



Social Exclusion and the Animacy Effect: Are words for people particularly well-remembered?

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Introduction

Animacy Effect

- It is well-established that humans have better recall for animate words (vs. inanimate words) (see Nairne et al., 2017)
- Social targets are necessarily animate

Social Motivation

- Individuals facing social exclusion have heightened motivation to connect with others (Gardner et al., 2000)
- Social exclusion promotes the ability to recall social events (Gardner et al., 2000)
- Social monitoring theory suggests that when individuals experience social exclusion, they dedicate greater amounts of cognitive resources to socially relevant information (Gardner et al., 2000)

Hypotheses & Justification

H1: Everyone will show the animacy effect (replicating previous work).

H2: Those who write about a time feeling socially excluded will recall animate words that represent people (i.e. burglar, kid) better than animate words that do not represent people (i.e. shark, gorilla) relative to those who wrote about being socially accepted or a control scenario.

Method

Participants: 221 participants recruited from MTurk, paid \$2.00 each.

- 147 females, 72 males, and 2 preferred not to answer
- $M_{age} = 42$ $N_{accept} = 70$ $N_{control} = 85$ $N_{reject} = 66$

Design: We adopted a 3 (Social Writing Task Condition) x 4 (Word Type) repeated measures design. The dependent variable was the average number of words recalled correctly. Planned comparisons were used to test for differences among word types and exclusion groups.

Memory Task:

32 words were chosen, with 4 different word types: Animate (People, Animals) and Inanimate (Objects, Places). Each subcategory had 8 words. All words were matched along 15 mnemonically relevant dimensions.

Sample Words

Animate	Inanimate
Burglar (Human)	Pearl (Object)
Kid (Human)	Dagger (Object)
Grandma (Human)	Towel (Object)
Chicken (Animal)	Street (Place)
Rabbit (Animal)	Castle (Place)
Gorilla (Animal)	School (Place)

Figures

Figure 1 *** $p < .001$ Error Bars Represent 95% Confidence Intervals

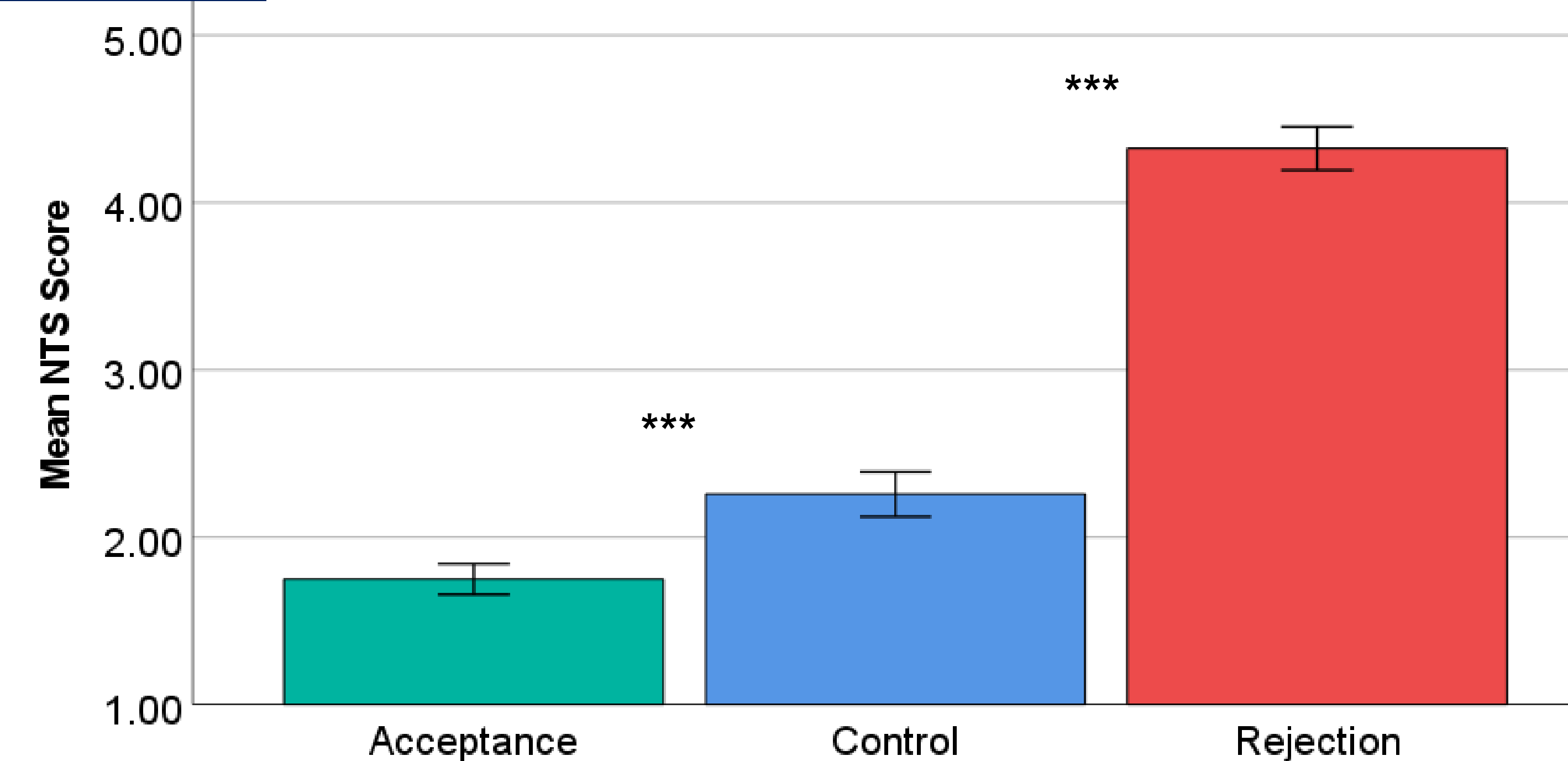
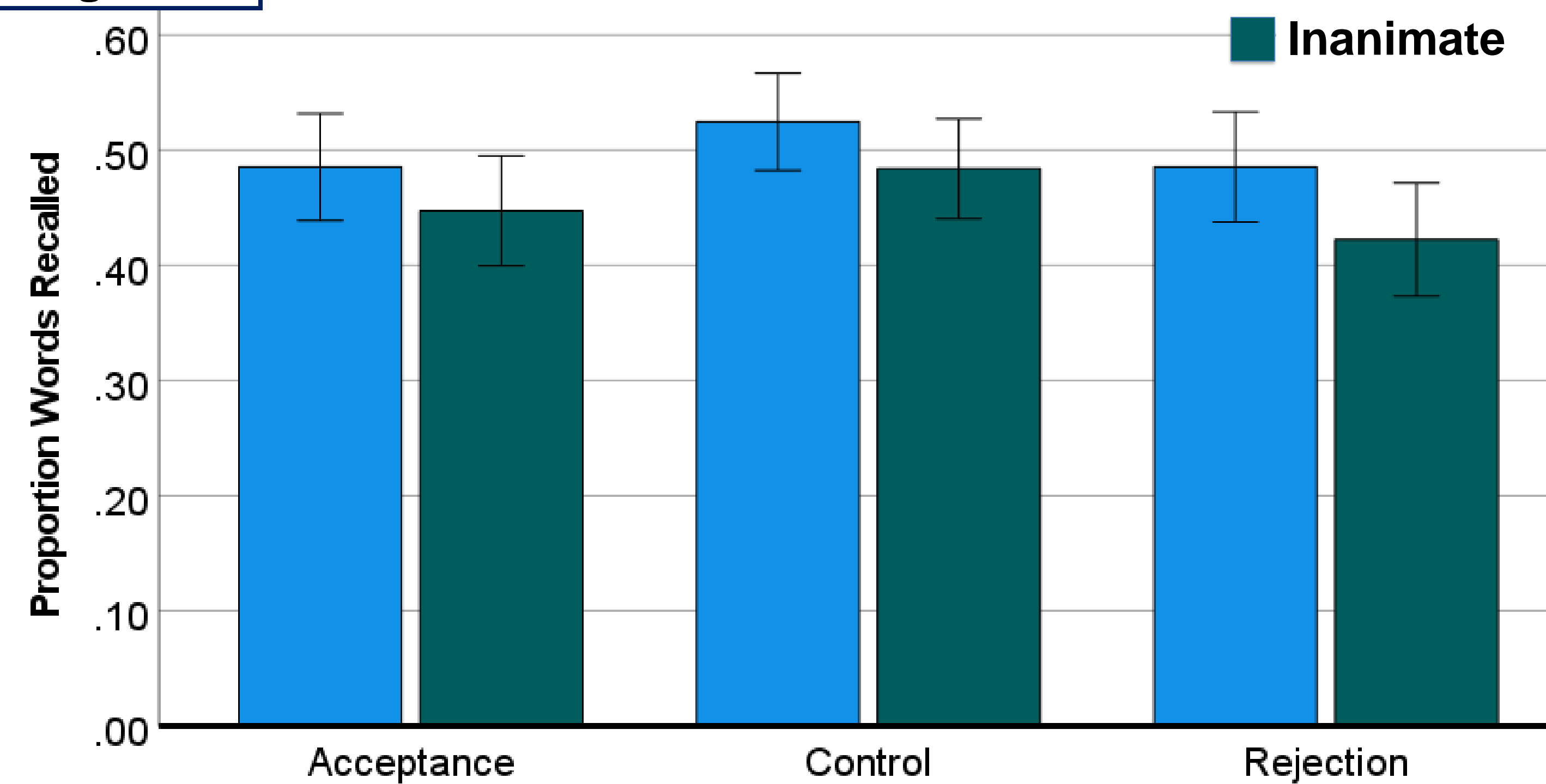
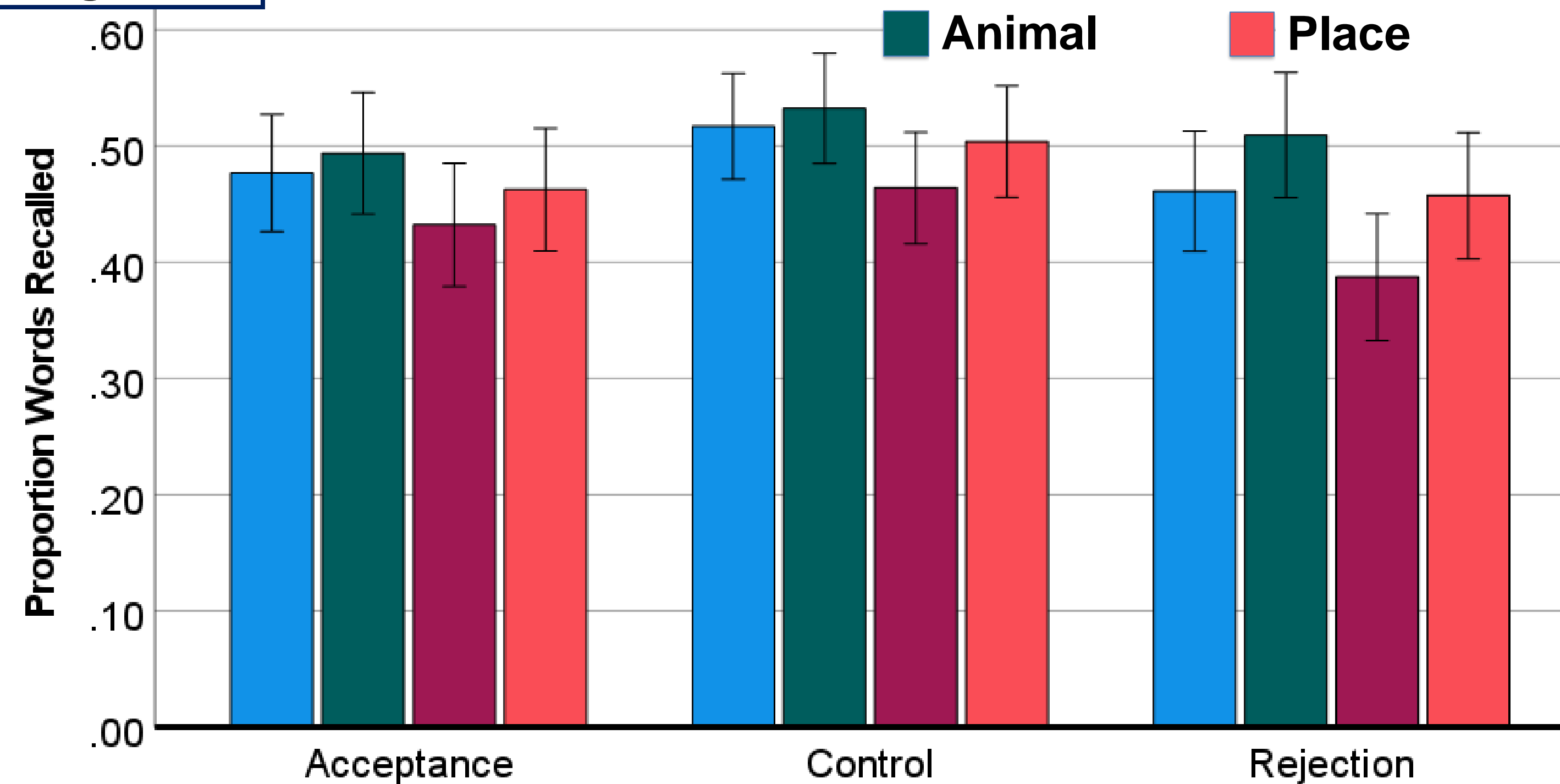


Figure 2



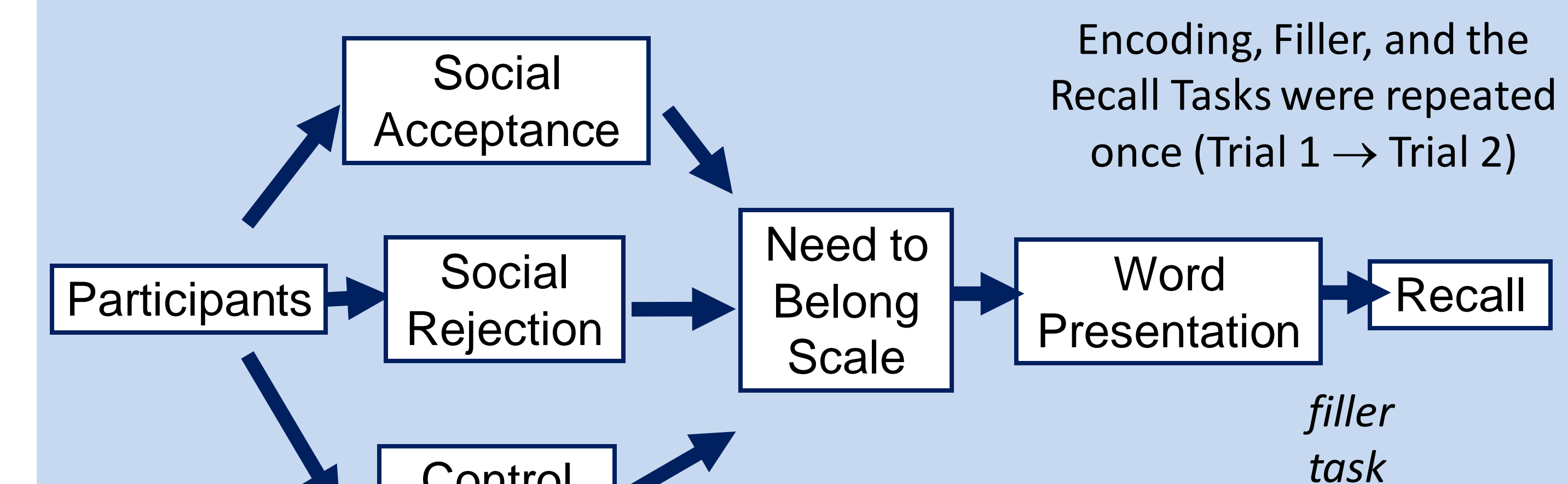
Effect of Condition: $F(2,218) = 1.56, p = .212, \eta_p^2 = .014$
 Effect of Word Type: $F(1,218) = 20.81, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .059$
 Effect of Condition X Word Type Interaction: *Not Significant*

Figure 3



Procedure Outline

Social Experience Writing Task



Results & Discussion

Hypothesis 1: ✓

- This hypothesis was supported as the animacy effect was present across writing task conditions
- This supports previous findings of the robustness of the animacy effect

Hypothesis 2: ✗

- This hypothesis was not supported as there was no differential effect of condition on recall of people words
- This goes against previous findings of how socially excluded individuals may dedicate more time to remembering and paying attention to socially relevant information (Gardner et al., 2000)

Discussion

- A limitation of the results is that the sample size for each condition was unequal due to random assignment.
- Recall for “place” words was much higher than expected, and may be a limitation of the study – a large portion of the “place” words were places where people often live and are otherwise present; participants may have imagined people inside these places. This does not bear on Hypothesis 2, however.
- If anything, animal words were remembered best in this instance – contrary to the predicted outcome of Hypothesis 2.

References

- Gardner, W. L., Pickett, C. L., & Brewer, M. B. (2000). Social exclusion and selective memory: How the need to belong influences memory for social events. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26(4), 486-496.
- Nairne, J. S., VanArsdall, J. E., & Cogdill, M. (2017). Remembering the living: Episodic memory is tuned to animacy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 26(1), 22-27.