

Background & Aim

- On average, autistic individuals are more likely than their neurotypical counterparts to:
 - Respond in an off-topic manner (Sng et al., 2020)
 - Leave longer turn-taking gaps (Ochi et al., 2019)
- Exhibiting unconventional conversational behaviours – such as off-topic or delayed responding – could result in negative social impressions of autistic children from their neurotypical peers (e.g., Place & Becker, 1991).
- However, it is possible that autistic individuals do not make the same social judgments due to different communicative preferences (Granieri et al., 2020).
- Study Aim:** To determine whether autistic children find off-topic or delayed responding a deterrent to friendship or interaction, and if not, whether they are aware of the societal dispreference for these behaviours.

Method

- Current results are based on 50 participants (N=25 per group) aged between 9;0- and 13;11-years.
- Mean scores on the Social Responsiveness Scale significantly differed between groups, where a T-score of 76+ indicates severe impairment (ASC = 82.24 vs. NT = 46.38).
- 48% of autistic participants attended specialist schooling.
- Groups were matched on:
 - Chronological age
 - Gender ratio
 - Core language ability
 - Non-verbal reasoning skills

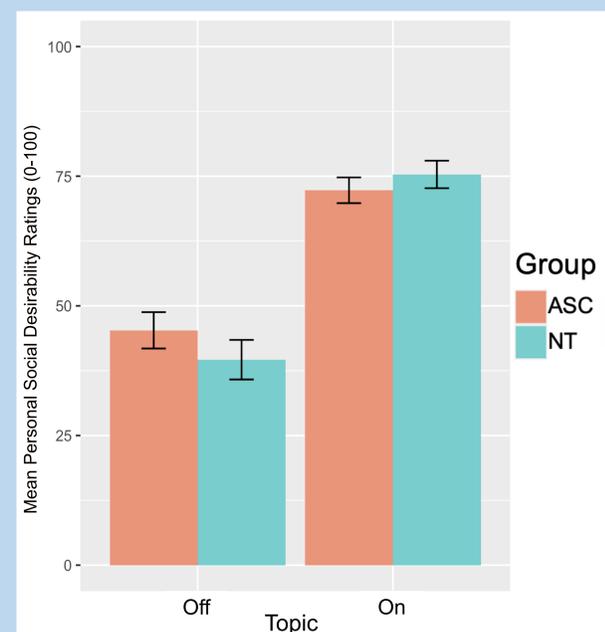
- Participants listened to several short audio clips of six-line conversations between two child actors.
- For each conversation, participants rated four statements on a 0-100 scale – two about their personal preferences, and two about their perceptions of what “most other people” would think.
- They also provided verbal justifications for each of their ratings:

“Most people would find that a bit annoying”
 “There's a really awkward pause”
 “That's kind of weird”

Results

- Two linear mixed effects models were conducted.
- Study 1: On-Topic vs. Off-topic**
 - The typicality of the target speaker's responses was manipulated via the content of their utterances.
 - Significant main effect of Topic ($p < .001$, $d = 1.40$).
 - On-topic ($M = 73.81$) > Off-topic ($M = 42.45$)**
 - No effect of Group ($d = .05$) or Rating ($d = .03$).
 - No significant interactions.
- Study 2: Typical vs. Delayed**
 - Responses came either 200-msec after the offset of the preceding utterance (Typical) or 3000-msec after (Delayed).
 - Significant main effect of Timing ($p < .001$, $d = .47$).
 - Typical ($M = 73.81$) > Delayed ($M = 63.84$)**
 - No effect of Group ($d = .29$) or Rating ($d = .04$).
 - No significant interactions.

Personal Preferences: On-Topic vs. Off-Topic



Discussion

- Judgements:**
 - Results suggest that autistic children are just as likely as their neurotypical peers to dis-prefer speakers who provide ‘atypical’ conversational responses.
 - While it is possible that some autistic adults may develop a preference for atypical communication styles, it appears that the preferences of autistic children are not only indistinguishable from that of neurotypical children, but also align with their perceptions of societal norms.
- Production:**
 - Once data collection is complete, participants' responses to conversation probes will be coded as contingent, non-contingent, minimal, or null. The latency of their responses will also be measured.
 - We will examine whether more favourable ratings of off-topic or delayed responding relate to higher levels of non-contingent or ‘slow’ responses in children's own production.