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REPUTATION JUDGMENTS IN CHIMPANZEES

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Humans, unlike other primates, regularly interact with strangers. This feature of human sociality may have favored the evolution of a cognitive system that attributes dispositions to conspecifics based on limited or indirect information. These reputation judgments can be used to predict future behavioral interactions and are thus an essential feature of cooperative exchanges among humans. Chimpanzees, one of humans' closest living relatives, spend the majority of their lives in the wild in dynamic but relatively closed groups, interacting almost exclusively with familiar group-mates. Thus, it is unknown whether, like humans, they are capable of making reputation judgments based entirely on observations of third party interactions. To address this question, seven chimpanzees observed unfamiliar humans either consistently give (generous donor) or refuse to give (selfish donor) food to a familiar human recipient (Exps. 1 and 2) and a conspecific (Exp 3). While chimpanzees did not initially prefer to beg for food from the generous donor (Exp 1), after continued opportunities to observe the same behavioral exchanges, four chimpanzees developed a preference for gesturing to the generous donor (Exp 2), and transferred this preference to novel unfamiliar donor pairs, significantly preferring to beg from the novel generous donors on the first opportunity to do so. In Experiment Three, four chimpanzees observed novel selfish and generous acts directed toward other chimpanzees by human experimenters. During the first half of testing, three chimpanzees exhibited a preference for the novel generous donor on the first trial. These results demonstrate that chimpanzees can infer the reputation of strangers by eavesdropping on third-party interactions.

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