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Doctoral Researcher

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About

I am a PhD student at the Cerebra Centre for Neurodevelopmental Disorders.

Qualifications

Psychology BSc

Clinical Psychology MRes

Biography

I completed my degree at Lancaster University in 2009 before moving to the University of Birmingham to complete an MRes in Clinical Psychology. As part of my masters I spent 9 months on placement in the Cerebra Centre, testing executive function and social cognition in typically developing children. I started a PhD in 2010 investigating the behavioural phenotype of Angelman syndrome.

Research

My current research is focused on behavioural characteristics in individuals with Angelman syndrome (AS).

Some individuals with AS are thought to have specific sensory, play and social preferences including a fascination with water (Didden et al., 2006) and high rates of laughing and smiling in the presence of adult attention (Horsler & Oliver, 2006). Individuals with AS also have an increased likelihood of having difficulties maintaining attention (Walz & Benson, 2002). Consequently, individuals may find learning new adaptive behaviours difficult or challenging. There is a strong rationale for the use of specific social and sensory preferences as effective reinforcers to help teach new adaptive behaviours.

Current project

The current project aims to investigate reinforcement in Angelman syndrome. This research will be run in three experimental phases. In the first phase of the research, we will explore specific sensory and play preferences in Angelman syndrome using both questionnaires and direct observations. From this, we hope to be able to design toys and activities that incorporate children's specific preferences. In the second phase of the research we aim to test the effectiveness of the toys/activities as reinforcers to teach new behaviours. In the final phase of the research we aim to investigate the effectiveness of social interaction as a reinforcer. It is hoped that identifying and developing effective reinforcers will not only help children with AS acquire new and adaptive behaviours but will also inform future behavioural intervention programmes.

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