

# Mother-Infant Reciprocity and the Development of Joint Attention in 12-Month-Old Infants

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## Abstract Details

Social contingency is the ability to connect social stimuli, such as those behaviors performed by oneself and those performed by others. Detecting social contingencies occurs by means of reciprocity through shared experiences with others. Reciprocity denotes a circumstance in which two individuals participate in a collaborative exchange, and is distinguished from an event in which two individuals engage in separate, unrelated activities. Specifically, reciprocity incorporates joint attention (JA), which occurs when two individuals simultaneously and visually attend to the same item. JA is facilitated by gazing and pointing, whereby one individual initiates the action and the second individual follows suit by, for example, gaze-following. However, little is known about the role the mother may play in the development of JA. The purpose of our study was to investigate social contingency between mothers and infants engaging in dyadic interactions. Thirty-three 12-month-old typically developing infants ( $M = 12.2$ ,  $SD = .19$ ;  $N = 19$  males) were filmed for 10 minutes during free play with their mothers and toys provided by an experimenter. Reciprocity was measured by coding mother-infant interactions when a precise chain of events occurred: (1) mother initiated a bid by introducing a toy/activity or request to the infant, (2) infant accepted the bid/request by engaging in play with the given toy/activity, and (3) mother persisted by continuing to engage in play with said toy/activity. We computed a Pearson Correlation to assess the relation between the mothers' initiations of JA and their infants' responses to JA. We found a moderately positive correlation between the two variables ( $r = 0.37$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Our findings suggest that reciprocity, an important component of social relationships, during parent-infant dyads may serve as a scaffold for joint attention abilities, which have been linked to social and language development.

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