

The Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences
Dissertation Defense Announcement

CATALINA SUAREZ RIVERA

will defend:

JOINT ATTENTION IN INFANCY: DEFINITIONS, SENSORY-MOTOR BASIS AND
DEVELOPMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

on FRIDAY, MAY 31, 2019 at 11:00 A.m.
in PSYCHOLOGY, ROOM 128

Defense Summary

The ability to attend to the things that others attend to is indispensable for the smooth dynamics of everyday social interactions. Joint visual attention occurs when an individual looks to the same object looked to by another individual at the same time. By 9 months of age, infants can engage in joint attention with an adult both in trial-based experiments and in continuous naturalistic play. In fact, infants' early joint attention skills, measured in both contexts, are strong predictors of future developmental outcomes including language development and thus, the consensus assumption is that the infants' skills supporting joint attention in trial-based experiments and in free play are the same. Recent evidence suggests the different contexts for joint attention elicit the phenomenon differently and thus work is needed to fully understand the phenomenon across contexts and revise the theoretical claims linking joint attention to child development. The aims of the dissertation are 1) to understand how joint attention between infants and social partners is achieved across contexts, and whether individual differences in the contexts are related, and 2) to examine the developmental consequences of joint attention. Together, three studies show that coordinated visual attention occurring during continuous naturalistic parent-infant play supports the development of the infant's own control of their visual attention, but that measures of joint attention obtained during naturalistic play do not tap the same underlying processes measured in trial-based contexts for joint attention. I discuss implications of this work for the theoretical claims on joint attention and suggest likely pathways through which coordinated joint attention may support language learning, academic achievement and self-regulation. The results also demonstrate one instance of the larger problem in science occurring when researchers attempt but fail to translate clean and controlled findings in the laboratory to the complexity of realworld contexts.

Chair

Dr. Linda Smith

Committee Members

Dr. Chen Yu

Dr. Daniel P. Kennedy

Dr. John Kruschke

