Abstract

Social categorization provides a valuable mechanism for explaining and predicting human behavior, yet also contributes to the development of social stereotyping and prejudice. Thus, understanding how social categorization develops is a critical issue for cognitive and social sciences. In this talk, I will present a theoretical perspective on the development of social categorization—that children map intuitive theories about the structure of the social world onto categories they encounter in their environment. I will then describe empirical work demonstrating that two intuitive theories—that social categories are natural kinds and that social categories mark people who are obligated to one another—shape the acquisition of social categories. Implications for how children explain, predict, and interact with their environment will be discussed.