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Children's expectations of dominant and prestigious leaders

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Abstract

Humans are enmeshed in many hierarchical relationships, like that between a parent and child. Leaders in *dominance* hierarchies attain influence through coercion and intimidation, while leaders in *prestige* hierarchies are granted influence based on competence and prosociality. Across two studies ($N = 214$), we examined whether children have different expectations about how dominant and prestigious leaders allocate resources. Children learned about two social groups, the dominant Glerks and prestigious Zonks. In Study 1 ($N = 109$), children ages 4–5 watched a leader and follower divide five apples in 5–0 or 3–2 splits, and were asked who received a given share. Overall, children expected similar allocations across leaders. In Study 2 ($N = 105$), children ages 6–8 predicted whether a dominant or prestigious leader would share an apple with a hungry follower or eat it. Children expected prestigious leaders to be more likely to give the apple (82%) than dominant leaders (48%).