



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Experimental Child Psychology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jecp



Family expressiveness relates to happy emotion matching among 9-month-old infants

Marissa Ogren*, Joseph M. Burling, Scott P. Johnson

University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90095, USA



ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 21 December 2017

Revised 8 May 2018

Keywords:

Emotion matching
Family expressiveness
Emotional development
Eye tracking
Infancy
Intermodal matching

ABSTRACT

Perceiving and understanding the emotions of those around us is an imperative skill to develop early in life. An infant's family environment provides most of their emotional exemplars in early development. However, the relation between the early development of emotion perception and family expressiveness remains understudied. To investigate this potential link to early emotion perception development, we examined 38 infants at 9 months of age. We assessed infants' ability to match emotions across facial and vocal modalities using an intermodal matching paradigm for angry–neutral, happy–neutral, and sad–neutral pairings. We also attained family expressiveness information via parent report. Our results indicate a significant positive relation between emotion matching and family expressiveness specific to the happy–neutral condition. However, we found no evidence for emotion matching for the infants as a group in any of the three conditions. These results suggest that family expressiveness does relate to emotion matching for the earliest developing emotional category among 9-month-old infants and that emotion matching with multiple emotions at this age is a challenging task.

© 2018 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Emotion understanding, the ability to identify emotional expressions and reactions, enables individuals to make inferences about the feelings and behaviors of others, to react appropriately in social

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: mogren@ucla.edu (M. Ogren).

situations, and to maintain successful relationships. Prior research with children has revealed the importance of home environments in the development of early emotion understanding (Dunn, Brown, & Beardsall, 1991; Ontai & Thompson, 2002). Here, we examined the possibility that these experiences influence emotional development at younger ages, testing the hypothesis that infants who experience more emotionally expressive family environments will develop the necessary skills to perceive emotion earlier than infants from less expressive families.

Emotion understanding emerges early and promotes optimal social and intellectual development during childhood. By 2 years of age, for example, children can use the emotional signals of others to adjust their behavior toward objects in their environment (Walle, Reschke, Camras, & Campos, 2017). By 3 years, most children can label and identify basic emotions (Denham, 1986). Emotion understanding among preschoolers is positively related to classroom adjustment (Shields et al., 2001) and predicts kindergarten social competence (Denham et al., 2003), aggression (Denham et al., 2002), and academic success (Denham et al., 2012). In addition, individual differences in emotion understanding trajectories from 3 to 6 years of age are highly stable (Brown & Dunn, 1996) and remain stable from 7 to 11 years (Pons & Harris, 2005). These findings suggest that by the time children are in preschool, their level of emotion understanding already has strong implications for their later social, emotional, and academic development.

The importance of emotion understanding in preschool motivates investigations of its development among younger age groups, and prior research has begun to look at emotional development during infancy. However, measuring emotion understanding during infancy is challenging, because infants cannot verbally state what they do and do not know about various emotions. Infants also have limited motor skills, making it difficult to measure understanding of emotion via a physical task. Therefore, researchers must rely on experimental tasks to tap into emotion perception with infants (such as emotion discrimination and matching paradigms) to determine when they can discriminate or categorize emotional stimuli. Such methods assess emotion perception without making explicit how these skills are related to verbal responses of emotion understanding taken from older children. For instance, it is possible that infants match emotions in different modalities (as tested in the current study) from experience in seeing and hearing happy (or angry or sad) faces and voices together without understanding their “meaning.”

By 6 months of age, infants can discriminate between static images of various emotions such as happy versus angry or neutral (LaBabera, Izard, Vietze, & Parisi, 1976) and fear versus sadness (Schwartz, Izard, & Ansul, 1985). Four-month-olds can categorize emotions across synchronous audio-visual pairings, and categorization of vocal and facial emotional stimuli independently emerges at 5 and 7 months, respectively (Flom & Bahrick, 2007). Studies using the intermodal preference technique (Spelke, 1976) have indicated that 7-month-olds can match happy and sad emotions across face and voice even when the stimuli are asynchronous (Walker, 1982) and that 3.5-month-olds can match happy and sad faces and voices when the stimulus is the infant’s own mother (Kahana-Kalman & Walker-Andrews, 2001). Moreover, 5-month-olds are sensitive to changes in emotional tones of voice (Walker-Andrews & Grolnick, 1983), and 7-month-olds can match the emotion of a face and voice even when the bottom third of the face is occluded (Walker-Andrews, 1986).

Individual differences in emotion understanding are stable from 3 to 6 years of age (Brown & Dunn, 1996), and identifying variables that contribute to emotion perception in infants may offer important insights into how emotion perception and early emotion understanding develop—the question we examined in the current study. Studies of individual differences during infancy have found, for example, relations between infant sensitivity to smiling faces and the mother’s encouragement to look at her when she smiled (Kuchuk, Vibbert, & Bornstein, 1986). In addition, 5-month-old infants of depressed mothers are at a disadvantage in emotion discrimination, such that they fail to discriminate neutral and smiling faces in a habituation paradigm, whereas their age-matched peers succeed (Bornstein, Arterberry, Mash, & Manian, 2011). Much remains unknown about contributions to early emotion perception on an individual basis. Of notable interest is the potential influence of infants’ social environments, in particular family expressiveness, on individual differences in infants’ emotion perception.

Prior research has shown a relation between emotion understanding and family functioning among preschool-aged children (Nixon & Watson, 2001) as well as emotion understanding and family

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7273690>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7273690>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)