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Can preschoolers use probability to infer others desires?

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Abstract

Probability influences our social inferences. Here, we explored whether preschoolers use probabilistic information to infer others desires. Sixty 3-year-olds were shown stories where one character went to a gumball machine with mostly red gumballs and just a few purple ones and another character went to a machine with the reverse distribution. Both characters received a red gumball. Children in one between-subjects condition were asked who wanted a red gumball and children in a control condition were asked who knew they would get a red gumball. Children mostly selected the character who went to the machine with more red gumballs when asked about desires but not when asked about knowledge. This suggests that 3-year-olds can use proportions to infer others desires.