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Does cognitive dissonance depend on self-concept? 2-year-old children, but not 1-year-olds, show blind choice-induced preferences

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Abstract

As adults, we do not only choose what we prefer, but we also tend to adapt our preferences post-hoc to fit our previous choices, even when these were blind. This is thought to result from cognitive dissonance as an effort to reconcile our choices and preferences. It has been argued to rely on the self-concept, but has also been found in preschoolers and monkeys. In a preregistered study, we therefore investigated when blind choice-induced preferences emerge and whether they are related to self-concept development in the second year of life. Results in $N=200$ children aged 16-36 months provide strong evidence that blind-choice induced preferences develop between 1 and 2 years ($BF_{10}=12.5$). Two-year-olds avoided an object that they had previously discarded in a blind choice, whereas 1-year-olds did not show any such preferences yet. Further, we found substantial evidence against a relation with measures of self-concept development ($BF_{10}=0.2$).