

Using false belief task to explore the effect of empathy situation on Theory of Mind function

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Abstract: Theory of Mind (TOM) is an ability to simulate mental activities, attribute intention, and predict behaviors of others. According to Ickes's study (1990), there are strong correlation between empathy and TOM. However, whether they have any causal-effect relationship is still unclear. It is possible to differentiate the two processes from a developmental perspective since TOM ability develops later than empathy. This study aimed to study the influence of empathy on TOM processes. In the experiment (N=28), 4-year-olds children received a traditional false belief task first; and then after a week, they were divided into two different empathic situations: bullying condition and bully-victim condition. The study found a trend that the TOM score is lower in the bullying condition but higher in the bully-victim condition compared to the baseline condition despite of the insufficient subjects. It suggests that empathic states indeed impact TOM processing.