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# UC BERKELEY LANGUAGE & COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT LAB NEWSLETTER



## LETTER OF THANKS

Dear Families, Teachers, and Staff of Zenith School,

Thank you very much for participating in our research this past winter! Our research is made possible by the generosity of families and communities like yours, and we greatly appreciate your support.

Our research focuses on how children learn different aspects of language, what this might tell us about the nature of cognitive and social development, and how these different aspects of development interact. This newsletter highlights some of the studies that your child or student may have participated in and gives an overview of our current findings.


If you have any questions about our projects, please feel free to contact us at [lcdlab@berkeley.edu](mailto:lcdlab@berkeley.edu).

Best wishes,

Mahesh Srinivasan, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Department of Psychology  
University of California, Berkeley

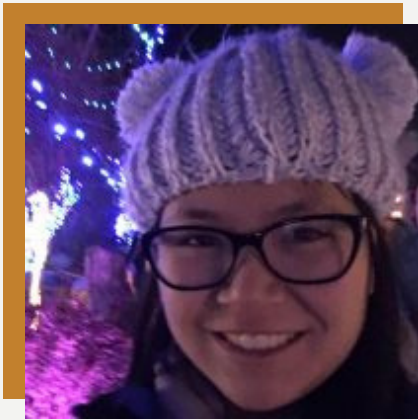
# LCD LAB MEMBERS



 [SRINIVASAN@BERKELEY.EDU](mailto:SRINIVASAN@BERKELEY.EDU)

## MAHESH SRINIVASAN

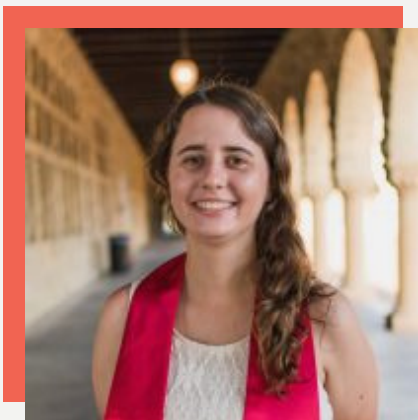
I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology and a member of the Cognitive Science Faculty at the University of California, Berkeley. Previously, I was a post-doctoral researcher in the Department of Psychology at the University of California, San Diego. Before this, I received a Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from Harvard University in 2011, and received a B.S. in Symbolic Systems from Stanford University in 2005. Using empirical methods from developmental psychology and psycholinguistics, our lab's research explores how linguistic, cognitive, and social abilities arise and interact with one another during human development and across different cultures.



 [VICTORIA\\_KEATING@BERKELEY.EDU](mailto:VICTORIA_KEATING@BERKELEY.EDU)

## VICTORIA KEATING

As a graduate student working in the LCD Lab and the UC Dreams Lab, I am interested in how the people and cultures children are exposed to affect how they think about the world and others. My current research interests are focused on how children learn to think about those that are different from themselves. For instance, how does the way we communicate about race with children shape their concepts of their own race and others? Additionally, I am curious about the multiple ways we can think about diversity and its various impacts.



 [SOPHIE\\_REGAN@BERKELEY.EDU](mailto:SOPHIE_REGAN@BERKELEY.EDU)

## SOPHIE REGAN

I am broadly interested in how children learn to communicate using language, especially how their burgeoning language skills interact with their developing understanding of the social world. My current research interests focus on the development of pragmatic reasoning, specifically how children learn to integrate information about specific speakers when interpreting and producing utterances. I am also interested in how language shapes the formation of different category representations and in adaptation and convention formation in conversation.

# LCD LAB MEMBERS



## ANTONIA LANGENHOFF


I am fascinated by the development of normative and linguistic cognition, and how these cognitive abilities interact with our uniquely human social reasoning skills. As a graduate student, I explore the role that engaging in social discourse and argumentation plays for children's developing cognitive skills. Specifically, I investigate the role of disagreement as a potential mechanism for cognitive development.

 [AFL@BERKELEY.EDU](mailto:AFL@BERKELEY.EDU)



## PAUL HAWARD


I'm a postdoctoral researcher working with Dr. Mahesh Srinivasan. Previously, I completed my graduate training with Dr. Susan Carey at Harvard University. My research focuses on the structure of human concepts. Humans are the only species to acquire such a vast stock of concepts—concepts like table, tiger, artist, universe, democracy, and hexagon. The concepts we possess have a profound impact on the way we think. They frame our interpretation of the external world, and we combine them together to produce complex, intricate thoughts using natural language. My research investigates the structure of these concepts, how that structure then skews the way we see the world around us, and the role it plays when concepts are combined.

 [HAWARD@BERKELEY.EDU](mailto:HAWARD@BERKELEY.EDU)



## EMILY CHAU

I'm a recent Berkeley graduate interested broadly in how people weigh competing sources of information to reach a goal they might have. I'm excited to explore this further in the intersection of language and cognition as I'm fascinated by how words in itself act as information units, often without needing to be explicitly told their meaning. If you have any questions about the lab—whether it be working in it or participating in one of our studies—please feel free to reach out.

 [LCDMANAGER@BERKELEY.EDU](mailto:LCDMANAGER@BERKELEY.EDU)

# LCD LAB RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

## GUJARAT RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

- NEHA SINGH
- PRACHI TALWAR
- HUDA PATEL
- RIDA SHAMSI
- TAZEEN SHAMSI
- MISHKAT FATEMA IQBAL
- VENU PARIKH
- SAMARJEET SHINDE
- KIRTI KAPOOR
- PRIT CHAUHAN
- ISHITA JETHWA
- VANDITA SHANBHAG
- SAUMYA GUPTA
- PRIYANKA DANI
- VIVEK KHATTAR
- PALAK JUNEJA
- KAUSTUBHA GARGE
- YUSUF KAPADIA

## BERKELEY RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

- ANANYA SHARMA
- GURSIMAR KAUR KOHLI
- SINI PATRA
- ANNIKA ANDERSON
- ALAN RYDER
- MITCHELL CHAN
- ALEX BUNTIN-NAKAMURA
- ECE TABAG
- AILANI SATO-LIM
- GURLEEN KAUR
- RAGHAD OSMAN
- AMIRA NIAZI



CLOCKWISE STARTING FROM UPPER LEFT: KAUSTUBHA GARGE, SAMARJEET SHINDE, PRIYANKA DANI, SAUMYA GUPTA, VICTORIA KEATING, VIVEK KHATTAR, EMILY CHAU, PALAK JUNEJA, VENU PARIKH, KIRTI KAPOOR, ISHITA JETHWA, PRIT CHAUHAN, MAHESH SRINIVASAN

# STUDIES CONDUCTED AT ZENITH SCHOOL

## DEVELOPING BELIEF NETWORK YEAR 1

As part of the Developing Belief Network, an international, cross-cultural collaborative research network exploring the development and diversity of cognition, our research at Zenith School explored how Hindu and Muslim children develop beliefs that have implications for global health, intergroup relations, and scientific learning. This is our first year working with children on this project.

More specifically, 1st to 6th standard students and their parents participated in three studies. The first study was an interview for children about their understanding of religious beliefs, and the second study was a survey that parents filled out about how they introduce their children to religious beliefs. The third study involved both children and their parents, exploring how they talk about topics like natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic.



 [DEVELOPINGBELIEF.COM](https://developingbelief.com)

## NORM VIOLATIONS & LOOPHOLES



People differ from each other in how much they follow different religious rituals and practices, such as deciding how to dress, eat, or pray. In this study, we were interested in whether these differences can be explained by how people think about what it means to be religious. For example, do people follow religious norms because they care about their relationship to God or because other members of their religion follow these norms?

To explore these and other questions, we presented 8th and 9th standard children with stories involving character who acted in ways that either followed or did not follow religious norms, and explored how children judged these actions.

# STUDIES CONDUCTED AT ZENITH SCHOOL

## HOW CHILDREN THINK ABOUT THEIR NEIGHBORHOODS

In this study, we wanted to understand what sorts of places Zenith students live in. People choose to live in different areas for different reasons. We wanted to know how Zenith students think about where they live and why other people choose to live in other places.

To explore these questions, we had a 10-15 minute interview with children in 5th, 6th, 8th, and 9th standards, where we asked them about where they lived. We also showed them pictures of areas where other people could live and asked them what they thought about these places. We also asked students what they thought about the people that lived in different places.



## HOW CHILDREN FORM THEIR RELIGIOUS IDENTITY



In this study, we were interested in what is most important for a child's religious identity. We asked questions about praying, believing in god, following the religious rules of eating and dressing, and being a good person. We were interested in the implications of a child seeing something as part of their religious identity (e.g., for how they and others should act with respect to that belief or behavior).

For each of the above, children were asked whether they thought it was part of their religious identity. For example, a child might be asked: "Do you think that praying is part of being Hindu – one of those things that makes a Hindu a Hindu?" We then asked a separate set of questions about how people should act (e.g., in this case, whether Hindus should pray, and if so, how important it was to pray).

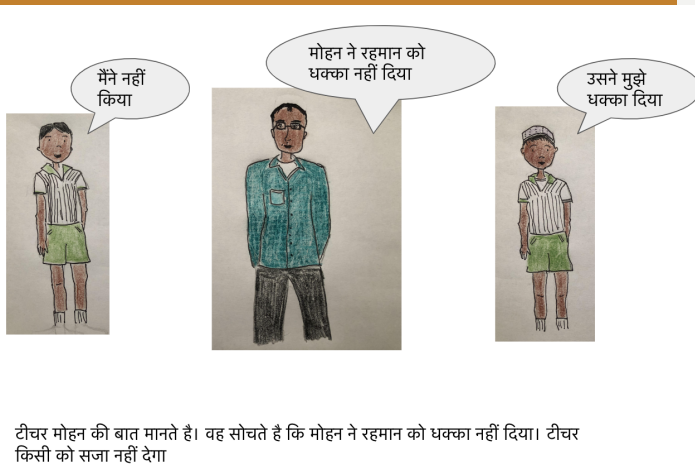
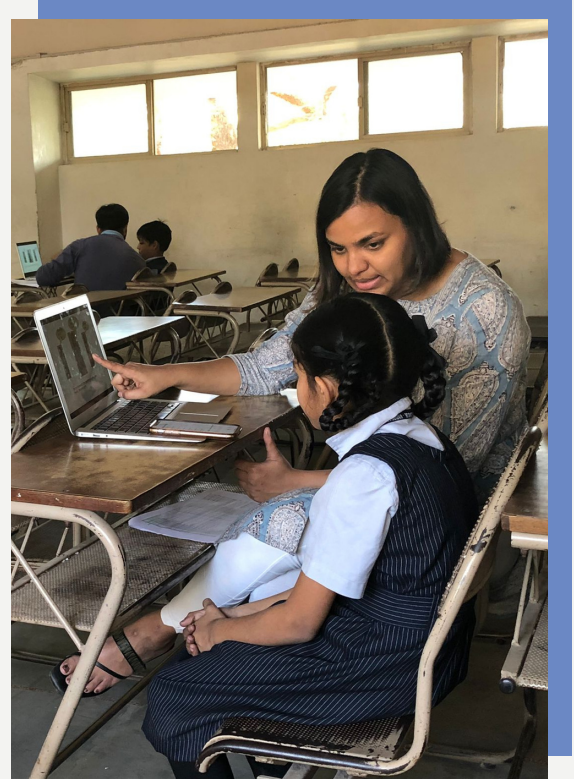
Our preliminary findings suggest that if a child sees something as an important part of their religious identity, then there are interesting implications for how they think people should act with respect to that aspect of their religion (e.g., praying, or following rules of eating or dressing).

# STUDIES CONDUCTED AT ZENITH SCHOOL

## EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE: IS IT RIGHT TO ONLY BELIEVE SOME PEOPLE?

In life, we believe many things. We believe the earth revolves around the sun, we believe  $2+2=4$ , we believe that Narendra Modi is the Prime Minister of India, and there are many more things that we think are true.

But how do we come to believe these things? Often, we believe things because people tell us that they are true. For example, we believe that the earth revolves around the sun because our science teachers tell us this is the case. However, sometimes, different people say things that conflict. This happens a lot in courtrooms. Person #1 will say that person #2 stole their wallet, but person #2 says they did not steal it. Sometimes, people are believed based on objective facts. Other times, people are believed over others for unfair reasons. For example, sometimes rich people are believed over poor people. We wanted to see whether children could understand this would be unfair.



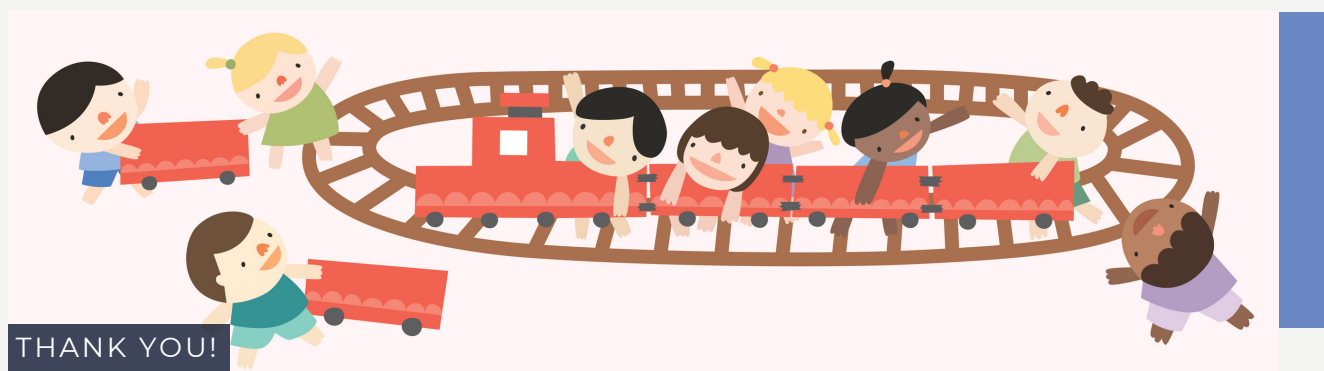
In this study, children were told a story with pictures about a school. Several times, they were shown a child who accused another child of doing something bad (like pushing him). The other child denied it. At the school, the teachers were biased to believe some children and biased to not believe other children. We asked children whether they thought it was fair that the teacher always believed some children and never believed other children. We found that children from the 3rd standard onward generally thought this was unfair.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT OUR RESEARCH, PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE.

<http://lcdlab.berkeley.edu>



email: [lcdlab@berkeley.edu](mailto:lcdlab@berkeley.edu)



THANK YOU!