

Social context engineering in children

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Abstract: Positive evaluations are important to succeed in social and economic life. The evaluation result often depends on the social context the evaluation is embedded in. By strategically shaping the social context, e.g., by choosing to compete against low rather than high performers, the chances of receiving a positive evaluation may be enhanced. While we know that adults manage to strategically shape their social context, little is known about when and how children develop this ability. We study this question experimentally in 180 children between 4 and 9 years of age. We show that children are able to strategically engineer their social context at about 6-7 years of age, and that inhibitory control and schooling play an important role in this development.