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Authors

Casey, Katherine
Scott, Kimberly
Ashton, Kira
et al.

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Neonatal imitation of caregivers at home: A feasibility pilot

Katherine Casey

American University, Washington, District of Columbia, United States

Kimberly Scott

MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts, United States

Kira Ashton

American University, Washington, District of Columbia, United States

Jeff Gill

American University, Washington, District of Columbia, United States

Elizabeth Simpson

University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida, United States

Laurie Bayet

American University, Washington, District of Columbia, United States

Abstract

The practical relevance of neonatal imitation for social development has remained largely unaddressed as most studies have been conducted in highly controlled, laboratory conditions. Utilizing the Lookit online infant experiment platform, we aim to demonstrate the feasibility of measuring neonatal imitation of caregivers in the home environment. Our between-subjects design, adapted from Meltzoff and Moore (1983), focuses on two of the most commonly studied neonatal gestures, tongue protrusion and mouth opening. Caregivers and their newborn are videotaped as caregivers model either gesture to their newborn. Coders, who are blind to condition, record newborns gesture frequencies. To analyze these data, we ultimately plan to specify a Bayesian hierarchical log-linear model testing whether the frequency of each neonatal gesture increased when caregivers modeled that specific gesture. Pilot data collection and behavioral coding are currently underway and will focus on inter-rater reliability, attrition, and recruitment rates of online data collection for neonatal imitation.