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Humans start out altercentric: the ontogenetic development of other-centered cognition

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Abstract

A traditional view of understanding other's mental states is that early in ontogeny infants start from a me-first position, and through themselves learn to understand others. Here we propose an opposite developmental trajectory, where infants might start out highly altercentric (Southgate, 2020) and through development increasingly rely on their own point of view.

In a pre-registered cross-sectional study we present 1-6-year-old children with a task where altercentric modulation has been found with 14-month-old infants (Kamps & Kovács, 2020). There, infants tended to search longer in a box when another person believed an object to be present, than when she believed it was empty. We predicted this tendency to decrease with age. Preliminary results with $n=191$ children included based on their search in baseline trials, show a decrease in altercentric modulation with age ($r=-.174$, $p=.016$), which will be discussed together with the relationship between altercentrism and the development of self-concept.