When Kids Know Better: Paternalistic Helping in 3 year old Children
Alia Martin & Kristina Olson (2013)

Question: Will 3-year-olds engage in ‘paternalistic helping’ by overriding a specific (but misguided) request and instead provide a more useful means for achieving a goal?

• 6-months: prefer helper vs. hinderer
• 12-months: motivated to help others (point to/hand object)
• 18-months: understand intended actions/ultimate goal and use this understanding to help other achieve their goal.
• 24-months: provide help when other’s goal is clear (or requested), but not when goal is unclear (or not requested)
Study 1

• E1 familiarized child with functional & dysfunctional objects.
• Later E2 requested an object to achieve her goal (4 trials: 2 functional, 2 dysfunctional)
• Would children help her by giving her (a) what she asked for or (b) what she actually needed?
Study 1

- When requesting a functional object, children gave functional object 97.4% of the time.
- When requesting a dysfunctional object...
  - children instead provided the functional object 68.4% of the time.
- By trial, children gave requested object more when it was functional rather than dysfunctional.

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Figure 1. Object pairs used in Studies 1 and 2.
Study 2

- Do children just prefer functional objects, regardless of experimenter’s ultimate goals?
- Same set up as Study 1, except E2’s goal changed: requested an object to throw it in trash.
- If children prefer functional items, they should more often give E2 the functional item.

*Figure 1.* Object pairs used in Studies 1 and 2.
Study 2

- Children gave the requested object roughly equally whether it was a functional object (93.9%) or dysfunctional object (100%).
- Suggests that children do not simply prefer functional over dysfunctional objects.

*Figure 1.* Object pairs used in Studies 1 and 2.
Study 3

- Do children consider object’s affordances when deciding how to help?
  - Provide a requested dysfunctional object for a task in which it could be used?
  - And provide an alternative when requested dysfunctional object could not be used?
- Will children voluntarily help (sans request)?

- E2 requested a dysfunctional object to achieve her goal (2 trials)

Conventional

Unconventional
Study 3

When a dysfunctional object was requested:

• Children provided the dysfunctional object more often for an unconventional task (89.5%) than for a conventional task (47.4%).
• On conventional tasks, 52.6% of the time children provided a functional alternative.
• Suggests children take into account affordances of objects for achieving one’s goals.
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Answer: “Children are able to recognize when others’ immediate requests are incompatible with their ultimate goals and provide them with alternative means to achieve these goals when such means are available” (p. 2079)