



## WHAT DO WE STUDY?

- How children and adults understand their social world.
- How children and adults perceive others.
- How children and adults think about right and wrong.



## THE SOCIAL & MORAL COGNITION LAB

at Columbia University



## WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING IN OUR LAB?

Since we opened our doors in 2016, we've completed multiple studies and continued to expand our lab. In this newsletter, you'll find updates about our studies and findings from the past year.

## WHERE TO FIND US:

We've continued recruiting families to participate in our lab at Columbia University. We also conduct studies at the Brooklyn Children's Museum (BCM), and this summer you can also find us in parks around the city!





**WANT TO PARTICIPATE WITH US AT  
THE BROOKLYN CHILDREN'S  
MUSEUM?**

**Every Thursday from 2-6 pm**

**Every Saturday from 1-5 pm**

### **How do children perceive others' ability to change?**

In one line of work, we examined how children and adults perceive those who have been punished. Here, neither children nor adults spontaneously indicated that rehabilitation was a central function of punishment. However, children—but not adults—perceived punishment as rehabilitative when we asked them about rehabilitation directly. When presented with characters who had transgressed, children reported that “mean” characters became “nicer” after being punished. Interestingly, children perceived “nice” characters to remain “nice” even after being punished. In a final study, we found that children view punishment as a general vehicle for rehabilitation, regardless of whether the punishment is relatively mild or relatively severe. This work suggests that perceptions of punished individuals change throughout development and that children may have relatively optimistic views about the ways in which people who have transgressed can change.

## How do people make moral judgments for ingroup and outgroup members?

Research suggests that people determine what is moral based on what is common. However, what is common depends heavily on the social group to which people belong. For example, eating certain foods is common among people in some social groups and uncommon among people from other social groups. In our study, we explored how people incorporate social-group based information in moral judgments. We tested to see whether behaviors that are common among more groups (i.e., both someone's ingroup and their outgroup) are also perceived to be the most moral, or whether people only attend to behaviors that are common in their ingroup. Our findings show that people are not sensitive to the behaviors and moral beliefs of people from social groups outside their own. We hope that this research can be used in intervention studies that aim to leverage social norms to nudge behaviors.

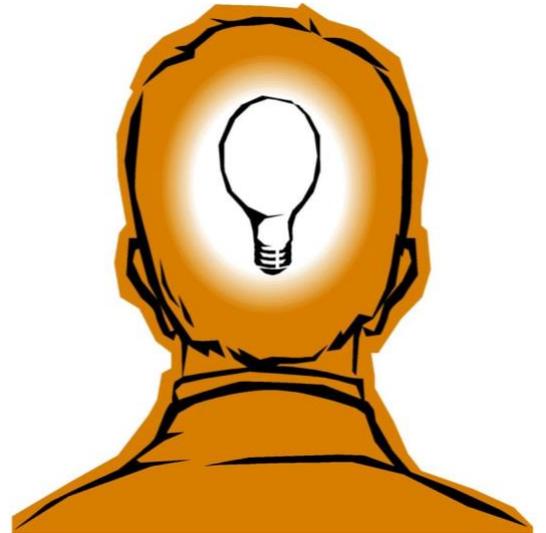


## How do children think about themselves & others?

In this line of work, we investigated how different social experiences influence how children think about the legal system. Children of incarcerated parents tended to answer our questions about the legal system similarly to children who did not know any individuals who are incarcerated. In this study, we also asked both groups of children about their feelings toward close others. Again, we found similarities across children, regardless of whether or not they had an incarcerated parent. Both groups of children indicated that they felt more positive than negative emotions toward close others, including their parent. These findings suggest that children's positivity toward close others is tenacious across different life circumstances.

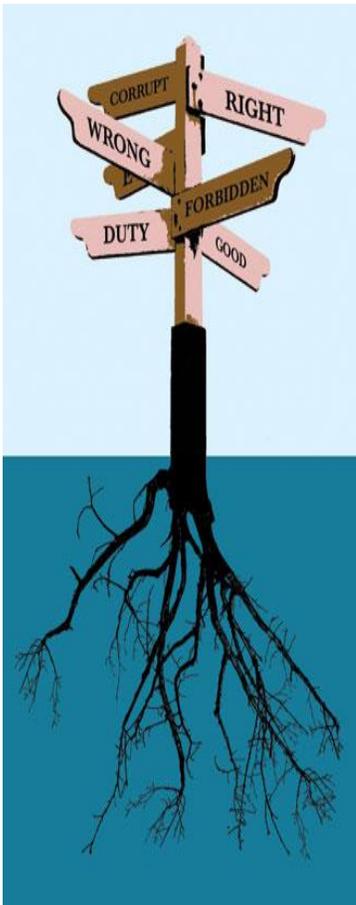
## How do children think about the minds of others?

In a current line of work, we're investigating how children think about different kinds of minds. To do so, we ask children questions about what different agents know. For example, we ask children whether Maxi would know where a piece of chocolate is located if someone moved the chocolate while Maxi was playing outside. We also ask children about supernatural minds, like whether God knows when someone does something wrong. This study is ongoing, and we look forward to reporting more information in our next newsletter!



## How do different explanations influence children's perceptions of others?

In the first study addressing this question, we told children about characters who were in jail because of the way they were inside, because of something they had done, or because of a social inequality. Children reported the most favorable attitudes after hearing the social inequality explanation and the least favorable attitudes after hearing the internally focused explanation. In a follow-up study, we found that children's attitudes depended on how much they thought the character deserved to be punished. For example, they thought people deserved to be punished the most when they heard internally focused explanations, and the more children thought characters deserved to be punished, the less they liked those characters. In a final study, we asked how children might respond to hearing multiple explanations. We found that the negative consequences of internally focused explanations were reduced by simultaneously using other types of explanations, such as those referencing societal inequalities.



## How do children think about groups of people who are different from themselves?

Our lab recently published a paper investigating how children think about members of different groups. We wondered whether children would perceive people who are different from them in the same way, or whether they would distinguish between people who were different from them in a few ways from people who were different from them in a lot of ways. We found that children did make this distinction sometimes. For instance, children whose families belonged to a religion thought differently about peers who belonged to a different religion and children who didn't belong to any religion at all. Children whose families didn't identify with a religion thought similarly about members of different religious groups.

If you would like to have your child  
participate in our research:

Call us: (212) 853 - 1407

Email us: [columbiasamclab@gmail.com](mailto:columbiasamclab@gmail.com)

Visit our website:

[www.columbiasamclab.weebly.com](http://www.columbiasamclab.weebly.com)



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We would like to thank all of the families  
that have participated in our research so  
far!

We are grateful to  
Columbia University, the John Templeton  
Foundation, and the American  
Psychological Association for supporting  
this work.

