



The Williams Syndrome Project

Boston University School of Medicine

Summer 2009



Update from the Project

Greetings from the Williams Syndrome Project at Boston University. We hope that this newsletter finds you well and enjoying the summer!

We are pleased to let you know that our research investigating social perception and social cognition in individuals with Williams syndrome continues, and we are currently in the process of analyzing all the interesting data collected last summer at the WSA National Convention in Garden Grove, California. As always, the family Convention was a great opportunity for us to see some familiar faces and to get to know new children and adults with Williams syndrome as well as their families. We have obtained a wealth of information about how adolescents and adults with Williams syndrome monitor their attention and respond physiologically when viewing various scenes with emotional and social or nonsocial content.

Some of the school age children participated in a new study exploring how they communicate with a collaborator during an interactive game activity. We are continuing our investigations of strengths and weaknesses in social communication in children with Williams syndrome comparing them to children with other developmental disorders, as well as to typically developing peers. One direction in which we are expanding our current work is to conduct direct comparisons between groups of participants with Williams syndrome and age-matched participants with autism spectrum disorders on various measures of visual attention, arousal and responsiveness to social-affective information. We expect to see very different responses in our participants with Williams syndrome!

Research Team News

Since our last update we have seen a number of changes in the Williams syndrome team. We were sad to see our research assistants, **Lisa Lindeke**, **Alex Fine** and **Meghan Kennedy**, leave us at the end of last summer to start their graduate studies.

This past fall **Lisa** began a doctoral program in Clinical Psychology at Penn State University. **Alex** is currently enrolled in a doctoral Linguistics Program at University of Rochester and **Meghan** will be attending Dartmouth School of Medicine in the fall of this year, having just graduated with a Masters in Public Health from BU. We are sorry to see them go but wish them all the best!

We are pleased to introduce new members of our research team:



Left to Right: Christine, Emily, Femi, and Allison

Christine André from Williams College joined our project last fall as a research assistant. **Femi Lafe**, a second year Psychology graduate student at Boston University, also joined our project last fall; **Allison Meyer** from the University of Rochester joined our lab in late spring and **Emily Ammerman** from Wellesley College joined us this July. We hope that many of you will get to meet them over the next two years.

Findings and Conference Presentations

In addition to our ongoing work in the lab, we are pleased to announce that since our last newsletter we have presented findings from our project at various conferences. The **2008 WSA Professional Conference** last July was another opportunity to share some of our findings on social cognition and social emotional development with colleagues studying Williams syndrome and to find out about the latest advances in their research.

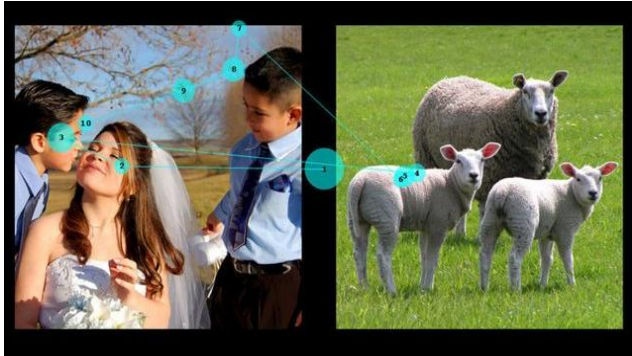


image the blue lines and dot size reflect the visual scan-path and looking time, respectively, of a young girl with Williams syndrome.

In June members of our lab presented a poster at the **2009 Third Annual Tufts University Conference: The Neuroscience of Emotion** in Medford, MA. Our poster highlights how adults with Williams syndrome differ from individuals with autism in their physiological responses (e.g., changes in the amount of sweat on participants' hands) to pictures with social-affective content, such as fearful or angry faces, compared to scenes without social content.

We are also excited to share some findings on other measures of arousal (e.g., pupil size changes) at the upcoming **Social and Affective Neuroscience Conference** this coming fall in New York City. Christine André will be presenting findings which suggest that individuals with Williams syndrome are less aroused by socially threatening images than individuals with autism or typically developing individuals, especially when looking at people's faces.

Publications

We are pleased to announce that since our last update our laboratory produced a number of professional publications and presentations reporting research findings from our projects on Williams syndrome. Our most recent publications are listed below; thanks to all of you who have contributed to these research endeavors!

Crawford, N.A, Edelson, L.R, Plesa Skwerer D., Tager-Flusberg H. (2008). Expressive language style among adolescents and adults with Williams syndrome. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 29, 585-602.

Plesa Skwerer, D., Borum, L., Verbalis, A., Schofield, C., Crawford, N., Ciciolla, L., Tager-Flusberg H. (2009). Autonomic responses to dynamic displays of facial expressions in adolescents and adults with Williams syndrome. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 4(1), 93-100.

Thank you to all of our dedicated participants!

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