

DO INFANTS SHOW SOCIAL PREFERENCES FOR PEOPLE DIFFERING IN RACE?

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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.

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.

1. On one theory, infants and children tend to prefer people whose properties are most familiar to them.
2. 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.
3. 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).
4. Do infants develop meaningful social preferences among novel individuals?
5. Further research provides evidence that social preferences for native speakers persist in later childhood and guide even more explicit social decisions.

6. The above studies provide tools that can be used to probe the origins and nature of social categories, and find signatures of social preferences that go beyond measures of looking time in infancy.
7. Language, however, is not alone in marking social groups in modern times.
8. In the present research, we borrow methods previously used to test social preferences based on language, and employ them to test for early social preferences based on race.
9. The present studies tested the race-based social preferences only of majority-race, White infants.
10. Experiment 1 presented White 10-month-old infants with an interactive “toy choice” in which toys were offered to infants by individuals who were either their own race (White), or another race (Black), and infants’ choices were measured.

5. GENERAL DISCUSSION (intentionally displaced)

1. Across three experiments, a developmental progression in infants’ and children’s race-based social preferences was observed.
2. Several alternative interpretations for the present findings can be rejected, based on the findings themselves and on past research.
3. Second, it is unlikely that infants’ and young children’s equal patterns of receiving and giving reflect a failure to detect the individuals’ race.
4. Third, it is unlikely that infants’ and young children’s equal patterns of receiving and giving reflect limitations of the methods used to test for race-based social preferences.
5. The contrasting effects of language and race on infants’ social preferences are of theoretical importance, for they suggest that these two dimensions of familiarity are not equal to infants.
6. Although 5–6 year-old children showed preferences based on race in Experiment 3, other research has compared race and language preferences directly at this age, providing evidence that accent trumps race in children’s explicit social judgments (Kinzler et al., 2009).
7. There are several reasons why language may trump race in its early social salience. First, children have a “head start” in their familiarization to language over race.
8. Finally, and perhaps most speculatively, attention to language over race may reflect an “essentialist bias,” in which language is treated by children as an “inner” property, whereas race is treated as a less important “outer” property of individuals.

The present research raises questions about the potential malleability of early social biases. Infants and toddlers in Experiments 1 and 2 do not attend to race in guiding their early interactions, but 5-year-old children shown the same stimuli prefer individuals of their own race almost unanimously. The finding that race-based preferences emerge over childhood suggests that they may not be mandatory, but rather may emerge as a result of exposure to racially stratified societies in which race is often a marker of group membership. Children may be inclined to group the world into human kinds (Hirschfeld, 1996), or ingroups and outgroups (Dunham, Baron, & Banaji, 2008); nonetheless, children may not view race as a mandatory

variable by which groups are determined in all environments. Future research therefore should investigate the potential malleability of early social preferences as a result of exposure to diverse environments. The present research provides a note of optimism that later race-based social preferences may not be a predetermined outcome of any and all social worlds.

2. EXPERIMENT 1

1. Experiment 1 borrowed the method of Kinzler et al. (2007), which tested infants' early social preferences based on language, to assess infants' preferences for social interactions based on race.
2. Because past research using this method revealed a strong effect of native language on infants' toy choices, it was important to equate the speech of the two individuals.

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants Twenty-four full-term White 10-month-old infants participated in the study (14 females; mean age 10 months 13 days; range 9 months 23 days–11 months 2 days).

2.1.2. Materials

The stimuli were modeled after those from Kinzler et al. (2007).

2.1.3. Design and procedure

On each of four test trials, infants saw a toy choice event, with both White and Black individuals pictured simultaneously offering a toy to the infant

2.2. Results

In both the speaking and the silent conditions, infants accepted toys about equally from the individuals of the two races; if anything, they showed a slight preference for the Black individual (Fig. 2, left).

2.3. Discussion

1. In contrast to infants' preferences for interactions based on language (Kinzler et al., 2007), infants did not preferentially accept toys from own-race individuals.
2. It should be noted that 10 months of age just precedes the time when infants are beginning to speak

3. EXPERIMENT 2

Experiment 2 investigated toddlers' preferences for own- vs. other-race individuals by means of a "magical giving game," (after Kinzler et al., in press).

3.1. Methods

3.1.1. Participants

Twenty-four full-term 2.5–3-year-old White children participated in the study (12 females; mean age 32.5 months; range 29.5–35.5 months).

3.1.2. Materials

The same Black and White individuals featured in Experiment 1 served as stimuli.

3.1.3. Procedure

Children were first instructed in the giving game. An experimenter sat facing the child, between the screen and the table.

3.2. Results and discussion

1. Children gave presents equally to the two individuals who differed in racial group membership (M White = 1.00, SE = .12; M Black = .96, SE = .11; Fig. 2, center).
2. Although past research demonstrates clear evidence of majority-race preschool-aged children's social preferences based on race, most findings are reported beginning at age 4 or 5, and do not necessarily find similarly strong results with 3-year-old children (Abel & Sahinkaya, 1962; Aboud, 2003; Brown & Johnson, 1971; Kircher & Furby, 1971; Stevenson & Stewart, 1958).

4. EXPERIMENT 3

Experiment 3 investigated 5–6 year-old children's explicit social preferences for novel individuals who are Black vs. White, using two measures

4.1. Participants

Twelve White 5–6-year-old children (mean: 5 years 9 months; range: 5 years, 2 months to 7 years 0 years) participated in the experiment.

4.2. Materials

Images from dependent measures in Experiments 1 (toy offering events) and 2 (static images of each individual) served as stimuli.

4.3. Design and procedure

Children were shown two events. During the toy offering event, children were shown a movie of the White and Black individual smiling, and offering two toys.

4.4. Results and discussion

Across the two test questions, children robustly chose the White individual (M White = 1.75 choices, SE = .13; M Black = .25 choices, SE = .13). See Fig. 2, right.

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