

EPFL-LATSIS Symposium 2009

Lausanne, Switzerland



understanding

February 11–13th 2009

VIOLENCE

Recent advances in biology, sociology and modeling

Program & Abstract Book

OAK FOUNDATION

the **cogito** foundation

 NOVARTIS

 MERCK
SERONO

 Roche

 FONDATION LATSIS
Internationale

 EPFL
ÉCOLE POLYTECHNIQUE
FÉDÉRALE DE LAUSANNE

P-20**IMPAIRMENTS IN NONVERBAL
EMOTION RECOGNITION AS A
RISK FACTOR FOR AGGRESSIVE
BEHAVIOR****Gomez, Jean-Marc¹; Van der Linden, Martial²***¹Swiss Center for Affective Sciences, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland; ²Department of Psychology, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland*

Background: As researchers have postulated and shown (Marsh & Blair, 2008), the perception of nonverbal affective cues may contribute in important ways to aggressive behavior in children. Indeed, misinterpretation of affective cues inevitably affects social interaction. This study examined the reliability of impairments in nonverbal emotion recognition in children with aggressive problems. Linguistic competence was also measured in order to determine its influence on facial emotional recognition. Method: 58 children (age range=7.5-13.8 years, M=11.4 years, SD=1.5), who attended special education in 13 classes in Geneva, participated in the study. The teachers assessed the aggressive behavior of their pupils with a questionnaire (French version of SDQ, d'Acremont & Van der Linden, 2008). Moreover, the children completed two standardized tests of nonverbal perception abilities (the first including emotional pictures, the second videos and auditory stimuli), as well as three control tests assessing the perception of faces and levels of syntax and vocabulary. Results: As predicted, children showing more pronounced prosocial behavior were better at recognizing emotions, especially fear and disgust. Children showing higher relational competence did particularly well at recognizing fear stimuli. Furthermore, children showing more prosocial behaviors were not only better, but also faster at recognizing facial and auditory emotional stimuli than were children with fewer empathic behaviors. We also observed a link between emotion perception and linguistic abilities. Conclusion: These results support the idea that deficits in emotion perception, which seem to be linked to linguistic competence, contribute to problematic behavior in children. More specifically, rapid information processing underlying the recognition of nonverbal emotional cues seems to be underdeveloped in children showing problematic social behavior. In conclusion, it is suggested that intervention programs specifically designed to boost the perception of affective cues may help resolve behavioral problems in aggression-prone children.