Development of Social Cognition

Our behaviour is shaped by our cognitive processes and subject to **conservatism, superficiality and accessibility.**

Social Cognition is the study of how people process social information, especially its encoding, storage, retrieval and application to social situations. This is not only used by social psychologist but clinical researcher in autism for example, who examine how autistic children's social lives are impaired by their syndrome.

Egocentrism

Illusion of Transparency/Spotlight Effect (Gilovich et al. 1998)
We over estimate the visibility of our internal states. We think ourselves to be more readable than we actually are. Participants in the Gilovich study drew cards that said 'lie' or 'truth' on it. Participants then read the card out loud in front of an audience and rated how likely it was that others would guess they were lying. They guessed around 50% whereas only 25% knew they were lying. They also simulated a dinner-scenario in which guests concealed their disgust for a drink. Guests predicted that around 5 people would read their lies whereas only around 3.5 actually did.

Executive Control
This allows us to follow new rules and inhibits automatic and emotional reactions.

Fry et al (1996) measured children's ability to sort cards in to box's according to rules (Dimensional Change Card Sort). 4 year old is unable to inhibit rules that they first leant in favour of new rules (sort according to shape). Switching is mediated by the frontal lobes which fully develop in late adolescence.

Walter Mischel et al. (1972) (Stanford Marshmallow Experiment) in his seminal paper showed that **delay of gratification** (postponing immediately available gratification in order to get more valued outcomes) is another task mediated by the temporal lobes and difficult to control in 4 year old children. Children were told that if they could wait until the experimenter came back to the room, they could have two Marshmallows instead of one. He notes (1989) that in follow up studies, those better at postponing gratification at age 4 were deemed more academically and socially competent by their parents than their peers, suggesting that delayed gratification at age 4 is a predictor of academic and social success,

Theory of Mind
Being able to infer the full range of mental states (beliefs, emotions etc.) that cause action (Baron-Cohen). Synonymous to 'mind-reading' 'understanding other minds'. Learning theory of mind allows a child to predict actions, express false beliefs and reason other peoples behaviour. Often considered to be grasped at **AGE 4.**

Clues such as facial features, motion and causation should theoretically facilitate a child's understanding that other people have minds (similar to how the same processes facilitate language acquisition)

Intention: Heider & SImmel (1944) showed participants two films. The first was of three shapes moving with what appeared to be a predetermined trajectory, much like the old windows screen savers. In the second film, the shapes appeared to have a human like intentionality in which they moved sporadically towards and away from each other with what appeared like purpose. The researchers found qualitative differences in the descriptions of **autistic** children and normal children with regards to the intentions. Normal children would describe the movement

Gaze: Infants are sensitive to gaze contact from birth (Farroni et al., 2002). They develop expectations and responses to adult gaze.

Unexpected Transfer Test (Wimmer et al., 1983: Baron-Cohen et al., 1995) Doll puts an object in a box when another doll is absent and child is asked where the absent doll will look to find the object. 3 year old children (Wimmer) and autistic children (Baron-Cohen) will say where the object was moved to whereas 5 year old and normal children will say where the object was originally placed.

There are three theories of TOM development:
Theory Theory (Gopnik) argues that understanding of the mind comprises of an everyday framework about mental representations. Children arguably, first develop desires, then beliefs and at around 4 understand that other people have these.

Modularity Theory (Leslie) argues that children do not acquire an understanding of mental representations, but acquire **neurological maturation** of modular mechanisms responsible for dealing with agents versus nonagent objects.

Simulation Theory (Harris) argues that children are introspectively aware of other peoples mental states.

Gallagh et al. (2003) suggests that theory of mind is located in the **anterior paracingulate cortex** (behind the bend in the corpus calossum).