Dear Families….

As the old year winds down and a new year begins, we wanted to write and thank you for allowing us to be a part of your child’s development.

The early years are particularly important for development, and the role of parents is pivotal to children’s successful development.

With your support of our research, we have worked on examining children’s development of self, emotion, and memory.

Many of our papers have been published in top journals in the field of psychology, including *Child Development*, and *Developmental Psychology*.

Our work continues this year by following children after they have entered school. We are not only interested in how the start of formal schooling may influence the way children think about themselves, but also how early experiences may affect children’s adjustment.

In this issue, we share with you some of the findings regarding children’s self development and how attachment to caregivers may play an important role.

In sum, the success of our research endeavor can be attributed to your continued participation. Thanks for all that you do!

Inside this issue!

* The development of the children’s self concept (pg. 2).
* Children’s caregiver attachment and their self development (pg. 2 - 3).
* Our interviewers speak up (pg. 4)!
“Me, myself and I”: The development of children’s sense of self

“How does children’s self concept change over time?”
“What influences children’s self-concept?” These are some research questions in which current studies in our lab are attempting to answer. During our interviews with children, we use a story telling task to ask children about themselves. We tell the children that we want to write a story about them, and we ask them to tell us what to put in the story. Our analysis have revealed interesting developments in children’s self concept.

Research shows that at around a child’s second birthday, many children begin to recognize themselves in a mirror or in a photograph. This development is independent of children’s experience with mirrors. *(Fun fact: Mirror self recognition have also been found in dolphins, chimpanzees and elephants!)* From the age of 18 months to 3 years of age, infants start to display self-awareness through the use of the word “me” or “mine”. By the time they are three years old, they can start to describe their characteristics.

Children start by describing things they own, or focusing on physical characteristics (e.g. “I am a girl” or “I am 3 years old”). During the early toddler years, children rarely mention psychological characteristics or traits such as “I am smart.” By about 5 years old, children focus heavily on describing themselves by preferences and start to focus more on traits and abilities.

Research with kindergarteners showed that securely attached children, knowing that they are worth the attention and care of their caregivers, develop a positive representation of self *(Verschueren & Marcoen, 1999)*. When asked to describe themselves, these children talk positively about themselves but yet, they are also opened to talk about their weaknesses. That is, securely attached children appear to understand that they would be accepted despite not being perfect *(Cassidy, 1988)*.

“Mommy, Daddy, and Me”: Attachment and children’s self

According to attachment theory *(Bowlby, 1969)*, caregivers’ sensitivity to children’s needs, especially in times of distress, is related to the quality of children’s attachment to them. That is, caregivers who are consistent in responding to the needs of children in appropriate and timely fashions have children who are securely attached to them. And knowing that they are protected, secure children feel safe to explore the world. Attachment with caregivers is closely related to children’s developing self-concept *(Bowlby, 1973)*.
The positive effects of secure attachment to mothers and fathers continue into the middle childhood years. In a newly published study, Diener, Isabella, Behunin, and Wong (2008) examined first, third and fifth graders’ attachment to mothers and fathers and their self-perceived competence. The data showed that as children get older, those who are more securely attached to mothers and fathers have higher levels of self-perceived academic and social competence. The positive effect on academic competence further strengthens when children are older (i.e., in fifth grade).

Furthermore, children who are securely attached to both mothers and fathers have higher levels of self-perceived competence (both academically and socially) compared with children who are only securely attached to one parent. Thus, both mothers and fathers are important attachment figures where children draw information about themselves from to develop (positive) self-concept.

I think I like the game part best because most of kids enjoy playing this kind of game and they think it’s fun. I also enjoy visiting the families because moms are so nice to us. They gave us good suggestions and prepared snack and drinks for us. Jing

It is a very enjoyable experience to work with the families and get to know the kids. Keeping track on the kids' mind and memory growth process is valuable to me and I can get many good opinions about dealing with my own kid. The entire project is like a fancy story book. Every interview is like a story time for me, my emotion is deeply affected by the families’ happiness and sadness. In the mean time, I can learn about how to hold my own life. Bo

I have been really surprised by the intelligent responses of the children on the survey questions and other tasks of the experiment. The children understand instructions very well and are very thoughtful with their answers. These children seem to have bright futures ahead of them. Alicia

It is very rewarding to see children enjoying themselves during the interviews, and mothers learning more about themselves and their children through these visits. And I deeply appreciate and enjoy the many friendships that have been built with the participating families. Jessie
I love hearing about how excited the kids are that we are coming to talk to them and how they are preparing for their interviews! It’s great when they recognize us too! **Lydia**

It’s great to see all of the different stories that the kids come up with. They are all so enthusiastic and creative!” **Tracy**

Working with families both in Ithaca and beyond allows us to see who our work really affects -- the kids we’re interviewing and others like them. I enjoy spending a few hours with families who are generous enough to share their kids and their time with us. Interviewing children pulls me out from under a pile of books and provides me with a refreshing perspective that reminds me why I love what I do. **Heather**

I love how each child has a unique personality that makes each visit unpredictable. Each child approaches the questions and the games in a different way, so you can never anticipate in which direction the interview will go. It makes the interviews much more fun and enjoyable! **Van-Kim**

My favorite part of observing parents with their children is hearing the children laugh when they go through storybooks together with the parents. You get to see their creativity and imagination come into play. **Katie**

With all the stresses of school work and everything that I do at Cornell, it is so refreshing and rejuvenating to be able to interact and hang out with the children we interview. One of the things I miss most about home is being able to be around young children, and interviews allow me to do that! **Caitlin**

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**Lab changes: A baby, new members, and Goodbye Lingxia**

The lab bid farewell to Lingxia Huang, our research associate in the summer. Lingxia had been a vital member in the project who worked on participant recruitment and data coding. She left Ithaca with her family. We miss having her as part of our team and wish her all the best in her future endeavors.

We have several new members in the project this year. Heather Gary is our first year graduate student. Heather graduated with a Masters in Education from Harvard University and is currently pursuing her PhD at Cornell University. Her research interest is in how young children understand their relationship with nature and environment. Heather currently works on interviewing the Caucasian families.

We have also newly recruited Bo Sun, who joined our team as a research associate. Bo recently moved to Ithaca and has a 20-month-old son. She loves children and enjoys being with them a lot. She is currently involved in interviewing the Chinese families, data transcription and coding.

In addition, we have six new undergraduate research assistants in the project. Alicia Wiprovnick, Caitlin Clark, Katie Lim, Shijin Shi, Tracy Gould and Van-Kim Dang are responsible for various aspects of the project. These include material preparation, data collection, transcription, and coding. Undergraduates are valuable resources in our team!

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We’re on the web! Visit us online at http://www.human.cornell.edu/HD/socialcognition/

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**About the Social Cognition Development Lab…**

The Social Cognition Development Lab at Cornell includes both undergraduate and graduate students working under the direction of Dr. Qi Wang. Students in the lab conduct projects examining the interplay between memory, self, and emotions across the life span and memory sharing between parents and their preschool and college-aged children. Dr. Wang received her Ph.D. in Psychology from Harvard University. She came to Cornell in the fall of 2000 and currently serves as an Associate Professor of Human Development.