

# 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 2024, we've been running for 9 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, children's concepts of people with disabilities, and children's understanding that successfully learning and remembering information varies based on time. 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 recent research, highlight upcoming studies, and extend our gratitude to the parents and educators who have helped us to do our work!

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?

Social biases—thought patterns that irrationally influence what and whom we like and dislike—pervade human cognition, and are held by children and adults. In a study that we recently launched, we are examining how the ability to detect others' social biases develops, and how being a part of a social group (or not) that is discriminated against plays a role. Children ages 4- to 6-years are asked to identify with one of two made-up groups of people; then children dress-up like a member of that group. Then children watch scenarios in which a protagonist routinely mistreats people of their social group (the one the child chose) or routinely mistreats people from the other social group. After each social interaction, children are asked to explain the protagonist's behavior. These methods will reveal how children's identification with a social group influences how children interpret negative behavior directed towards members of different social groups.



## HOW DO CHILDREN UNDERSTAND THE FIVE SENSES?

We are wrapping up an exciting study exploring how children (without disabilities) evaluate the sensory performance (hearing, smelling, tasting, touching) of children with visual deficits. Children ages 5-9 years are introduced to characters who “see as good as most kids your age” or “who cannot see anything at all”. Children are asked to rate the performance of their own 5 senses using a scale, and then the 5 senses of each character. Children are told stories in which an object (e.g., a tennis ball) goes missing in the dark, and are asked whether they would ask characters with typical vision or no vision to help find the missing object in the dark. Participants are asked “why” they pick the character they do, and what senses that character would use to find the missing object. Preliminary findings suggest that 9-year-olds pick the blind character to help significantly more often than 5- and 7-year-olds, who rarely select the blind character. We will also evaluate the reasoning that children use to explain their character choices. These findings have the potential to contribute to researchers’ and caregivers’ understanding of children’s ideas about the sensory capabilities of children with and without disabilities.

## HOW DOES TIME RELATE TO KNOWLEDGE?

Knowledge is a form of memory – for example, the more time you spend learning something, the more knowledge you gain. The reason is that you have more opportunities to form new memories or consolidate your existing memories. So, knowledge increases with increasing learning time. But time can also work against us...if you learn something new today and are asked to recall it tomorrow, you might remember it; but perhaps you won’t recall it in a month. In this case, knowledge *decreases* with increasing retention time. When we understand the ways that knowledge works, we can thoughtfully plan our learning, such as allocating more time to a new subject, or refreshing our memory by re-learning material before an exam. The “Time Sensitivity of Knowledge” study in our lab is designed to assess when and how children start to appreciate these two ways that knowledge works. The findings can be translated into educational practice, by informing educators about when children are developmentally prepared to learn and employ these principles.



## EXCITING LAB UPDATES

Nicolette, Social Cognition Lab member for 9 years, successfully defended her dissertation and graduated with her Ph.D. She will miss the lab dearly, especially all the wonderful families she has come to know over the years. She wants to give a special shout-out to St. Bernard Academy, who she worked closely with on data collection for two of her studies.



Bella, longtime Social Cognition Lab Research Assistant, took on additional responsibilities this year as part of her immersion project:

*“The members of this lab are so encouraging and helped me to learn a lot about myself and my strengths. I got to conduct literature reviews, revise study protocols, and develop a coding scheme to analyze children’s open-ended reasoning. My favorite part was running studies with the kids. Their answers are always fascinating, and they are so fun to talk to; the students at St. Bernard were so nice and eager to participate.”*



## MEET OUR NEW DOCTORAL STUDENT



Hi everyone! My name is Wen Lu and I am a new PhD student from China. The great thing about being part of our lab is how every member is so committed. This highly supportive environment fosters research and makes my time here warm and meaningful. Outside of work I enjoy reading detective stories and science fiction, and travelling!

### SOCIAL COGNITION LAB CONTACT

PHONE: 615-343-3997

EMAIL: [SC3LAB@GMAIL.COM](mailto:SC3LAB@GMAIL.COM)

WEBSITE: [MY.VANDERBILT.EDU/SOCIALCOGNITIONLAB](http://MY.VANDERBILT.EDU/SOCIALCOGNITIONLAB)

