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Infants' and Toddlers' Perception of Possible and Impossible Objects

Visual perception is more than simply sensing the intensity of light and its wavelength or color; it is how we come to know the environment and it makes possible our ability to recognize objects and act. The goal of my research is to further understand the development of the complex processes that go on while a human being is visually receiving sensory input and interpreting that information. Specifically, I have been working with children ranging from ages 5 months to 4 years old. I am trying to find the age at which young children can incorporate all the parts of a 3-dimensional picture, and analyze it as a whole. Within current research, there is a lot of controversy over at what age this ability emerges in young children. To do so, I show children two pictures at once (one of an odd, "impossible," objects and one of a normal, "possible," object) and measure the looking times to infer if they recognize the difference between the two pictures.

This research will help us understand normal perceptual development, but also has the potential help us better understand abnormal development. There is evidence that Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) affects the perceptual abilities. It may be difficult for an autistic child to perceive the differences between impossible and possible objects.It is commonly thought that they see the pieces of the puzzle, but not the whole picture. If we can determine the age at which infants are able to perceive a difference between possible and impossible objects, we may be able to develop it into a test that will help diagnose Autism at an early age. Currently, it is difficult to diagnose ASD before toddler years. This type of research has the potential to move that timeline up dramatically.

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