Preferring the Mighty to the Meek: Toddlers Prefer Novel Dominant Agents

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Introduction

*Hierarchical relationships: relationships where people are ranked along some linear dimension such as age, military rank, etc. (Fiske, 1999, 2006)

*Infants recognize social rank:
  *10-month-olds expect larger agents to win dominance contests (Thomsen, Frankenhaus, Ingoal-Smith, & Carey, 2011)

*6-month-olds expect agents from larger groups to win dominance contests. (Pun, Birch, & Baron, 2016)

*15-month-olds expect rank to be stable across situations (Mascaro & Csibra, 2012)

*But, who do toddlers like better? dominant agents, subordinate agents or neither?

Participants

*Experiment 1: Twenty-two (N=22) 21-31 month-olds were tested. Mean age=24.95 months. 13 boys

*Experiment 2: Twenty-one (N=21) 21-31 month-olds were tested. Mean age=26.24

*Experiment 3: Twenty-seven (N=27) 21-31 months. 13 boys

Experiment 1

**Procedure**

Which one do you like?

**Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Liked Low-Ranking</th>
<th>Liked High-Ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>N=4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

*Toddlers prefer dominant to subordinate individuals, and this preference depends on a zero-sum interaction where one agent reaches its goal and the other does not.*

*Maybe, toddlers want to affiliate with dominant individuals for more access to resources, knowledge etc. (See Silk, 1999 for similar behavior in macaques) OR...

*Maybe they seek to form relationships with high-ranking individuals expecting leadership, protection or guidance etc (see Fiske & Rai, 2014)*

*Next question: What about younger infants?

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