

ISLAND LAB

NEWSLETTER



IN THIS ISSUE

LETTER TO CAREGIVERS

PROJECT UPDATES

MEET THE LAB

HOME ENVIRONMENT LINKED TO DIFFERENCES IN EARLY PHONETIC PERCEPTION ABILITY

MEET THE PETS

WHAT'S THE MOST COMFORTING SMELL IN THE WORLD?

ANOTHER YEAR ON ZOOM

LAB SOCIALS

NEW LAB MANAGER

EASE INTO IN-PERSON LEARNING

FAQS

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHTS

A Letter to Caregivers

Welcome to the Infant Studies of Language and Neurocognitive Development (ISLAND) Lab's second annual newsletter! This newsletter serves to provide you updates on what we've been up to over the past year, announcements about new studies and science, upcoming projects, and ways to get involved with our lab.

Our director, Dr. Natalie Brito, started the ISLAND Lab because she wanted to share her passion for developmental psychology, decrease barriers to scientific research so more families can participate, and make a positive impact on various communities of families. Throughout the years, the lab grew larger and now includes high school, undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral students working on various projects focused on better understanding important predictors of healthy child development. Currently, Research Assistants (RAs) work on a wide range of tasks in the lab, such as conducting visits with families for research studies, coding and analyzing data, contributing to publications, organizing community outreach events, communicating our work through social media,

and producing this annual newsletter.

In 2020, we were faced with the COVID-19 pandemic forcing us, like many others, to start working remotely. While it was definitely an adjustment, the lab still managed to make significant progress remotely during the past year and a half, even starting a new project to learn more from our families on their experiences during the pandemic (COVID-19 & Perinatal Experiences Study). The lab also managed to stay socially connected on Zoom, with weekly lab meetings and virtual socials. As things start to open up again, we're very excited to resume in-person lab work and connect with families once again via in-person data collection.

We want to thank you, the caregivers, for all your support over the years. None of our studies would be possible without your willingness to participate and contribute to science!

Sincerely,

The ISLAND team

Editor-in-Chief: Srinidhi Ananth

Editors: Grace Kellogg, Yuhan Liu, Nehal Mittal

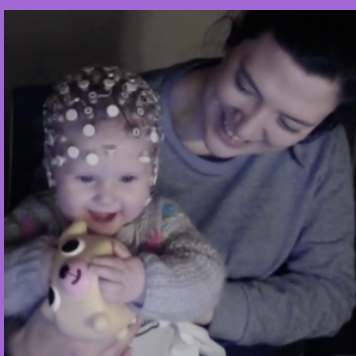


ISLAND LAB
Infant Studies of Language &
Neurocognitive Development

Project Updates

COPE Study

COVID-19 and Perinatal Experiences (COPE) Study is our ongoing longitudinal study in collaboration with Dr. Moriah Thomason (NYU Langone Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Department) that began last year at the height of the pandemic. We are interested in examining the impact of COVID-19 on maternal mental health and child outcomes. Thus far, we have over 600 women enrolled and over 100 women and their babies participating in our surveys, remote behavioral visits and biospecimens.



SHELL Study

Stress, Home Environment, Language & Learning (SHELL) looks at how the early home environment impacts trajectories of language and cognitive development. We have wrapped up data collection and are working on analyzing our data. We hope to share research papers and findings soon! We are extremely thankful for our families who have participated with us over the years.

MAREA

MAREA (Maternal Affect, Resiliency, & Experiences of Anxiety) is a qualitative study that began last year. We recruited 70 Hispanic women for remote interviews, including a cohort of 40 women who were pregnant during the pandemic and a cohort of 30 women with infants aged 3 -12 months. Additionally, women who were pregnant during the pandemic were invited to participate in in-person lab visits when their children were 3-months-old. Through this study, we hope to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on maternal stress and mental health in the Hispanic community.



DURF Grant

In order to address the challenge of recruiting and retaining participants from under-resourced or historically marginalized populations, two undergraduate students in the lab, Lisa Abe & Srinidhi Ananth, created a new study called “Primary Caregivers’ Barriers to Participating in Research Studies.” This study asks what the most prevalent barriers that primary caregivers’ face when being asked to participate in research studies. In contrast to previous research on this topic that focused mainly on adult participation, their project seeks to understand experiences and perspectives of caregivers with infants and young children. Their project is funded by the Dean’s Undergraduate Research Fund at the NYU School of Arts and Science.

By making studies more accessible to caregivers of diverse backgrounds, they hope to expand the research implications of infants and young children, and advance our knowledge on the impact of the social and language environment on early neurocognitive development. Generating data regarding the most prevalent barriers caregivers encounter will help uncover efficient solutions that mitigate these barriers, and promote inclusivity and accessibility within scientific research among New York City residents.

Meet the Lab!

Dr. Natalie Brito**Director**

Assistant Professor of Developmental Psychology in the Department of Applied Psychology at NYU Steinhardt

Dr. Denise Werchan

Post Doctoral Fellow at the NYU School of Medicine, interests: cognitive development, risk and opportunity

Ashley Greaves

Doctoral Student in the Developmental Psychology Department at NYU, interests: poverty, cognitive development

Annie Aitken

Doctoral Student in the Developmental Psychology Department at NYU, interests: biological behavioral assessment, childhood development

Stephen Braren

Doctoral Student in the Developmental Psychology Department at NYU, interests: stress, SES, cognitive development

Sarah Vogel

Doctoral Student in the Developmental Psychology Department at NYU, interests: early life adversities, executive function

Maggie Zhang**Lab Manager**

Graduated NYU with a B.S. in Applied Psychology, interests: stress, parent-child interaction

Gianina Perez**COPE Project Coordinator**

Graduated Teachers College, Columbia University with a Master's in Neuroscience and Education, interests: bilingualism, neurocognitive development

Tehmeena Salahin**Data Manager**

Graduated from University of Virginia with a B.A. in Cognitive Science and a minor in Architecture, interests: data collection

John Zhang

Graduated NYU with a Master's in Applied Statistics for Social Science Research, interest: family leave, infant brain function

Alejandra Lemus

Graduated Florida International University with a B.A. in Psychology and obtained a Master's in Clinical Neuropsychology, interests: SES, bilingualism

Mahima Golani

Master's Student in Neuroscience and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, interests: sustainable interventions for caregivers and children

Meet the Lab! (cont.)

Grace Kellogg

Rising Second Year Master's Student at NYU in Counseling for Mental Health and Wellness, working on COPE project

Ayomide Popoola

Rising Senior at McMaster University and NYU QUEST Student, working on MAREA Study Research Proposal

Amy Hume

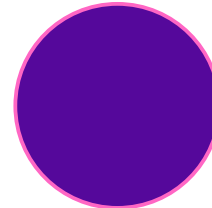
Rising Senior at the University of Bath, working on COPE project and VPC/visual attention coding

Audrey Lin

Rising Senior at NYU in the B.S./M.A Counseling for Mental Health and Wellness Program, working on behavioral coding

Isabelle Jacques

Rising Senior at NYU majoring in Psychology and minoring in Chemistry, working on COPE project

Gabby Ortecho

Graduate of Lehman College and NYU QUEST Student

Meera Arumugam

Rising Senior at NYU majoring in Applied Psychology and Global Public Health, working on COPE project

Yuhan Liu

Rising Senior at NYU majoring in Psychology and Sociology, working on behavioral coding

Srinidhi Ananth

Rising Junior at NYU majoring in Applied Psychology and Global Public Health, working on DURF Grant, and Lead of Communications

Matthew Weatherhead

Rising Junior at Princeton University majoring in Psychology, working on publications based on behavioral coding

Nehal Mittal

Rising Junior at NYU majoring in Biology with minors in Chemistry and Child Adolescent Mental Studies, working on behavioral coding

Zoe Cooper

Rising Freshman at Harvard University, working on behavioral coding

Lisa Abe

Rising Junior at NYU majoring in Neural Science and minoring in Global Public Health, working on DURF Grant

Natalia Tiller

Rising Senior at NYU majoring in Applied Psychology and minoring in Chemistry, working on behavioral coding

Julia Dudensing

Rising Junior at NYU majoring in Applied Psychology, working on behavioral coding

Home Environment, But Not Socioeconomic Status, is Linked to Differences in Early Phonetic Perception Ability

Samantha A. Melvin, Natalie H. Brito, Luke J. Mack, Laura E. Engelhardt, William P. Fifer, Amy J. Elliott, Kimberly G. Noble

Article Translation By: Grace Kellogg

When infants are born, they can initially discriminate between all phonemes and as they age, will start perceptually tuning to the *phonemes* of their native language or languages. *Perceptual tuning* occurs when an infant begins to discriminate between the *phonemes* of only their native language(s).

First and foremost, what is a *phoneme*? Think about the words “pad, pat, bad, and bat.” The *phonemes* are the parts of each word that distinguish one from another in terms of how the words sound.

Now, what do *phonemes* have to do with early childhood development? Perceptual tuning generally occurs between 6 and 12 months of age, and some studies have found that infants who perceptually tune earlier in life, on average demonstrate higher scores on later language assessments.

This might make someone wonder, what factors are tied to an infant's early discrimination of *phonemes* and, therefore, greater language skills later in childhood? Melvin and colleagues (2016) sought to answer that very question.

What they found was that the quality of the infant's *home environment* (including resources in the home and interactions with caregivers) was the main factor in an infant's early ability to discriminate between *phonemes*.

The study tested the *phonetic discrimination* ability of 75 infants. Families participated in two laboratory visits - one when their infant was 9 months old, and again when their infant was 15 months old. Families were also visited at home to assess the home environment.

What types of tasks were involved in the lab visits?

- *Phonetic Discrimination*: infants were tested on their ability to differentiate between two phonemes (in a different language! These phonemes were perceptually similar sounds that are common in

perceptually similar sounds that are common in the Hindi language, but indistinguishable to adult native English speakers).

- *Receptive and Expressive Language*: infants (at 9 and 15-month timepoints) were given language assessment scales. These scales examined the infants' abilities to comprehend and respond to language, as well as their abilities to express language.
- *Home Environment*: a 45-item structured interview and observation checklist was administered during the 15-month home visit in order to assess home environment factors such as parental involvement, warmth, and responsiveness, as well as types of toys, books, or any other materials present.



Researchers found that, independent of socioeconomic factors, infants with higher overall quality of home environments (e.g., a more cognitively stimulating environment, higher parental responsiveness) were more likely to perceptually tune to their native language earlier.

The research ultimately showed that an infant's home environment is associated with phonetic discrimination ability as early as 9 months of age.

So what can we learn from this study? Tell stories, play, and spend quality time with your little one (below you can find resources for finding your local library and family events in NYC).

Resources:

Find your nearest New York Public Library [here](#)

Find family friendly events here hosted by the New York Public Library [here](#)

Meet the Pets

Introducing our favorite furry friends from our lab!

Riley

Age: 1
Dog Mom: Maggie



Fun Facts about Riley:
His favorite treats are chicken and cheese, and he spends his day napping and stealing food off the table.

Henry

Age: 10 months
Cat Mom: Julia D.



Fun Fact about Henry: he loves to steal hair ties!

Bentley

Age: 1
Dog Mom: Grace



Fun Fact About Bentley: she absolutely loves carrots!

Koby

Age: 2
Dog Mom: Gianina



Fun Facts about Koby: He enjoys really long naps, snacking, saying hi to people on his walks, and he recently learned how to "snake" on cue on the floor!

Savannah

Age: 3
Cat Mom: Sarah



Fun Fact About Savannah: She loves napping in the sun, playing with her catnip toys, and keeping her parents company on the desk while they work from home!

Pip

Age: 1 ½
Dog Mom: Denise



Fun Fact About Pip: His favorite city activity is howling along with fire truck sirens!

What Is The Most Comforting Smell In The World?

It's You, Mama!

Article Translation by Mahima Golani

Have you ever wondered why picking up your baby when they're crying can calm them down almost immediately? Babies need to have their caregivers close because they are signals of safety. Newborns have inbuilt mechanisms that help them rely on their social environment. For example, even very early on, they show a strong preference for their mother's voice and odor. We've known for a long time, through research and anecdotes from caregivers, that crying infants can be soothed when they're picked up and held close. One possible explanation is that maternal odor has a soothing effect. Maternal odor can be a powerful signal, telling the baby, "You're okay. You're safe!"

Some past research has shown just how powerful maternal odor can be. One study by Nishitani and colleagues showed that maternal odor even reduced their infant's pain response during medical procedures. A different study found that infants look at faces for a longer amount of time in the presence of maternal odor. Have you ever noticed that your baby seems to stare at faces longer than any other shape or pattern? The ability to process faces is incredibly important (especially for infants) as it can provide social information about the person's identity and emotion.

Sarah Jessen, a neuroscientist, designed an experiment to see how babies would respond to happy and fearful faces differently depending on what smells they were exposed to. Did you know that by the time babies are seven months old, they can process different emotional facial expressions?

To do this, Jessen used 3 types of smells x (3 different t-shirts):

1. Odor of their own mama
2. Odor of an unfamiliar mama
3. No specific odor



The infants were randomly assigned to either the maternal odor group or one of the control measures (unfamiliar odor or no odor). They randomized participants to different groups so they could accurately understand if the odor caused the infant's response. If they didn't randomly assign the participants, and instead chose to assign all the female infants to the maternal odor group and all the males to the unfamiliar odor group, it would be hard to tell if the infant's response was due to their sex or the odor they were smelling!

She got a group of 50 moms to wear the same t-shirt 3 nights in a row (this may sound yucky, but it's for science!). The moms were asked to use their normal shampoo, deodorant, soap etc. as usual, and to not introduce any new products during this time. This was to ensure the t-shirts really smelled like them.

Then, when mom and baby came into the lab, the babies put their electroencephalography (EEG) caps on to measure brain activity. EEG can be used to get safe, noninvasive recordings of electrical activity in the brain. The recordings can help tell us about patterns of activity in the brain. When babies are sound asleep, for example, there is a recognizable pattern of electrical activity.

B Stimulus Material



When the babies had their EEG caps on, the t-shirts were placed on their chests – close enough so that they could smell them!

What was particularly interesting about this study was that infants were placed in a car seat, not on their mom's lap. This is so Jessen could disentangle the effects of physical proximity to the mama compared to just smelling them.

What she found was pretty amazing.

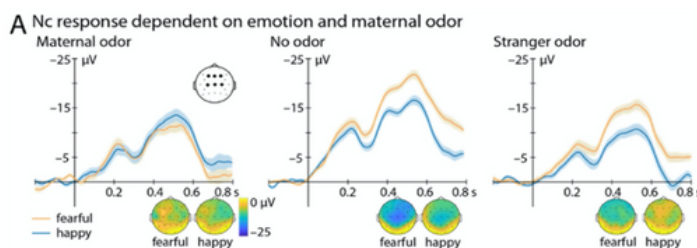
The graphs below show how the EEG patterns of the infants in each group differed. When the babies were exposed to the fearful faces and the shirt that smelled like mom, their brains showed less of a fear response! When the t-shirts used had no specific odor or the odor of an unfamiliar mom, the infants had a greater fear response.

So, what does this tell us?

Jessen's results show that the mother's presence, even if it's just the smell of her, is like a safety signal for infants. Our little ones rely completely on their social environment for survival. For babies especially, the world can be a little scary because they don't understand a lot of it. Part of our job as caregivers is to help them decide what is safe and what isn't.

So, here's what we're prescribing: Cuddle your little ones!

Citation: Jessen S. (2020). Maternal odor reduces the neural response to fearful faces in human infants. Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience, 45, 100858. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcn.2020.100858>



This doesn't mean that these infants were in great distress when viewing the fearful face, but it does show that their brain was telling them that they should be a little more vigilant. The fear response is a very normal (and essential) part of figuring out what is safe and what could be a potential threat.

Another Year on Zoom!



Another year on Zoom, and what a year it's been! Everything was virtual for the majority of the year – from lab meetings, to socials, and outreach events, like our alumni panel! We certainly missed seeing each other in person, but we enjoyed learning how to use a different platform than we were familiar with in order to stay connected. Despite virtual challenges, our lab was able to accomplish most things that we would do in-person. While our time on Zoom might slowly be coming to an end as the fall approaches, we're so excited to reconvene in person!

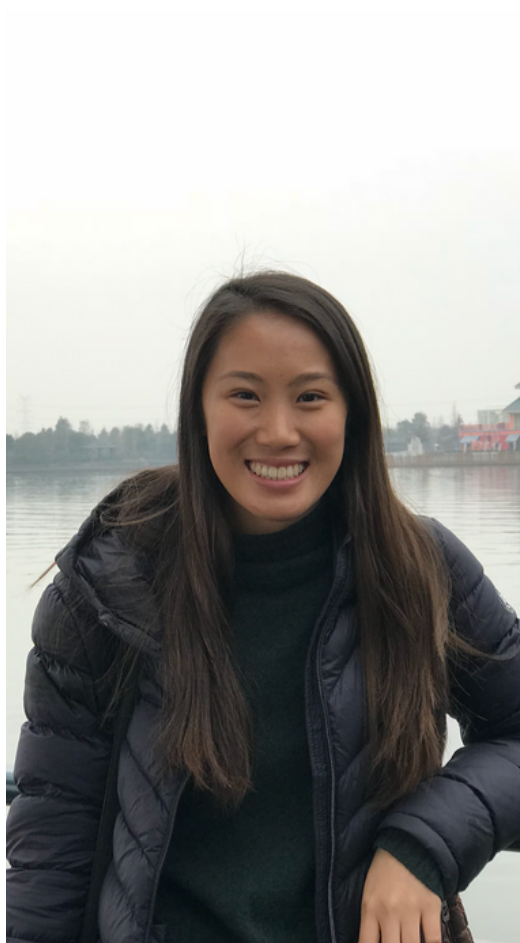
Lab Socials!



We had two in-person socials this year – one in the spring, and one in the summer. For our in-person social in May, we had a picnic, and it was a blast of a time! We enjoyed the food, the fun, and the excitement of being together again. It was a reunion of sorts, because we had only seen each other via Zoom for so long. There was a lot of laughter, happiness, and socializing. We had another social in June, this time with our puppies! We're so glad that we had the opportunity to meet after so long, and we're definitely looking forward to future socials.

With Our New Lab Manager!

Welcome our new Lab Manager, Maggie Zhang! Maggie started her position as Lab Manager in August of 2020, and prior to that, she was a Research Assistant for three years and graduated NYU with a B.S. in Applied Psychology in 2020.



Q: What do you do as a Lab Manager?

A: I'm in charge of managing staff and research assistants, handling logistics and administrative tasks, overseeing budgeting and finances and lastly data collection and scheduling participants.

Q: Why did you want to be a Lab Manager?

A: I'm broadly interested in parent-infant interactions and how these early social interactions can influence learning and socio-emotional development later on in life. I am also interested in pursuing a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology in the future, and this position provides me the opportunity to explore my research interests and exposure to working in academia.

Q: What do you hope to accomplish as Lab Manager?

A: I hope to expose our research assistants to a variety of skills that are transferable to multiple fields including behavioral coding, using Excel, how to communicate research to the general public, etc. I also hope to build connections with our participants and create a positive experience when participating with us, in person and remotely.

ISLAND Lab Encourages You to Get Vaccinated to Fight the Spread Against the COVID-19 Pandemic

The best ways to minimize the spread of COVID-19 amidst new emerging variants are, 1) to stay masked in public spaces (indoors or outdoors) with lots of people, and 2) to get vaccinated. This way, we can all do our part to keep each other safe.

Visit <https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/> to locate your nearest vaccine site!

Visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html> to learn more about the vaccines!



Helping Kids EASE Back into In-Person Schooling

By: Srinidhi Ananth

This article was published on the Creature Times, the blog of Social Creatures, dedicated to social connectedness. Visit <https://www.thesocialcreatures.org/thecreaturetimes> to read more!

After more than a year of virtual schooling and social distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many children and adolescents are finally preparing for the return to full-time, in-person learning for the upcoming school year. Although children (and caregivers) will undoubtedly benefit from going back to school in person, returning to normalcy may be met with challenges and difficulties. Having some strategies for dealing with these issues will be important for making the transition back to the classroom manageable. In this article, we present a handful of such strategies that could benefit both children and their parents as in-person schooling resumes.

Children have faced many struggles due to social isolation and remote learning due to COVID that have resulted in both academic and social-emotional disruptions, especially among minority and underrepresented groups [1]. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, many children have not had much, if any, direct in-person interaction with their friends and peers. As we have previously discussed, these face-to-face interactions between kids are important for fostering a child's social connectedness. And in turn, social connectedness plays an important role in children's well-being, promoting healthy development, physical and mental health, and personal growth. Rebecca Rialon Berry, Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at New York University Langone Health says, "There's a key connection between having good peer interactions and social emotional well-being."

In certain populations, we're seeing that our depression and anxiety are heightening with continued quarantining."

Yet, despite the struggles that prolonged separation from peers can cause, it should not come as a surprise if some children exhibit mixed emotions, or even anxiety, as they prepare to return to school full time.

"I already see children having higher levels of anxiety about going back to school," reports child, adolescent, and adult psychiatrist, Dr. Samantha Saltz. "There's significant concerns about loneliness. They've been away for a while. They are concerned about how they are going to reintegrate with the other children socially, who they are going to fit in with, what kind of groups they are going to be a part of." Children may also have anxiety about returning to school because they've become accustomed to their home routine and immediate social circle.

The good news is there are several ways parents and guardians can alleviate some of their children's fears, anxieties, or difficulties with the transition back to school while promoting social connectedness. One such tool is the EASE acronym, created by the late, great John Cacioppo — psychologist and former director of University of Chicago's Center for Cognitive and Social Neuroscience—to help people ease their way back into social connections after periods of isolation. Below we provide some details outlining each of the steps involved in following the EASE approach.

E - Extend Yourself Safely

After more than a year of seeing faces on a computer screen, it's understandable if your child is hesitant to step back into the classroom and socialize with their peers in the same capacity as



before. Leading up to the return to school, help your child extend themselves into social situations and interactions by doing so cautiously, a little bit at a time. One way to do this is to reach out to and reconnect with fellow classmates from the previous semester. If your child is starting a new school, try to visit the school before the program starts so that your child can begin to familiarize themselves with the new environment. You could also reach out to connect with your kid's teacher or coach ahead of the start of school.

A - Make an Action Plan

This means first recognizing and validating any anxiety your child has about returning to school, and then coming up with an actionable plan to help them develop a sense of emotional control around social situations. You can, for instance, find social outlets that best suit you and your child's needs and goals. If you want to join an after-school activity, for example, participating in something you're already familiar with and enjoy might be a better option than something completely new. Another part of making an action plan is establishing a routine that you can stick to and a schedule you can follow.

References:

Loades, M. E., Chatburn, E., Higson-Sweeney, N., Reynolds, S., Shafran, R., Brigden, A., Linney, C., McManus, M. N., Borwick, C., & Crawley, E. (2020). Rapid Systematic Review: The Impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in the Context of COVID-19. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 59(11), 1218–1239.e3. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2020.05.009>

S - Seek Collectives

Help your child find similar, like-minded peers to interact with. This could mean, for instance, joining a new club, after-school activity, or sports team so that your kid can connect with others who have similar interests, activities, values. The key is to look for and select people who share common qualities in some way. This will make it easier for them to find synergy and to fall back into routines of high-quality interaction with peers. And don't forget that being selective is important. Having a few meaningful and rewarding relationships is more important than a lot of superficial ones.

E - Expect the Best

Last but not least, parents should encourage their children to always expect the best. Be optimistic—even when the current situation is unpleasant and stressful. Parents should emphasize the importance of looking ahead to future possibilities and the good things that can help to remind a child of past times when they have faced challenges and overcame them, ultimately for the better. Also, it's important to remember that some of the most difficult things in life yield the most rewarding things. Although there is always more to a problem than just your mental attitude, thinking positively can certainly help with overcoming anxiety and stress. Parents can easily set an example by doing this themselves and also by letting their child know they believe in them.

Frequently Asked Questions

Has COVID-19 impacted my child's development?

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought on many unprecedented challenges, especially for families. It is understandable that parents may have questions on how this pandemic has impacted their children's development. Our current ongoing longitudinal study (COPE) is interested in this exact question and understanding the ways that families have adapted to these stressful times. Our study begins prenatally with moms who were pregnant or gave birth during the height of the pandemic and follows families up through toddlerhood. Follow us on Instagram to get updates on this important project (@britobabylab)!

Is it safe to get involved in research now?

Yes! With all of our studies, we make sure that both parents and children are comfortable with everything we do. At the beginning of the study, we will make sure you understand everything that will happen during the visit and you can choose to stop the study at any point. In terms of COVID-19, our lab has taken full precautions to ensure the safety of our families. All of our research assistants are fully vaccinated, we fully sanitize our workspace before and after the visit, and everyone will wear masks throughout the duration of your visit.

How do I get involved in the lab?

To be a part of a study with ISLAND, email britobabylab@nyu.edu for more information, and we will try to match you with the perfect project. You can also visit our website, britobabylab.com, to learn about our current studies and read testimonials from previous participating families.

ISLAND Lab Alumni Spotlights

Karina Kozak



Karina graduated the NYU Stern School of Business in 2021 with an MBA and served as the previous Lab Manager of ISLAND Lab. Currently, she works as the Senior Associate Consultant at Magnolia Innovation. At her time at ISLAND, she was able to leverage her research experience to demonstrate that she had transferable skills that are crucial for consulting and market research (e.g. survey writing, quantitative data analysis). Karina's favorite thing about ISLAND is that there was a constant effort to blend her personal goals/interests with the work she was given, and made her feel like people were investing in her.

Joy Shen



Joy graduated NYU Steinhardt in 2020 with a B.S. in Applied Psychology, and served as a Research Assistant, and the Lead of Communications during her time at ISLAND. Currently, she is a research assistant at Cognitive and Behavioral Consultants, a mental health clinic and wellness center. She will be starting a PsyD program in the fall at Ferkau's Graduate School in Clinical Psychology, training to become a clinician. ISLAND taught Joy so many research skills such as working with data, interpersonal skills, and leadership. All of this is utilized in her day to day tasks as a research assistant for a clinical lab, even if the data is vastly different.

Nick Tong



Nick graduated NYU Steinhardt in 2020 with a B.S. in Applied Psychology, and served as a Research Assistant during his time at ISLAND. Currently, he is a Research and Data Analyst at The Doe Fund. While applying for a job, Nick emphasized his problem solving skills developed from ISLAND, especially when coding behavioral videos under a deadline. Furthermore, he developed his belief in transparency and ethics in research and data analysis while in the lab. His favorite part about volunteering with ISLAND is the sense of welcoming and support in the lab, as well as having the flexibility to explore and learn new tasks and skills.

Jessica Rickel



Jessica graduated Syracuse University with her B.S. in Psychology in 2017, and NYU Steinhardt with her Master's Degree in 2019. She served as a Research Assistant during her time at ISLAND. Currently, she is a Research Science Associate at Harlem Children's Zone. Jessica learned how to handle real world data, clean data, make decisions about processes, flag anomalies in the dataset, and conducting quality checks as a Research Assistant. Furthermore, she valued having experience outside the classroom, communicating with a team, and managing time and priorities. Jessica's favorite part of ISLAND are the cute babies, and working with the team.

Buyong Joo



Buyong graduated NYU with her B.S. in Applied Psychology in 2019, and served as a Research Assistant during her time at ISLAND. When she was in the lab, she was in charge of the LENA, making sure recorders are sent back in time, and analyzing the data she got from the participants. Currently, she works as a Project Director at a market research firm that works with a lot of pharmaceutical companies. Buyong developed many skills that she uses in her job from ISLAND, such as developing quantitative/qualitative surveys based on the objectives of the project, managing the field, and analyzing the data.