

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. As of 2021, we've been running for 6 years! *Social cognition* refers to how children and adults understand other people and how they learn from one another. Our work this past year and a half has looked different than in years past, as we have started to conduct studies with children online. We've been studying a range of topics, including how children learn about new social groups, children's concepts of people with disabilities, and how children seek information in books. In this newsletter, we reflect on our research from the past year and a half, 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 everyone at the Social Cognition Lab:



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

Learning Facts from Books

We recently completed a study conducted in-person and online (on Zoom) to explore children's curiosity, as seen in how they decide which books they would like to have read to them. For each of 12 real but unusual animals (for example, olms), children were shown a pair of books with identical covers. One book was described as including a fact consistent with children's intuitions (for example, "This book is about how olms can live their whole lives underwater"; a novel but intuitive fact); the other book was described as including a fact counter to children's intuitions (for example, "This book is about how olms can live 10 years without food"; an idea children often find counterintuitive). For each pair of books, children were asked which book they would like the researcher to read to them. These methods will allow us to identify whether children's decision to interact with certain books is driven more by curiosity (choosing books with counterintuitive content) or by a confirmation bias (choosing books with intuitive content).



HOW DO CHILDREN AND ADULTS CONCEPTUALIZE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?

We've been working on two exciting studies exploring people's concepts of persons with disabilities. The first study was conducted with adults, through an online survey. Participants (without disabilities) read about people with certain disabilities, and were asked to surmise how much that disability influences other characteristics of those persons, including their capacities and their personality. Results from this study can help us better understand how people tend to interpret disabilities, and may inform social efforts designed to benefit disabled communities.

The second study explores how fair children (without disabilities) judge common accommodations given in school to children with disabilities. For example, children might be asked if it is fair or unfair to give a child with a learning disability extra time to take a test. We'll begin data collection for this study in the Fall!

HOW DO CHILDREN LEARN ABOUT NEW SOCIAL GROUPS?

Children's drawings of new social groups



In a recent study (Conder & Lane, 2021), we found that children can form negative opinions about new social groups by overhearing other people make mean comments about the group during a video-chat conversation. After hearing mean comments, children less often wanted to be friends with a person from the new group and less often wanted to try their food or attend one of their parties. We're now further analyzing data from this study, by examining how children *drew* people from the new group.

Children were asked to draw a picture of themselves and a member of the group on the same sheet of paper. Using these drawings, we can evaluate which colors children used to draw a person from the new group, how they drew their facial expressions, and the size of the drawings.

Overhearing Zoom conversations about new social groups

For one of our new studies, we're calling families on Zoom so that they can participate from the comfort of their homes! In this study, we're investigating children's *attention* (for example, the time they spend looking) toward a scripted conversation between their parent and researcher about a new social group. We anticipate that the results from this study will help us come closer to understanding how children learn about and form attitudes toward new social groups.



HOW DO ADULTS PERCEIVE POLITICAL CANDIDATES?

We're developing a study exploring how the professional backgrounds of political candidates—their jobs and their wealth—impact people's perceptions of them. One of our main questions in this study is whether the previous industry of a candidate affects how people perceive them—so, if a candidate used to work as an actor or as a lawyer before entering politics, how does that job experience affect people's perceptions of the candidate? We also want to explore whether a candidate's level of wealth affects how potential voters evaluate them. A third question is whether a candidate who inherited their parents' wealth is evaluated differently than a candidate who earned their own wealth. The study will be conducted with adult participants, online.

MEET OUR DOCTORAL AND MASTERS STUDENTS!



Emily Conder has been part of our lab since the very beginning. She was our first lab manager, and in 2016 she began pursuing her PhD in our department's Developmental Science program! Emily's research is focused on how children learn about groups of people. She successfully defended her dissertation in the Summer of 2021, and will soon be Dr. Conder! You can read more about her work on page 2.



Nicolette Granata worked in the lab as an undergraduate and completed her undergraduate honors thesis alongside Dr. Lane. In 2019, Nicolette began working toward her PhD in Psychological Sciences with a concentration in Developmental Science. You can read more about her studies on persons' concepts of disabilities, on page 2.



Alex Ford joined the lab in 2019, as a Master's student in the Child Studies Program. She is interested in civic engagement and moral development. On page 3, you can read about her plans to study people's concepts of political candidates. Alex completed her Master's degree in the Spring of 2021!

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