

Assessing children's perceptual sensitivity to social information

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Abstract

Recent theories of social-cognitive development have generally focused on the development of theory of mind between infancy and preschool. However, social understanding involves more than developing an inferential understanding of mind and continues beyond the early childhood years. We present preliminary findings from a study that evaluated children's perceptual sensitivity to subtle kinematic cues that distinguish between intentions in others' behaviour, based on Pesquita et al. (2016). On each trial, children observed videos of an actor reaching to touch one of two buttons. On half the trials the actor chose which button to touch and on the other half they were directed. A paired-samples t-test showed that participants were reliably faster at correctly predicting the actor's movement in the chosen condition than the directed condition [$t(39) = 6.23, p < .01, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.99$]. We argue that social understanding comes in various forms and at different levels of awareness.