

PSYCHOLOGY 407/507
CHILDREN'S THEORIES OF MIND
Winter 1995

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Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday, 1-2, Wednesday 3-4, or by appointment.

General Description:

In coming to understand the social world, adults make use of a commonsense psychological theory that interprets human action and interaction in terms of a rich network of mentalistic concepts. That is, we attempt to predict and explain our own and other people's behavior in terms of beliefs, desires, intentions, emotional states, and so on. In this seminar we will discuss recent theory and research on children's acquisition of this everyday "theory of mind". Perspectives from philosophy, primatology, and developmental psychopathology will be considered in addition to those from the study of typical human development. In conjunction with the seminar, we will be holding a conference on theories of mind at the University of Oregon on Friday, February 3 (afternoon) and Saturday, February 4. The conference will bring together leading experts from around the country to present their latest theories and findings on this topic. The seminar and conference represent unique opportunities to learn about state-of-the-art ideas in what is currently one of the most exciting and rapidly expanding areas in the study of cognition.

Text and Readings:

The text for the seminar is Astington, J.W. (1993), The child's discovery of the mind, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. In addition there will be a number of other readings from the theories of mind literature (see Schedule of Topics). The text and most of the readings are available at the Bookstore. A few of the readings (* in the schedule) are only available from Knight library reserve.

Seminar Requirements:

- Research Paper (50% of grade). Students will write a short research proposal (approx. 10-15 pages) based on some aspect of the course material. The research itself does not need to be conducted. The proposal should summarize the relevant literature, provide a rationale for the research, describe the proposed research methodology, and how the data would be analyzed, and discuss the main ways in which the findings might come out. The due date for the proposal is Friday, March 3.
- Full participation in the seminar (50% of grade). The best and most enjoyable seminars are those in which everyone comes well prepared and makes thoughtful contributions to the discussion. In addition to such contributions, each student will be asked to help lead the discussion for at least one seminar during the term. The discussion leader should come prepared to briefly summarize the week's readings, and to present ideas or questions to help "jump start" the discussion if it happens to peter out or stray too far from the topic at hand. Discussion leaders should consult with me in the week before the relevant seminar meeting.
- Weekly Thought Pieces. Each week all students (except the discussion leader for that week) will be asked to turn in short informal critiques (approx. 1-2 typed or handwritten pages) of that week's readings. The aim of these is to prompt people to think carefully about the readings, to articulate their thoughts on paper, and, most importantly, to help generate intelligent and lively seminar discussions. The critiques should be original thoughts and ideas provoked by the readings, rather than summaries of the readings themselves. They might include one or more of the following: methodological or conceptual strengths or weaknesses in the research described; alternative interpretations of research findings; connections or contrasts with other findings or theories in the readings or elsewhere; suggestions for further research. Although the critiques are a course requirement they will not be graded.
- Attendance at the theories of mind conference.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

January 4 Introduction

Astington Chs 1 & 2

January 11 Knowledge and Belief

Astington Chs 5, 7, & 8 (pp. 111-125)

Mitchell, P. & Lacohee, H. (1991). Children's early understanding of false belief. Cognition, 39, 107-128.

Moses, L.J. (1993). Young children's understanding of belief constraints on intention. Cognitive Development, 8, 1-25.

Clements, W.A. & Perner, J. (in press). Implicit understanding of belief. Cognitive Development.

January 18 Deception

Astington Ch 8 (pp. 125-137)

Russell, J., Mauthner, N., Sharpe, S., & Tidswell, T. (1991). The "windows task" as a measure of strategic deception in preschoolers and autistic subjects. British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 9, 331-350.

*Chandler, M. & Hala, S. (1994). The role of personal involvement in the assessment of early false belief skills. In C. Lewis & P. Mitchell (Eds.). Children's early understanding of mind: Origins and development (pp. 403-425). Hove, UK: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

*Sodian, B. (1994). Early deception and the conceptual continuity claim. In C. Lewis & P. Mitchell (Eds.). Children's early understanding of mind: Origins and development (pp. 385-401). Hove, UK: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

January 25 Desire and Emotion

Astington Ch 6

*Wellman, H.M. & Woolley, J.D. (1990). From simple desires to ordinary beliefs: The early development of everyday psychology. Cognition, 35, 245-275.

Gopnik, A. & Slaughter, V. (1991). Young children's understanding of changes in their mental states. Child Development, 62, 98-110.

Wellman, H.M. (in press). Young children's conception of mind and emotion. In J. Russell (Ed.). Everyday conceptions of emotion. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer

February 1 Conference Preparation (No class meeting)

Gopnik, A. (1993). Psychopsychology. Consciousness and Cognition, 2, 264-280.

Lalonde, C., Chandler, M. & Moses, L.J. (1992). Early steps toward an interpretive theory of mind: On recognizing the possibility of being wrong in more than one way. (Unpublished manuscript, University of British Columbia).

Taylor, M., Esbensen, B.M., & Bennett, R.T. (in press). Children's understanding of knowledge acquisition: The tendency for children to report they have always known what they have just learned. Child Development.

Mundy, P., Sigman, M. & Kasari, C. (1993). The theory of mind and joint-attention deficits in autism. In S. Baron-Cohen, H. Tager-Flusberg & D.J. Cohen (Eds.). Understanding other minds: Perspectives from autism (pp. 181-203). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Povinelli, D.J. (1994). What chimpanzees (might) know about the mind. In R.W. Wrangham, W.C. McGrew, F.B.M. de Waal & P.G. Heltne (Eds.). Chimpanzee cultures (pp. 285-300). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Flavell, J.H. (1993). Young children's understanding of thinking and consciousness. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 2, 40-43.

February 3 & 4 Theories of Mind Conference

February 8 Pretense

Astington Ch 4

Leslie, A.M. (1988). Some implications of pretense for mechanisms underlying the child's theory of mind. In J.W. Astington, P.L. Harris & D.R. Olson (Eds.). Developing theories of mind (pp. 19-46). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Harris, P.L., Kavanaugh, R.D., & Meredith, M.C. (1994). Young children's comprehension of pretend episodes: The integration of successive actions. Child Development, 65, 16-30.

Lillard, A.S. (1993). Young children's conceptualization of pretense: Action or mental representational state? Child Development, 64 372-386.

February 15 Infancy

Astington Ch 3

Moore, C. (1994). Theories of mind in infancy. (Unpublished manuscript, Dalhousie University).

Baldwin, D.A. & Moses, L.J. (1994). The ontogeny of social information-gathering. (Unpublished manuscript, University of Oregon).

Meltzoff, A.N. (1990). Foundations for developing a concept of self: The role of imitation in relating self to other and the value of social mirroring, social modeling, and self practice in infancy. In D. Cicchetti & M. Beeghly (Eds.), The self in transition (pp. 139-164). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

February 22 Autism

Astington Ch 9

Baron-Cohen, S. (1991). The theory of mind deficit in autism: How specific is it? British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 9, 301-314.

*Leslie, A.M. & Thaiss, L. (1994). Domain specificity in conceptual development: Neuropsychological evidence from autism. Cognition, 43, 225-251.

Hobson, P. (1993). Understanding persons: the role of affect. In S. Baron-Cohen, H. Tager-Flusberg & D.J. Cohen (Eds.). Understanding other minds: Perspectives from autism (pp. 204-227). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Review Mundy et al. article (February 1).

March 1 Other Species

Gallup, G.G., Jr. (1985). Do minds exist in species other than our own? Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews, 9, 631-641

Byrne, R.W. & Whiten, A. (1991). Computation and mindreading in primate tactical deception. In A. Whiten (Ed.). Natural theories of mind: Evolution, development and simulation of everyday mindreading (pp. 127-141). Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell

Review Povinelli article (February 1)

*Heyes, C.M. (1994). Anecdotes, training, trapping and triangulating: do animals attribute mental states? Animal Behaviour, 46, 177-188.

March 8 Explanations of Development

Astington Ch 10

*Harris, P.L. (1991). The work of the imagination. In A. Whiten (Ed.). Natural theories of mind (pp. 283-304). Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell.

*Gopnik, A. & Wellman, H.M. (1994). The theory theory. In L. Hirschfeld & S. Gelman (Eds.). Domain specificity in culture and cognition (pp. 257-293). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Review Gopnik article (February 1).