



Do infants show social preferences for people differing in race?

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ABSTRACT

Do infants develop meaningful social preferences among novel individuals based on their social group membership? If so, do these social preferences depend on familiarity on any dimension, or on a more specific focus on particular kinds of categorical information? The present experiments use methods that have previously demonstrated infants' social preferences based on language and accent, and test for infants' and young children's social preferences based on race. In Experiment 1, 10-month-old infants took toys equally from own- and other-race individuals. In Experiment 2, 2.5-year-old children gave toys equally to own- and other-race individuals. When shown the same stimuli in Experiment 3, 5-year-old children, in contrast, expressed explicit social preferences for own-race individuals. Social preferences based on race therefore emerge between 2.5 and 5 years of age and do not affect social choices in infancy. These data will be discussed in relation to prior research finding that infants' social preferences do, however, rely on language: a useful predictor of group or coalition membership in both modern times and humans' evolutionary past.

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1. Introduction

Adults' social interactions with novel individuals are guided not only by the actions of those individuals, but also by the social categories to which they belong. Adults particularly attend to gender, race and age in evaluating people (Fiske, 1998), and their social judgments are influenced by others' language and accent as well (Giles & Billings, 2004; Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Research in developmental psychology suggests that category-based social preferences emerge early in development, and raises questions concerning the processes that produce these preferences. The present research attempts to shed light on the processes governing children's social category-based preferences by assessing infants' and young children's social preferences based on race, in relation to prior work demonstrating young children's preferences based on language and accent.

On one theory, infants and children tend to prefer people whose properties are most familiar to them. Familiarity, in this case, is not limited to or defined by any particular domain. Indeed, human preferences for the familiar are observed for non-social stimuli such as line drawings, polygons or words, as well as for social stimuli such as faces (Bornstein, 1989; Harrison, 1969; Rhodes, Halberstadt, & Brajkovich, 2001; Zajonc, 1968, 2001). An early preference for the familiar might be adaptive given that entities that are familiar could, on average, be safer than the unknown. On a different theory, human social preferences might reflect preferences for and reasoning about social kinds (e.g., a naïve sociology that differs from reasoning about non-human kinds; Hirschfeld, 1996). These early preferences for human kinds might even originate in a more specific, evolved, sensitivity to information that distinguished between categories of people within and across social groups throughout our evolutionary history. Within a single social community, all societies in all times are composed of individuals of varying gender, age, and kinship relationships, and so these factors may be

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particularly psychologically prominent (Cosmides, Tooby, & Kurzban, 2003; Kurzban, Tooby, & Cosmides, 2001; Lieberman, Oum, & Kurzban, 2008). Throughout ancient times, patterns of cooperation and competition would have served as good predictors of coalitional group membership across different social groups, and young children attend to these factors today (Cosmides et al., 2003; Fehr, Bernhard, & Rockenbach, 2008; Olson & Spelke, 2008; Rhodes & Brickman, in press). Given the speed with which languages and accents evolve, and the apparent difficulty with which we learn a non-native accent as adults, language, too, may have served as a valid predictor of native group membership throughout our evolutionary history (Baker, 2001; Henrich & Henrich, 2007; McElreath, Boyd, & Richerson, 2003; Pietraszewski & Schwartz, 2007). Though race-based social categorization is certainly apparent in adults today, the aspects of visual appearance that distinguish members of different racial groups today were likely of little value in distinguishing members of neighboring coalitions in ancestral environments, prior to the onset of long-distance migration (Cosmides et al., 2003; Kurzban et al., 2001). Thus, though race may be an indicator of coalition in many societies today, we likely did not evolve to see race *per se* as a marker of group membership, and infants and young children may not intuitively award social importance to racial group membership.

Research with children provides some support both for the presence of early familiarity preferences, and also for young children's more specific preferences for certain social categories. First, considering preferences for familiar social others more generally, young infants' visual preferences for the faces of novel individuals have been linked to the familiarity of the face categories. Infants of African descent look longer at own-race (Black) faces than at other-race (White) face if they reside in Africa, in a community in which faces of their race predominate, but Ethiopian infants born in Israel look equally to Black and White faces (Bar-Haim, Ziv, Lamy, & Hodes, 2006; see also, Kelly et al., 2005). Moreover, infants look longer at female faces than male faces if their primary caretaker is female, but may not show this preference if their primary caretaker is male (Quinn, Yahr, Kuhn, Slater, & Pascalis, 2002; Ramsey-Rennels & Langlois, 2006); furthermore, 3-month-old infants display visual preferences based on gender only when tested with faces of a familiar race (Quinn et al., 2008). By preschool age, children often demonstrate social preferences for individuals of their own gender, race, and age (Aboud, 1988; Alexander & Hines, 1994; Baron & Banaji, 2006; French, 1984; Katz & Kofkin, 1997; Kircher & Furby, 1971; Kowalski & Lo, 2001; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1987). Moreover, children's preferences for the familiar may underlie the finding that in-group preferences based on race are stronger for majority-race children than for minority-race children (Cameron, Alvarez, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2001). Finally, 5–6 month-old infants look longer at the face of a person who had previously spoken in their native language with a native accent, relative to a second person who previously spoke in a foreign language or accent (Kinzler, Dupoux, & Spelke, 2007). Nevertheless, in each of the cases described above depicting infant research, it is not clear whether looking patterns

in infancy are reflective of rich social preferences, or instead may reflect perceptual processing advantages, without any obligatory social meaning.

Though children demonstrate preferences for the familiar based on multiple dimensions, children's early social responses also reflect priorities in the importance they grant to different social categories (Kinzler, Shutts, & Correll, 2010). Children show social preferences for same-gender children by 2–3 years of age (e.g., Jacklin & Maccoby, 1978; LaFreniere, Strayer, & Gauthier, 1984); nevertheless, race-based preferences do not reliably emerge until closer to 4 or 5 years of age (Abel & Sahinkaya, 1962; Aboud, 2003; Brown & Johnson, 1971; Kircher & Furby, 1971; Stevenson & Stewart, 1958). In a recent study, Shutts, Banaji, and Spelke (2010) directly compared the influence of gender, race and age on 3-year-old children's preferences for novel objects or activities that were endorsed by unfamiliar people who varied in gender, race and age. Gender and age, but not race, were robust guides to children's choices. Similarly, 5-year-old children express beliefs that gender categories, but not race categories, are objectively and biologically determined (Rhodes & Gelman, 2009). Finally, though children demonstrate both native-accent and own-race preferences when each category is tested separately (Aboud, 1988; Kinzler et al., 2007), when the two categories are put in conflict such that accent is pitted against race, children prefer native-accented other-race individuals to foreign-accented own-race individuals (Kinzler, Shutts, DeJesus, & Spelke, 2009). To tease apart the forces that drive children's developing social preferences and potential priorities that emerge in children's social categorization, it will be important to study the emergence of these preferences in younger infants.

Do infants develop meaningful social preferences among novel individuals? If so, do these preferences depend on the relative familiarity of those individuals on any dimension, or do they depend on a more specific focus on particular kinds of categorical information? Recent research begins to address this question by focusing on infants' social engagement with speakers of different languages and accents. In a series of studies, 10-month-old infants in the US and France were shown movies of a native French speaker and a native English speaker who spoke to the infant in alternation. Infants then were shown events in which the two speakers appeared together without speaking, held up two identical toys and, silently and in synchrony, offered the toys to the infant. Just at the moment at which the toys disappeared from view, two real toys appeared in front of the infant, giving the illusion that the toys came from the screen. Infants in the US reached for the toy offered by an English speaker rather than a French speaker, and infants in France reached for the toy offered by the French speaker, even though the toys were identical and were never paired on screen with the language (Kinzler et al., 2007). Prior to speaking themselves, therefore, infants chose to interact with a native speaker of their native language.

Further research provides evidence that social preferences for native speakers persist in later childhood and guide even more explicit social decisions. In one study, 2.5-year-old children were shown the same displays of

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