

# Reaping the best of both worlds: the body-in-motion meets cultural cognition

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## Abstract

Although embodiment has become a crucial concept in many areas of cognitive science in recent years, the term obviously still means different things to different people. Several authors have lately tried to clarify different notions, aspects, and levels of embodiment that can be found in the cognitive science literature. The lack of agreement, however, has resulted in some oversimplifications of the role of the body in cognition. On the one hand, much focus has been on different kinds of physical realization of the ‘static’ body, despite the fact that research in anthropology has shown the relevance of locomotor experience for human cognition. On the other hand, a lot of attention has been directed on the relation between the individual body and individual processes, but it is well-known that embodiment is of importance also in social interactions. We stress that the “*body-in-motion*” is of crucial relevance for human social interaction. Around the age of nine months, children begin to participate in social discourse developing various kinds of “joint attention behaviors”, which characterizes the ability to “identify” with others and understand them as *intentional agents* – the so-called “nine-month revolution”. Why does this revolution occur at that age? Our conjecture is that self-produced locomotion behavior is a crucial factor for the emergence of the social understanding of the self. When the child begins to crawl and creep voluntarily, which usually also occurs at the age of 9 months, the *interaction* between the child and the physical and social environment is changed radically, since the child receives social signals that have a distal referent, making it possible for the child to grasp that others also have intentions. The point I want to make is that the onset of self-produced locomotion and the “nine-month revolution” coincide in time. I suggest that this is in fact no coincidence at all, since the sensorimotor and social dynamics of bodily experience function as a crucial driving force in cognitive development.