



# 12-month-olds Understand Fear in Adults, but Not in Children

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## BACKGROUND

- By 12 months, infants use adults' fear of a novel object to govern their own behavior<sup>1</sup> (i.e. social referencing)
- Infants are interested in other children, but their understanding of peers' behavior and goals lags behind their competence with adults<sup>2</sup>
- Understanding adults' emotions may be more adaptive for infants than understanding children's emotions, hence earlier developing
- Can 12-month-olds use another child's fear of a novel object to govern their own play?

## HYPOTHESES

- 12-month olds will use an adult's fear of a novel toy to alter their play
- Using the same paradigm, 12-month olds will *not* use an older child's fear of a toy to alter their play

## PARTICIPANTS

- 12-month-olds (14 boys; 13 girls)
- Adult condition (N=16)
  - Child condition (N=11)

## PROCEDURE

### Emotion display (20 sec video)<sup>1</sup>

- 6-yr-old child *OR* adult woman ; 2 neutral toys (*target* and *distracter*)
- Condition 1: Adult fear of target toy



- Condition 2: Child fear of target toy



- Toys and sides counterbalanced

### Play period (30 secs)

- After each trial

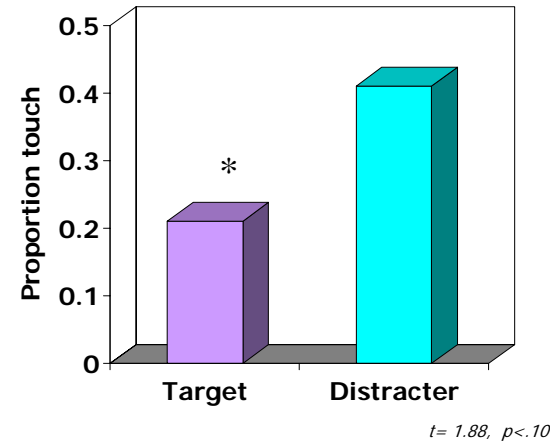


### Measures

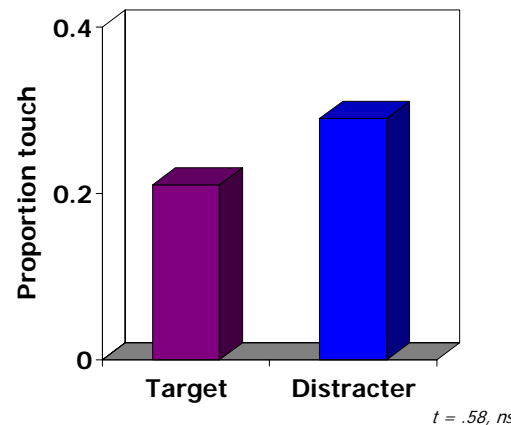
- Proportion touch duration to each toy (target, distracter)

## RESULTS

### Did an adult's fear alter infants' play with the toys?



### Did a child's fear alter infants' play with the toys?



## CONCLUSIONS

- 12-month-olds did *not* systematically alter their play with a novel toy when they saw an older *child* display fear towards it
- 12-month-olds *did* tend to alter their play with a novel toy when they saw an *adult* display fear towards it
- Infants' use of peers' emotions to govern their behavior with novel objects appears to develop later than their ability to use adults' emotions
- *Further studies are needed to establish whether infants' understanding of other children's emotions develops in concert with other peer interaction skills over the second year of life*

### References

1. Mumme, D. & Fernald, A. (2003). *Child Development*, 74, 221-237.
2. Brownell, C., Ramani, G. & Zerwas, S. (2006). *Child Development*, 77, 803-821.

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