

UC Merced

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

Primates watching primates watching primates: Why do we anthropomorphise?

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6xm3n8hd>

Authors

Milidakis, Margarita Artemis
Baronesse von Bistram, Donata
Spierings, Michelle
et al.

Publication Date

2021

Peer reviewed

Primates watching primates watching primates: Why do we anthropomorphise?

Margarita Milidakis

University of Vienna, Vienna, Vienna, Austria

Donata Baronesse von Bistram

University of Vienna, Vienna, Vienna, Austria

Michelle Spierings

University of Vienna, Vienna, Vienna, Austria

Palmyre Boucherie

University of Vienna, Vienna, Vienna, Austria

Clíodhna Quigley

University of Vienna, Vienna, Vienna, Austria

Abstract

Anthropomorphism is the attribution of human traits, capacities, or mental states to non-human animals. Numerous factors likely affect our tendency to anthropomorphise (TA). Previous studies, using questionnaire methods found increased TA with phylogenetic distance to other species, while empathy and compassion decreased. We used covert focal observations, typically used to quantify animal behavior, to collect visitor comments at primate enclosures in two European Zoos (Vienna, Nuremberg). We quantified TA as the relative frequency of anthropomorphic vs. non-anthropomorphic comments. We additionally collected questionnaire data to investigate how average perceived resemblance to humans and species aesthetic appeal mediate the relatedness effect on TA. Following our hypotheses, we expect TA to correlate negatively with phylogenetic distance, and positively with increased resemblance and aesthetic perception independently of phylogenetic distance. Using a novel approach, this study provides new insights into human perception of and emotional connection to non-human primates.