A note to families….

We wanted to take this opportunity again to update you on the happenings at the Social Cognition Development lab at Cornell.

It has been nearly 9 months since we finished all of the home visits for the American families. In Beijing, our home visits also wrapped up during the fall months. Home visits with Chinese families living in the United States will be completed by the end of July.

Even though our home visits are finishing we still have plenty of work to do in our lab! We have made great progress analyzing the videos obtained during the home visits. Much of the data from the first round of visits have been coded and analyzed, and we’ve made great progress coding the data from the second and third rounds.

As always, we want to keep you updated on the results that we have obtained. In our winter newsletter we told you about our research report finding that emotional knowledge influences autobiographical remembering. Below, we summarize our new findings showing the relationship between maternal reminiscing style, children’s self-concept, and memories.

As always we thank you for your generous support of our research endeavors. Our research is only made possible through the helpful cooperation of families such as yourselves!

Warm Regards,

The Social Cognition Development Lab

Maternal Reminiscing Style and Children’s Self-Concept Influence Autobiographical Remembering

In the most recent investigation from the social cognition development longitudinal study, we examined the relationship between maternal reminiscing style and children’s self-concept on autobiographical remembering. We also looked at this relationship within a cultural context, by examining the effect in European-American, immigrant Chinese, and Chinese families living in Beijing.

Maternal reminiscing style was assessed through a joint reminiscing activity between mothers and their 3-year-old children. The amount of elaborations (adding new details) and evaluations (confirming, negating, or repeating a child’s previous statement) were counted.

Self concept was assessed through a task where children were asked to tell the researcher a story about themselves. Children’s responses were coded as private, collective (referring to group memberships or demographic variables), or public (referring to interpersonal relations). An agentic self score was calculated by subtracting the collective and public scores from the private score.

(continued)
Mother Reminiscing Style and Self, cont.

Finally the amount of information children reported both in the shared memory task and in a memory sharing task with a researcher (independent memory task) was also recorded. The results indicated that there were cultural differences in both mother reminiscing style and child self-concept. American mothers tended to use more elaborations and evaluations than Chinese immigrant and Beijing mothers. Additionally, American children’s self-concept was more agentic, while Chinese and Beijing children’s self-concept tended to be more collective and relational.

The results also showed that across all cultures children whose mothers used more elaborations and evaluations and children who had a more agentic self-concepts provided more memory information both in the shared memory and independent memory activities. Furthermore, while there were group-level cultural differences in children’s memory reports, these differences were partially explained by differences in mother’s reminiscing style and self-concept.

The results of this study highlight the way in which social and cognitive processes interact on the development of autobiographical memory in culturally appropriate ways. Through family narrative practices children learn how to construct life stories that reflect the prevailing cultural views of selfhood and the importance autobiographical remembering is given in that culture.

Other Research in the Social Cognition Development Lab

The social cognition development lab is one of the most active research labs in the Department of Human Development. Graduate and undergraduate students are involved in a number of research projects in addition to the social cognition development longitudinal study.

At our final lab meeting of the semester students had the opportunity to share their research projects and findings. Among the projects: Darleen Chien, Charis Law, and Erin Collier investigated the content of dinner-time conversations between parents and college-aged children in European-American and Asian families. They found that in these conversations, Caucasian and Asian families exhibited volume, content, and stylistic differences.

Amber Liang, Jessica Li, and Sean Lindsay examined self-analysis in personal essays written by Asian and Asian-American college students. They discovered a number of themes present in student’s self-analyses that add insights to previous understanding of Asian individuals’ self-concept.

Sarah Kulkofsky examined the relationship between the way preschool children talk about past events and the accuracy of their reports. She discovered that children who provided more elaborate and cohesive stories also tended to provide more inaccurate information.

Cagla Aydin and Katrin Mueller-Johnson examined middle-aged adults’ memories for public events in four different cultures: the U.S., Germany, Turkey, and China. They found a differences between cultures in the number and type of memories recalled.

Bernard Lam looked at the reasons why Caucasian and Chinese students think about and talk about memories of the past in everyday life. He found a number of differences between cultures in the functions and the nature of autobiographical memories across the two cultures.

A number of other students presented research proposals for projects they plan to carry out over the course of the coming months. As our lab continues to grow and become even more productive we look forward to sharing even more of our exciting research with members of the community.
News Notes from the Social Cognition Development Lab

The spring semester saw the addition of a new face in the social cognition development lab. Lingxia Huang joined our team as a research support aid. Lingxia has been primarily working on coding the Chinese interviews, and most recently has been coding the portion of the interviews where mothers and children talk about past events. Lingxia and her family have lived in Ithaca for 5 years. She says, "I am the mom of an eleven-year-old girl, so I’m always interested in knowing about children. It’s my pleasure to work on the longitudinal project because it helps me to be a better mom."

The social cognition development lab is also looking forward to a new face of a different sort. Rui Wu, who conducted many of the Chinese interviews and also accompanied interviewers on many of the Caucasian family visits is expecting a new baby! Rui will be leaving Ithaca at the end of July with her husband and moving to the Chicago area. We will miss having her as a part of our team but wish her all the best!

We also wish to extend congratulations to Rachel Hutt, who visited many families during all rounds of home visits. Rachel graduated from Cornell this May, receiving honors in Human Development. Lucky for us, Rachel has not gone far. She’s continuing to work in the lab this summer and during the next academic year. We are very excited to keep her as a valuable asset to our team.

Finally, this April, Dr. Wang was awarded the Early Scientific Achievement Award from the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) at the Biannual Meeting of SRCD in Atlanta. The award marks achievements in the beginning stages of a researcher’s career. SRCD is the premier organization for researchers in Child Development, and this award is a great honor signifying the important and interesting work produced in the Social Cognition Development Lab.

Have a safe and fun summer!