

Developing a Theory of Mind: An Interdisciplinary Perspective

Chi-Lin Yu

Humans are physically independent but psychologically connected. We constantly think about each other, and we frequently try to read our own and others' beliefs, desires, and intentions. From a young age, this social-cognitive inclination towards "mind reading" forms a foundational aspect of human cognitive development. For years, scholars have referred to this distinctive trait as theory of mind. Theory of mind is a progressive acquisition of childhood, raising the question: How do children develop theory of mind? In this talk, I will discuss how theory of mind is shaped by evidential experience, illustrate what evidential experiences contribute to theory-of-mind learning and development, and show how they do so. I will discuss several example studies encompassing diverse child populations, including children with varied cultural backgrounds, deaf and hard of hearing children, and bilingual children. These studies use meta-analyses, behavioral experiments, neuroimaging, and computational modeling, providing an interdisciplinary perspective on how behavioral and neural factors intertwine to shape typical and atypical theory-of-mind development. I will conclude by addressing how these studies deepen our knowledge of theory of mind by highlighting the emergence of universals and heterogeneity in its development.