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Investigating social norms in nonhuman animals

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Abstract

Social norms—rules governing which behaviors are deemed appropriate or inappropriate within a given community—are typically taken to be uniquely human. Recently, this position has been challenged (Andrews 2020; Danón 2019; Fitzpatrick 2020; Kappeler et al. 2019; von Rohr et al. 2011). The view that norms are human unique stems from commitments regarding the psychological capacities required for having them, and skepticism that animals possess these prerequisites (Birch 2020; Rakoczy and Schmidt 2019; Schlingoff and Moore 2017; Tomasello 2016). However, among norm cognition researchers there is little agreement about the cognitive architecture that underpins social norms in humans. To move forward, we draw inspiration from the progress made in the animal culture research, develop an operationalized account of social norms as *a socially maintained pattern of behavioral conformity within a community* (Westra and Andrews, in preparation), and offer methods for studying social norms in wild and captive primate populations.