Early Interaction: New Approaches

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Abstract and Keywords

Early interaction is a dynamic, emotional process in which infants influence and are influenced by caregivers and peers. This chapter reviews new developments in behavior imaging—objective quantification of human action—and computational approaches to the study of early emotional interaction and development. Advances in the automated measurement and modeling of human emotional behavior—including objective measurement of facial expressions, machine-learning approaches to detecting interaction and emotion, and electrophysiological measurements of emotional signals—provide new insights into how interaction occurs. Furthermore, advances in automated measurement and modeling can be applied to the study of atypical development, contributing to our understanding of, for example, social affective behaviors in toddlers with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The chapter concludes by posing questions for future directions of the field of computational approaches to emotion.

Keywords: infants, machine learning, interaction, modeling, computational, electrophysiological, autism

Introduction

EARLY interaction between infants, parents, and other caregivers is an emotional process replete with bouts of both laughter and distress. These emotional expressions often develop in the context of intricate social interactions that may be the basis of patterns of emotional engagement throughout the life span (Messinger et al., 2010). However, our understanding of emotional expression has been hampered because human coding of emotional expression is time-intensive (Cohn & Kanade, 2007). A consequence of this measurement bottleneck is that more is known about infants' perception of emotional expressions than of their actual production of these expressions (Mitsven et al., 2020). To surmount these difficulties, this chapter reviews computational approaches to the measurement and modeling of emotional expression and interaction. Modeling here refers both to advanced inferential (statistical) methods, machine-learning approaches, and their increasingly common hybrids. Finally, we review recent work applying automated measurement of electrophysiological and behavioral indices of emotion to the characterization of autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Automated Measurement of Emotional Expression and Interaction

Advances in machine learning (in which software learns to represent and classify video or audio signals) offer the possibility of automated measurement of facial expressions, (p. 306) emotional vocalizations, and other expressive actions. Here, we review three primary approaches to automated measurement of emotion. In the first approach, objective measures of low-level behavior features, including the movement of facial landmarks and the proximity of infant and parent, serve as direct indices of emotional functioning. In the second, unsupervised algorithms detect emotional signals directly from audio or video data. Here, the software detects and represents the phenomena of interest—and the human investigator interprets the results. The third and most common approach involves using algorithms to replicate human coding.

Low-Level Tracking Methods

Tracking of Emotional Facial Expressions

One approach to measuring emotional expressions, such as facial expressions, involves automated tracking of the movement of facial landmarks and head position in 3D space from video (Jeni et al., 2017). In an illustrative project, 13-month-olds were exposed to a positive (bubbles) and a negative (toy removal) emotion-eliciting task. Facial features exhibited greater displacement, velocity, and acceleration in response to the negative than the positive task, and infant head position showed the same pattern (Hammal et al., 2019). Together, the movement of facial features and head movement accounted for one third of the variance in manual behavioral affect ratings within each of the two conditions (Hammal et al., 2015). Manual coding confirmed higher levels of smiles during positive tasks and higher levels of cry-faces (which encompass distress and anger expressions) during negative tasks (Hammal et al., 2018). The results suggest that low-level tracking of facial and head movement can distinguish negative (cry-face) versus positive (smiling) expressions.

Tracking Movement and Orientation

Low-level physical features of interaction have also been used to predict expert measurements of psychological constructs such as synchrony and mutual engagement. Leclère and colleagues (2016) combined 2D and 3D sensor data from 10 high-risk (referred for neglect) and 10 low-risk 1- to 3-year-olds and their mothers to examine mother–infant interactions during a pretend tea party. Kinect depth and video tracking indicated that higher levels of mother motion were associated with lower expert ratings of maternal sensitivity and intrusiveness, and higher ratings of infant avoidance. In addition, pauses in infant and parent joint movement were associated with higher ratings of maternal sensitivity and higher levels of infant engagement. The findings suggest that relatively low-level physical features such as mother–infant proximity and activity level are promising markers of caregiver sensitivity and intrusiveness and infant engagement, key indices of socioemotional development.

(p. 307) Unsupervised Machine Learning

A more radical approach to automated measurement involves direct unsupervised machine learning of emotional interaction from video or audio. Prabhakar and colleagues (2010), for example, directly detected parent–child playful interaction, characterized by quasi-periodic spatiotemporal patterns, from posted YouTube videos. Likewise, Chu and colleagues (2017) automatically detected affective synchrony in videos of parents and infants engaged in face-to-face interaction. Using shape features of infant and mother faces, an unsupervised algorithm detected a priori areas of common action in overlapping segments of video that corresponded to infant and mother smile displays (see Figure 21.1). This is a bottom–up validation of the importance of positive emotion communication in early interaction. These approaches suggest the, as yet, unrealized potential of unsupervised machine learning to identify new patterns of early emotional interaction.

Computational Approaches to Replicate Human Coding

The most common approach to objective measurement is supervised training to replicate human expert measurements. One target is replication of the Facial Action Coding System (FACS; Ekman & Friesen, 1992; Ekman et al., 2002)—applied to infants in BabyFACS (Oster, 2006)—an expert system for documenting anatomically based appearance changes based on facial Action Units (Lucey et al., 2007; Mahoor et al., 2008). We previously instantiated automated measurement of the presence and intensity of Action Units by using nonlinear manifold learning (Belkin & Niyogi, 2003) of data (p. 308) by combining active appearance and shape models to train support vector machines (SVMs; Messinger et al., 2012). This approach yielded insights into similarities between early positive and negative emotion expression, the structure of interactive positive affect, and early interaction dynamics.

Figure 21.1 Discovered Synchronies in Six Parent–Infant Dyads.

Strong smiles and mutual attention were among the synchronies discovered between parents and their 6-month-old infants.

Reproduced from Chu, W.–S., De la Torre, F., Cohn, J., & Messinger, D. S. (2017). A branch-and-bound framework for unsupervised common event discovery. *International Journal of Computer Vision*, *123*(3), 372–391, Figure 11. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11263-017-0989-7 Copyright © 2017, Springer Nature.

Positive and Negative Expression Similarities

Just as smiles are often used to index infant positive emotion, the cry-face is the preeminent infant expression of negative emotion. Importantly, both smiles and cry-face expressions can involve different degrees of mouth opening and Duchenne activation (i.e., eye constriction produced by the muscle orbiting the eyes). The Duchenne intensification hypothesis holds that Duchenne activation and mouth opening index the intensity of both smile and cry-face expressions (Bolzani–Dinehart et al., 2005; Darwin, 1872/1998). In support, both mouth opening and the Duchenne marker indexed greater perceived positive valence in smile expressions and greater perceived negative valence of cry-face expressions. Next, the intensification hypothesis was tested using the Face-to-Face/Still-Face (FFSF) protocol (Mattson, Cohn, et al., 2013; but see Mattson, Ekas, et al., 2013). In the FFSF, a naturalistic face-to-face interaction is interrupted when the parent is asked to hold a still-face and not engage with the infant, and ends when the parent is asked to play again with the infant (Adamson & Frick, 2003; Tronick et al., 1978). During face-to-face play, which is expected to elicit positive emotion, smiles were more likely to involve eye constriction than during the still-face, which elicits negative emotion (see Figure 21.2). As predicted, the proportion of cry-faces involving eye constriction during the negative emotion-eliciting still-face was higher than during face-to-face play (Messinger et al., 2012). The results suggest that automated measurement of facial Action Units such as eye constriction can produce insights into the structure of infant positive and negative emotion expression.

Interactive Positive Affect

Use of the active appearance models described above (Mattson, Cohn, et al., 2013) to measure the Action Units involved in infant and parent smiling produced insights into the expression of positive emotion and the dynamic structure of early interaction. Some propose that only adult Duchenne smiling expresses positive emotion, whereas smiles without the Duchenne marker do not (Ekman & Friesen, 1982), although they do have other important social functions (see Mireault, this volume). Objective measurement of the intensity of smiling and eye constriction in the face-to-face interactions of two dyads indicated that Duchenne smiling was not a discrete entity but a continuous signal (Messinger et al., 2009). Specifically, the intensity of smiling and eye constriction were highly correlated in both mothers and infants. In sum, neither infants nor mothers appeared to exhibit discrete Duchenne and non-Duchenne smiles during interaction (Messinger et al., 2008). Instead, all features of smiling covaried together, suggesting they indexed a continuum of positive emotion.

Interaction Dynamics

Messinger et al. (2009) went on to describe early caregiver–infant interaction using a continuous measure of Duchenne smiling intensity derived from objective measurement (p. 309) of facial Action Unit intensity. This dynamic portrait of positive emotion uncovered variability in interactive synchrony at multiple temporal levels (see Figure 21.3). In Figure 21.3, changes in the zero-order correlation of infant and mother Duchenne smiling intensity illustrate variability in emotional synchrony over time. These changes suggest disruptions and repairs of emotional synchrony (Schore, 1994; Tronick & Cohn, 1989). Findings of dynamic changes in emotional synchrony are intriguing because a large body of research suggests that the degree to which parents adjust their own affective expressions to match those of their infants is associated with subsequent self-control, the internalization of social norms, and attachment security (Beebe et al., 2010; Kochanska et al., 2005; Halberstadt et al., this volume).

Figure 21.2 Eye Constriction (the Duchenne Marker) Indexes Positive and Negative Affective Intensity in the Face-to-Face/Still-Face (FFSF).

Smiling during the face-to-face play with the parent involved a higher proportion of smiling with eye constriction than smiling during the still-face. The still-face involved a higher proportion of cry-faces with eye constriction than face-to-face play.

Adapted from Mattson, W. I., Cohn, J. F., Mahoor, M. H., Gangi, D. N., & Messinger, D. S. (2013). Darwin's Duchenne: Eye constriction during infant joy and distress. *PloS One, 8*(11), e80161, Figure 1. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0080161 © 2013 Mattson et al. Licensed under the CC-BY 4.0.

Coding Vocal Expressions

In the audio domain, the use of physical characteristics to index emotional components of vocal expression is common. Bourvis and colleagues (2018) employed automated measures of infant and mother vocalization during the FFSF. These were supplemented with detection of an emotional component of mothers' speech—infant-directed speech (e-IDS)—indexed by higher pitch and wider pitch range. Infants increased their rate of vocalizing between the face-to-face and reunion episode of the FFSF, but mothers (p. 310) exhibited few changes in vocalization parameters. In the reunion episode, likewise, infants increased their rate of response to mothers' e-IDS, rates of overlapping speech increased, and pauses in dyadic speech decreased. The results illustrate the potential of objective measures of the dyadic speech stream to disentangle patterns of emotional interaction following the still-face perturbation, a standard assessment of socioemotional functioning.

Figure 21.3 Automated Interaction: Correlations Between Infant and Mother Smiling Activity.

Above each segment of interaction is a plot of the windowed cross-correlations for successive 3-second segments of interaction. High positive correlations are deep red and high negative correlations are deep blue (see color bar at right). The horizontal midline of the plots indicates the zero-order correlation; lagged correlations are indicated above and below the midline.

Reproduced from Messinger, D. S., Mahoor, M. H., Chow, S.–M., & Cohn, J. F. (2009). Automated measurement of facial expression in infant–mother interaction: A pilot study. *Infancy, 14*(3), 285–305. https://doi.org/10.1080/15250000902839963 Copyright © 2009 International Society on Infant Studies.

Coding Attachment

Attachment security is central to early social and emotional development, and indexes an infant's ability to be comforted by a caregiver when distressed. Attachment security is typically assessed in the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP), which involves two brief separations from and reunions with the parent. However, attachment assessment is conventionally assessed using expert subjective ratings. Using relatively low-level, Kinect-based, depth-video measurements of position and LENA (Language ENvironment Analysis)-derived estimates of infant crying, Prince et al. (2015) explored objectively measured attachment behavior in the reunion episodes of the SSP. Objective (p. 311) measurements of the frequency with which the infant made contact with the mother, the duration of that contact, the duration of infant crying, and the inverse of the velocity of the infant's initial approach to the mother accounted for a substantial proportion of the variance in, respectively, expert ratings of proximity seeking (approaching mother), contact maintenance (staying close to mother), resistance (to contact with mother), and avoidance (ignoring or moving away from mother). These results suggest that measurement of physical proxemics and crying can provide insight into patterns of attachment previously captured exclusively via expert, but subjective, rating scales.

Chow and colleagues (2018) modeled "qualitative" changes in movement dynamics during the reunion episodes of the SSP by incorporating regime switching into a system of differential equations. Seeking a computational foundation for attachment theory, the researchers distinguished a proximity-seeking regime, in which infants tended to approach the parent, and an exploration regime, in which infants moved away from the parent to explore the room. As the infant attachment system became more activated in the second reunion, there was an increase in transitions to the proximity-seeking regime. These transitions were heightened in the presence of infant vocalizations (often cries), which functioned as signals of the infant's attachment needs. These results speak to an emerging capacity of researchers to computationally capture objectively measured infant- and dyad-specific emotional dynamics on a moment-to-moment basis to illuminate long-standing theories of early social motivation.

Modeling Approaches to Emotional Expression and Interaction

Computational approaches to the study of early emotion involve more than the use of machine-learning algorithms to detect and measure expressive signals. Researchers are using increasingly sophisticated models to characterize when and why emotional signals are used during interaction, and to describe the development of those emotional interactions (for an advanced approach, see Rudrauf et al., this volume). Here, we review research on the development of dyadic responses to infant distress, modeling of the predictability of smiling interactions, and the application of a novel framework for inferring infant goals during emotion-laden interactions.

Modeling Face-to-Face Interactions

Chow et al. (2010) applied computational and statistical modeling approaches to understanding changes in infant and parent affective valence as they unfold in the FFSF. Specifically, a bivariate autoregressive model indicated the presence of both infant-to-parent and parent-to-infant interactive influence. Although each partner was (p. 312) responsive to the other, parents were more responsive to their infants than infants were to their parents. A stochastic regression approach applied within a multidyad time series revealed changes in interactive influence over time that were accentuated in the reunion episode following the still-face. The results point to the importance of quantifying change over time to characterize how dyads respond to one another emotionally (Chow et al., 2014).

Goals of Face-to-Face interactions

Recently, our team used inverse optimal reinforcement modeling to infer likely infant and mother goals during their interactions (Ruvolo et al., 2015). Probable consequences of beginning and ending smiles on the durations of subsequent dyadic states such as mutual smiling were used to infer goals. Results of this modeling approach suggest that mothers' likely goal is to increase the duration of mutual smiling (see Figure 21.4). However, infants' likely goal is to increase the duration of epochs when mother is smiling but the infant is not. To achieve this goal, infants briefly smile until the mother smiles, and then they end their own smile. These results are surprising as they suggest infants do not act to increase the time they express positive emotion. Instead, infants smile as part of a dyadic process in which they create and then disengage from moments of mutual positive emotion expression (Stifter & Moyer, 1991).

(p. 313)

Figure 21.4 Means of the Probability Distributions of Potential Mother and Infant Goals.

Error bars are 95% confidence intervals of the mean.

Reproduced from Ruvolo, P., Messinger, D., & Movellan, J. (2015). Infants time their smiles to make their moms smile. *PloS One*, 10(9), e0136492, Figure 1. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0136492 Copyright © 2015 Ruvolo et al. Licensed under CC BY 4.0.

Development Changes in Face-to-Face Interactions

We examined the predictability of infants initiating or ending a smile within particular face-to-face interactive contexts observed weekly from 1 to 6 months of age (Messinger et al., 2010). The mean, variance, and overall distribution of mutual smiling states became more similar over consecutive weekly sessions with age, such that individual dyads' states of mutual positive affect became more predictable—to each partner, as well as to an outside observer—with development. Infants and mothers also increased the number of alternating turns in turn-taking interactions involving initiating and terminating smiles, suggesting that infants and mothers became more emotionally responsive to one another with age (Messinger et al., 2010). These findings suggest that repeated infant–parent interactions produce stable dyadic differences in emotional expressivity.

Developmental Consequences of Face-to-Face Interactions

Ekas and colleagues (2013) examined continuous trends in manually coded infant expressivity over the course of the still-face using multilevel models (see Figure 21.5). Group effects indicated logarithmic decreases in infant gazing at the parent and smiling, and increases in infant cry-face expressions. At the level of individual trajectories, infant-gaze (but not smiling) trajectories were associated with later attachment security in a theoretically meaningful fashion (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Infants with later insecure-avoidant attachment exhibited the steepest drop in gazing at the parent (disengagement with the attachment figure); infants with later insecure-resistant attachment exhibited the least drop in gazing (they remained engaged with the parent despite their unavailability); and securely attached infants exhibited a moderate slope of disengagement. The results suggest that dynamic modeling of changes in engagement over time during the negative emotion-eliciting still-face may be associated with later patterns of socioemotional security.

Modeling Naturally Occurring Elicitors of Emotional Interactions

Researchers have combined computational modeling (e.g., Hidden Markov Models, or HMMs) and statistical (e.g., cluster analysis) approaches to understanding infant–mother interaction in natural contexts—in this case, dyadic responses to childhood inoculations (Backer et al., 2018; Stifter & Rovine, 2015). Studies investigating interactive processes involved in the downregulation of infant distress following immunization have traditionally relied on correlational or contingency analyses to understand the effectiveness of maternal soothing behaviors on infant distress. However, such approaches are unable to capture the influence of multiple simultaneous soothing behaviors that occur in response to infant distress. HMMs indicated that infants utilized more complex responses to aversive stimuli and became more organized and efficient in their soothing behaviors with age (Stifter & Rovine, 2015). Cluster analyses indicated that the fit between infants' capacity to be soothed (indexed by temperamental factors) (p. 314) and appropriate and responsive changes in maternal soothing behaviors over time determined infant soothability. These findings suggest the potential of an integrative approach to modeling the reciprocal interplay of emotional communication between parent and child over time (Backer et al., 2018).

Figure 21.5 Observed and Predicted Mean Frequencies of Gazes at Parent, Smiles, Positive Social Bids, and Cry-Face Expressions Over Time in the Still-Face Episode.

Frequencies refer to the number of frames per second (maximum 30) in which a particular behavior occurred. Social bids were defined as smiles in the presence of gazing at the parent. Predicted refers to the expected frequency based on a hierarchical linear model containing an intercept and a linear term indexing behavior change proportional to log10 transformation of the number of seconds elapsed. Although the model only contains linear terms, the log transformation allows for curvilinear change over seconds.

Reproduced from Ekas, N. V., Haltigan, J. D., & Messinger, D. S. (2013). The dynamic still-face effect: Do infants decrease bidding over time when parents are not responsive?' *Developmental Psychology*, *49*(6), 1027–1035. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029330 Copyright © 2013, American Psychological Association.

Modeling Emotional Vocalizations

Infant cries are a central focus of automated measurement research on emotional components of the vocal signal. Infant crying is a universal distress signal that becomes a more heterogenous negative emotion expression over the first year (Gustafson & Green, 1991). The commercially available LENA technology employs Gaussian mixture models to detect adult speech, infant speech, and emotion-laden nonspeech vocalizations (which tend to be cries, and are referred to as such here).

Temporal and Interactive Dynamics of Crying

In day-long home recordings, Fields–Olivieri and Cole (2019) found that mothers were less likely to respond to toddlers' cries than toddlers' word-like vocalizations. However, when mothers did respond to toddlers' cries, the toddlers were more likely to subsequently produce speech-like vocalizations rather than additional cries (Fields–Olivieri & Cole, 2019). With respect to temporal structure, Abney and colleagues (2017) found that home-recorded cries in the first year exhibited a higher degree of clustering in time (p. 315) (temporal heterogeneity) than speech-like vocalizations. Likewise, among 1- to 2-year-olds in an early intervention preschool classroom, we found that vocal expressions of negative affect perpetuated themselves in time (the duration of one cry predicted the duration of the next) and cries tended to occur in clusters over the day (burstiness; Messinger et al., 2019). Together, these results highlight the power of objective measurement of cries to shed light on the temporal structure of negative affect and the dynamics of early communication using day-long samples of naturally occurring behavior.

Automated Measurement and Modeling to Understand Atypical Development

Researchers have begun using automated measurement, including electrophysiological approaches, to measure individual differences in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). ASD is a pervasive disorder of social communication that impacts both nonverbal and verbal interaction (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; see Conner et al., this volume). We begin by describing electrophysiological measurement of arousal and then review its application to ASD. We then review work using machine learning of behavior to index ASD symptoms during diagnostic assessments.

Tracking Arousal

Physiological indices of arousal are a key index of emotional dynamics. Electrodermal activity (EDA) measured by skin conductance, for example, can index sympathetic nervous system (SNS) arousal, providing a physiologic indicator of children's emotional responses and regulation (Benedek & Kaernbach, 2010; Chow et al., 2010; Rogers & Ozonoff, 2005). Measurement of EDA captures the SNS "fight or flight" response and considers both the slow-changing levels of arousal (tonic EDA) and immediate responses to the environment (phasic EDA; Fowles, 2007). Phasic changes in EDA are the result of fluctuations in eccrine sweat function in response to sympathetic activation (Fowles, 2007). EDA is widely used as an indicator of emotional arousal (Bouscein, 2012). In neonates, noxious stimuli—including a heel-prick procedure (Harrison et al., 2006) and high sound levels (Salavitabar et al., 2010)—have been tied to sharp, sustained increases in EDA. By contrast, cessation of nursing is associated with a reduction in EDA below baseline levels (Harrison et al., 2006).

Electrodermal Activity in Children With ASD

Recent technological developments have enabled ambulatory measurement of EDA via wearable wrist sensors approximately the size and appearance of a watch (Poh (p. 316) et al., 2010, 2012). These ambulatory measurements provide a unique understanding of individual differences in response to environmental stimuli and interactions. In a sample of children with ASD (4–10 years), the concordance of ambulatory measures of parent and child EDA during a free-play period was lower in dyads in which the child had higher autism symptoms (Baker et al., 2015). Over developmental time, it is possible that autism-related social impairment interrupts the development of synchronous interactions between child and parent. Toddlers with ASD, with higher restricted and repetitive behavior scores on the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule or ADOS-2 (Lord et al., 2012)—the gold-standard, play-based assessment of ASD—have greater increases in skin conductance level (SCL) in response to mechanical toys as opposed to passive toys (Prince et al., 2017). This lends credence to the idea that children with higher autism symptoms are differentially reactive to specific stimuli in the immediate environment in a way that may preclude concordance with the parent. In both children with typical development and children with ASD, low EDA appears to be a risk factor for externalizing behavior problems in the context of harsh or low-quality parenting (Baker et al., 2017; El–Sheikh & Erath, 2011). Strikingly, instances of severe physical aggression for inpatient, minimally verbal, school-age children with ASD can be predicted one minute ahead based on ambulatory monitoring of sympathetic (EDA) and parasympathetic (cardiac) arousal (Goodwin et al., 2018). The ambulatory measurement of arousal is a promising tool for understanding individual differences in how children with and without ASD interface with their social and physical environments.

Measuring ASD Symptoms With Machine Learning

During the ADOS-2 assessment of ASD, a trained clinical examiner assesses autism symptoms. We were interested in predicting ADOS-2 social-affect symptoms, which index deficits in the quantity and quality of vocal initiations, gesturing, and facial expressions including smiles, as well as unusual eye contact. Processing video with the Affdex system (Stockli et al., 2018), objective measurements of social smiling to the examiner and parent from video were inversely associated with ADOS social-affect symptoms (Ahn et al., 2019; Moffitt et al., 2019). LENA measures of adult–child turn-taking during the ADOS were also moderately associated with social-affect symptoms such that higher turn-taking was associated with lower symptom levels. We next used deep learning to directly predict social-affect symptoms from the ADOS-2 audio stream (Sadiq et al., 2019). Deep-learning algorithms take raw data as input and represent features of these data in sequential layers whose output can be a classification (Bishop, 2006; LeCun et al., 2015) of audio or video signals (Lavner et al., 2016). We combined neural networks with recurrence and memory features to leverage temporal sequencing with a Synthetic Random Forest—a nonlinear algorithm in which the sequential interplay of input features correspond to the branches of virtual trees—to predict outcomes (Lu et al., 2018). This deep-learning approach predicted social-affect severity scores (p. 317) more effectively than the pretrained LENA algorithm (Sadiq et al., 2019). Together, the results highlight the potential of different forms of machine learning to directly estimate emotional symptoms in children being assessed for ASD (Hashemi et al., 2012).

Conclusions

Infants' early interaction and emotional expressions set the stage for emotional functioning throughout the life span. Objective measurement of behavior and computational modeling are providing insights into how infants express emotion, and how emotional interactions unfold in real time and over development. Applications of these approaches to children with ASD suggest the potential utility of objective measurement of the emotional component of autism symptoms, and the role of psychophysiological measurements of arousal in understanding individual differences in children with ASD.

Future Directions

Objective measurement of children's emotional behavior by means of deep learning is in its infancy. The synthesis of multimodal emotional parameters (e.g., facial, vocal, movement) remains an important goal, as does the integration of these objective measurements with psychophysiological indices of constructs such as arousal. Likewise, the ability of automated measurement to facilitate studies of children's emotional functioning over substantial periods of time and multiple contexts (e.g., home, preschool, clinic) endures as a goal, as does the objective study of children's emotional interactions with peers as well as parents. Finally, computational modeling of emotional interaction is increasing in its ability to understand moment-to-moment changes in affective states. However, modeling of objective measurement to better understand emotional development remains aspirational.

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