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Get in touch!

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We wanted to briefly update the article "Toddler Ramp Studies" from the Winter-Spring 2004 newsletter. In these studies, we have been interested in examining how 2-year-olds think about objects that have gone out of view. In all of the ramp studies, toddlers are presented with a car that rolls down a ramp. On each trial, a panel containing two doors is placed in front of the ramp, the car is released to roll down the ramp, and then the toddler is asked to locate the car by opening one of the two doors. The car can stop behind either door depending on where the experimenter places a bright green stop wall.

The conclusion from Studies 1-3 (see "Toddler Ramp Studies," Winter-Spring 2004



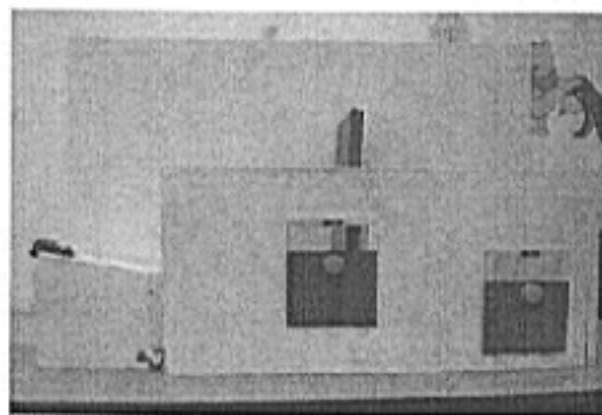
for more details) was that

toddlers are most successful at searching for an object (e.g. a car) that has gone out of view when they can see part of that object (e.g. its antenna) either through a door of the panel occluding the ramp or sticking out above the panel

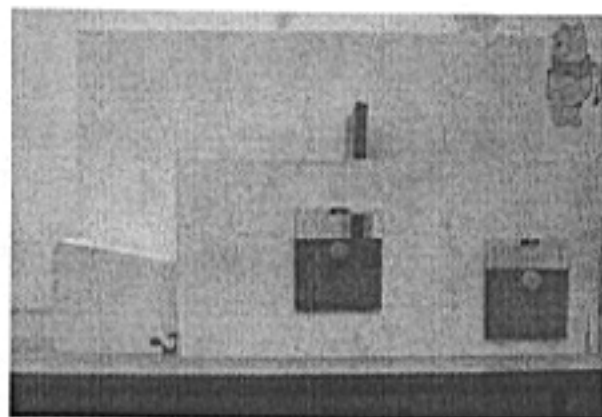
occluding the ramp. In a final study, Study 4, we asked what

would happen if toddlers could see the bright green stop wall (but not any part of the car) through the window in the panel door. Would this help them use the wall to locate the hidden object? Surprisingly, making this change had no effect on toddlers' performance on the task; they were unable to locate the car even though they could see the stop wall right through the door they needed to open. Thus our previous conclusion was given more support: toddlers

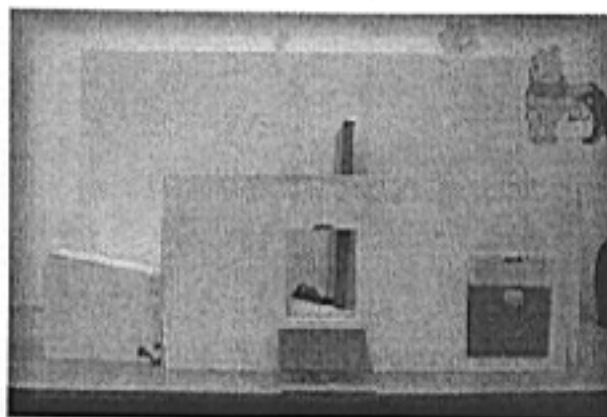
need to be able to see part of the object they must track in order to successfully locate it.



Toddler Ramp Studies



Kristin Shults, Graduate Student



These studies are looking at what kinds of information babies and toddlers can keep track of in a motion event. When your baby watches you move around the house, is he or she thinking, "Mom's going into the kitchen" (the goal of your motion) or instead thinking "Mom's walking" (the way you were moving)? We're interested in whether babies and toddlers can keep track of both of these kinds of information and if they have a preference for tracking one over the other.

For the babies who participated in this study, we showed them a short play in which toy bunny moved to one



In an ongoing follow-up study, we are looking to see which actions babies distinguish from each other to try to determine what makes an action more interesting than the goal of the event.

For the toddlers who participated in this study, we used small stuffed animals to act out a motion event, such as having a bunny hop into a bowl and having a frog swim across a board.



Actions vs. Goals

Laura Wagner, PhD

of two goal locations (either a yellow tub or a purple platform) using some characteristic action (hopping, scooting, or gliding). We timed how long the babies looked at the bunny while it was performing one motion event, and then we changed it so that the bunny went to a different goal. We were interested in whether the new goal would attract the babies' attention and cause them to look at the display longer. So far, we have found that 11-month-old babies do track goal information (that is, they notice when the bunny changes goal objects) but only so long as the action used to get there wasn't too interesting: when the bunny scoots along its bottom to the goal, babies don't seem to notice the goal change.

Then we gave the animals to the toddlers and asked them to imitate what we had done. This study is still ongoing, but so far, it looks like 16 - 18 month olds are able to act out both the action and the goal part of the event. However, they have difficulty combining those parts into a single event. Usually, they act out just one element of the event (just the action, or just the goal) and sometimes they even act them out in the reverse order (putting the animal on the goal and then removing it to show the action)! We are continuing to work on this imitation study, and we're especially interested in how learning verbs might influence toddlers' understanding of events.

