

Background

- Young children have difficulty sharing with others because it requires a sacrifice of something valuable for the benefit of someone else.²
- Age and theory of mind may account for that difficulty.
- Theory of mind is the ability to understand what others might be thinking, believing, or the ability to take someone's perspective.^{4, 5, 7}
- There is a lack of research on strategies that specifically increase sharing behaviors in this population, but moral identity strategies have been promising in promoting similar types of behaviors.
- Even at a young age, children want to maintain a positive moral identity. Past research has used language cues like nouns (vs. verbs) to activate that moral identity and increase helping behaviors (e.g., "being a helper" vs. "helping").³
- This study used moral identity strategies, formerly implemented to promote helping behaviors and delay gratification, to increase sharing behaviors.^{3, 6}
- The moral identity strategies include the influence of role models or peers who are described as "sharers" or "sharing".

Objective

To study factors that might influence sharing behaviors in young children, including age, theory of mind, and moral identity strategies.

Methods

Participants

- 58 children between the ages of 3 and 6 (females=32, males=26).

Measures

- **Theory of Mind Tasks:** Sally and Anne Task and the Ice-Cream Truck Task.
- **Sharing Tasks:** Sharing of stickers and Legos combined into total sharing score (0-40).

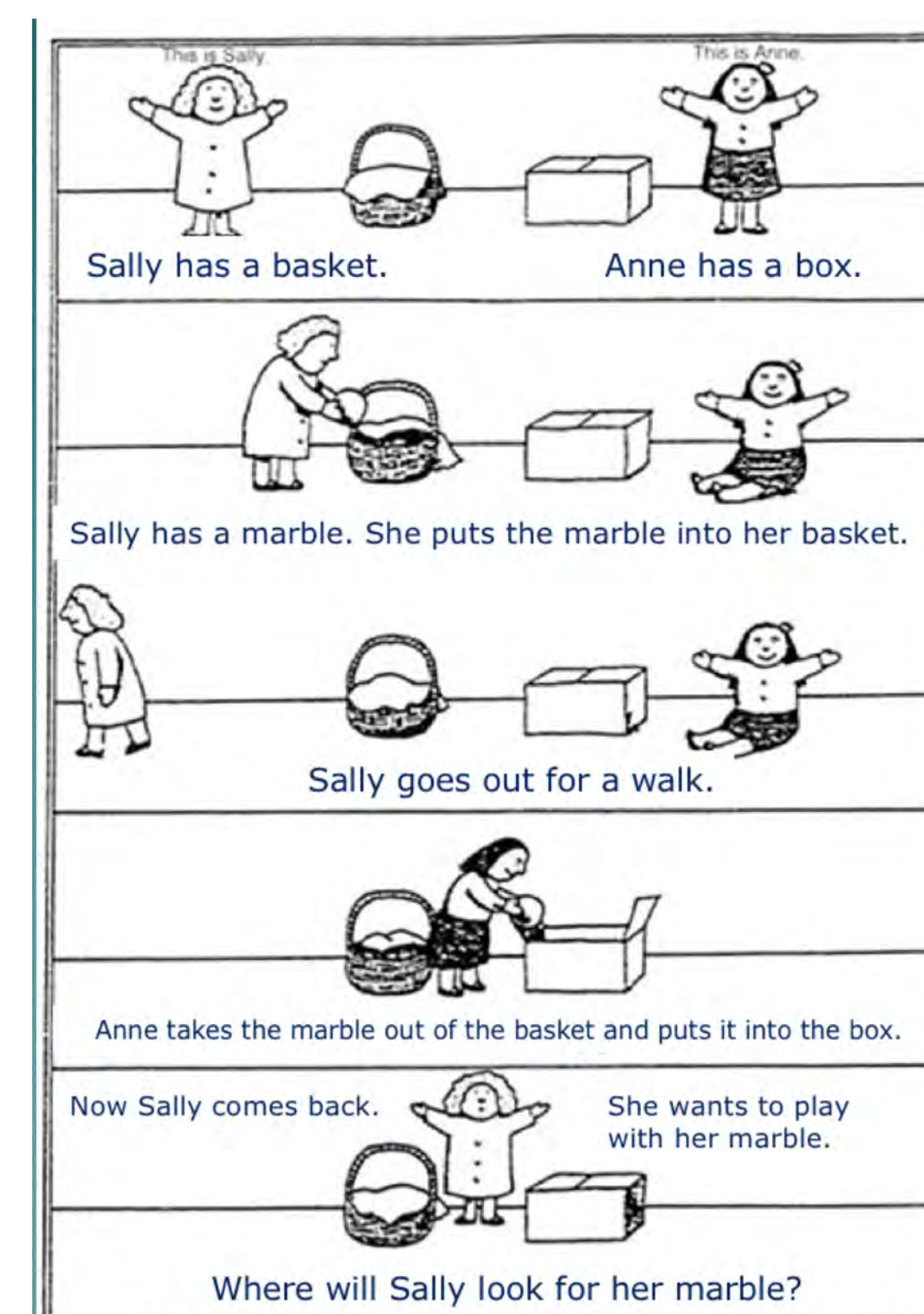
Conditions

- **Superhero-Noun:** "Do you like superheroes? ... Which one is your favorite? ... _____ has very special powers, right? But do you know that _____ is also a sharer. You could be a sharer when you share a toy with another kid or you could be a sharer when you share your food with others. While we play you can pretend to be _____. OK?"
- **Superhero-Verb:** "Do you like superheroes? ... Which one is your favorite? ... _____ has very special powers right? But do you know that _____ also shares? You could share when you share a toy with another kid or you could share when you share your food with others. While we play you can pretend to be _____. OK?"
- **Peer-Noun:** "Some children your age choose to be sharers. You could also be a sharer when you share a toy with another kid or you could be a sharer when you share your food with others."
- **Peer-Verb:** "Some children your age choose to share. You could also share when you share a toy with another kid or, you could share when you share your food with others."

Procedure



Theory of Mind Tasks



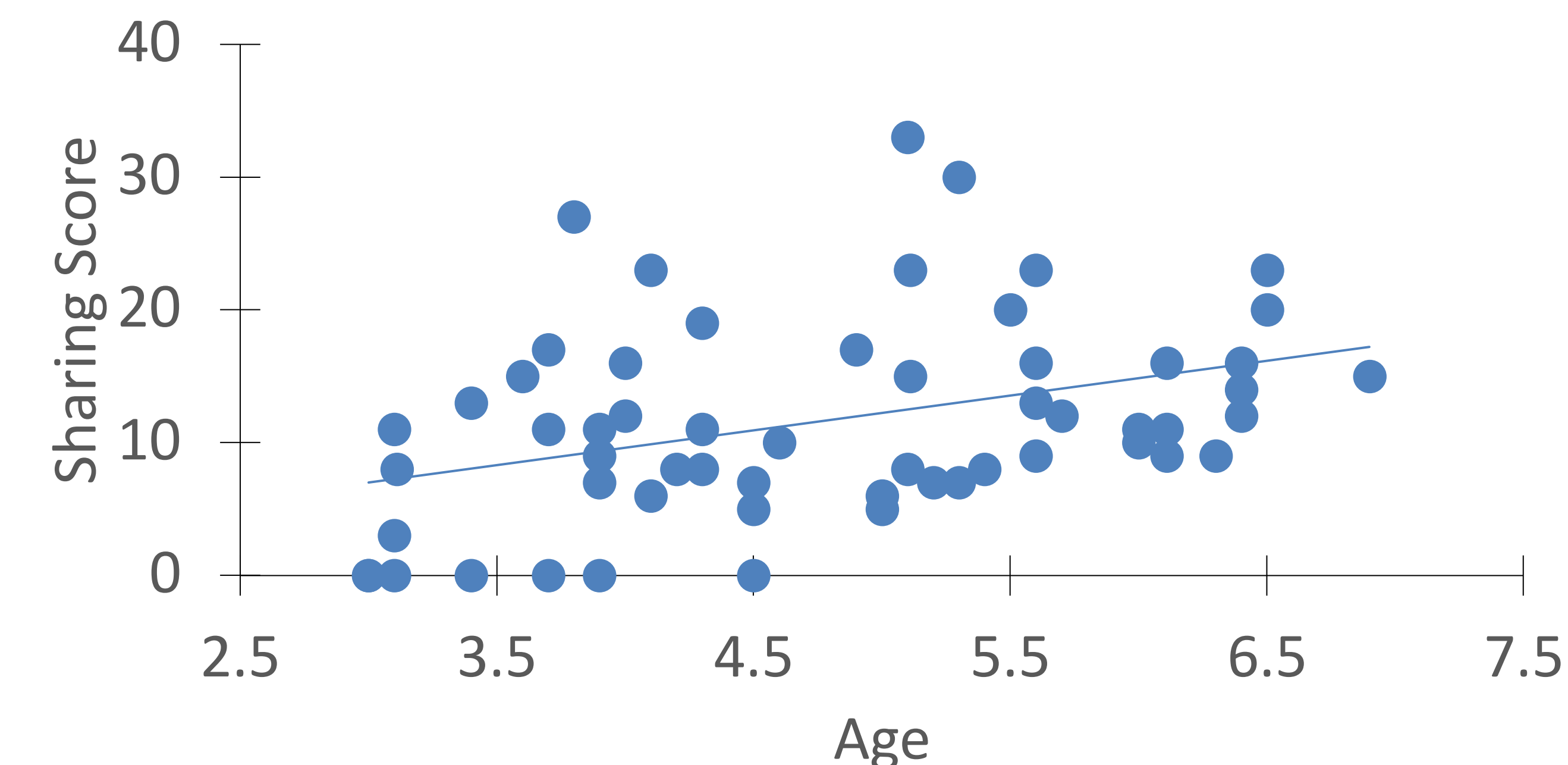
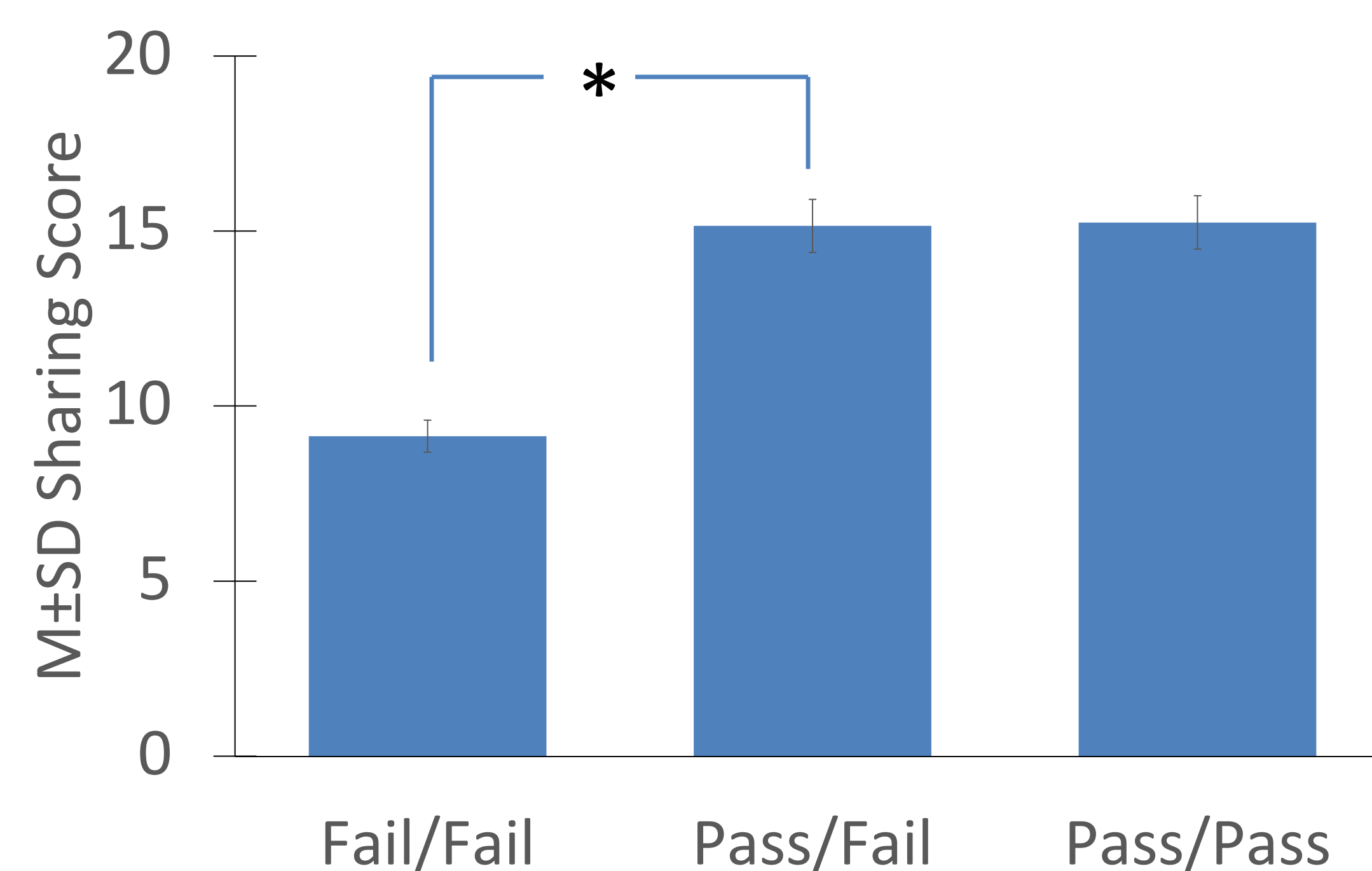
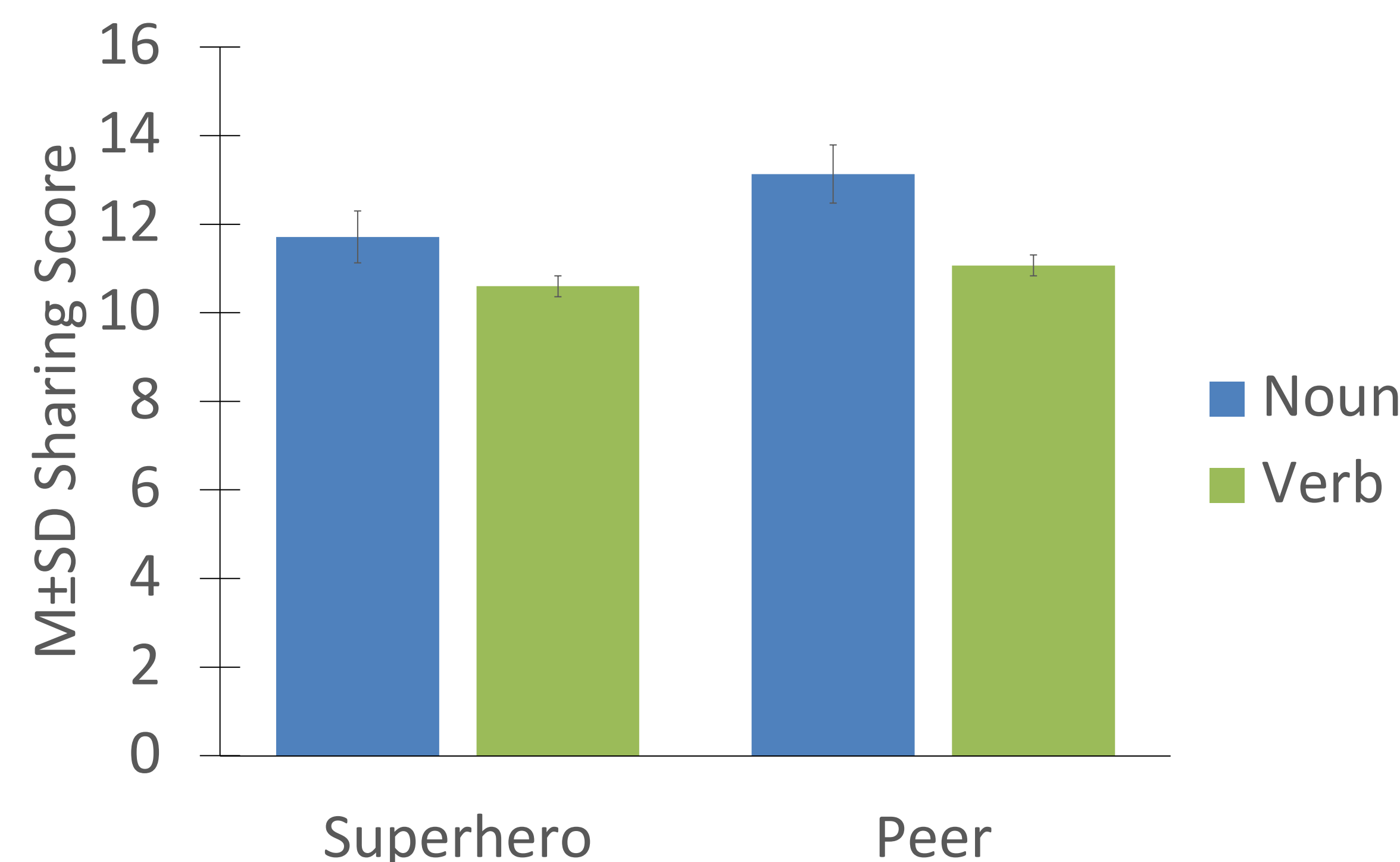
First Order False Belief Task: It assesses an individual's understanding that other people might have different beliefs than them.^{1, 4}



Second Order False Belief Task: assesses an individual's understanding that one individual might think differently than another or have different beliefs.⁷

Image by: M. Parisi, R. Fadda. Moral Judgment and Metarepresentational skills in preschool and in school children.

Results



Summary

- The moral identity manipulations did not affect sharing behaviors. No significant differences were found in sharing scores across the role model and language cues conditions ($p > .05$).
- Theory of mind was significantly related to sharing behavior. Children who failed both theory of mind tasks shared significantly less than those who passed one of the tasks ($p < .02$). No significance was found between failing both tasks and passing both tasks because few participants passed both tasks.
- Age was a significant predictor of sharing behaviors. Older children tended to share more than younger children ($p < .05$).

Discussion

- One limitation of the study was the small number of participants in each condition.
- Another limitation was the difficulty of the theory of mind tasks. Few participants were able to pass both theory of mind tasks.
- Another limitation was the objects that the children shared. Many children shared all of the stickers or Legos because they were not interested in those objects.
- Future research should focus on other types of strategies to increase sharing behaviors and what other factors could affect such behaviors aside from age and theory of mind. For example, how parental behavior such as encouraging sharing affects their children's sharing behaviors.
- In conclusion, even if the moral identity manipulations failed to increase sharing behaviors, age and theory of mind were associated with sharing behaviors. These findings suggest that as children grow older and are able to take someone's perspective, they increase their sharing behaviors.

References

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Language Development Lab
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