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Authors

Chen, Yiwei

Enns, Robyn

Nicoladis, Elena

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Do gestures serve an interpersonal function?

Yiwei Chen

University of Alberta

Robyn Enns

University of Alberta

Elena Nicoladis

University of Alberta

Abstract: Some researchers argue that gestures serve an interpersonal function, such as making the intended message clear (e.g., Gallagher & Frith, 2003; cf. Kita, 2000). In this study, we tested whether gestures serve an interpersonal function, specifically predicting that the higher participants' autism spectrum quotient, the less frequently they would gesture. Participants completed the Autism Spectrum Quotient questionnaire (Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Skinner, Martin, & Clubley, 2001). To elicit gestures, participants did two tasks. In one, they explained spatial and social concepts. In another, they told the story of a cartoon. The dependent variable is the gesture rate (gestures per word), to account for individual differences in volubility. Participants completed a standardized vocabulary test. The initial results show no correlation between gesture rate in either task and ASQ scores. There is a negative correlation between ASQ and vocabulary scores. These results are inconsistent with the argument that gestures serve an important interpersonal function.