

The Conceptual Development Lab

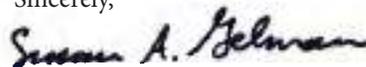
Dear Parent,

We continue to be most grateful for your support of our research at the University of Michigan Conceptual Development Lab. When you and your child participate in our studies, you are a vital contributor to the scientific process. The “games” that we play and the conversations that we observe help answer important questions about how children think, learn, and grow. Without your help we couldn’t continue making discoveries about child development! The more we know about the important period of early childhood, the better the world can be, for children and their families.

We offer this newsletter to share with you some of the projects we have worked on during the 2016 research year. Here we describe some of the projects we are currently conducting and have recently completed. Our studies investigate a range of topics that relate to four basic questions: How do children form concepts? How do children learn language? What is the relation between language and thought? And what is the role of parents in these processes? Much of our research continues to take place in our child-friendly, on-campus lab in East Hall. We also continue to conduct some of our studies in community-based labs at the Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum and the U-M Museum of Natural History, thanks to the University of Michigan Living Lab program. Additionally, we conduct some studies in local preschools and after-care programs. We are excited that we can offer families a number of ways to participate in our research, and grateful for the opportunity to partner with these outstanding organizations.

We hope to see you at one of our lab sites soon! And please remember that you can sign up online to participate in our research. Thank you again for your ongoing support of our research!

Sincerely,



Susan A. Gelman
Heinz Werner Distinguished University Professor
of Psychology and Linguistics
University of Michigan – Ann Arbor

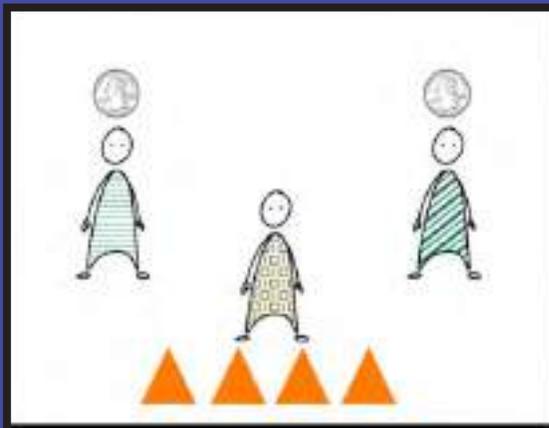
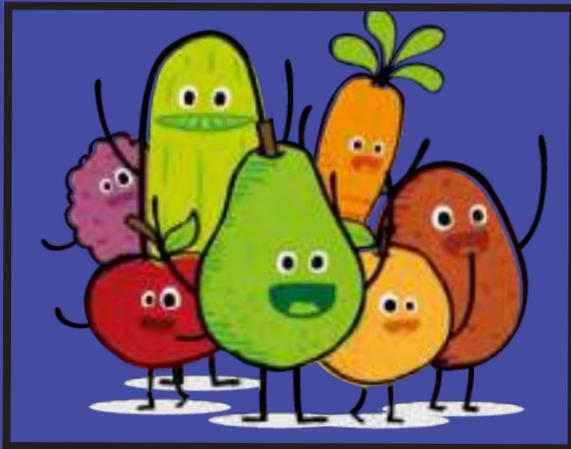


Current Studies

Children's Food Preferences

Jasmine Dejesus

In this study, we are interested in children's eating behaviors and attitudes about different foods. This study involves a one-time visit to the lab in which children will take part in a series of fun activities with one of our researchers. At the end of the session, children will be offered a food to eat and we will measure how much food children eat and how much children say that they like or dislike their food. This study will help us understand the factors that influence children's food choices, an important topic with real-world implications. We are looking for 5- to 6-year-old children to participate, so please let us know if you are interested!



Does Money Make Children Less "Fair?"

Margaret Echelbarger

One of the earliest lessons children learn is to be fair, and for many young children "fair" means equal. However, as adults, what we consider "fair" may change depending on the situation. For this reason, we investigated whether children were sensitive to what others were willing (or not willing) to pay for, in this case, stickers. In our task, we asked children to help a Giver decide how to allocate stickers. We predicted that children would deviate away from "fair-as-equal" when one friend was willing to pay more for the stickers than another, and that money would influence older children more than younger children.

During the study, children between the ages of 5 and 10 years were told stories about different characters (all friends) and asked to help one of the characters (the Giver) give away their extra stickers. In some cases, the friends, as depicted below, were willing to pay the same amount, whereas in other cases, the friends offered different amounts. We then asked children to explain some of the choices that they made.

As predicted, children tended to give more to friends who were willing to pay more for the stickers, and older children gave more unequally when friends made unequal offers. Together, these results show that even young children will depart from equal (or "fair") distributions when money is involved, and show that there is a shift in children's willingness to deviate from equal distributions. It is this shift that we wish to explore in upcoming studies.

Saving and Spending in Childhood

Craig Smith & Margaret Echelbarger

As adults, we often characterize ourselves as either “spenders” or “savers,” and we likely attribute some of these spending and saving tendencies to early money-related experiences in childhood. It is these early experiences that interest us, and are the focus of this exciting on-campus study!

In this study, we are interested in how children think and feel about spending and saving money, and how these thoughts and feelings change as children age. We are also interested in whether differences in how children behave with and around money are related to differences in: temperament, parenting practices/approaches, understanding of number, the ability to plan for the future, and more! We believe that this study will shed light on factors that influence children’s financial behaviors, and identify opportunities to help children make optimal choices.

This study involves a one-time visit to the lab. While in the lab, children (5 to 10 years) complete a series of fun activities. Some of these activities include: enjoyable number tasks, impulse control tasks, and a fun survey where children decide which cute creature is most like them. We also ask children about their own spending habits. Meanwhile, parents are asked to complete a survey about their own parenting practices and their children’s behavior. Finally, at the end of the study, we give children their own money to spend in our little lab store (see picture). If interested in participating, please contact the lab!



Object History

Lily Uribe
Merranda McLaughlin

How does an object’s history affect our perception of that object? How come collectors are willing to pay large amount of money for an object that was owned by a famous person, but not for an identical object owned by someone they’ve never heard of? Previous research has indicated that an object’s history has a strong effect on adults’ perceptions of its value and potential. But is the same true for children? In this study, we are exploring how children think about object history and how they believe it persists over time. The study consists of one visit to the lab, and involves watching a short video and completing a fun shape-drawing game. We are looking for participants between the ages of 4 and 6 years old. Please contact the lab if you are interested in becoming involved!



Dogs and Objects

Margaret Echelbarger

As human children grow up, they develop close attachments to favorite objects, such as blankets or teddy bears. Attachments are fueled not by attraction to blankets or teddy bears generally, but by the personal history that a child has with a particular blanket or teddy bear. For instance, children will not give up their dirty, worn attachment objects for brand new versions of the same item, even if they typically prefer new toys over old ones. This type of individual-object bond may, like material culture, seem uniquely human. Yet individuals of other species also have temporary “possessions” which are important to them, such as food and nesting materials. How do animals conceptualize these objects? Do they form preferences that are evolutionary precursors to human-object attachment? Determining whether other species show object attachments similar to ours may help us to understand how attachment to material objects evolved in humans.

Pet dogs provide an opportunity for such investigation as they are given objects to play with by their owners: toys. We seek to determine whether dogs form attachments to specific objects, such as toys, and how dog's attachments compare to those between human children and their attachment objects.

We are interested in testing dogs who have favorite objects, live nearby, and are comfortable and excited to meet new human visitors in their homes! For dogs who meet these criteria, we may conduct up to two home visits where we examine how your dog interacts with his or her favorite object. Do you think your dog would like to have participate in our study? If so, contact us at conceptlab@umich.edu.



How Do Children Learn To Talk To Different People?

Danielle Labotka

Everyday, we change how we talk depending on who we're talking to –an important skill to have if we do not want to come off as rude. For instance, you should not address the President as though he were a baby; doing so would be incredibly rude and possibly get you in trouble. At a young age, children develop this ability to adjust their speech appropriately for an addressee. But how do they learn to do so? Do they just mimic what they hear their parents do? Or do they explore speech choices by trial and error? To find out, we are testing whether children can identify speech directed at different groups of people. What does speech directed to a baby sound like? How about speech directed to a teacher? Most critically, can children accurately detect appropriate speech directed to a social group they do not frequently interact with such as non-native speakers? That is, can they identify appropriate speech even if their parents do not often model for them? Finding out will give us deeper insight to this complex aspect of communication.

If you are interested in any of these studies please email conceptlab@umich.edu.

Language and Beliefs

Ariana Orvell

Part of being a kid is learning how to interact with objects, animals and people. We are interested in the type of language that parents use to talk to their children about how to interact with various objects and animals, and what they like (or don't like) about them. We're also interested in how parents and children talk about different types of interpersonal interactions, both positive and challenging. To look at this, parents read their children short stories and then ask them questions about them. For example, how did the character feel? What might she do next time? Through this study and others, we hope to gain insight into how parents and children use language to express their beliefs about the world.



Children's Reasoning About Group Norms

Steven Roberts

Some of our previous research shows that children take what is (descriptive regularities), to infer what should be (prescriptive judgments). That is, if they learn that a group is characterized by a specific property (e.g., Hibbles who eat a specific kind of berry), they negatively evaluate individuals who do not share that property (e.g., a Hibble who eats a different kind of berry). In this study, we are examining the strength of children's negativity. For example, do children negatively evaluate individuals who do not conform to their group because they want to uphold a moral norm (e.g., if their group typically hurts people, but they choose to help people). Do they evaluate non-conformity negatively

If you are interested in this study please email conceptlab@umich.edu.

even if we show them that it could be a good thing (e.g., speaking a language that your group typically doesn't speak can foster relationships with other people)? We are looking forward to exploring these and other questions in the Living Lab!

Anthropomorphism

Lily Uribe

Natalie Davidson

As every parent knows, children often anthropomorphize (attribute human characteristics to) their toys. Certain toys, especially ones that resemble living beings (such as stuffed animals or dolls), are especially likely to take on person-like qualities in the minds of children. In this study, we are exploring how children play with their toys and their beliefs about them. We are interested in learning more about how a child's level of attachment to a toy affects their perception of its sentience. This study involves one visit to the lab, for which we ask that your child bring in two of their favorite toys. During the study, your child will be asked some questions about their toys, and invited to play a few short research games with them. We have a questionnaire for you, the parent, as well. We are currently looking for participants between the ages of 3 and 4 years old, please contact us if you are interested in becoming involved!



Friendships

Maria Arredondo

How do we choose our friends? Friendships have a strong impact in our overall wellbeing and identity, but what information becomes most important when picking out who we will play with, share our toys with, and who we do not want to make contact with? Does the type of information that we find important when picking friends change over time as we become older? In a one-time visit of 20 minutes, children will see pictures of children and hear them speak; then, they will pick who of the children will become good friends. We recently finished our version with Spanish-speaking children and now are looking for English speaking children. Children older than 4 ½ are welcome to participate!



The Toy Study

Rachel Fine

We are about to launch an exciting new study looking at the factors that children take into account when considering the preferences of others. In this quick 10 minute study we will ask children to help us choose toys for other children. We will present children ages 5-6 and 9-10 with pictures of other children and their families along with a variety of different types of toys. Our goal is to see what factors influence the decisions they make. If you are interested and have a 5, 6, 9 or 10 year old please let us know!



Toy Preferences

Lily Uribe
Natalie Davidson

Children develop and understand the concept of ownership at a very young age. Adults and children exhibit the endowment effect, placing special value on an object that one owns, as opposed to a similar object that one doesn't own. However, at the same time, we are often drawn to objects that are new and exciting. In this study, we are exploring the interaction of these two effects. Are children more likely to be strongly attracted to a toy they already possess, or to a new toy? We are currently looking for 4- and 5-year-olds to participate!



If you are interested in any of these studies please email conceptlab@umich.edu.

Contact Us!

If you are interested in any of our studies please contact us using the information below. We are typically available weekdays 9am to 5pm.

Website: umconceptlab.com
Email: conceptlab@umich.edu
Phone number: 734-647-2587
Address: B464 East Hall
530 Church St
Ann Arbor, MI 48109



Recent Publications

- Echelbarger, M., & Gelman, S. A. (in press). The value of variety and scarcity across development. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*.
- Frazier, B. N., Wellman, H. M., & Gelman, S. A. (in press). Young children prefer and remember satisfying explanations. *Journal of Cognition and Development*.
- Gelman, S. A., & DeJesus, J. M. (in press). The language paradox: Words invite and impede conceptual change. In T. Amin & O. Levrini (Eds.), *Converging perspectives on conceptual change: Mapping an emerging paradigm in the learning sciences*. Routledge.
- Gelman, S. A., & Gottfried, G. M. (in press). Creativity in young children's thought. In J. C. Kaufman & J. Baer (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to creativity and reason in cognitive development, 2e*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gelman, S. A., Martinez, M., Davidson, N. S., & Noles, N. S. (accepted pending revisions). Developing digital privacy: Children's moral judgments concerning mobile GPS devices. *Child Development*.
- Gülgöz, S., & Gelman, S. A. (in press). Who's the boss? Concepts of social power across development. *Child Development*.
- Heiphetz, L., Gelman, S. A., & Young, L. L. (in press). The perceived stability and biological basis of religious beliefs, factual beliefs, and opinions. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*.
- Meyer, M., Gelman, S. A., Roberts, S. O., & Leslie, S. J. (in press). My heart made me do it: Children's essentialist beliefs about heart transplants. *Cognitive Science*.
- Roberts, S. O., & Gelman, S. A. (in press). Can White children grow up to be Black? Children's reasoning about the stability of emotion and race. *Developmental Psychology*.
- Roberts, S. O., & Gelman, S. A. (in press). Multiracial children's and adults' categorizations of multiracial individuals. *Journal of Cognition and Development*.
- Roberts, S. O., Gelman, S. A., & Ho, A. K. (in press). So it is, so it shall be: Descriptive regularities license children's prescriptive judgments. *Cognitive Science*.
- Roberts, S. O., Ho, A. K., & Gelman, S. A. (in press). Group presence, category labels, and generic statements foster children's tendency to enforce group norms. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*.
- Roberts, S. O., Williams, A. D., & Gelman, S. A. (in press). Children's and adults' predictions of black, white, and multiracial friendship patterns. *Journal of Cognition and Development*.
- Tasimi, A., & Gelman, S. A. (in press). Dirty money: The role of moral history in economic judgments. *Cognitive Science*.
- Tasimi, A., Gelman, S. A., Cimpian, A., & Knobe, J. (in press). Differences in the evaluation of generic statements about human and non-human categories. *Cognitive Science*.
- Baptista, M., Gelman, S. A., & Beck, E. (2016). Testing the role of convergence in language acquisition, with implications for creole genesis. *International Journal of Bilingualism, 20*, 269-296.
- Gelman, S. A., & Davidson, N. S. (2016). Young children's preference for unique owned objects. *Cognition, 155*, 146-154.
- Gelman, S. A., Manczak, E. M., Was, A. M., & Noles, N. S. (2016). Children seek historical traces of owned objects. *Child Development, 87*, 239-255.
- Gelman, S. A., Sánchez Tapia, I., & Leslie, S. J. (2016). Memory for generic and quantified sentences in Spanish-speaking children and adults. *Journal of Child Language, 43*, 1231-1244.
- Graham, S. A., Gelman, S. A., & Clarke, J. (2016). Generics license 30-month-olds' inferences about the atypical properties of novel kinds. *Developmental Psychology, 52*, 1353-1362.
- Jipson, J. L., Gülgöz, S., & Gelman, S. A. (2016). Parent-child conversations regarding the ontological status of a robotic dog. *Cognitive Development, 39*, 21-35.
- Kushnir, T., & Gelman, S. A. (2016). Translating testimonial claims into evidence for category-based induction. In A. Papafragou, D. Grodner, D. Mirman, & J. C. Trueswell (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 38th Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society* (pp. 1307-1312). Austin, TX: Cognitive Science Society.
- Meyer, M., & Gelman, S. A. (2016). Gender essentialism in children and parents: Implications for the development of gender stereotyping and gender-typed preferences. *Sex Roles, 75*, 409-421.
- Meyer, M., & Gelman, S. A. (2016). Generic reference is less marked than specific reference in children's gestures. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 40*, 65-79.

Our Researchers



Dr. Susan Gelman is a Heinz Werner Distinguished Professor of Psychology & Linguistics. She is an author of over 200 scholarly publications including a prize-winning book *The Essential Child* (Oxford University Press, 2003). Her main interests are in the development of concepts and language in young children.



Lily Uribe received her B.A. in Psychology from Kalamazoo College. She has a wide range of research interests in cognitive, emotional, and social development across the lifespan. She plans to attend a graduate program in clinical psychology, and hopes to do therapeutic work empowering people of all ages.



Dr. Craig Smith is a Research Investigator at CHGD and the Director of the [UM Living Lab Program](#). His main areas of interest include moral cognition, and the development of emotion understanding and fairness norms.



Steven Roberts, a doctoral student, is interested in children's social cognitive development. Specifically he examines children's understanding of race, genetics, status, personality, and social essentialism. His research is supported by the National Science Foundation and the Ford Foundation.



Margaret Echelbarger is a doctoral student and the [Living Lab Coordinator](#). Her main interests are how children develop and understand economics. Her most recent studies look at spending/saving behavior as well as how children value objects differently based on scarcity and variety.



Maria Arredondo, a doctoral student, is interested in how children acquire knowledge through language and cognitive development with many of her studies involving bilingualism. She is currently finishing her dissertation, which utilizes brain imaging (fNIRs) to study language and attention in the [Kovelman Lab](#).



Jasmine DeJesus is a postdoctoral research fellow having recently obtained her PhD from the University of Chicago. Her research investigates the way language transmits information about social groups and important conceptual knowledge, as well as children's developing reasoning about food.



Danielle Labotka, a doctoral student, is interested in children's language development and how it relates to social cognition. She recently graduated from the University of Chicago with a BA in Comparative Human Development and Anthropology.



Ariana Orvell is a PhD student in Social Psychology. She examines how subtle shifts in language and construal impact self-control. In another line of work, she studies how stereotypes influence individuals' identities and motivation. She is interested in interventions that leverage this research to improve well-being.



Rachel Fine is a doctoral student interested in how children and adults learn about and perceive social categories such as race and gender. She is especially interested in how these categories are learned and used together.

Lab Staff

We would like to thank all of our wonderful undergraduate research assistants and research staff for their hard work and dedication in making our research possible!

Thank you Zainab Ali Ahmad, Jennifer Alpert, Anna Bergson, Wyatt Clement, Alicia Hubbard, Joanna Lee, Warren Lee, Hannah Romain, Jared Silverberg, Sarah Snay, and Rachel Taylor!

And our deepest thanks and best wishes to our former Lab Managers:

Natalie Davidson
Merranda McLaughlin

