

RECIPROCAL BEHAVIOR IN CHIMPANZEES

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Chimpanzees have complex social relationships and have been observed to assist both related and unrelated individuals in several different contexts. Specifically, reciprocity, in which individuals alternate assisting each other, has been observed both in the wild and in captivity. However, turn-based contingent reciprocity has not been shown to occur in captive chimpanzee experiments. The reasons for this disconnect are not clear. It has been proposed that chimpanzees behave differently in food than non-food situations, that they are superior at competitive than cooperative tasks, and that they help primarily when requests are made. However, none of these hypotheses has remained unchallenged. We propose that one of the reasons for this challenge is that chimpanzees' behavior varies much more based on relationships and social interactions than the game itself. Therefore understanding the nuances of behavior between individuals may be illustrative in determining how they understand the social interaction. We will discuss this in relation to data from an economic decision-making task in chimpanzees which indicates that the decisions made may be dependent upon the social interactions of the participants rather than on an overall economic strategy that is developed by the chimpanzees. This work suggests that it is important not just to examine the outcomes of the experimental manipulations, but to also take into account the behavior and interactions between the chimpanzees used in the study to learn more about how chimpanzees make decisions in the context of reciprocity.

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