

Critical Summary:
Sex Differences in the Development of Termite-Fishing Skills in the wild Chimpanzees

Lonsdorf, Elizabeth V. (2005) Sex Differences in the Development of Termite-Fishing Skills in the Chimpanzees (*Pan Troglodytes Schweinfurthii*) of Gombe National Park, Tanzania. *Animal Behavior*, 70:673-683.

Elizabeth Lonsdorf researched how young chimpanzees learned foraging skills. She studied the chimpanzees, at the Gombe National Park in Tanzania, for several months to collect data for this project. Currently, she is the director of Lester E. Fisher Center for the Study and Conservation of Apes.

Lonsdorf tells us that chimpanzees use tools more than any other nonhuman animal (Lonsdorf 673). She then explains that there is little information known about how chimpanzees acquire tool utilizing skills. Even less is known about the gender differences of young chimpanzees and how the gender will affect development in utilizing specific tool skills.

Lonsdorf found that female chimpanzees were more apt to learn the skills necessary for termite-fishing than male chimpanzees. Females “were able to successfully termite-fish ... [on] average...27 months earlier than males” (Lonsdorf 678). Therefore, females are more successful at termite-fishing, with a greater ability at a younger age, than the males. This is due to the fact that females were more prone to learn by imitation of their mothers. Lonsdorf found that females “watched significantly more than males...whereas males spent significantly more time at the termite mound playing” (Lonsdorf 679).

To avoid any nurturing bias, Lonsdorf also studied how the mother chimpanzees treated their sons in contrast to their daughters. She noted that there was no difference in the way that mothers treated their sons and daughters, yet daughters “used teachings that were similar to their mothers’, whereas males did not” (Lonsdorf 682).

These studies lead to the conclusion that “the process by which termite-fishing is learned differs for male and female chimpanzees” (Lonsdorf 673). Furthermore, this study also implies that the process of watching actions may be more important than practicing them when it comes to a chimpanzee’s ability to develop new skills.

(This paper was prepared by a summary written by Taraleigh Jeshelle Hoer-Duffey, a student at USU)