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Research Abstract

UBC Psychology 413: Social and Personality Development

Comprehensive overview of the psychological processes in the social and personality development of infants, children, and adolescents.

Developmental Psychology reveals that infants possess an evolutionary trait enabling them to understand social cues, categorize social behaviors, and form stereotypes. Powell and Spelke (2013) demonstrated that infants aged 10 to 13 months can make social judgments based on behavior and stereotypes in their social environment. For instance, they use physical appearance to assess dominance and weakness (Thomsen, Frankenhuys, Ingold-Smith, & Carey, 2010).

However, the critical question of when infants acquire the capacity to establish such social cues for inferences about their social group remains unanswered. Investigating this, Pun, Birch, and Baron (2015) explored how infants under 12 months understand social behaviors by using numerical factors as cues for determining dominance. Their findings indicate that infants under 12 months can indeed detect dominant agents using numerical factors, suggesting an evolutionary adaptive trait for comprehending their social environment.

Remarkably, infants as young as 7 months make inferences about social behaviors without extensive kinship or linguistic contact, highlighting the innate ability to form social and cognitive connections (Powell & Spelke, 2013). Across studies, consistent findings reveal that infants gaze longer at agents not adhering to social norms, reinforcing the idea that infants instinctively use social cues to infer others' behaviors (Powell & Spelke, 2013; Thomsen et al., 2010; Pun et al., 2015).

While the existing research provides valuable insights, future studies could enhance our understanding by examining infants younger than 7 months, delving into the early stages of social cue development. This could shed light on whether structuring social cues to comprehend the social world is an innate evolutionary adaptive trait.

Powell, L. J., & Spelke, E. S. (2013). Preverbal infants expect members of social groups to act alike. *PNAS Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 110(41), E3965–E3972. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/10.1073/pnas.1304326110>

Pun, A., Birch, S. A. J., & Baron, A. S. (2016). Infants use relative numerical group size to infer social dominance. *PNAS Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 113(9), 2376–2381. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/10.1073/pnas.1514879113>

Thomsen, L., Frankenhuys, W. E., Ingold-Smith, M., & Carey, S. (2011). Big and mighty: Preverbal infants mentally represent social dominance. *Science*, 331(6016), 477–480. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/10.1126/science.1199198>