

Forthcoming in [PNAS](#), a groundbreaking article by [Olivier Mascaro](#) and [Gergely Csibra](#) investigating the "Representation of stable social dominance relations by human infants" (available [here](#)).

Abstract: What are the origins of humans' capacity to represent social relations? We approached this question by studying human infants' understanding of social dominance as a stable relation. We presented infants with interactions between animated agents in conflict situations. Studies 1 and 2 targeted expectations of stability of social dominance. They revealed that 15-mo-olds (and, to a lesser extent, 12-mo-olds) expect an asymmetric relationship between two agents to remain stable from one conflict to another. To do so, infants need to infer that one of the agents (the dominant) will consistently prevail when her goals conflict with those of the other (the subordinate). Study 3 and 4 targeted the format of infants' representation of social dominance. In these studies, we found that 12- and 15-mo-olds did not extend their expectations of dominance to unobserved relationships, even when they could have been established by transitive inference. These results suggest that infants' expectation of stability originates from their representation of social dominance as a relationship between two agents rather than as an individual property. Infants' demonstrated understanding of social dominance reflects the cognitive underpinning of humans' capacity to represent social relations, which may be evolutionarily ancient, and may be shared with nonhuman species.