

Office Supplies vs. Actual Friggin Toys: A Paired Choice Analysis

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt the lives of many working parents with young children¹. Childhood behaviors that once served as fun anecdotes to share with colleagues now provide minute-by-minute reminders of the chaos that rules our lives². For example, statements like “*we bought our child a toy car but they only want to play with the box!*” might once have stirred a ripple of empathetic chuckles around the boardroom as everyone settled in to discuss work with their corporeal colleagues during relatively uninterrupted blocks of time. However, concepts like “work” and “uninterrupted blocks of time” are increasingly abstract. Under current circumstances, similarly charming statements like “*STOP UNPLUGGING THE ROUTER!!*” barely echo off the walls of the hastily converted home office.

This study compares the entertainment preferences of a 15-month-old child coexisting with their academic parent in a novel work-from-home stay-at-home-parent environment. These findings may inform toy manufacturers as to what entices children most in a lawless hellscape.

Methods

Study Participants and Conditions

A 15-month-old child served as the test subject. To maximize the probability of compliance, the researcher offered the subject a healthy snack prepared with love prior to testing. The subject refused that snack in favor of some old cereal found under the stove. The researcher interpreted this behavior as sufficient satiation to begin the choice experiment.

Paired Choice Experiment

The experiment offered a total of four items as paired options (Figure 1). The items included a wireless computer mouse (Apple, Cupertino CA), an eraser (probably Amazon??, Seattle WA), an empty plastic cup (no clue, Somewhere in the Sol System), and an actual friggin toy designed to entertain children (Melissa & Doug, Westport CT). The researcher simultaneously placed two objects in front of the seated-ish participant and documented a choice when the subject touched and/or bit an item.

Statistical Analysis

LOL, no.





Figure 1: Objects included (a) a wireless computer mouse, (b) an eraser, (c) an empty cup, and (d) an actual friggin toy designed to entertain children.

Results

The researcher offered the paired items in the following order: eraser/mouse, cup/mouse, mouse/toy, eraser/toy, cup/toy, cup/eraser. This might represent a complete matrix of possibilities but honestly the researcher wasn't being that careful in the study design or in even reading what they are writing right this very second so they probably goofed. Table 1 shows the numbers of times the subject selected each item.

Item	# of times selected
Computer mouse	1
Eraser	2
Cup	2
Actual friggin toy	0

Table 1: Choice outcomes.

One may notice that the sum of selections does not equal the number of paired choices. During the second choice (cup/mouse), the subject chose neither object. Instead, the subject ran off with the paper and pen the researcher was using to record their findings (Supp. Figure 1).

Conclusions

These results provide further evidence that children prefer office items over actual friggin toys. The subject never even once chose the item designed to please a child. The popularity of the eraser may be explained by its astonishing similarity in appearance to the mouse (Fig. 1A–B), but also the great abundance of brightly colored, hopefully non-toxic chalk dust that is, apparently, delicious. The relatively frequent selection of the empty cup may indicate thirst, but the subject made no obvious attempt to drink from the cup. Instead, the subject repeatedly banged the object upside down to produce a joyous sound – a behavior the child delights in practicing when the cup contains water as well.

Importantly, the subject demonstrated a preference for non-toys *even when the researcher was not attempting to use those items*. The researcher initially hypothesized that intentional disruption to scholarly productivity served as the primary motivation for the child's preference for office items. These findings suggest an innate allure of the objects that merits further study.



Ethical Statement

All study participants and/or their legal guardians provided verbal informed consent to their best ability given their current state of existential crisis.

Sincere (Really) Acknowledgements

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Supplementary Materials



Supplementary Figure 1: Erratic behavior following the choice between cup and mouse.

References

1. Personal communication.... a LOT of personal communication.
2. Some funny tweets I saw once but can't find right now.

