The Emergence of Early Visual Attention Profiles in Infants at High Risk for Autism Spectrum Disorder

This dissertation is comprised of two manuscripts focused on early visual social and nonsocial attention in children at-risk for developing autism spectrum disorder (ASD): infants with fragile X syndrome (FXS) and infants with an older sibling diagnosed with autism (ASIBs). Each manuscript will present original research: the first will consist of a cross-sectional and longitudinal examination of attention to objects in infants with FXS and infant ASIBs in comparison to a group of typically developing infants (TD) and how developmental trajectories of object attention predict later ASD symptom severity. The second will extend this line of research by examining cross-sectional and longitudinal trajectories of social and nonsocial attention in these at-risk groups as compared to TD infants as well as how these trajectories impact later ASD symptom severity. These manuscripts will address the extent to which early visual social and nonsocial attention impairments differentiate at-risk groups for ASD prior to the age of diagnosis and how trajectories of social and nonsocial attention are linked to ASD outcomes. The results of these studies have implications for informing early diagnosis efforts, identifying early behavioral phenotypes, and in the development of syndrome specific interventions.