

Social Perception in Williams Syndrome Project
Boston University School of Medicine



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Project Update

Hello from the Williams Syndrome Project at Boston University, we hope that this newsletter finds you well and enjoying the summer! Our research investigating social perception and social cognition in individuals with Williams Syndrome continues, following the renewal of the project's grant by the National Institute of Health for the next 5 years. Continuing and expanding this line of research, we are particularly interested in implicit, unconscious processing of social and emotional information by adolescents and adults with Williams Syndrome.

We have also received NIH funding for our new project exploring the Social and Emotional Development of Children with Williams Syndrome and their families. We are excited to begin contacting and recruiting families who have children with Williams Syndrome for participation in our new project. We would love to speak with parents of children between the ages of 2 to 4 years, who might be interested in coming into our laboratory at Boston University to participate in this project.

Research Team News

This summer we will be welcoming some new faces to our research team and saying goodbye to one of our research assistants, **Nicole Crawford**. Nicole will be leaving the laboratory this summer to begin her graduate studies in Clinical Psychology under the guidance of Carolyn Mervis at the University of Kentucky, Louisville, where she will continue to investigate Williams Syndrome. We will be sorry to see her go and wish her all the best!

We are also excited to welcome two new research assistants to the Williams Syndrome project. **Lisa Lindeke** comes to us from Williams College where she had prior psychological testing experience working with children. **Meghan Kennedy** joining us from Bowdoin College, will work primarily on the Social Perception and Cognition grant. Both are very excited to get to know and work with all of the participants in these projects.

Conference Presentations

June has been a busy month in our lab as we made preparations to attend the **2006 National Convention of the Williams Syndrome Association** in July, which will take place in Richmond, Virginia. We look forward to conducting additional research and seeing our participant families and research colleagues again, and are happy that we will be joined by two of our former research assistants, Alyssa Verbalis and Casey Schofield. They will be helping us with the Social Perception Project at the conference. We are excited for the opportunity to meet new individuals with Williams Syndrome and their families, particularly as many of these families live outside of the Boston area so are unable to visit us in our laboratory. Thank you to all who have already signed up to meet with us!

We are also looking forward to presenting the results of our ongoing work with other researchers investigating Williams Syndrome attending the professional conference on Sunday and Monday, July 23-24.

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At the WSA professional conference in July, Daniela Plesa Skwerer, Nicole Crawford and Lisa Edelson will take part in a language symposium, presenting new data about the use of prosody (the intonation, rhythm, stress, and melody of speech) in the language of individuals with Williams Syndrome, specifically in a task requiring them to describe a complex picture. Our current findings show that adolescents with Williams syndrome use expressive devices, including prosody, more abundantly than adults do, and that with increasing age there appears to be a tendency toward less use of such devices, at least in elicited descriptions. We will also review our findings about how adolescents and adults with Williams syndrome understand the prosody used in the speech of other people. In addition to this talk, we will present several posters summarizing recent findings. One poster highlights how individuals with Williams Syndrome differ from typically developing individuals in their reactions to visual images of faces expressing different emotions, measured by a variety of methods (psychophysiology, reaction time, etc.). A second poster will describe the themes explored by adolescents and adults with Williams Syndrome in personal narratives about their daily lives. Additionally, we are excited to present preliminary findings from the work we are just beginning with toddlers with Williams Syndrome about the relationships these children form with their primary caregivers.

We hope that this upcoming conference will be an opportunity for us to both share what knowledge we have gained from our research with our colleagues and learn from other research teams, to further advance our knowledge of Williams Syndrome.

Publications and Findings

We are pleased to announce that in the last year, our laboratory has succeeded in producing four professional publications based on our research exploring social perception and social cognition in people with Williams Syndrome. In two book chapters we have expanded on current knowledge about social cognition and social engagement in Williams Syndrome, including recent findings from our research programs. We have also recently published an article presenting the results of our investigation into how adolescents and adults with Williams syndrome perceive and interpret prosodic cues in speech (*Language and Cognitive Processes*). A second article published in 2006 in *Cognitive Neuropsychology* revealed differences in the way that individuals with Williams Syndrome are able to perceive and interpret information about emotions from non-verbal cues.

We'd like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for all your support.. Thanks to your participation we are able to continue to learn about the way individuals with Williams Syndrome understand and think about emotions in their daily lives Thank you for all of your help and we look forward to working with you in the future to continue to learn about Williams Syndrome!

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