Donna Kean

Division of Psychology, University of Stirling

**Title: (Well-trained) Monkeys Have the Capacity for Cumulative Culture.**

Cumulative culture (also called ‘ratcheting’) is a capacity that may depend on the ability to *selectively* learn from social models and is argued to be restricted to humans. We investigated whether monkeys could learn from and use both rewarded and unrewarded information in a simulated transmission-chain experiment as a test of the capacity for ratcheting. Capuchin monkeys (N=25) and baboons (N=12) were tested using the novel ‘Potential-for-Ratcheting’ (PFR) Task. The PFR Task is a touchscreen stimulus selection task that required subjects to learn the strategy of repeating rewarded and avoiding unrewarded selections following a demonstration. The demonstrations provided information of varying success. We tested whether higher quality information would be associated with greater task success, a hallmark of cumulative culture, and whether subjects could outperform the demonstrations they were presented with. Responses to the PFR Task were then used to classify each individual’s capacity for cumulative culture, and to simulate linear transmission chains. Twenty-three monkeys met our performance criterion (≥80%) on PFR Task training trials, allowing assessment of their potential-for-ratcheting. Overall, task performance was positively correlated with demonstration value, suggesting sensitivity to the value of information provided. Several individuals also outperformed some levels of demonstration, displaying an ability to improve upon the information they were presented with. Two individuals were classified as *significantly* displaying the capacity for cumulative culture, and several others also achieved this classification, but without significance. Simulated transmission chains showed that although there was some ratcheting, this progress was limited, as the highest levels of demonstration were not consistently outperformed. This difficulty may represent a barrier to the development of cumulative culture in the natural behaviour of non-human species.