New research on children's executive functioning and self-regulation has begun to reveal important connections to their developing social understanding (or “theories of mind”) and emotional competence. The exact nature of the relations between these aspects of children's social and emotional development is, however, far from being fully understood. Considerable disagreement has emerged, for instance, over the question of whether executive functioning facilitates social-emotional understanding, or vice versa. Recent studies linking the development of children's social understanding with aspects of their interpersonal relationships also raise concerns about the particular role that social interaction plays in the development of executive function. Three key questions currently drive this debate: Does social interaction play a role in the development of executive function or, more generally, self-regulation? If it does play a role, what forms of social interaction facilitate the development of executive function? Do different patterns of interpersonal experience differentially affect the development of self-regulation and social understanding? In this book, the contributors address these questions and explore other emerging theoretical and empirical links between self-regulation, social interaction, and children's psycho-social competence. It will be a valuable resource for student and professional researchers interested in executive function, emotion, and social development.
Correlations between an understanding of self and other in psychological terms, often referred to as “theory of mind,” and the control of action, often labeled “executive functions,” have been reported and debated. We suggest that claims about such relations rest on a prior assumption that these are two separate, coherent domains and children have stable, measurable abilities in these areas. Examining relevant research, however, indicates variability in a number of ways, suggesting that both social understanding and executive skills are substantiated and develop within the flow of interaction with people and objects. According to our alternative approach to social cognitive development, social understanding develops within social interaction as children learn to talk about situations of shared understanding. We suggest that executive function and social understanding may be interdependent and emerge through the same processes within social interaction.

Executive Function: Theoretical Concerns
Jack Martin and Laura Failows

Research on executive function faces a variety of theoretical issues and challenges. In this chapter, we begin with a survey of definitions, methods, and conceptions that currently resist integration and raise the specter of theoretical incoherence. We move on to tackle broader issues of psychologism, reductionism, and mechanism. We then conclude with a general suggestion that might provide an initial platform for theoretical advance in research on executive functioning. What we recommend is the development of theories of executive function (EF) that privilege descriptions of the functional activities of individuals.
in particular task environments and social contexts over premature postulations of generously, but imprecisely, endowed psychological and neurological explanatory mechanisms of dubious ontological status.

The Evolution of Human Sociocognitive Development
Victoria Wobber and Brian Hare

This chapter argues that the next frontier in developmental psychology will be to investigate comparative cognitive development with a particular focus on humans' closest living relatives, chimpanzees (Pan troglodytes) and bonobos (Pan paniscus). Pioneering comparative developmental studies have focused intensively on the development of a few chimpanzee individuals and for the first time have begun to map social cognitive development across multiple tasks in these individuals. The next step will be to extend this research by examining a wide range of physical and social cognitive skills in a larger sample. A broader comparative developmental approach will be particularly useful in identifying the cognitive components that are “missing” in other species' sociocognitive development that lead them to possess differing adult abilities from our own.

Theory of mind in children with cerebral palsy: The impact of limited expressive linguistic abilities
Annika Dahlgren Sandberg and SvenOlof Dahlgren

This chapter examines the effects of restricted conversation interaction on the theory of mind (ToM) of children with cerebral palsy. Research on typically developing children has found children to be competent early in life with an urge to interact and communicate. Development takes place in a complex interaction between, on the one hand, internal conditions, and biological and cognitive maturation, and, on the other hand, external factors, more specifically, the society and people around
the child. Communication can be described as a co-constructive act, where intentionality and understanding of the other's thoughts and intentions are important components for success. It is characterized by reciprocity and meaning. The chapter explores the consequences for performance on ToM tasks if full participation in this intricate interaction is hindered by physical impairment or difficulty in producing speech sounds. It reviews studies indicating a delay in children with cerebral palsy and communicative disabilities that parallels the performance of deaf children from hearing families. The chapter argues that it is important to provide children with cerebral palsy and communicative problems with appropriate and sufficient communication aids early to enhance social cognitive development.

**Food as a Unique Domain in Social Cognition**

Julie Lumeng

in *Navigating the Social World: What Infants, Children, and Other Species Can Teach Us*

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Item type: chapter

Children are naturally reluctant to sample new foods, a phenomenon that has been termed “food neophobia.” This chapter argues that food is a unique and important domain in which to study social cognitive development because while children evidence nuanced understanding of the reliability of others as models, they often seem not to apply these social cognitions when the stimulus is a food. Understanding this apparent paradox has the potential to inform the study of social cognitive development in general, while also having substantial practical implications related to the development of currently much-needed interventions to shape children's eating behavior and food selection.

**The Emergence of Perceptual Preferences for Social Signals of Emotion**

Jukka M. Leppänen and Charles A. Nelson III

in *Navigating the Social World: What Infants, Children, and Other Species Can Teach Us*

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This chapter reviews studies that have examined the early development of facial expression processing. It gives particular attention to findings that show a clear developmental shift at the turn of the second half of the first year in perceptual processing of facial expressions. Studies have shown that it is at this age when infants begin to discriminate facial expressions of emotion and start to exhibit a robust perceptual preference for some emotional expressions (especially facial expressions of fear). The chapter examines the mechanisms that might govern the appearance of this perceptual preference and discusses how future studies of the preference may shed light on the ontogenetic bases of typical and atypical social-cognitive development.

On the Uniqueness of Human Normative Attitudes
Marco F. H. Schmidt and Hannes Rakoczy

in The Normative Animal?: On the Anthropological Significance of Social, Moral, and Linguistic Norms
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Humans are normative beings through and through. This capacity for normativity lies at the core of uniquely human forms of understanding and regulating socio-cultural group life. Plausibly, therefore, the hominin lineage evolved specialized social-cognitive, motivational, and affective abilities that helped create, transmit, preserve, and amend shared social practices. In turn, these shared normative attitudes and practices shaped subsequent human phylogeny, constituted new forms of group life, and hence structured human ontogeny, too. An essential aspect of human ontogeny is therefore its reciprocal nature regarding normativity. This chapter reviews recent evidence from developmental psychology suggesting that, from early on, human children take a normative attitude toward others’ conduct in social interactions, and thus a collectivistic and impersonal perspective on norms. The chapter discusses to what extent humans’ closest living primate relatives lack normative attitudes and therefore live in a non-normative socio-causal world structured by individual preferences, power relationships, and regularities.