

THE SOCIAL COGNITION CHRONICLE

GREETINGS FROM THE SOCIAL COGNITION LAB!

The Social Cognition Lab, part of Peabody College at Vanderbilt University, is directed by Dr. Jonathan Lane. Our lab has been studying the development of children's social cognition for over four years now! Social cognition involves how we understand and interact with other people, including how we learn from others. Our work this past year has examined children's understanding of new social groups, children's understanding of people with disabilities, and how children work with adults to decide which types of books to learn from.

In this, our third newsletter, we reflect on our research from the past year and extend our gratitude to the parents and educators who have helped us to do our work. Read on to learn more!

On behalf of Dr. Lane and
all the Research Assistants
at the Social Cognition Lab:



We greatly appreciate the help of all of
the children, parents, schools, and
teachers who have participated in our
studies! We couldn't do this work
without you!

WELCOME TO OUR NEW DOCTORAL AND MASTER'S STUDENTS!



We are excited that Nicolette Granata, who completed her undergraduate honors thesis under the guidance of Dr. Lane, is back in our lab after a fun summer hiking with alpacas in Ireland! Starting this fall, she is working in our lab towards a PhD in Psychological Sciences with a concentration in developmental psychology. You can read more about her study, *Children's Concepts of Disabilities*, on page 3.

Alex Ford joined the lab this semester as a master's student in the Child Studies program. She studied middle school education at UNC-Chapel Hill and then taught English for two years in South Korea. She's interested in children's civic engagement and moral development, and she has been enjoying learning how everything works in the Social Cognition Lab!



WHAT DO CHILDREN THINK ABOUT INVISIBLE ENTITIES?

Teachers and parents often tell children about invisible entities (like oxygen, germs, or God) that are thought to play major roles in their lives. We have been researching how children begin to understand that invisible entities can cause events that they observe. In previous work, we found that children as young as 3 years of age can determine that a new invisible entity must be the cause of an (otherwise unexplainable) event. We also found that, by roughly 4 years of age,

children can use that knowledge to manipulate that invisible entity and *produce* the outcome themselves! Our most recent studies have explored children's assumptions about invisible entities' properties, such as their ability to float (like helium) or pass through solid objects (like Wi-Fi signals). Our final study on this topic just concluded this year, and we're starting to analyze the data. We look forward to sharing what we find!

HOW DO CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT NEW SOCIAL GROUPS?



Our research on how children learn about new social groups recently led to a publication in the journal *Child Development*!

Emily Conder, a PhD candidate in the lab, is continuing to study how children learn about different groups of people, and how other people's messages influence children's attitudes toward the groups. She just completed a large study investigating how children's attitudes are influenced by brief, negative messages they overhear from other children or adults about a fictional group of people. The results indicate that children can quickly develop negative attitudes towards new groups, regardless of whether they hear the negative messages from adults or other children. And

these effects lasted two weeks after children heard the messages!

In the upcoming months, Emily will start a new study, on children's attitudes toward new groups of people after they overhear *positive* messages about the groups. We're interested in whether the results of this study will mirror those of the last study, with children feeling more positively about the group after hearing the messages. We hope that results from this study will eventually be used by adults to help children develop positive attitudes about new groups of people.



WHAT DO CHILDREN THINK ABOUT OTHER CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES?

Over the course of the 2018/2019 academic year, two honors students from the Social Cognition Lab, Nicolette Granata and Megan Wiebe, worked with Dr. Lane to complete two experiments exploring how children understand other children with disabilities. Children were given different scenarios about characters who either had perceptual disabilities, physical disabilities, or no disabilities. Children were asked about each character's knowledge, trustworthiness, and

behavior. We have found that children as young as 4 years are equally good at correctly attributing knowledge to people, whether or not those people have disabilities. Other results suggest that by 5 years, children begin to evaluate characters with disabilities (versus characters without disabilities) as "less naughty" if they behave in ways that conflict with social or moral norms. Nicolette is currently planning the next version of this study, which we'll start to run in the winter of 2019!

LOOKING FORWARD...



We are currently running a new study, *Information Seeking!* In this study, we measure how children make decisions about the types of books they want to learn from. We show children a series of books about different types of animals and let children choose which of the books they'll read with the researcher. With all these new studies in the works, the Social Cognition lab will certainly keep busy this year!

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