



Imitation Preferences of Preverbal Infants

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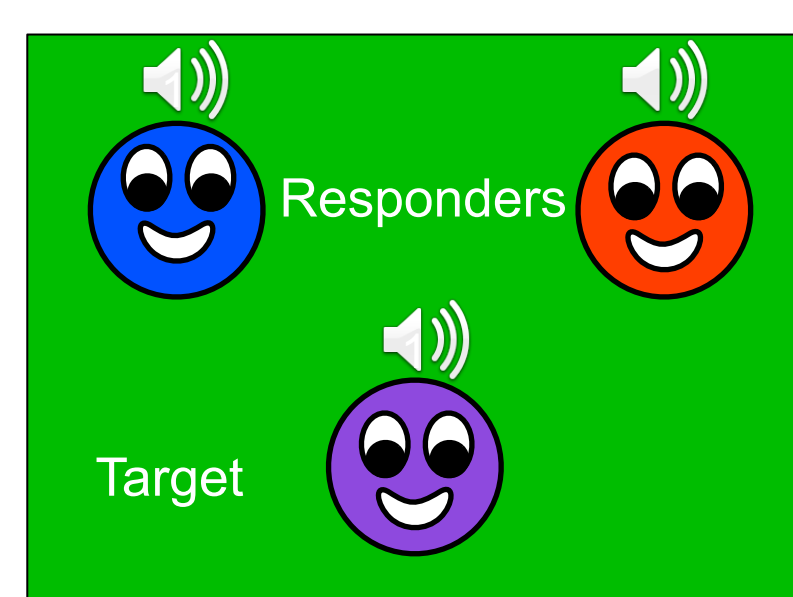


Background

Imitation promotes prosocial behavior in adults and children (Chartrand & Bargh, 2012; Carpenter, Uebel, & Tomasello, 2013).

Do children learn that imitation is positive through extensive social interaction, or do even young infants prefer imitators?

Do infants like imitators even when the infants themselves are not the engaged in the imitation?



Responders Condition

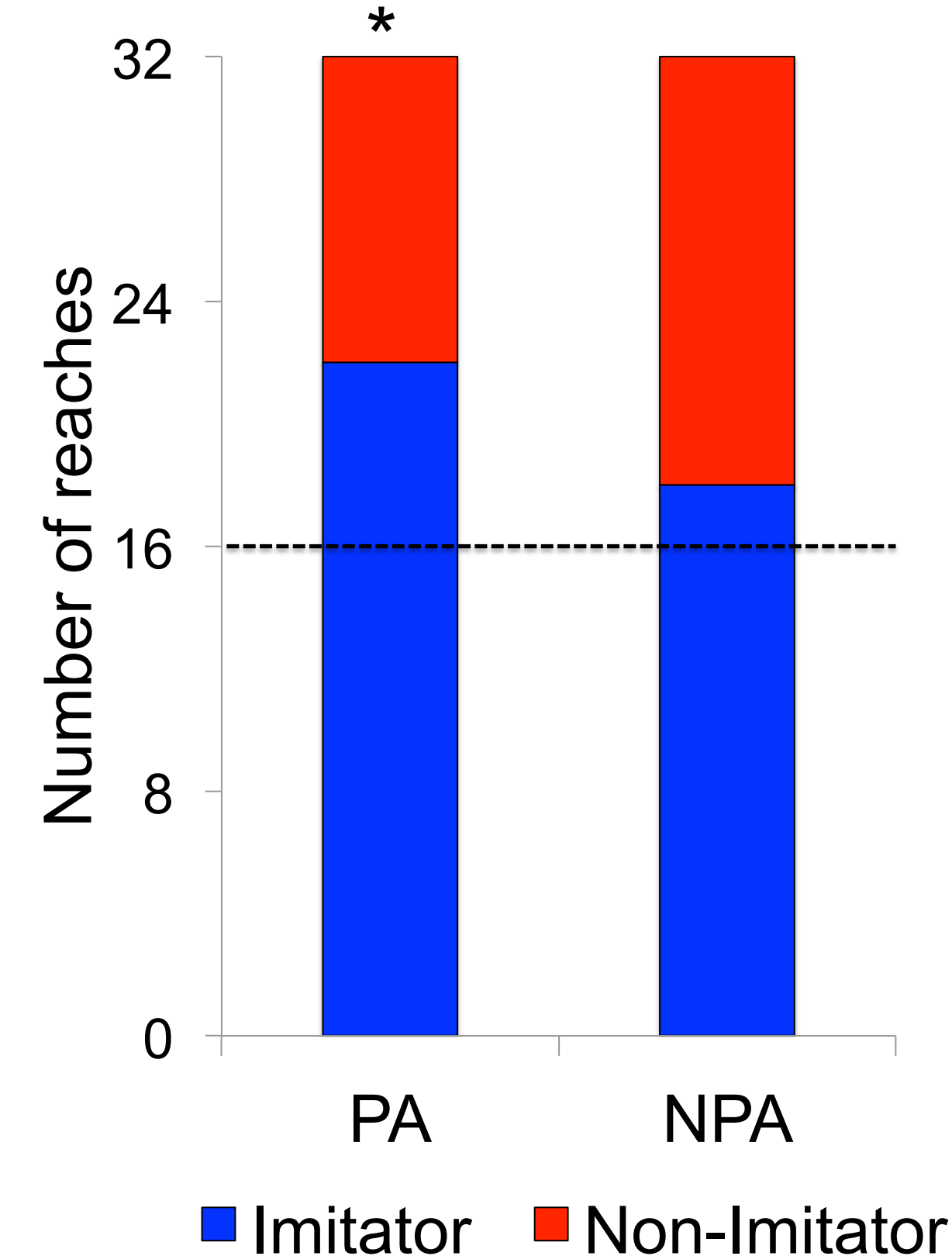
Preferential looking tests suggest 4-month old infants have a preference for those they see imitating others Powell & Spelke, in prep).

This preference could also reflect liking for familiarity, similarity, or agents who engage in repetitive behavior.

One way to rule out these alternatives is to ask whether infants' preferences are sensitive to the imitator's perceptual access to the target.

An initial preferential reaching indicates infants (12-months) prefer an imitator with perceptual access (binomial test, $P=0.015$) but not without (binomial test, $P=0.110$).

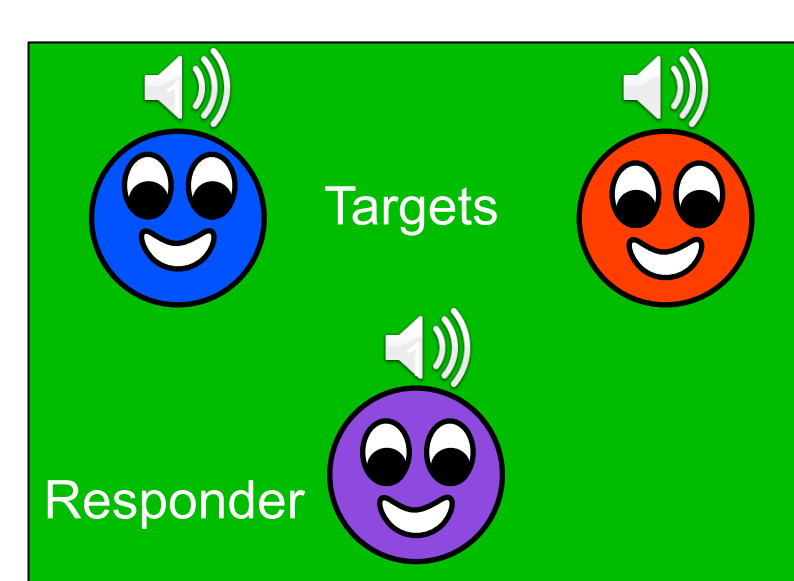
There was no interaction between conditions (Fisher's Exact, $P=0.44$), perhaps due to issues with statistical power.



Study 1

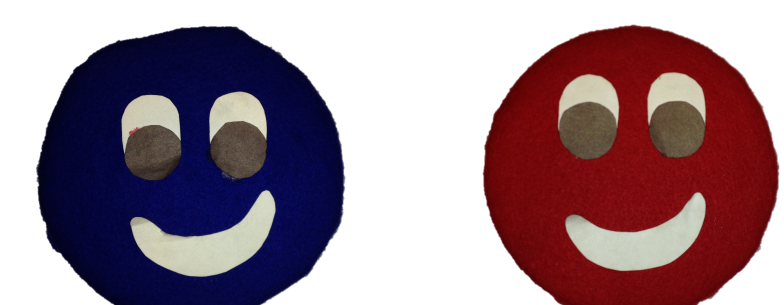
Do infants prefer imitators or just a character with a familiar or similar attribute? We tested by asking whether infants prefer targets of imitation.

Participants: 12 (of an intended 24) four-month-old (4,00 – 5,00) infants.



Targets Condition

Four rounds of familiarization. Responder imitates one of two targets.

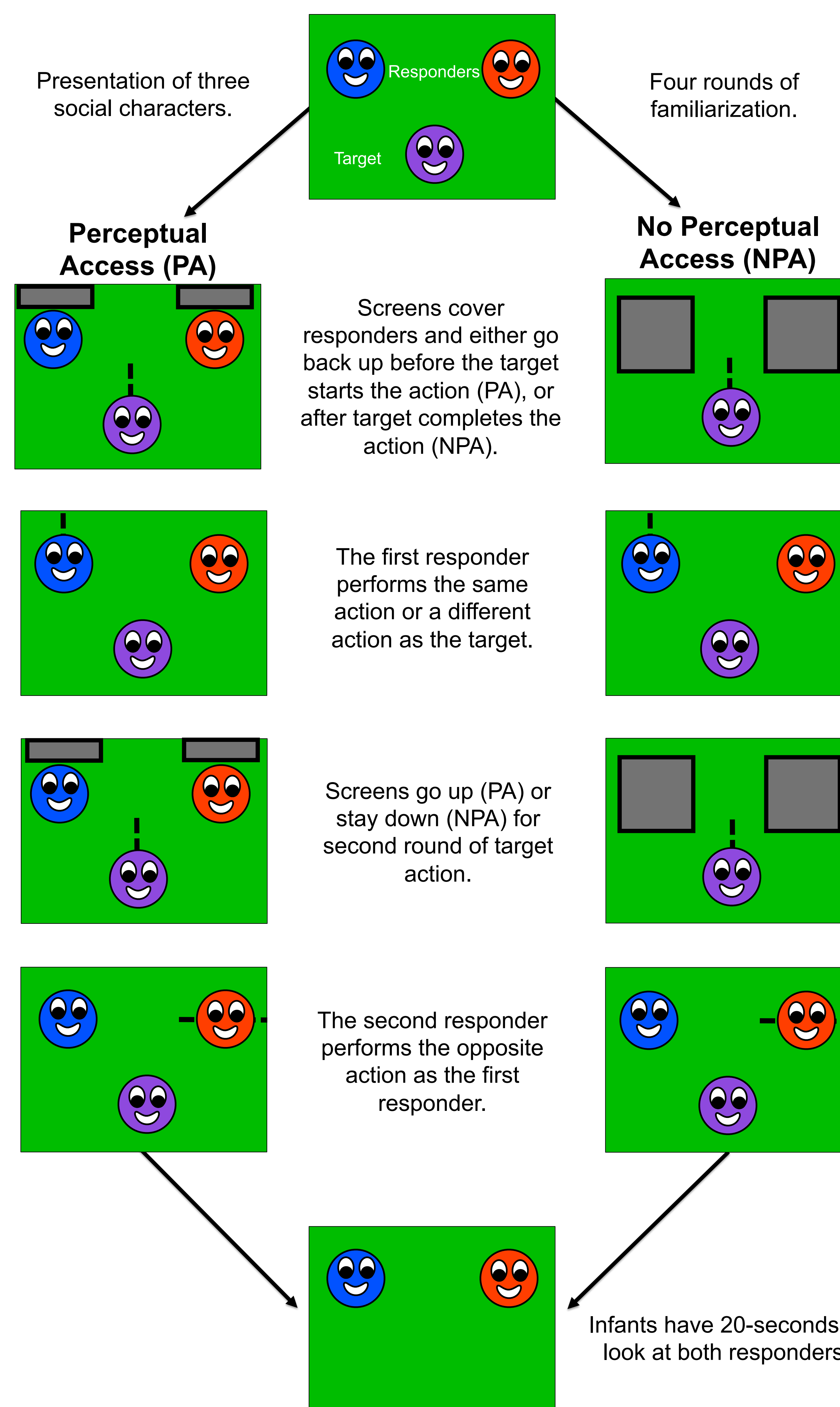


Experimenter presents physical versions of target and non-target character to infants for 20-seconds.

Study 2

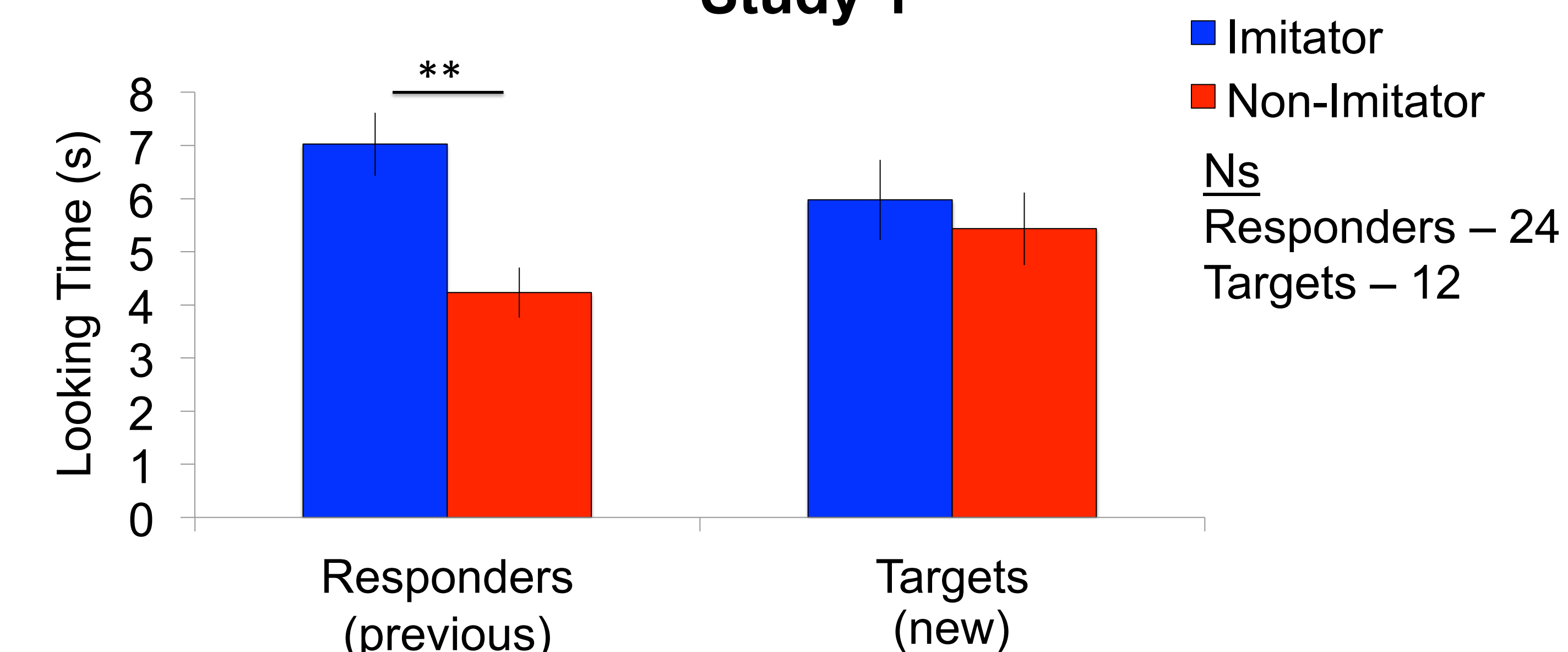
Will we find better evidence that infants' preference for imitators is sensitive to the imitators' perceptual access to the targets if we use a more powerful preferential looking test, even with younger infants?

Participants: 12 (of an intended 48) seven-month-old (6,15 – 8,00) infants.



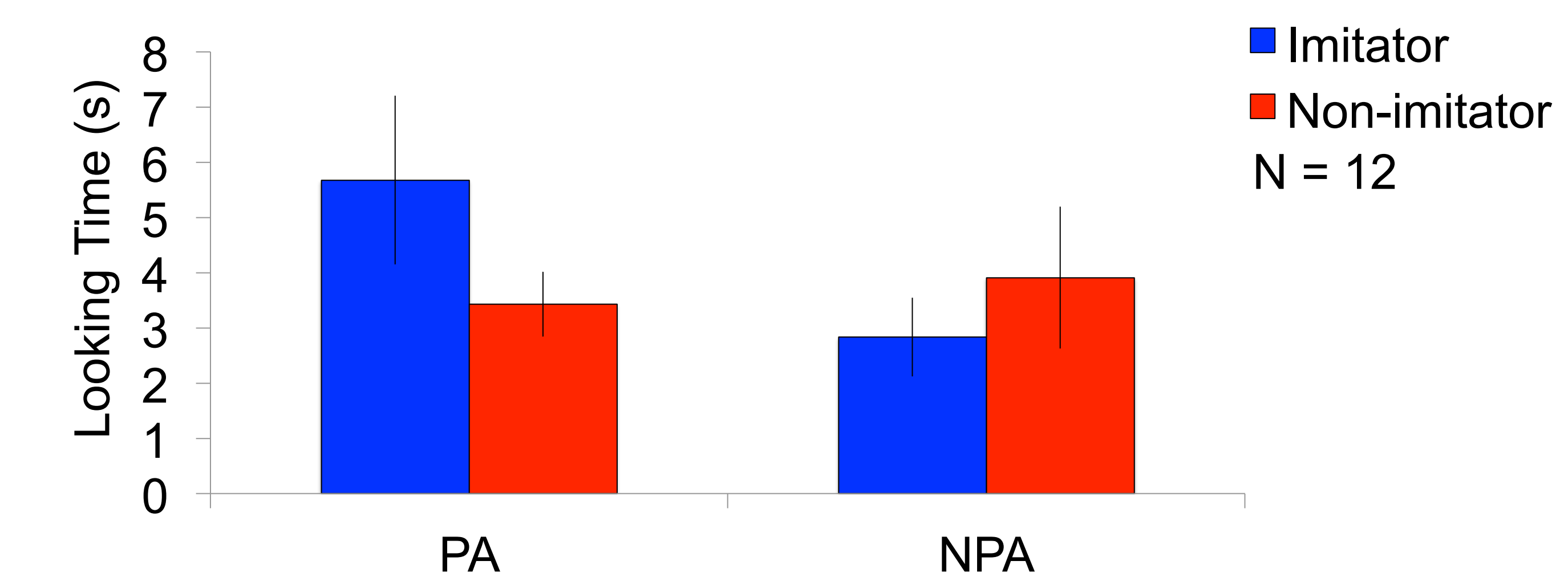
Preliminary Results

Study 1



Unlike imitator preference in the Responders condition, 4-month-olds in the Targets condition do not currently show a strong preference for the target of imitation over the non-target. When data collection is complete, an interaction between the two conditions would show infants prefer imitators rather than agents that engage in similar or repetitive behavior.

Study 2



As in the 12-month-old reaching study, so far 7-month-old infants in the perceptual access (PA) condition are showing a preference for the imitator and infants in the no perceptual access (NPA) condition are not. When data collection is complete, an interaction between the two conditions would show that infants have a stronger preference for imitators with perceptual access to their targets than those without.

References

Chartrand, T. L., & Bargh, J. A. (1999). The chameleon effect: The perception-behavior link and social interaction. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.*, 76(6), 893-910.
Carpenter, M., Uebel, J., & Tomasello, M. (2013). Being mimicked increases prosocial behavior in 18-month-old infants. *Child Development*, 84(5), 1511-18.
Powell, L. J., & Spelke, E. S. (In Preparation).

Acknowledgements

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