Preverbal Infants’ Third-Party Imitator Preferences
Animated Displays versus Filmed Actors
Heather L. Kosakowski\textsuperscript{1,2}, Lindsey J. Powell\textsuperscript{1}, & Elizabeth S. Spelke\textsuperscript{2}
\textsuperscript{1}Brain and Cognitive Sciences, MIT, \textsuperscript{2}Department of Psychology, Harvard University
Center for Brains, Minds, & Machines

Introduction
- Imitation promotes prosocial behavior (Chartrand & Bargh, 2012; Carpenter, Uebel, & Tomasello, 2013).
- Preferential looking tests suggest 4-month-old infants prefer agents that imitate (Powell & Spelke, in prep).
- Newborn infants process schematic and real face stimuli similarly (Farroni et al., 2005).

Questions
- Do children learn that imitation is positive through extensive social interaction, or do even young infants prefer imitators?
- Will infants still demonstrate an imitator preference if actors are used instead of animations?

Participants
- 97 four- to five-month-old infants (4.00-5.15).

Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Familiarization</th>
<th>Initiators Condition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responders</td>
<td>The Initiator performs an action and Responder 1 performs the same action (imitating) or a contrasting action (not imitating). Then the Initiator repeats her action and Responder 2 does the opposite of Responder 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responders</td>
<td>Initiator 1 performs an action, and the Responder performs the same action (imitating) or a contrasting one (not imitating). Then Initiator 2 performs the contrasting action and the Responder performs the same action as before.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preferential Looking Test
After four rounds of familiarization, we measured the amount of time infants spent looking at each character during a 20 second time period.

Results

- Interaction between condition and action $[F_{1.37}] = 6.58, P < .05$.
- Infants look longer at the imitator than the non-imitator: animated $[ar{t}(23) = 3.26, P < .01]$; video $[ar{t}(23) = 2.80, P < .05]$.
- Infants fail to differentiate between the target and non-target: animated $[ar{t}(24) = .63, P > .5]$; video $[ar{t}(23) = .62, P > .6]$

Conclusions
- Infants prefer third-party imitators but do not demonstrate a preference for targets of imitation.
- Infants’ imitator preferences are reliable in both animations and video displays.

References

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