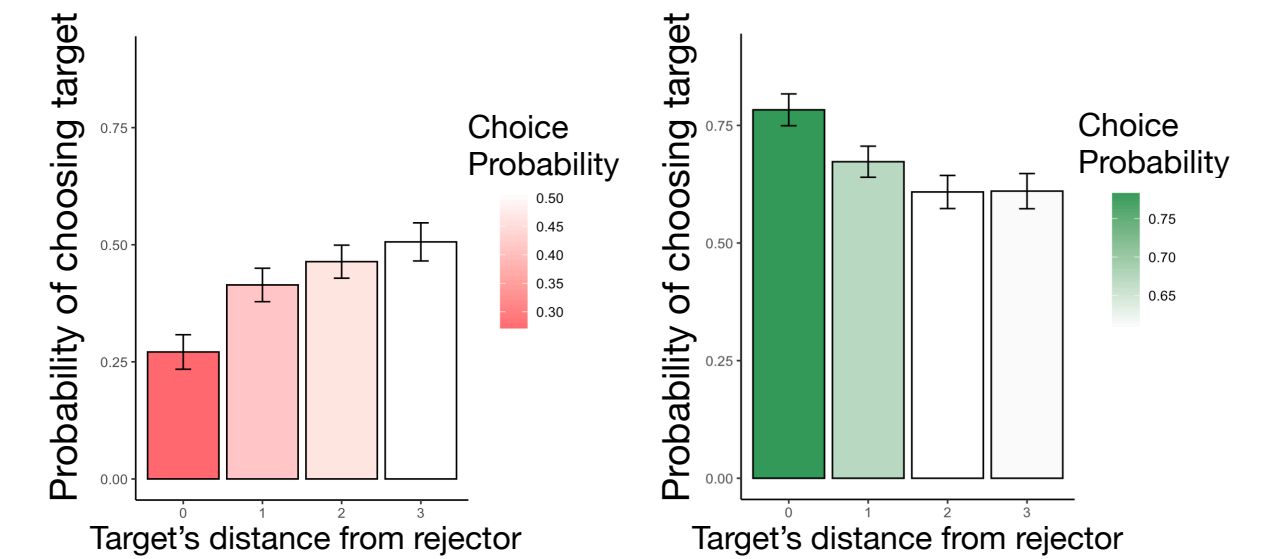
Consistent with this idea, participants who score high on the FNE scale (+1SD) show greater increase in the probability of choosing a target as they move away from the rejector ( $B = .14, p = .03$ ).



## Supplemental Results

**Rejection also affected *whether* people choose to interact with others.**

In Phase 3, participants are also given the opportunity to not interact with anyone. As a result, participants are more likely to avoid social interaction altogether following rejection (**left fig**) compared with acceptance (**right fig**).



## Discussion

- Our work shows that response to rejection and acceptance generalize along social network ties. It sheds light on how social rejection interacts with learning mechanisms to influence social preferences.
- Our work raises the possibility that stimulus generalization might render rejection-sensitive individuals avoidant of social interactions in general and lonelier across time.
- Future work should examine how network structure influences how people respond to rejection and test the lab findings in more naturalistic settings (e.g. college dorms).

## References

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- Maner, J. K., DeWall, C. N., Baumeister, R. F. & Schaller, M. (2007). *Interpersonal Processes and Group Behaviors*.
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