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Authors

Yuen, Francis

Hamlin, Kiley

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Exploring 3- and 11-month-olds' understanding of social versus nonsocial goals

Francis Yuen

University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Kiley Hamlin

University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Abstract

Research in the cognitive sciences has demonstrated infants' remarkable ability to mentalize, such as their capacity for goal attribution (Woodward, 1998). However, failed replications of seminal findings have brought into question the strength of such capacities. One possibility is that infants are likely to mentalize in socially relevant/evaluative contexts (Woo et al., 2023). In two pre-registered studies, the present work investigated this possibility by testing whether 3-month-olds (via VoE; Woodward, 1998) and 11-month-olds (via anticipatory looking; Cannon & Woodward, 2012) will show stronger evidence of goal attribution for social versus nonsocial goals. Preliminary analyses revealed surprising results: Three-month-olds (N=52) show evidence of attributing location goals only in the social condition. By contrast, 11-month-olds (N=36) showed the reverse: Their anticipatory eye-movements showed evidence of attributing location goals in the nonsocial condition. The poster will present data from the full target sample (N=64) and further interpret these novel findings.