O.Fillod - juillet 2014 - Point de départ de la vulgarisation de Hassett, Siebert et Wallen (2008)

1) L'article de New Scientist (en ligne, accédé le 15 janvier 2009)

Male monkeys prefer boys' toys

17:28 04 April 2008 by Ewen Callaway

It's thought of as a sexual stereotype: boys tend to play with toy cars and diggers, while girls like dolls. But male monkeys, suggests research, are no different (see a <u>related video report</u>). This could mean that males, whether human or monkey, have a biological predisposition to certain toys, says <u>Kim</u> <u>Wallen</u>, a psychologist at Yerkes National Primate Research Center in Atlanta, Georgia. Wallen's team looked at 11 male and 23 female rhesus monkeys. In general the males preferred to play with wheeled toys, such as dumper trucks, over plush dolls, while female monkeys played with both kinds of toys. This conclusion may upset those psychologists who insist that <u>sex differences</u> - for example the tendency of boys to favour toy soldiers and girls to prefer dolls - depend on social factors, not innate differences.

Guys and dolls

"A five-year-old boy whose compatriots discover has a collection of Barbies is likely to take a lot of flak," Wallen says. Social factors undoubtedly influence children's preferences, he says, but in general boys tend to be pickier with toys than girls. To try and tease out the effects of nature over those of nurture, Wallen and his colleagues studied a group of captive rhesus monkeys. His team reasoned that the choices of the monkeys wouldn't be determined by social pressures. Most of the study animals were juvenile (age one to four years), but some sub-adult and adult monkeys were included. "They are not subject to advertising. They are not subject to parental encouragement, they are not subject to peer chastisement," Wallen says.

Monkey fun

Wallen's team offered the monkeys two categories of toys: "wheeled" and "plush". The wheeled toys, intended to be masculine, included wagons and vehicles. The more feminine plush toys included Winnie the Pooh and Raggedy-Ann dolls. Two toys, one wheeled and one plush, were placed 10 metres apart. At first the monkeys formed a circle around a toy, but eventually one would snatch the toy and run off. Other monkeys soon joined in the fun, Wallen says. The researchers captured play sessions on video and measured how long each monkey spent with plush versus wheeled toys. The team found that the males spent more time playing with wheeled toys, while the females played with both plush and wheeled toys equally.

'Compelling results'

Wallen cautions against over-interpreting the results. The plush and wheeled categories served as proxies for feminine and masculine, but other toy characteristics, such as size or colour, might explain the male's behaviour, he says. Or the male monkeys might seek out more physically active toys, he says. But the study ties in with a previous experiment with green vervet monkeys showing that males favour masculine toys. "Together the results are compelling," says <u>Gerianne Alexander</u>, a psychologist at Texas A&M University in College Station, who led the vervet monkey study. She thinks that <u>biological differences between sexes</u> start the ball rolling toward learned preferences for play toys. "There is likely to be a biological tendency that is amplified by society," she says.

Journal reference: Hormones and Behavior (DOI: 10.1016/j.yhbeh.2008.03.008)

2) La dépêche AFP du fil en français (par Guy Clavel)

Chez les singes, les mâles plus attirés par des jouets "de garçons" (étude)

PARIS, 07 avr 2008 (AFP) - Les singes mâles semblent plus attirés vers les jouets considérés comme "de garçons" (petites voitures, benne à ordures...) que par des poupées ou des peluches, rapportent sur le site de la revue New Scientist des chercheurs américains. Cette étude, menée par le psychologue Kim Wallen, du Centre national de recherche sur les primates Yerkes a Atlanta (Georgie), a montré que les singes, non influencés par leur environnement social ou la publicité, contrairement aux enfants humains, avaient des

comportements identiques. L'équipe du Pr Allen a placé 11 males et 23 femelles Rhésus, dont la plupart étaient âgés de un à quatre ans, face a deux groupes de jouets distants de 10 m, l'un avec des objets à roues (charriots, véhicules), l'autre avec des peluches. Les chercheurs ont constaté que les mâles passaient plus de temps avec les jouets à roue alors que les femelles partageaient leur temps entre les deux types de jouets. Le Pr Wallen reste toutefois prudent dans ses conclusions : outre que les femelles étaient peut-être tout simplement plus curieuses que les males et avaient donc envie de découvrir les deux sortes de jouets, d'autres caractéristiques ont pu influencer males et femelles, comme la forme et la couleur des objets. Ou encore, les males préfèrent des jouets avec lesquels on dépense plus d'activité physique. Toutefois, les résultats de cette étude confortent ceux d'une autre recherche, menée sur le singe vervet par le Dr Gerianne Alexander, psychologue à l'université Texas A&M. Pour elle, les différences de comportement entre les sexes commencent dès le plus jeune âge, et les tendances sont ensuite "accentuées par la société".

3) La dépêche AFP du fil en anglais (par Marlowe Hood)

Boys will be boys, even if they're monkeys: study

PARIS, 07 avr 2008 (AFP) - Johnny may be hardwired to play with toy guns and dump trucks after all. As for his little sister's preference for Barbie and Beanie Babies, chalk it up to DNA, say scientists. The notion that children's taste in toys might somehow be genetically determined has long been disparaged by psychologists, pooh-poohed as unscientific, sexist or both. But a study by researchers in the United States has added new fuel to the nature versus nurture debate, and suggests that when it comes to choosing between trucks and cuddly stuffed animals, chromosomes could make a difference. There have been hundreds of studies that sought to distinguish acquired from innate behaviour patterns in small children. But by the time kids are old enough to choose and play with toys, they have also been socialized -- picking up cues from their parents, peers and television -- on how little girls and boys should behave, making it impossible to tease the two influences apart. So a team of scientists led by Kim Wallen of the Yerkes national Primate Research Centre in Atlanta, Georgia decided to offer typical "male" and "female" toys to rhesus monkeys to see if preferences aligned with sex. Much to their surprise, they did. The 11 male monkeys headed straight for the wheeled toys, such as dump trucks, leaving the plush toys more-or-less unmolested. The 23 females were more curious, and played with both. "They are not subject to advertising. They are they are not subject to parental encouragement, they are not subject to peer chastisement," said Wallen. The results support an earlier study at Texas A&M University, with green vervet monkeys, which also showed a distinct preference among male monkeys for "masculine" playthings. Wallen's study was first published in the journal Hormones and Behaviour, and reported on the British website NewScientist.com.