

**Adolescents View Social Exclusion Based on Social Class  
as More Wrong than do Children**

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### Author Note

This publication is a part of the first author's dissertation research at the Department of Psychology, Middle East Technical University.

We report how we determined the sample, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study. We followed APA journal article reporting standards. The data of this manuscript are not openly available due to the regulations of the Directorate for National Education, but it is available upon request to the corresponding author. This study's design and its analysis were not pre-registered.

**Abstract**

Psychological attitudes about social status hierarchies and social mobility often reflect stereotypic expectations about competencies and entitlements based on inequalities. Children who experience exclusion based on social class are at risk of experiencing a lack of opportunities, contributing to societal disparities. Recently, developmental science has examined the origins of attitudes that contribute to social exclusion, reflecting moral judgments about fairness as well as societal and group-based concerns about norms and intergroup dynamics. This study investigated children's reasoning about intergroup exclusion by focusing on social class as a potential exclusion criterion for children and adolescents in peer contexts in Turkey, an understudied context for research. Participants living in a metropolitan area of Turkey ( $N = 270$ ) between the ages of eight to ten ( $M_{\text{age}} = 9.80$ ;  $SD_{\text{months}} = 9.33$ ; 53.5% girls) and fourteen to sixteen ( $M_{\text{age}} = 15.51$ ;  $SD_{\text{months}} = 11.23$ , 61.7% girls) from lower and higher socioeconomic backgrounds were asked for their exclusion evaluations, emotion attributions, related justifications, and individual solutions. While participants overall viewed social class-based social exclusion as wrong, adolescents typically viewed it as more wrong than did children. Adolescents focused on unfair treatment and discrimination, whereas children focused on interpersonal aspects of social exclusion more frequently. Older participants from lower SES viewed the excluders' intentions as discriminatory more often than did older participants from higher SES who desired to protect the status quo. These findings shed new light on how children and adolescents evaluate societal-based biases contributing to peer social exclusion.

*Keywords:* social inequalities, morality, social class, peer relationships, social exclusion

**Public significance statement:** The present study demonstrated that children and adolescents view social class-based exclusion as wrong, and with age, they recognize the link between social exclusion and discrimination. Overall, few in-group biases were revealed. These findings indicated an important developmental period to include discussions about biases based on social class in the classroom context. Children have the capacity to recognize when peer-based social exclusion is wrong but do not yet fully understand what makes exclusion based on social class unfair. This study recommends that this topic become a discussion point between parents and their children as well as in the classroom context. An implication is that reducing societal disparities requires enabling children to understand the connections between peer exclusion and perpetuating unfair treatment of others.

### **Adolescents View Social Exclusion Based on Social Class as More Wrong than do Children**

According to global reports, unequal access to resources is at its highest level ever observed in the last fifty years (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, 2021). Public health research has revealed the aversive impacts of resource inequalities, including health disparities, particularly for individuals living in disadvantaged conditions (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2006). Further, access to quality educational opportunities and medical treatment is often challenging in societies with high wealth inequalities. Psychological attitudes about wealth inequalities provide insights into why individuals and societies often condone exclusion based on social class as legitimate inequalities, specifically the lack of access to essential resources for healthy development (Ruck et al., 2019). What has been demonstrated is that psychological attitudes about social class, social hierarchies, and mobility often reflect stereotypic expectations about competencies and entitlements based on inequalities (Jost & Kay, 2010).

Recently, developmental science has examined the origins of attitudes that contribute to wealth inequalities, social hierarchies (Burkholder et al., 2020, 2021), and unfair allocation of resources (Elenbaas, 2019), reflecting moral judgments about fairness as well as societal and group-based concerns about norms, traditions, and group dynamics (McGuire & Rutland, 2020). Most research on wealth biases has been conducted in the U.S. and the U.K. (for an exception, see Grütter et al., 2021) with children and adolescents from middle to upper socioeconomic backgrounds. However, investigating these attitudes in non-U.S. contexts and including children from disadvantaged backgrounds is essential for understanding the generalizability and cultural specificity of these attitudes.

In the present study, we investigated children's and adolescents' reasoning about exclusion based on social class in peer relationships in Turkey. We were interested in

conducting a study in an under-represented context and because the economic situation in Turkey has become a volatile issue for its citizens. Over the past ten years, the wealth gap in Turkey has become one of the largest among European countries (Eurostat, 2022). We had an opportunity to sample children and adolescents living in the capital of Turkey, Ankara, and from children from lower and higher socioeconomic status (SES). Thus, we examined the role of children's age and socioeconomic background as potential factors related to their reasoning of exclusion and inequalities based on social class.

### **Conceptualization of Social Class as a Social Group Membership**

In the present research, we drew on multiple theories and research methodologies to investigate how children and adolescents conceptualize social class. Social class is a sociocultural group identity consisting of access to tangible resources (e.g., wealth, education, and occupation) and an individual's perceptions of relative status within the social hierarchy (Diemer et al., 2013; Kraus et al., 2012). Furthermore, individuals' access to objective resources also has sociocultural implications since these opportunities are believed to affect individuals' cognitions, behaviors, and expectations through perceived social status and power within society (Kraus et al., 2017).

Compared to other social group memberships (e.g., gender, ethnicity, nationality), social class is often overlooked due to being less visible and reflecting an ideal of upward mobility (Thomas & Azmitia, 2014). Even though there is a tendency to perceive social class as fluid, global reports reveal that it usually takes generations for children from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds to reach their societies' average living conditions, creating a multigenerational disadvantage (OECD, 2021). Recent developmental science research has also theorized about social class as a group identity dimension (Mistry et al., 2021) that bears directly on how children and adolescents make decisions about peer inclusion and exclusion (Burkholder et al., 2021; Elenbaas & Killen, 2016; Grütter et al., 2022). Further,

developmental research has investigated children's conceptions of status markers such as "rich" houses with positive traits (e.g., the likelihood to share resources; Ahl et al., 2019; Ahl & Dunham, 2019) and whether parents' economic worries are related to youth's perceptions of financial stress (Mistry & Elenbaas, 2021). These studies reflect a burgeoning and new area of developmental science research focused on how children and adolescents conceptualize wealth, SES, and social class in their everyday lives.

Due to many factors, including social class-based segregation in social and educational contexts, children often choose to be friends with others from similar socioeconomic backgrounds (Owens et al., 2016). Findings show that children also identify with their families' backgrounds as indicated by their subjective SES (Mistry et al., 2015). They expect families and communities from specific socioeconomic backgrounds to share similar values and norms, such as being helpful, resourceful, and trustworthy (Bessell, 2019). Social class might also affect children's expectations about socialization patterns and the related judgments on social interactions in a way that children might feel more comfortable spending time or being friends with other children from similar social and economic opportunities. Consequently, social class also serves as a group identity in children's lives (Mistry et al., 2021). In this study, we investigated children's and adolescents' evaluations and reasoning about peer exclusion based on social class, drawing on previous research on peer inclusion and exclusion.

## **Theoretical Background**

Due to the salience of social class as social group membership, we drew on the social reasoning developmental (SRD) model (Killen & Rutland, 2011; Rutland et al., 2010) as the theoretical framework. The SRD model integrates developmental perspectives on social identity theory which has documented group norms, group identity, and group dynamics in childhood (Abrams & Rutland, 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), with social domain theory,

which focuses on moral, societal, and psychological domains of social interactions and judgments (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006). The main premise of the SRD model is that evaluations of intergroup exchanges, such as when an individual is excluded because of their group membership (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity), often involve moral (e.g., fairness), societal (e.g., group norms) and psychological (e.g., autonomy) considerations. Understanding how children approach intergroup interactions will help determine how best to reduce prejudice and bias that emerge in childhood.

Past research based on the SRD model indicated that the transition from middle childhood to adolescence is marked by age-related changes regarding whether children view intergroup exclusion as wrong due to moral concerns or legitimate based on group functioning and identity (McGuire et al., 2018). With age, adolescents become more aware of inequalities' social and institutional roots and how societies are segregated (Arsenio & Willems, 2017). Their capacity to approach inequalities as unfair and to rectify them also increases. Adolescents also advance their perspectives on how restricted access to resources is a right violation (Helwig et al., 2014). In this transition period, children also further develop their understanding of group norms and identity and how group memberships are linked to status and power (Rutland et al., 2010).

Research based on the SRD model showed that children evaluate exclusion solely based on group memberships, such as race (Killen & Rutland, 2011), nationality (Malti et al., 2012a), and gender (Gönül & Sahin-Acar, 2018; Park et al., 2012), as wrong and unfair. Nevertheless, when the benefit of the social groups is also salient, adolescents were shown to protect group welfare and norms more than their younger peers (McGuire et al., 2018; Møller & Tenenbaum, 2011). Only a few studies have examined how children and adolescents evaluate social exclusion based on wealth and race with an intersectionality perspective. For instance, Burkholder et al. (2021) examined children's reasoning about the exclusion of peers

who matched on wealth (high, low) or race (White, Black), with analyses revealing that most participants expected that peer groups would give priority to same-wealth matched peers over same-race matched peers. This study indicated that wealth biases might underlie race biases regarding peer inclusion decisions.

Most of these studies, however, have been examined in the U.S. and the U.K. No studies that we know of have examined this phenomenon in the context of children's experiences in Turkey. To address this gap, in the current study, we sampled children between the ages of 8-10 and 14-16 years to study age-related changes regarding evaluations and reasoning about social class-based exclusion in Turkey, a novel societal context in the research literature on this topic.

### **Children's Approach to Wealth and Socioeconomic Inequalities**

When children categorize individuals based on social class and SES, they often attend to material ownership and tangible resources at earlier ages (Enesco & Navarro, 2003). As children reach middle childhood and adolescence, their attributions to poverty and wealth get more complex (Sigelman, 2012), with a deeper understanding of the structural and institutional problems leading to inequalities (Emler & Dickinson, 2005). They also become more aware of the role of social class as a barrier to reaching resources (Flanagan et al., 2014). Despite these developmental trends in children's understanding of access to resources and their implications, they often perceive societal distributions of wealth as justified (Arsenio & Willems, 2017).

Children's knowledge of inequalities is accompanied by their attributions to different social class groups. Research has shown that children prefer peers and groups with more resources (Horwitz et al., 2014). They also expect affluent individuals to be more generous towards disadvantaged peers (Ahl & Dunham, 2019). Regarding academic achievement, children attribute more positive stereotypes to peers from affluent backgrounds and negative

ones to peers from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as lack of personal effort or motivation (Mistry et al., 2015; Woods et al., 2005). Children's pro-wealth attributions become more mixed in the area of social competence, with some children attributing generosity and kindness to peers from lower SES in contrast to selfishness and greed to peers from higher SES (Burkholder et al., 2020). It is important to note that how children approach access disparities is also affected by their positions in society. Children from privileged backgrounds perceive inequalities more as a matter of personal effort (Emler & Dickinson, 2005) and endorse more negative stereotypes toward disadvantaged groups (Weinger, 2000).

Children's assumptions about social class and wealth also inform their social decisions and reasoning, but much knowledge in this field comes from the studies of trait and competence attributions. To date, only a handful of studies have examined children's reasoning about intergroup exclusion based on wealth (Ruck et al., 2019), and very few studies have approached social class as a group membership in children's peer relationships (Burkholder et al., 2020; 2021). Burkholder et al. (2021) examined middle and upper-income U.S. children's reasoning about peer exclusion at the intersection of wealth and race and revealed that children and adolescents expected their peers to be less negative about interwealth exclusion than interracial exclusion. In a study conducted in a rural area of Nepal, adolescents were asked whether parents would support friendships between dyads from lower and higher SES (Grütter et al., 2021). Results showed that participants expected parents from higher SES to reject and lower SES to support such friendships more frequently. Thus, for these studies with diverse cultural contexts, children and adolescents recognized that peers and parents may be discouraging about interwealth peer relationships.

To date, no studies have examined children's reasoning about social class-based exclusion from disadvantaged and affluent socioeconomic backgrounds in an urban context. On the one hand, since children from lower SES are more likely to understand what it feels

like to be excluded (Grütter et al., 2021), they might also evaluate the exclusion of a disadvantaged peer from peer interactions as more unacceptable by referring to the violation of moral values, such as fairness and equality. On the other hand, as shown in other social group memberships such as race and ethnicity (Killen et al., 2002; Malti et al., 2012b), children in advantaged positions in their societies are more likely to approach intergroup exclusion as more legitimate. Thus, children from higher SES might also find excluding a peer from lower SES legitimate by referencing social-conventional issues and in-group bias, such as stereotypes, authority decisions, and motivations to protect the status-quo. Children might also endorse additional concerns such as perceived (dis)similarity, particularly in close relationship contexts (e.g., having lunch). In the present study, we aimed to examine these novel questions regarding children's reasoning based on social class in daily peer interactions.

### **The Present Study**

The present study investigated children's and adolescents' reasoning about social exclusion and attributions of emotions for social class-based peer exclusion. We examined whether and on which grounds children and adolescents living in Turkey use social class as a legitimate intergroup exclusion criterion. When presenting participants with stimuli depicting social class, we focused on the display of the wealth of the house that the character in the vignette lived in (high or low income), similar to past research on wealth biases (Burkholder et al., 2020; Elenbaas et al., 2016).

In addition, we focused on the period between middle childhood and middle adolescence to understand potential age-related differences in children's and adolescents' approach to exclusion based on social class as a moral violation or a group concern. Lastly, we recruited children from lower and higher SES to unveil the role of SES on children's judgments about social class-based exclusion and their explanations of why peers from different socioeconomic backgrounds distance themselves from each other.

Children were presented with situations in which characters from disadvantaged backgrounds were excluded from peer activities. They were asked for their exclusion evaluations, related justifications for the about social class-based exclusion, intention attributions to the excluder, as well as their individual perspective expectations pertaining to reasoning about social class-based exclusion. In the current study, children's emotional attributions to the excluder characters and their justifications were also investigated. The emotions children attribute in intergroup contexts are one of the indicators of how they conceptualize intergroup encounters, such as from the perspective of morality or group concerns (Malti & Ongley, 2014; Turiel & Killen, 2010). Awareness of others' emotions is informative in understanding the consequences of intergroup exclusion better, both for the victims and the perpetrators.

Finally, no studies, to date, have investigated how children and adolescents reason about and provide emotion attributions for social class-based exclusion in the context of Turkey, an underrepresented sample in the developmental science literature. Turkey has been experiencing economic, social, and political changes regarding individuals' access to socioeconomic resources and the significance attributed to status. According to a national survey, adults reported economic issues and unemployment as the country's primary concerns (Aydin et al., 2021). Coupled with escalated access disparities (Eurostat, 2022; Turkish Statistical Institute, TSI, 2021), children's and adults' attributions to inequalities, as well as the meaning ascribed to power and privilege, have also changed within the last couple of decades (Çelik & Özdemir, 2022). In a context where both objective and subjective manifestations of social class are unstable, it is valuable to investigate children's reasoning on moral issues, and it would contribute to our understanding of the development of prejudices and stereotypes and related fields on intergroup exclusion and their implications.

### ***Hypotheses***

Hypotheses of this study were drawn on the SRD model (Killen & Rutland, 2011; Rutland et al., 2010). Based on previous research indicating developmental changes in weighing moral concerns and societal norms (Killen & Smetana, 2015), (H1) we expected an age effect such that older children (14-16 years old) would evaluate exclusion based on social class as less acceptable and justify their evaluations by referring to the wrongfulness of discrimination than would younger children (8-10-year-olds) (H2). In terms of explanations for their evaluations, we hypothesized that older children would recognize the exclusion as a form of discrimination more frequently than would younger children. Since adolescents were shown to attend group benefit and function in intergroup contexts in more advanced ways (Burkholder et al., 2020; Killen et al., 2002), (H3) we expected older children to refer to group concerns and status-quo more than would younger children. Regarding children's socioeconomic background (H4), we predicted that participants from lower SES would evaluate social class-based exclusion as less acceptable than would children from higher SES. Finally, (H5) in children's individual perspective expectations of what they would do in such situations, we expected participants to consider both moral and group concerns.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The sample of this study included 270 children. There were 142 participants between the ages of 8 to 10 ( $M_{age} = 9.80$  years;  $SD = .77$ ) and 128 participants between the ages of 14 to 16 ( $M_{age} = 15.51$  years;  $SD = .93$ ). As shown in Table 1, participants were relatively evenly divided by lower and higher socioeconomic backgrounds within each age group. The research site included Ankara, the capital of Turkey, a large metropolitan region. Ankara is comprised of districts reflecting a range of social and economic demographics. The districts where the higher SES sample was collected reflected high education attainment and household income,

with white-collar occupations often reflecting professional positions (e.g., doctors, lawyers, bankers). The districts where the participants from lower SES were recruited were located close to the metropolitan area's periphery and reflected lower educational attainment and household income, with blue-collar occupations reflecting more service jobs, factory workers, and precarious employment.

**Table 1***Sample Demographics*

		8-10-year-olds	14-16-year-olds
<b>Lower SES</b>	<i>N</i>	79	65
		44 girls, 35 boys	42 girls, 23 boys
<b>Age</b>		<i>M</i> = 9.80	<i>M</i> = 15.51
		<i>SD</i> = .77	<i>SD</i> = .93
<b>Higher SES</b>	<i>N</i>	63	63
		32 girls, 31 boys	37 girls, 26 boys
<b>Age</b>		<i>M</i> = 10.52	<i>M</i> = 15.4
		<i>SD</i> = .71	<i>SD</i> = .92

*Note.* SES of the participants assessed by average household education

Power analyses were conducted before the data collection to estimate the required sample size using G\*Power (Faul et al., 2009). The estimated effect sizes were determined based on previous research examining children's intergroup reasoning in different contexts (e.g., Burkholder et al., 2020; Hitti et al., 2019; Rutland et al., 2015; Tenenbaum et al., 2018), indicating a small to medium effect size (ranging on average between .01 to .07). The minimum sample to detect a small effect size (set to  $\eta^2 = .04$ ) with 80% power in a between-subjects F- test was 268 and repeated measures-between factors F-test was 204.

***Participants' Socioeconomic Classification***

In order to categorize the sample as from lower and higher SES, the average household education criterion was used in the current study. As one of Turkey's most robust

SES predictors (Duman, 2008), the average household education (Gönül & Wängqvist, 2022; Kalaycıoğlu et al., 2010) referred to the average years of schooling completed by the participants' primary caregivers. In addition, in a volatile economy, education attainment is viewed as a valid measure of SES (Gönül & Wängqvist, 2022).

Children's primary caregivers were asked to report both caregivers' highest level of education achieved, if applicable. Their responses were converted into years of schooling completed corresponding to each education level based on the Turkish educational system (for calculation details, see Supplemental Materials). While children whose families with an average household education were less than or equal to nine years were categorized as lower SES, an average household education greater than or equal to thirteen years was classified as higher SES. Based on this criterion, 144 children were classified as lower SES and 126 as higher SES. This sample did not reflect immigrant or ethnic minority participants from outside Turkey. For additional support for socioeconomic group comparisons, please see Supplemental Materials.

### **Procedure**

The study's ethical treatment of human subjects approval was provided by the Human Subjects Ethics Committee of the first author's institution and the Provincial Directorate for the National Education Ankara. Before the official permission for data collection in schools, the Provincial Directorate informed us about the districts with high potential to recruit participants from lower and higher socioeconomic backgrounds. The research site included Ankara, the capital of Turkey, a large metropolitan region. The data were collected from four districts. The data were collected in the academic year of 2018-2019 from two primary (grades 2-4), three middle (grades 5-8), and eight high schools (grades 9-11), which were economically homogenous relative to the district living standards.

Before the research was conducted, parental consent forms with demographic information were collected. Participants were informed about the study procedure, and their verbal assents were collected. Participants attended the study in their schools in pre-arranged classrooms. Study sessions were carried out by the primary researchers and five trained undergraduate assistants. Participants filled out vignettes in a paper-and-pen format, which lasted approximately 35 minutes, and were compensated with bookstore vouchers.

## Measures

Participants were presented with three vignettes, including scenarios in which a character from the disadvantaged social class background was excluded from afterschool peer activities (see Supplemental Materials for all three vignettes). Characters were different across the vignettes. For each vignette, two house photos (see Figure 1) were presented referring to the socioeconomic background of the relevant vignette's main characters (one character from disadvantaged social class background, another character from affluent disadvantaged social class background). Please see Supplemental Materials for the selection procedure of the photos and pilot study conducted with children in which the photos were normed with a sample of adults and children to verify that the houses depicted different social class backgrounds. The characters' gender in the vignettes matched the participant's gender. The order of photos presented with the vignettes was counterbalanced across the sample (affluent home first and the disadvantaged one second, and vice versa). Children's responses were collapsed across the three scenarios.

## Figure 1

*Scenario Stimuli Shown to Participants to Depict Different Social Class Backgrounds*



The socializing vignette was as follows:

Elif and Ayşe are two children who met at their school. Elif and her family live in this house [indicating the affluent house]. Ayşe and her family live in this house [indicating the disadvantaged house]. They were playing games and spending some time together at their school. In her free time outside of school, Elif was doing some activities, such as going to movies and visiting shopping malls. Her friends were from her neighborhood who live in houses like Elif's. Ayşe would like to join Elif and her friends. One day, Elif decided to invite Ayşe to join them while going out. But one of Elif's friends did not want her to ask Ayşe because she does not live in their neighborhood.

Each vignette was followed by six questions constituting participants' reasoning about exclusion based on social class. These questions were:

- 1) *Evaluations of exclusion* (e.g., “Is it alright or not alright for Elif not inviting Ayşe to join them while going out? 1 = not okay at all, 5 = completely okay)
- 2) *Justifications for the evaluations of exclusion* (e.g., “Why did you rate this way? – corresponds to the value given to the exclusion evaluations)
- 3) *Intention attributions to the excluder* (e.g., “Why do you think Elif's friends from their neighborhood did not want Ayşe to join them?)
- 4) *Emotion attributions of the excluded* (e.g., “How do you think Ayşe would feel when she learns she was not invited while going out?)
- 5) *Justifications for the emotion attributions* (e.g., “Why do you think Ayşe would feel this way?)

6) *Individual perspective expectations* (e.g., “What would you do if you were Elif? Why?)

### ***Coding for Reasoning***

Except for the exclusion evaluations, participants gave open-ended answers to the questions described above. These answers, including the assessments of justifications for the evaluations of exclusion, intention attributions to the excluder, justifications for the emotion attributions, and individual perspective expectations, pertained to participants' reasoning about social class-based exclusion. Participants' responses were coded, and coding categories were drawn from the SRD model (Burkholder et al., 2020; Killen & Rutland, 2011) and pilot data. The coding categories for each section were derived from three predominant forms of reasoning in the literature defined as *moral* (e.g., fairness, wrongfulness of discrimination, others' welfare, and rights), *social-convention* and *conformity* (e.g., conventions, traditions, group norms, conformity to rules, authority decisions, and maintaining the status quo), and *pragmatic* (e.g., efficiency, practicality). The most frequently used categories were included in the final coding scheme. Conceptually irrelevant responses coded as “Other” (e.g., “I don't know”) or “Missing” data occurred in less than 5% and were not included in the analyses. Please see Table 2 for the descriptions and examples of coding categories.

### ***Coding for Emotion Attributions***

Similar to the reasoning questions, participants' emotion attributions of the excluded characters were coded based on the previous research focusing on children's emotions in intergroup exclusion (Malti et al., 2012b). Three emotion categories were coded: 1) Feeling sad and lonely; 2) Feeling neglected and treated unfairly; 3) Feeling degraded (see Table 2 for the descriptions).

### **Table 2**

*Descriptions and Examples of Reasoning and Emotion Attributions Coding Scheme*

Coding Category and Definition	Mean Proportion	Examples
<b>Justifications for the evaluations of exclusion</b> <p><i>Wrongfulness of unfair treatment based on social class:</i> Rejecting the exclusion based on economic or social disadvantage</p> <p><i>Wrongfulness of social exclusion:</i> Rejecting the exclusion without referring to differential access to resources</p> <p><i>Conformity to rules and authority decisions:</i> Prioritizing the rules and authority decisions</p> <p><i>Maintaining status quo:</i> Being motivated to protect an established inequality</p>	.35 (.31) .26 (.30) .07 (.15) .02 (.10)	<p>“It doesn’t matter where you live or what you own; it is not fair.”</p> <p>“It is wrong and rude not to invite a friend while going out.”</p> <p>“It is okay because it might be the parents’ decision not to invite.”</p> <p>“It is okay because people with different opportunities do not have common interests.”</p>
<b>Intention attributions to the excluder</b> <p><i>Discrimination and unfair treatment based on social class:</i> Perceiving the discriminatory nature of the exclusion</p> <p><i>Motivation to maintain status quo:</i> Approaching the exclusion as the consequence of the current social structures</p> <p><i>Pragmatics:</i> Focusing on practical reasons of exclusion, such as physical proximity</p> <p><i>Conformity to rules and authority decisions:</i> Seeing the exclusion as the outcome of complying with the decisions and wishes of authority</p>	.58 (.34) .09 (.21) .05 (.13) .04 (.11)	<p>“What happened in the story was that they excluded her because she was from a poor family.”</p> <p>“It is normal that some people have different lives; they just can’t be the same.”</p> <p>“They did not invite him just because he lives away.”</p> <p>“A parent might have told not to invite the [disadvantaged] peer.”</p>
<b>Emotion attributions of the excluded</b> <p><i>Sad and lonely:</i> Attributions of feeling bad, sad, heartbroken, and disappointed</p> <p><i>Neglected and treated unfairly:</i> Attributions of feeling neglected, excluded, or treated unfairly</p> <p><i>Degraded:</i> Attributions of feeling despised, underestimated, unimportant or degraded</p>	.70 (.32) .06 (.16) .04 (.13)	<p>“She would feel so sad being left out.”</p> <p>“He would feel unwanted.”</p> <p>“She might feel like she is incapable of having friends.”</p>

<b>Justifications for the emotion attributions</b>		
<i>Exclusion and neglect:</i> Referring to being left out or excluded	.41 (.37)	“Because not being invited to your friend’s house would make you feel this way.”
<i>Discrimination based on social class:</i> Acknowledging stereotyping and differential treatment	.23 (.30)	“If others judge him by the things he doesn’t own, he could feel this way.”
<i>Empathy:</i> Empathic understanding and putting oneself into someone’s shoes	.16 (.31)	“I would feel the same if I were excluded.”
<b>Individual perspective expectations</b>		
<i>Inclusion:</i> Solutions referring to the disadvantaged character’s inclusion	.68 (.32)	“I would just invite him to hang out with us.”
<i>Seeking authority approval:</i> Solutions of relying on what authority figures (parents, teachers, principals) would allow	.08 (.14)	“I would ask my parents if she could join us while going out.”
<i>Exclusion:</i> Statements aggregating with the disadvantaged character’s exclusion	.06 (.15)	“I would not invite her/him to our home for lunch too.”

For reasoning and emotion attributions, participants’ responses were converted into proportional usage of each coding category. When participants only used one category in a single response, they got a score of 1.0 (full usage, 100% of the category). In the case of using two coding categories in response, they elicited .50 for each, representing partial usage (50%). Finally, 0 indicated not using the category. Only a few participants used more than three coding categories (< 5%); thus, triple coding was not conducted. These proportional scores were calculated for each coding category and participant; later, they were averaged for the three peer exclusion vignettes. These scores pertained to the mean proportion of each justification or emotion category.

### ***Reliability***

Twenty percent of the dataset ( $N = 60$ ) was coded by a second coder who was blind to the study hypotheses. The mean value of Cohen's kappa coefficient was found as .89 (ranging between .79 to 1.0), indicating good inter-rater reliability.

### **Data Analytic Strategy**

In order to test the hypotheses, analysis of variance (ANOVA)-based analyses were conducted with SPSS Version 25. Analyzing mean proportions of justifications and emotion attributions has been prevalent in social cognitive developmental studies (Smetana, 2006; Wainryb et al., 2001). Follow-up analyses included pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni adjustments and t-tests for within-subjects effects. In analyses where the sphericity assumption was violated, values were reported based on the  $\epsilon$  value. Additionally, corrected results were reported in t-tests failing Levene's test for equality of variances.

### **Transparency and Openness**

We report how we determined the sample, all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures in the study. We followed APA journal article reporting standards. The data of this manuscript are not openly available due to Directorate for the National Education regulations but are available upon request to the corresponding author. This study's design and its analyses were not pre-registered.

## **Results**

Prior to the main analyses, children's gender was included in all of the ANOVAs. Due to a lack of significant effects ( $ps > .05$ ), gender was dropped from the final analyses.

### **Evaluations of the Exclusion**

In order to test whether evaluations of exclusion varied by age and SES, a 2 (age group: 8-10 vs. 14-16) x 2 (SES: lower vs. higher) between-subjects ANOVA was performed. Overall, children evaluated the exclusion of a disadvantaged peer as wrong ( $M = 1.76$ ,  $SD = .88$ ). In line with the expectations, a main effect for age was revealed,  $F(1, 260) = 8.08$ ,  $p =$

.005,  $\eta_p^2 = .031$ . Older children evaluated exclusion based on social class as less okay ( $M_{14-16-yr-olds} = 1.70$ ,  $SD = .61$ ) than did younger children ( $M_{8-10-yr-olds} = 2.01$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ). Contrary to our expectations, participants' own SES did not impact their exclusion evaluations,  $F(1, 260) = 0.001, p = .998$ .

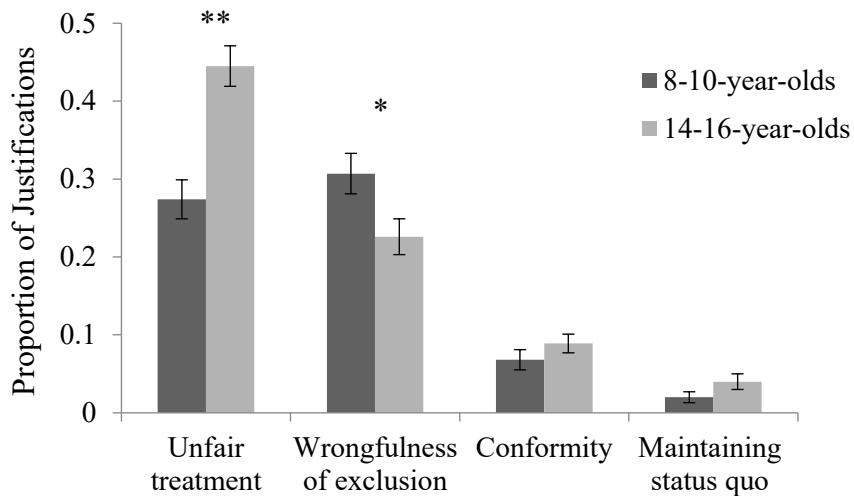
### **Justifications for the Evaluations of Exclusion**

While examining justifications for the evaluations of exclusion, a 2 (age group: 8-10 vs. 14-16) x 2 (SES: low vs. high) x 4 (justification: unfair treatment, wrongfulness of social exclusion, conformity, maintaining status quo) ANOVA with repeated measure on the last factor was conducted. Overall, the most frequently used justifications were wrongfulness of unfair treatment based on social class ( $M = .36$ ,  $SD = .31$ ) and wrongfulness of social exclusion ( $M = .27$ ,  $SD = .30$ ). Parallel with the exclusion evaluations, age had a significant main effect,  $F(2.06, 547.87) = 10.89, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .039$ . Post-hoc comparisons indicated that older children referred to the wrongfulness of unfair treatment based on social class ( $M = .44$ ,  $SD = .29$ ) more frequently than did younger children ( $M = .27$ ,  $SD = .30$ ),  $p < .001$  (see Figure 2). On the other hand, referring to wrongfulness of social exclusion was more prevalent among younger children ( $M = .30$ ,  $SD = .32$ ) than for older children ( $M = .22$ ,  $SD = .27$ ),  $p = .032$ .

SES did not have a significant impact on children's justifications, contrary to our expectations,  $F(2.06, 547.87) = .69, p = .50$ .

**Figure 2**

*Children's Justifications of Exclusion Evaluations by Age*



*Note.* \*\* $p < .001$ , \*  $p = .001$

**Intention Attributions to the Excluder**

To investigate whether children's intention attributions to the excluder varied by age and SES, a 2 (age group: 8-10 vs. 14-16) x 2 (SES: lower vs. higher) x 4 (intention attributions: discrimination, maintaining status quo, conformity, pragmatics) ANOVA with the repeated measure on the last factor was performed. The findings revealed that most children referred to discrimination and unfair treatment based on social class as the excluder's intention ( $M = .59$ ,  $SD = .66$ ).

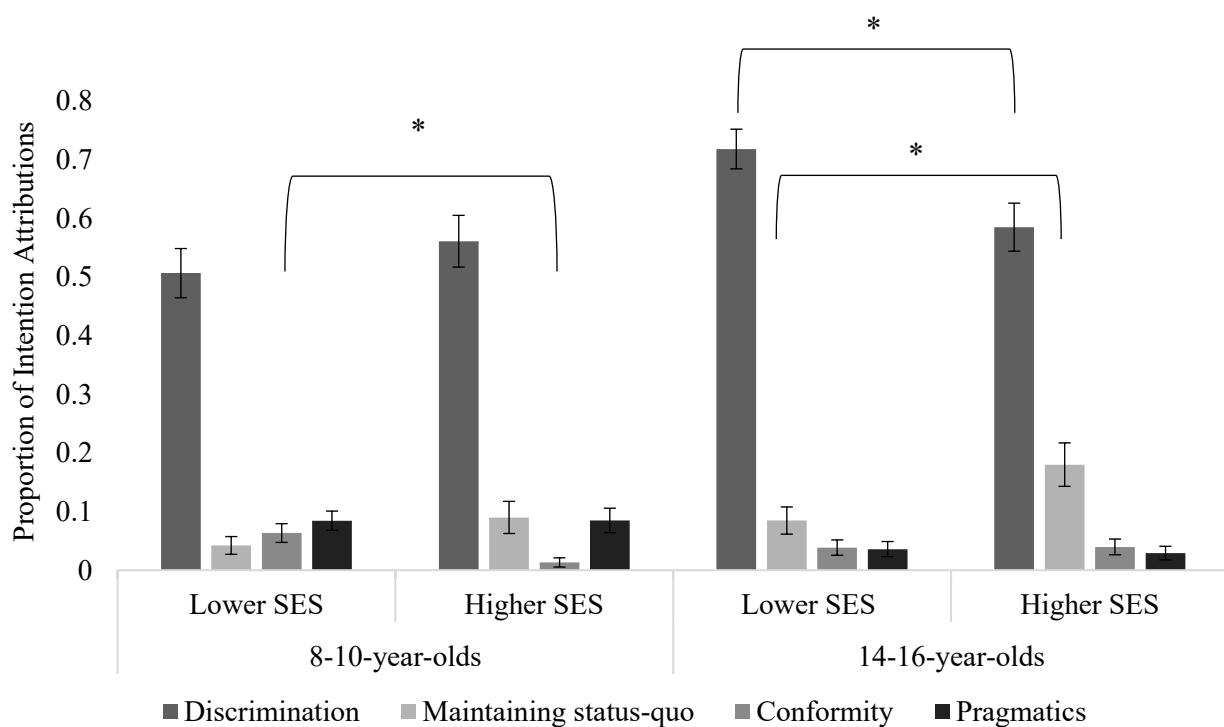
Confirming the hypotheses, the main effect of children's age on their intention attributions to the excluder was significant,  $F(1.79, 477.81) = 6.74$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .025$ . Older children referred to discrimination and unfair treatment based on social class ( $M_{14-16-yr-olds} = .65$ ,  $SD = .30$ ;  $M_{8-10-yr-olds} = .53$ ,  $SD = .36$ ) and maintaining status quo ( $M_{14-16-yr-olds} = .13$ ,  $SD = .24$ ;  $M_{8-10-yr-olds} = .06$ ,  $SD = .17$ ) as the excluder's intention more frequently than did younger children ( $p = .004$  and  $p = .011$  respectively).

The main effect of SES was not significant ( $F(1.79, 477.81) = 2.962$ ,  $p = .057$ ); yet children's intention attributions were qualified by age and SES interaction with a small effect size,  $F(1.79, 477.81) = 3.86$ ,  $p = .026$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .014$ . Post-hoc comparisons showed that in the

older group, referring to discrimination and unfair treatment based on social class was more common among children from lower SES ( $M = .71, SD = .27$ ) compared to their peers from higher SES ( $M = .58, SD = .32$ ),  $t(126) = 2.51, p = .013$ , 95% CI of the difference = [.02, .23] (see Figure 3). Contrary, older children from higher SES ( $M = .17, SD = .29$ ) attributed maintaining status quo intention to the excluder more frequently than did children from lower SES ( $M = .08, SD = .18$ ),  $t(126) = -2.197, p = .030$ , 95% CI of the difference = [-.181, -.009].

**Figure 3**

*Children's Intention Attributions to the Excluder by Age and SES*



*Note.* \* $p < .05$

The difference with regard to younger children was in the usage of conformity to authority decisions and rules intention such that it was more prevalent among younger children ( $M = .06, SD = .14$ ) from lower SES compared to their peers from higher SES ( $M = .01, SD = .06$ ),  $t(140) = 2.81, p = .006$ , 95% CI of the difference = [.01, .08]

### Emotion Attributions of the Excluded

Children's emotion attributions to the excluded character were examined with a 2 (age group: 8-10 vs. 14-16) x 2 (SES: lower vs. higher) x 3 (emotion: feeling sad, feeling neglected and as treated unfairly, feeling degraded) ANOVA with the repeated measure on the last factor. The most frequently reported emotion was feeling sad and lonely ( $M = .70$ ,  $SD = .32$ ).

As expected, children's age was influential on their emotion attributions to the excluded,  $F(1.38, 368.64) = 14.50$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .052$ . While younger children ( $M_{8-10\text{-yr-olds}} = .75$ ,  $SD = .31$ ) attributed feelings of sad and lonely to the excluded character more frequently than did older children ( $M_{14-16\text{-yr-olds}} = .64$ ,  $SD = .31$ ),  $p = .004$ , older children attributed feelings of neglect ( $M_{14-16\text{-yr-olds}} = .13$ ,  $SD = .18$ ) and being degraded ( $M_{14-16\text{-yr-olds}} = .08$ ,  $SD = .18$ ) more frequently than did younger children ( $M_{8-10\text{-yr-olds}} = .03$ ,  $SD = .12$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $M_{8-10\text{-yr-olds}} = .008$ ,  $SD = .05$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively).

SES did not impact children's emotion attributions to the excluded contrary to our expectations,  $F(1.38, 368.64) = 3.16$ ,  $p = .062$ .

### **Justifications for the Emotion Attributions**

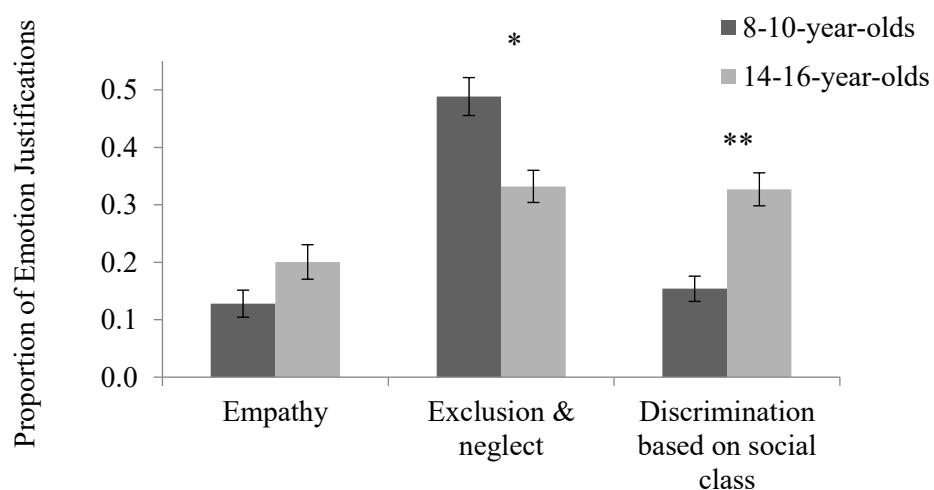
Children's justifications for the emotion attributions were examined with a 2 (age group: 8-10 vs. 14-16) x 2 (SES: lower vs. higher) x 3 (justifications for the emotion attributions: exclusion and neglect, discrimination based on SES, empathy) ANOVA with repeated measure on the last factor. Justifications of exclusion and neglect ( $M = .41$ ,  $SD = .37$ ) and discrimination based on SES ( $M = .23$ ,  $SD = .30$ ) were the most common responses. In line with the other reasoning domains, children's age was also influential on their justifications for the emotion attributions,  $F(2.05, 546.51) = 12.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .045$  (see Figure 4). Younger children referred to exclusion and neglect justification more frequently than did older children ( $M_{8-10\text{-yr-olds}} = .48$ ,  $SD = .39$ ,  $M_{14-16\text{-yr-olds}} = .33$ ,  $SD = .32$ ),  $p = .001$ . In addition, older children ( $M_{14-16\text{-yr-olds}} = .32$ ,  $SD = .32$ ) justified their emotion attributions by

focusing on discrimination based on social class more frequently than did younger children ( $M_{8-10\text{-yr-olds}} = .15$ ,  $SD = .26$ ),  $p < .001$ .

SES did not have significant impacts on children's justifications for the emotion attributions,  $F(2.05, 546.51) = 1.18$ ,  $p = .30$ .

**Figure 4**

*Children's Justifications for the Emotion Attributions by Age*



*Note.* \*\* $p < .001$ , \* $p = .001$

### Individual Perspective Expectations

Children's responses were analyzed to examine their first-person views of what they would do if they were in the excluders' position in the vignettes. Children's individual perspective expectations were examined with a 2 (age group: 8-10 vs. 14-16) x 2 (SES: low vs. high) x 3 (expectations: inclusion, authority approval, exclusion) ANOVA with the repeated measure on the last factor. Contrary to our expectations neither children's age ( $F(1.46, 390.17) = .32$ ,  $p = .65$ ) nor SES ( $F(1.46, 390.17) = 1.51$ ,  $p = .22$ ) influenced their individual perspective expectations. The majority of children ( $M = .68$ ,  $SD = .32$ ) stated that they would include the character from the disadvantaged social class background in the vignettes in the peer activities. Only a few children reported that they would seek authority

approval ( $M = .08$ ,  $SD = .14$ ) and chose to exclude the character from the disadvantaged background ( $M = .06$ ,  $SD = .15$ ) if they were to decide.

## Discussion

This study investigated children's reasoning about intergroup exclusion by focusing on social class as a potential exclusion criterion for children and adolescents in peer contexts in Turkey. One of the novel findings of the current study was that participants evaluated social class-based social exclusion as wrong overall. However, adolescents were more likely to connect social exclusion based on social class to discrimination than were children. Adolescents' reasoning focused on unfair treatment and discrimination ("It doesn't matter where you live or what you own, it is not fair") in contrast to children, who were more likely to focus on the interpersonal dimensions of social exclusion ("Not inviting someone to the activity is very inconsiderate"). Awareness of discrimination and the wrongfulness of exclusion based on socioeconomic inequalities and social class is a recent research field, and this is the first study to demonstrate the conditions under which adolescents are more likely to view it as unfair than do children.

Previous research has portrayed mixed age-related results regarding orientations to social inequalities. In some studies, adolescents were more likely than children to recognize that inequalities restrain individuals in social encounters (Flanagan et al., 2014; Mistry et al., 2015) and perceive unequal access to resources as a form of discrimination (Arsenio & Willems, 2017). Yet, when group concerns were involved, adolescents viewed wealth-related exclusion as more legitimate than race-based exclusion (Burkholder et al., 2020). The present study revealed a different pattern with adolescents' increased rejection of social class-based exclusion, citing reasons for discrimination and unfair treatment.

Another novel finding was that participants did not display an in-group bias when evaluating and providing justifications for the social class-based exclusion. We expected

participants from higher SES backgrounds to display an in-group bias based on their social class status as a way of protecting the status quo, given that U.S. adolescents who identified as high-wealth were more likely to condone exclusion based on SES than were low-wealth adolescents, citing reasons about similarity (Burkholder et al., 2020). One explanation for the lack of in-group bias in our findings might be related to the specific context of exclusion portrayed in this study. Participants might not have viewed afterschool social activities or having lunch as threatening to group cohesiveness or benefit. Thus, their social class identity might not be at the forefront in evaluating such circumstances. In the case of in-group bias, future studies would benefit from focusing on other contexts to examine whether the lack of in-group biases would persist, for instance, in educational settings where the assumption of competence interacts with children's reasoning about intergroup exclusion.

Turkey's sociopolitical and cultural context also provides important insights into understanding children's reasoning about socioeconomic inequalities. As the findings indicated, children's and adolescents' overall acceptability ratings of social class-based exclusion were low, and many perceived the related social exclusion as a form of discrimination even in a close relationship context. In the present study, participants did not view the choice of friend strictly in terms of personal choice reasons when social class was involved. This pattern was in contrast to research from Nucci (2001), who demonstrated that individuals often view decisions about the choice of friends as a personal choice. Similarly, the majority of children in the U.S. sampled in studies on interracial friendship inclusion do not view these decisions strictly in personal terms. These findings might reflect the instability of economic opportunities and wealth inequalities that have dominated Turkey for the past decade (Eurostat, 2022; TSI, 2021). However, the findings could also reflect social and cultural practices and traditions in Turkey. For instance, within the scope of Eid as a religious and cultural practice, wealthier and devout individuals usually donate money or food, which is

known as almsgiving, as a form of faith-based charity (Koc, 2014). Therefore, the protection of financially disadvantaged groups is a salient component of the sociocultural fabric of Turkey. Thus, children and adolescents in Turkey may be less likely to approach wealth-based exclusion as a matter of personal choice.

The lack of in-group bias in children's evaluations and related justifications of social class-based exclusion might also be related to mentioned sociocultural dynamics. Participants in this study were part of a generational cohort who had grown up with the values of being frugal and financially not standing out (Özgür, 2013). Being explicit about the resources someone owns and drawing attention to others' disadvantages were frowned upon, and these behaviors were often perceived as humiliating. Despite current changes in the importance of wealth, status, and power in Turkey, families might refrain from giving their children such messages verbally or nonverbally, as a form of value transfer across generations. While children might have prejudicial attitudes about individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, they might also recognize the hardships experienced by those who have less. Considering the importance of parental socialization on children's intergroup attitudes (Degner & Dalege, 2013) and understanding inequalities (Wray-Lake et al., 2016), examining parental messages children perceive about socioeconomic differences would be fruitful for future studies. Since most of the knowledge regarding children's reasoning about inequalities and social hierarchies comes from the U.S., apart from a few exceptions (e.g., Grütter et al., 2021), our novel context also indicates that certain reasoning patterns could differ depending on the sociocultural features of a particular context.

Future studies that probe sociocultural messages about interwealth exclusion, as well as sampling from other contexts and cultures, would provide important insights regarding societal and parental messages regarding the contact between children from different social class backgrounds. Thus, wealth-based exclusion literature needs more research on the larger

sociopolitical context, which might serve as a contributing factor in Turkey and other cultural contexts.

### **Emotion Attributions to the Excluded**

Another novel contribution of the present study was its focus on attributions of emotions for the excluded character from a disadvantaged background and their justifications. Overall, the emotions children attributed were negative, similar to the literature examining children's reasoning of intergroup exclusion (Peplak et al., 2017). To date, only one study investigated how four and eight-year-olds would feel about excluding an economically disadvantaged peer (Dys et al., 2019), revealing emotions of feeling sad, bad, and guilty. Considering our sample's age range, more complex emotion descriptions were used, such as feeling neglected, treated unfairly, and degraded. Similar to the age findings regarding exclusion evaluations, adolescents were also better at recognizing the disadvantaged character's emotional burden due to being exposed to stereotyping and differential treatment. Even though younger children also attributed negative emotions to the excluded character, their primary reason behind these emotions was the social exclusion of a peer. As in other intergroup contexts, children's approach to social class-based exclusion supported the interplay between moral reasoning and affect (Arsenio & Gold, 2006). An interesting avenue for future research would be examining emotion attributions to the characters from affluent backgrounds from the excluders' perspective. For instance, unveiling whether emotions linked to group functioning, such as pride, as found by Malti et al. (2012a) in national groups, would emerge in children's attribution to perpetrators of social class-based exclusion would provide an additional layer of information.

It is important to note that the emotion *degraded* has not been observed in past studies focusing on other social group memberships. Endorsement of this emotion might correspond to recognizing children's negative stereotypes often attributed to lower SES, such as being

incompetent and less socially attractive (Sigelman, 2012). Children who attributed feelings of degradation to the peer from the disadvantaged social class background might be the ones who recognize the negative impact that stereotypes have on disadvantaged peers. Another possibility might be that in Turkey's cultural context, exposure to discrimination in relational contexts is often perceived as an insult to self and derogatory. Given that very few studies have examined a variety of populations within different nationalities and sociopolitical and economic contexts, more research should be collected to understand participants' reasoning about wealth and how it reflects the history and societal context for wealth distribution (see Elenbaas & Mistry, 2021).

### **Reasoning about Social Class-Based Exclusion**

Participants, particularly adolescents who had a better understanding of social class-based exclusion as a form of discrimination, did not reflect on group concerns, such as protecting status-quo or stereotyping, as has been reported in other cultural contexts, such as the U.S. and the U.K. When they were asked about the protagonists' intentions for the exclusion, group concerns became salient in their responses. Confirming our hypotheses, adolescents from lower SES more frequently stated that the excluders' intentions were discriminatory, similar to the reports from Nepal (Grütter et al., 2021). In contrast, adolescents from higher SES believed that the excluders intended to protect the status quo. These novel findings indicate a critical difference in how adolescents recognize the motives behind this discriminatory act. It has been shown that children who are members of historically disadvantaged groups are more sensitive to the moral implications of intergroup exclusion (Killen et al., 2002; Malti et al., 2012a). A similar pattern was also observed for wealth, such that children who perceived themselves as lower in economic status evaluated interwealth exclusion as less acceptable (Burkholder et al., 2020) and perceived the stratification in society more realistically (Flanagan & Kornbluh, 2019). In a parallel fashion,

adolescents from lower SES understood why differential treatment of a disadvantaged peer is wrong more than any other group in our sample. As potentially the victims of such treatments in their lives, this group of children is also at a high risk of facing the psychological consequences of discrimination due to socioeconomic disadvantages.

Adolescents from higher SES backgrounds approached excluders' intentions as a way of protecting an established social system. Interestingly, they did not identify the fact that this social system benefits them. If they thought that excluding a disadvantaged peer was a way of preserving the segregation in social life based on social class, we would expect them to evaluate the exclusion as more justifiable. After all, it would be one way of preserving the privileges. Yet, they did not choose to endorse such attitudes in their exclusion evaluations, as shared by an adolescent: "Life works this way, and you can't help it. There are things you can't do together. But still, it is very cruel to exclude someone just because they don't have enough money." Future research could also investigate how children and adolescents would reason about intentions when less affluent peers exclude an affluent peer. Since children also endorse negative stereotypes about peers from higher SES (Burkholder et al., 2020), these attributions of intentions might differ based on children's SES.

Despite being conscious of their families' social and economic opportunities, recognizing the link between status attributions and exclusion was harder for younger children, as reflected in our findings. Younger children from lower SES might find themselves conforming to the decisions of authority figures more frequently, assuming they are also exposed to differential treatment and discrimination. Future research should be conducted to determine the full scope of interpretations of social class exclusion in a primary school sample.

### **Individual Perspective Expectations**

Prior research regarding resource inequalities has probed children regarding how they would distribute resources among groups that are disadvantaged with respect to access to resources (Elenbaas et al., 2016; Rizzo & Killen, 2020). Assessments have included questions about how they would distribute the resources, whether they would rectify it, and why. No research that we know of has investigated what children and adolescents think should happen next in an exclusionary context among peers in an intergroup social class context. Thus, a novel assessment was to measure participants' individual perspectives on what to do next. While this question required them to personalize the circumstances while responding, it also gave them a sense of responsibility for solving the exclusion. Regardless of age and socioeconomic background, most children stated that they would invite and include the disadvantaged peer in their social activities. A lack of in-group bias in children's exclusion evaluations and justifications persisted in children's solutions to the exclusion.

While their inclusion solution was a positive orientation, it did not go as far as rectifying the inequality (as has been shown with resource allocation decisions, see Elenbaas et al., 2021). Only a few children reported that they would make up for the times when the disadvantaged character was not invited. Children might have seen the peer activities they evaluated (school activity pair-up, socializing, inviting to lunch) as close interactions but not as violations of rights that need to be rectified. Indeed, children were shown to differentiate contexts with personal interactions and fundamental rights (Ruck et al., 1998) and evaluate obstacles to accessing education more as a violation of fairness and equality (Elenbaas et al., 2016). Even though children disapproved of exclusion due to its discriminatory nature, they did not associate these circumstances with past disadvantages in offering solutions. It would be fruitful for future studies to investigate the cultural context-related norms and values that might have contributed to Turkish children's disapproval of the social class-based exclusion. For example, focusing on other contexts that might evoke fundamental rights concerns, such

as education, would be worthwhile to examine children's solutions to social class-based exclusion.

### **Limitations**

The present study has some limitations that need to be considered. First, while examining children's reasoning about exclusion based on social class, we focused on reasoning about exclusion and emotion attributions. It is essential to examine different aspects of children's attitudes, such as peer group dynamics and norms (McGuire et al., 2018). In addition, even though this is one of the important social contexts in children's lives, there are others where children's assumptions about social class might be salient. One crucial context is education due to its potential to evoke assumptions about competency and rights (Ruck et al., 1998) as well as adult-child contexts in the home. Secondly, as the first study investigating children's reasoning regarding exclusion based on social class in Turkey, we only focused on access to tangible resources and did not include different components of class identity broadly. Future studies should investigate the meaning and importance of social class in social and group interactions, particularly in underrepresented contexts.

Our sample was from a metropolitan area in Turkey. Different from many studies recruiting children from middle-to-upper SES, we reached children from lower SES, indicated by objective and subjective measures of SES. Yet, the meaning of children attributed to status and wealth might differ in rural areas (see Helwig et al., 2014, for distinctions about conceptions of rights in China). A valuable avenue for future research would be to include children living in rural areas to investigate potential (dis)similarities between children living in urban and rural areas in different parts of the world. Lastly, we have only focused on social class, but disadvantages often include the intersection of different group memberships (e.g., ethnic minorities, immigration). Future studies could also investigate how children approach

exclusion when multiple group memberships are salient (e.g., Bešić et al., 2018; Burkholder et al. 2021).

## Conclusion

The current study made a contribution to the literature by demonstrating that age-related differences exist regarding children's and adolescents' reasoning about social class-based exclusion in peer interactions and in a novel cultural context, Turkey. Socioeconomic inequalities are part of children's peer interactions. Regular daily interactions have a significant role in forming and maintaining stereotypes and prejudices based on social class. These interactions also have a strong potential to teach children how to be more inclusive and stand up against differential treatment when necessary. As indicated by the results, the period between middle childhood and adolescence is valuable in children's recognition of why excluding a disadvantaged peer is wrong, unfair, and discriminatory. Thus, it would be effective to intervene to support children's capacity to be sensitive toward the consequences of such behaviors and guide them to be just and inclusive. It was promising that affluent adolescents who understood how status-quo operates in socioeconomic stratification rejected the exclusion of a disadvantaged peer. Giving children accountability in this sense would help them understand their roles in the psychological impacts of socioeconomic inequalities. In that sense, the current study constitutes a valuable source for designing and conducting intervention research to decrease discrimination and social exclusion based on social class.

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## Supplemental Materials

### Method

#### Participants' Socioeconomic Classification

**Calculation of the average household education.** In order to calculate this criterion, the participating children's primary caregivers were asked to report both (if applicable) caregivers' highest level of education achieved. Their responses were converted into years of schooling completed corresponding to each education level based on the Turkish educational system (0 = being only literate, 1 year = drop-out of primary school, 5 years = primary school, 6 years = drop-out of secondary school, 8 years = secondary school, 9 years = drop-out of high school, 11 years = high school, 11 years = drop-out of the associate degree, 13 years = associate/vocational degrees, 12 years = drop-out of Bachelor's degree, 15 years = Bachelor's degree, 17 years = Graduate degrees). For cases with missing information, school counselors provided the necessary details. Each household's education was calculated by taking the average of the primary caregiver(s) education in years (ranging from 1 to 21). While children whose families with an average household education were less than or equal to nine years were categorized as lower SES background, an average household education greater than or equal to thirteen years was classified as higher SES background. Children whose average household education was out of these ranges (i.e., 10-12 years) were not included in the final sample. Based on this criterion, the final sample consisted of 270 children. One hundred and forty-four children were classified as from lower SES and 126 as higher SES backgrounds.

**Socioeconomic group comparisons.** Participants' family income and subjective social status (SSS) were investigated to explore whether categorization based on average household education could also capture differences in these indicators. The income per capita is calculated by the caregivers' reports of monthly income divided by the number of people

sharing it after the regular debts (e.g., loans, credit card payments) were deducted. This assessment indicated a significant difference between the families of participants who were classified as lower SES ( $M = 598.87$  TL,  $SD = 356.21$  TL, range -60 to 1.750 TL) and higher SES ( $M = 2.494,65$  TL,  $SD = 1.648,5$  TL, range 1.516-13.330 TL),  $t(227) = -12.586$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-2.192,53, -1.599,02].

Children's subjective social status, SSS, was assessed by the single-item measure developed by Mistry et al. (2015) to capture children's perceived SES based on financial resources. Participants were asked to locate themselves on a 10-numbered rug where they stand socioeconomically compared to other individuals in their society (1 = individuals who have the least amount of money; 10 = individuals who have the most money). Children from lower SES ( $M = 5.70$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ) perceived themselves as lower in status than children from higher SES ( $M = 6.79$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ),  $t(242) = -5.015$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-1.512, -.659].

Average household education ( $r = .391$ ) and income per capita ( $r = .250$ ) were significantly correlated with children's SSS ratings,  $p < .001$ . When the relation between average household education and children's SSS ratings was analyzed separately for two age groups, a similar pattern was detected for younger ( $r = .294$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and older children ( $r = .308$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## Measures

**Selection of the photos and the pilot study.** Photos presented with each vignette were selected based on a prior rating procedure. The research team first selected fourteen house photos (half referring to the disadvantaged living conditions and another half to the affluent conditions). Photos were matched in terms of their resolution, radiance, and proportion of houses. One hundred forty-seven adults ( $M_{age} = 27.78$ ,  $SD = 7.07$ , 90 females, 57 males) were asked to rank-order seven photos from the most disadvantaged to most

affluent in their respective categories. House photos rated as the most representative in each category were selected.

Selected photos were used in a different interview study with thirty-three children (17 from lower SES and 16 from higher SES) between the ages of eight to fourteen, the same age in the present research. Before the interviews, they were asked to indicate which of the two photos reflected disadvantaged and affluent social and economic conditions. All the children could correctly identify and elaborate on the living conditions in each photo.

**Exclusion Vignettes.** Study vignettes are presented below. They were matched for the participant's gender. Vignettes were translated from Turkish. The order of photos (locating the affluent house first and the disadvantaged one next to it, and vice versa) and the introduction order of the characters were counterbalanced in the entire sample.

*Vignette 1.* Zeynep and Miray met at their school. Zeynep and her family live in this house [indicating the affluent house]. Miray and her family live in this house [indicating the disadvantaged house]. Zeynep had a lot of friends, and almost everyone at school knew her. She was very popular. Miray was a new student and did not know a lot of friends. Zeynep and Miray both joined the same afterschool club in their school. In this club, students were doing activities in pairs. The club teacher asked Zeynep if she would like to be paired with Miray. Zeynep thought she could be a pair with Miray. But Zeynep's friends told her not to because they knew Miray lived.

*Vignette 2.* Elif and Ayşe were two children who met at their school. Elif and her family live in this house [indicating the affluent house]. Ayşe and her family live in this house [indicating the disadvantaged house]. They were playing games and spending some time together at their school. In her free time outside of school, Elif was doing activities like going to movies and shopping malls. Her friends were from her neighborhood who lived in houses like Elif's. Ayşe would like to join Elif and her friends. One day, Elif decided to invite Ayşe

to join them while going out. But one of Elif's friends did not want her to ask Ayşe because she does not live in their neighborhood.

*Vignette 3.* Defne and Yağmur met at their school. Defne and her family live in this house [indicating the affluent house]. Yağmur and her family live in this house [indicating the disadvantaged house]. They were playing games and spending some time together in their school. One day, Defne planned to invite her friends from the neighborhood for lunch at her home. At first, Defne considered inviting Yağmur along with other friends. But then she changed her mind and didn't invite Yağmur because she thought her parents would not want her to invite Yağmur over.