

Best Friends

Children's sensitivity to social information in gaze

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Introduction

A great deal of information about others can be learned by monitoring their eye gaze.

Children use gaze to track a person's attention, to disambiguate the referent of words (Baldwin, 1991), to infer a person's preferences (Baron-Cohen et al, 1995; Einav & Hood, 2006), and even to identify when a speaker might be lying (Einav & Hood, 2009).

How do children interpret and use eye gaze in social situations? Are children able to track third-party eye gaze information to identify social alliances?

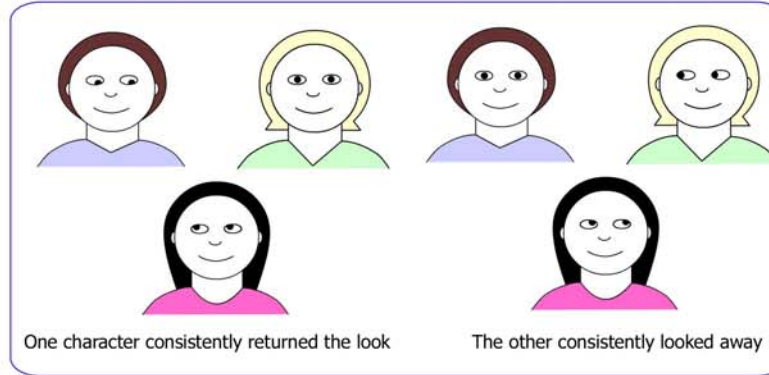
Our question:

Can children use gaze cues to identify out of a group of three, which two individuals like each other the most?

General Procedure:

Children watched short flash videos in which three characters looked at one another.

Children were asked either about the social affiliation of the characters, or about their gaze behaviour.



Results

Five- and six-year-olds used third-party gaze cues to extract information about social affiliation (Experiment 1 and 2).

Four-year-olds, despite being able to detect the gaze frequency, did not use this to identify mutual friendships (Experiment 1)

Conclusions

By 4 years of age children are skilled at monitoring gaze cues, even in complex dynamic social scenes.

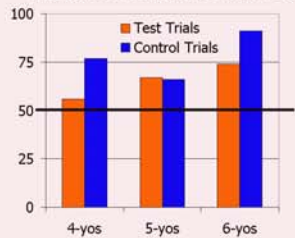
Sometime between 4 and 5 years of age, children come to interpret social gaze cues in terms of the social affiliation between the parties involved.

Experiment 1: Who is best friends with her?

Participants: 32 4-year-olds, 32 5-year-olds, 32 6-year-olds

Procedure: Target always bottom center. On 4 **test trials**, participants asked, "Who is best friends with [her]?" On 2 **control trials**, participants asked, "Which one of [these two] looks at [her] the most number of times?"

Percent correct performance



4-yos:
at chance on 'friend' question
above chance on control

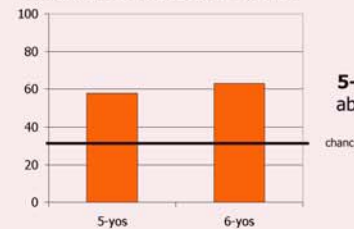
5-yos and 6-yos:
above chance on 'friend'
above chance on control

Experiment 2: Which two are best friends?

Participants: 29 5-year-olds, 32 6-year-olds

Procedure: Any two pairs of faces could be 'best friends', presented in random order. On 6 trials, participants simply asked, "Which two are best friends with one another?"

Percent correct performance



5-yos and 6-yos:
above chance performance

References:

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