Knowledge of Other People and Oneself

• “naïve psychology”: Children’s common-sense level of understanding of people.

• Three psychological constructs are at the center of naïve psychology, the ideas that people commonly use to understand human behavior:
  – Desires
  – Beliefs
  – Actions.

What do infants know about people?

• **Intentions:** the goal or desire to act in a certain way.

• **Self:** recognizing themselves.

  (self video)
… beyond infancy?

• **Theory of mind** (2-5 years): the basic understanding of how the mind works and influences behavior.

• A theory of mind includes knowledge of:
  – Perceptions (see, hear, smell, touch, feel)
  – psychological states (emotions, desires, beliefs)
  – actions.

Wellman’s model of preschoolers

**Theory of Mind**

- Perception
  - see, hear, smell
  - touch, feel

- Belief
  - believe, suppose
  - know, expect
  - doubt, suspect

- Action
  - hit, grab
  - accept, get
  - search
  - attend to

- Reaction
  - happiness, sadness, anger
  - surprise, puzzlement

- Basic Emotions/Physiology
  - love, like, enjoy
  - hate, dislike, fear
  - hunger, thirst
  - pain, arousal

- Desire
  - want, desire
  - wish, hope
  - ought, should

understanding the connections between others’ desires and their actions.
Theory of Mind:
False Belief Problems

**False-belief problems** test children’s understanding that other people will act in accord with their own beliefs even if the child knows that those beliefs are incorrect. (Smarties video)

Some findings in false-belief problems:
- 3-year-olds fail, cross-culturally.
- 3-year-olds more likely to succeed if they collaborate with experimenter to deceive another child
- 4-year-olds succeed

Information Processing on Theory of Mind

- What processes and representations are necessary to solve the task?

- Theory of mind improves due to the growth of general information-processing skills essential to understanding other people's minds, such as keeping track of conflicting information.
Socio-cultural Theories on Theory of Mind

• Theory of mind comes from interactions with people.

• Children with older siblings do better in false-belief task.

Core Knowledge Theories

• Child as product of evolution.
  ▪ Focus on *innate knowledge* in areas that have been important to people through human history.
  ▪ Specialized learning mechanisms - For example, language acquisition device.
  ▪ *Children’s informal theories*: Children *actively* organize their understanding into informal theories related to important domains like psychology, biology, and physics.

▪ Change occurs through:
  - *Specialized learning mechanisms*
  - *Actively organizing experiences into theories*
Core Knowledge on Theory of Mind

• There is a **Theory of Mind Module** (TOMM), a brain mechanism devoted to understanding others which matures over the first five years of life.

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Children with Autism

• **Autism**: a syndrome that involves a variety of intellectual and emotional difficulties.
  – Rarely form close relationships.
  – Show greater interest in objects than people.
  – Engage in solitary repetitive behavior.
  – Lack normal language skills, specifically using verbs such as “know” or “think”
  – Most do not engage in pretend play

• Children with autism find tasks that test understanding of the knowledge of other people's minds particularly hard.
• Theories on the nature of autism?