

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 2022, we've been running for 7 years! *Social cognition* refers to how people think about one another and learn from one another. We've been studying a range of topics, including studies of how children and adults detect biased behavior in others, and children's concepts of people with disabilities. In addition to conducting our work with children and families in-person, over the past few years we have increasingly incorporated children and families who join us for studies online. In this newsletter, we reflect on our research over the past year, highlight upcoming studies, and extend our gratitude to the parents and educators who have helped us to do our work. We also highlight our lab's involvement in recruitment efforts with Vanderbilt's Child Studies Group!

On behalf of Dr. Lane and everyone at the Social Cognition Lab:



We are so grateful to the children, parents, schools, and teachers who have participated in our studies! We couldn't do it without you!

DO CHILDREN DETECT BIASED BEHAVIOR?

Biases—thought patterns that irrationally influence what and whom we like and dislike—pervade human cognition, and biases are held by children and adults. By 8-years of age, children may appreciate that people hold social biases (e.g., about racial or ethnic groups) and that those biases may be inconsistent with objective reality. In a study that we recently launched, we are examining how the ability to detect others' social biases develops. Children ages 4- to 10-years watch scenarios in which a protagonist routinely mistreats people of a specific social group, and kindly interacts with folks from another group. Children observe and reason about the protagonist's behavior across multiple social interactions and explain the protagonist's behavior for each interaction. These methods will reveal: (1) how children interpret malicious behavior directed towards members of particular social groups, and (2) how the amount of behavioral evidence (i.e., number of observed social interactions) needed to infer bias varies across early and middle childhood.



HOW DO CHILDREN JUDGE THE FAIRNESS OF ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES?

We are wrapping up an exciting study exploring children's concepts of persons with disabilities. The study explores how children (without disabilities) judge the fairness of accommodations given to children with disabilities. Participants ages 5-9 years are introduced to characters who are either typically-abled or who have a learning disability or a walking disability. Participants are told stories in which opportunities or assistance are given only to the children with disabilities (for example, they do less classwork, go outside for recess first, or play soccer with their hands). Participants are asked "why" they think the characters do these things, and are then asked to judge how fair those behaviors are. Preliminary findings suggest that 9-year-olds judge accommodations as significantly more fair than 5- and 7-year-olds. We will also evaluate how the reasoning that children use to explain accommodations is associated with their fairness judgments. These findings have the potential to contribute to researchers' and caregivers' understanding of children's ideas about the fairness of disability-related interventions.

UPCOMING RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT: CAN CHILDREN DETECT UNCONSCIOUS BIAS?

Extending our current work on children's detection of social biases, we are currently developing studies exploring children's and adults' understanding of *unconscious* bias. One of our main questions is whether children and adults assume that others have unconscious biases based on how they interact with different social groups. For example, participants will be introduced to several story characters; one explicitly states her dislike of a specific (fictional) social group, another claims that she likes everyone including the fictional social group, and another character doesn't state anything about the fictional group. All of these characters are then shown discriminating against the fictional group, and participants will be asked to explain what they believe caused each person's discriminatory behavior. We are interested in how participants' reasoning compares across the characters.



PROMOTING THE CHILD STUDIES GROUP

The goal of the Child Studies Group (CSG), a team of 11 (and counting) faculty in the Department of Psychology and Human Development at Vanderbilt University's Peabody College, is to include Nashville-area children and families from a wide variety of backgrounds in our play-based studies. To do this, tremendous efforts have been made by all 11 participating labs to spread the word about the CSG at events across the greater Nashville area.

Our graduate students and undergraduate RAs have greatly enjoyed being a part of this effort! To learn more about the CSG, visit: <https://my.vanderbilt.edu/childstudiesgroup/>

"My experience at the Tennessee Maker Fest was great! A lot of the parents who registered their kids for CSG were employed in some field that either studied or worked with children, so they understood the importance of these studies in learning more about child development." – Jane (Research Assistant)

"I got to attend the Halloween in the park event and table for the CSG database. Interested parents sometimes asked to hear more about the program, and we got to tell them all about how studies at Vanderbilt interview kids to better answer questions about how they learn and develop!" – Bella (Research Assistant)

MEET OUR DOCTORAL AND MASTERS STUDENTS!



Nicolette Granata worked in the Social Cognition 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. Nicolette's research interests include children's theory of mind, moral development, and concepts of disability.



Hanna Lee is a master's student in Vanderbilt's Child Studies program. Her research interests include theory of mind and children's understanding of reputation, jokes, and deception. After graduating, she hopes to pursue a PhD in developmental psychology.

CONTACT

PHONE: 615-343-3997

EMAIL: SC3LAB@GMAIL.COM

WEBSITE: [MY.VANDERBILT.EDU/SOCIALCOGNITIONLAB](https://my.vanderbilt.edu/socialcognitionlab)

