

EDUCATION

- University of California** Irvine, CA
Ph.D. in Cognitive Sciences, Advisor: Barbara W. Sarnecka 2013–2018
Dissertation: “Winners, Losers, Bullies and Leaders. How infants and children think and feel about social hierarchy.”
- University of California** Berkeley, CA
B.A. in Architecture 2004–2008
Thesis: “Poem, Forest, Light”

POSITIONS

- Massachusetts Institute of Technology** Cambridge, MA
Postdoctoral Fellow, Center for Research on Equitable and Open Scholarship 2021-current
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology** Cambridge, MA
Postdoctoral Fellow, Brain and Cognitive Sciences 2018-2021
- Harvard** Cambridge, MA
Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Psychology 2018-2021

GRANTS

NIH National Research Service Award, 2018-2021
Grant Title: *How infants use the affiliations of their caregivers to evaluate others.*
Grant Number: 1F32HD096829 Co-Mentors Elizabeth Spelke and Rebecca Saxe

NSF, SBE Postdoctoral Fellowship, declined
Grant Title: *Finding one’s social circle: How caregivers influence the social evaluations of infants.*
Grant Number: 1810526 Co-PIs Elizabeth Spelke and Rebecca Saxe

PUBLICATIONS

- Thomas, A.J.**, Sumner, E., Sarnecka, B.W. (*in press*) Children expect leaders to oust intruders, to refrain from aggression, but do not expect leaders to be generally prosocial. *Collabra*; [preprint](#); [OSF page](#)
- Thomas, A.J.**, Piff, P., Terrizzi, B., Sarnecka, B.W. (*in press*). Children recognize decision-making structures and prefer groups with less concentrated power. *Open Mind*; [preprint](#); [OSF page](#)
- Thomas, A.J.**, Woo, B., Nettle, D., Spelke, E., Saxe, R. (2022) Early concepts of social intimacy: Young humans use saliva sharing as a cue of thick relationships. *Science*; [preprint](#); [OSF page](#)
- Thomas, A.J.**, Sarnecka, B.W. (2019). Infants Choose Those Who Defer in Conflicts. *Current Biology*, 29.13: 2183-2189.; [manuscript](#); [OSF page](#)
- Thomas, A.J.**, Thomsen, L., Abramyan, M., Lukowksi, A., Sarnecka, B.W. (2018). Toddlers Prefer Those Who Win, But Not When They Win by Force. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 2(9), 662; [manuscript](#); [OSF page](#)

6. **Thomas, A.J.**, Stanford, P.K., Sarnecka, B.W. (2016). No Child Left Alone: Moral Judgments about Parents Affect Estimates of Risk to Children. *Collabra*, 2(1), 10.; [manuscript](#); [OSF page](#)
7. **Thomas, A.J.**, Sarnecka, B. W. (2015). Exploring the relation between people's theories of intelligence and beliefs about brain development. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00921>; [manuscript](#); [OSF page](#)

COMMENTARIES

1. Radkani, S, **Thomas, A.J.**, Saxe, R., (in press). Advantages and limitations of representing groups in terms of recursive utilities. Commentary on Pietraszewski, D. Towards a computational theory of social groups: A finite set of cognitive primitives for representing any and all social groups in the context of conflict. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 1-62.; [preprint](#)
2. Stanford, K.P., **Thomas, A.J.**, Sarnecka, B.W., (2020). Rationalization may improve predictability rather than accuracy. Commentary on Cushman, F. Rationalization is rational, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*; [manuscript](#)

PUBLICATIONS UNDER REVIEW

1. **Thomas, A.J.**, Saxe, R., Spelke, E. (*resubmitted to PNAS*) Infants learn who is part of their social world by observing their parents' social interactions with unknown others; [preprint](#); [OSF page](#)
2. Kominsky, J. F., Lucca, K., **Thomas, A. J.**, Frank, M. C., Hamlin, K. (*under review*). Simplicity and validity in infant research. [preprint](#)
3. O'Connor, C., Relihan, D. P., **Thomas, A. J.**, Ditto, P. H., Stanford, K., Weatherall, J. O. (*under review*). Moral Judgments Impact Perceived Risks from COVID-19 Exposure. [preprint](#)
4. Relihan, D. P., **Thomas, A. J.**, Ditto, P. H. (*under review*). Wrong is risky: Moral judgments shape risk perceptions. <https://sites.uci.edu/~peterdittolab/files/2021/08> [OSF page](#)

POPULAR PRESS ARTICLES

1. Stanford, K.P., Sarnecka, B.W., **Thomas, A.J.** (2016). We're really bad at judging risk to kids. We're really good at judging parents. *The Washington Post, Post Everything*, December 16th, 2016; [article](#)

AWARDS

Associate Dean's Fellowship, 2017.

Recognizes graduate students who are making excellent progress in their graduate program. It will take the place of a TA fellowship during my dissertation year.

Annual Jean-Claude Falmagne Award, 2017.

Awarded to one advanced graduate student from the Cognitive Science Department, accompanied by \$5000.

Annual Jean-Claude Falmagne Award, runner up, 2016.

Awarded to one advanced graduate student from the Cognitive Science Department, I received the runner-up prize, which was accompanied by \$500.

Annual Yellott Scholar Award, 2015.

Given to one graduate student, who has not yet advanced, from the Cognitive Science Department. I received the runner-up prize, which was accompanied by \$500.

Experimental Social Science Graduate Student Workshop Program, Research Grant, 2014. Awarded to two students after a workshop where students presented research proposals, \$500.

UC Irvine Merit Fellowship, 2013-2018.

This award is granted to students entering the PhD program at the University of California, Irvine, to replace four quarters of TA fellowships.

EVENTS ORGANIZED

Symposium on Early Representations of Caregiver Relationships and Consequences for Social Cognition The Society for Research on Child Development Conference, virtual. 2021.

Developing Theories on Naïve Sociology Pre-Conference Co-Chaired with Elizabeth Enright-Ake at the Cognitive Development Society, Portland, Oregon, 2017.

Symposium on The Powerful and Mighty: How Social Dominance shapes children's preferences, trust and social inferences. Co-Chaired with Dr. Lotte Thomsen at The Society for Research on Child Development Conference, Austin, TX. 2017.

INVITED TALKS

Thomas, A.J. Early ideas about Social Relationships. *Cooperation Lab Virtue Project*, Boston College

Thomas, A.J. How Infants Navigate their Social Networks *Invited by Cog Lunch Seminar Series*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Thomas, A.J. Friendly or Fearsome, Children's Representations of Social Hierarchy. *Invited by the Social Psychology Seminar Series*, University of Oslo, Norway.

Thomas, A.J. No Child Left Alone: Moral judgments about parents affect estimates of risk to children. *Invited by the department of Logic and Philosophy of Science*, University of California, Irvine

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- **Thomas, A.J.,**Bourg,C., Saxe,R., (2022). "Do researcher's perceptions of the social dynamics in their field relate to their decisions to be open?" *Presented at the Meeting of the American Chemical Society.*
- **Thomas, A.J.,**Woo, B., Nettle, D., Spelke, E.S., Saxe, R. (2021). "Infants use saliva-sharing to infer social intimacy" *Presented at the Society for Affective Sciences.*
- **Thomas, A.J.,**Woo, B., Nettle, D., Spelke, E.S., Saxe, R. (2021). "Infants Recognize 'Thick' Social Affiliation" *Presented at the Society for Research on Child Development Conference.*
- **Thomas, A.J.,** Saxe, R., Spelke, E.S. (2021). "Expanding Social Circles: Infants see the affiliates of their caregivers as more relevant to them than others." *Presented at the Society for Research on Child Development Conference.*
- **Thomas, A.J.,** Saxe, R., Spelke, E.S. (2021). "Infants see the affiliates of their Caregivers as more relevant to themselves" *Presented at the Social Cognition Preconference for SPSP.*
- **Thomas, A.J.,** Saxe, R., Spelke, E.S. (2020). "Infants use imitation but not comforting or social synchrony to evaluate those in social interactions" *Presented at the Cognitive Development Society.*
- **Thomas, A.J.,** Saxe, R., Spelke, E.S. (2020). "Infants represent 'like-kin' affiliation" *Presented at Budapest CEU Conference on Cognitive Development.*

- **Thomas, A.J.**, Sarnecka, B.W. (2019). Infants prefer those who 'bow out' of zero-sum conflicts. *Presented at 31st Human Behavior and Evolution Society*, Boston, MA.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Abramyan, M., Lukowski, A., Thomsen, L., Sarnecka, B.W. (2019). Toddlers prefer winners but not if they win by force. *Presented at 31st Human Behavior and Evolution Society*, Boston, MA.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Sumner, E., Sarnecka, B.W. (2019). Children Expect Leaders to Protect but not to Bully. *Presented at the Society for Research on Child Development Conference*, Baltimore, MA.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Abramyan, M., Lukowski, A., Thomsen, L., Sarnecka, B.W. (2017). Toddlers like winners, but not bullies. *Presented at the at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology*, Atlanta, GA.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Abramyan, M., Lukowski, A., Thomsen, L., Sarnecka, B.W. (2017). Toddlers like winners, but not bullies. *Presented at the Evolutionary Psychology Preconference at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology*, Atlanta, GA.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Abramyan, M., Lukowski, A., Thomsen, L., Sarnecka, B.W. (2017). Toddlers like winners, but not bullies. *Presented at the Naive Sociology Preconference at the Cognitive Development Society*, Portland, OR.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Sarnecka, B.W. (2017). Children Expect Leaders to be Protectors, Not Bullies. *Presented at the Cognitive Development Society*, Portland, OR.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Abramyan, M., Lukowski, A., Thomsen, L., Sarnecka, B.W. (2017). Toddlers like winners, but not bullies. *Cognitive Development Society*, Portland, OR.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Abramyan, M., Lukowski, A., Thomsen, L., Sarnecka, B.W. (2017). Mighty or the Meek: Changes in social preferences across the first two years of life. *Presented at the Society for Research on Child Development Conference*, Austin, TX.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Abramyan, M., Lukowski, A., Thomsen, L., Sarnecka, B.W. (2017). Mighty or the meek: Toddlers prefer novel, dominant individuals. *Presented at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology*, San Antonio, TX. **Outstanding Poster Award**
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Abramyan, M., Lukowski, A., Thomsen, L., Sarnecka, B.W. (2017). Mighty or the Meek: Changes in social preferences across the first two years of life. *Presented at the Budapest CEU Conference on Cognitive Development*, Budapest, Hungary.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Piff, P., Sommerville, J., Sarnecka, B.W. (2017). Three to Five-year-old children prefer hierarchical dyads to non-hierarchical dyads. *Presented at the Budapest CEU Conference on Cognitive Development*, Budapest, Hungary.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Abramyan, M., Lukowski, A., Thomsen, L., Sarnecka, B.W. (2016). Preferring the Mighty to the Meek. Toddlers Prefer Novel Dominant Agents. *Presented at the 38th Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*, Philadelphia, PA.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Abramyan, M., Lukowski, A., Thomsen, L., Sarnecka, B.W. (2016). Preferring the Mighty to the Meek. Toddlers Prefer Superiors to Subordinates. *Presented at the 42nd annual Society for Philosophy and Psychology Conference*, Austin, TX.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Stanford, P.K., Sarnecka, B.W. (2016). No child left alone: Moral judgments about parents affect estimates of risk to children. *Presented at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology Conference*, San Diego, CA.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Sarnecka, B.W. (2015). Children's ideas about fairness. Do children believe in a meritocracy? *Presented at the Symposium on Cognition and Language Development*, Irvine, CA.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Sarnecka, B.W. (2015). Hard Work, Drive, or Talent? How children reason about the causes of scholastic success. *Presented at the Society for Research in Child Development*, Philadelphia, PA.

- **Thomas, A.J.**, Sarnecka, B.W. (2015). Is it the Thought that Counts? How children allocate rewards based on effort and outcome. *Presented at the Budapest CEU Conference on Cognitive Development*, Budapest, Hungary.
- **Thomas, A.J.**, Sarnecka, B.W. (2014). Implicit Theories of Intelligence, Essentialism, and the Brain. *Presented at the Symposium on Cognition and Language Development*, Los Angeles, CA.
- Negen, J., **Thomas, A.J.**, Sarnecka, B.W. (2014). Young children hear more number words if they use number words themselves. *Presented at the Meeting for the Jean Piaget Society*, San Francisco, CA.

TEACHING

Instructor, graduate seminar at MIT
(Tools for Robust Science) 20 students

Fall 2021

Instructor at University of California, Irvine
(Introduction to Psychology) 90 students

Summer 2015, Summer 2016

Teaching Assistant at University of California, Irvine

Led Discussion sections in: Developmental Psychology, Psychology for Psychology Majors (year-long class), Research Methods,

SERVICE

Associate Editor: Collabra

Reviewer: Developmental Science, Proceedings of the Royal Society B, Royal Society Open Science, Psychological Sciences

Department Climate Committee, Harvard Psychology Department

Community of Practice Saxelab Liaison, MIT

MENTORING

I have mentored around 30 undergraduate research assistants. Many of whom have been awarded grants through University Research Opportunity Programs and Summer Undergraduate Research Programs at UC Irvine, MIT, and Harvard (total of \$20,744.) I have also served as a mentor for *PPREP* (Prospective Ph.D. RA Event in Psychology) program at Harvard.

Mentees: Luz Donato; Vivian Mitchell; Shixuan Shirley Wang; Sharon Thomsen; Judith Gallardo; Denise Giardina; Adrian Paul Ripa Riberall; Amy Giang; Anna Elizabeth Chavez Garcia; Anne Collinwood Brunson; Elisa Campello de Mello; Gabby Lomeli; Ghadeer Alabas; Joanna Baires Amaya; Judith Gallardo; Julia Elissa Majdali; Justine Skaar; Lucero Elena; Mayra Santos; Jazmin Henderson; Michelle Hung; William Adams; Sara Alansari, Vanessa Kudrnova; Annie Harris; Kristine Hocker; Aiyeden Uzamere; Will Adams, Vanessa Kurdrnova

Theses and Research Projects Supervised *With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility?* (Elisa Campello de Mello); *A Naïve Understanding of Social Hierarchies: Which Organization do Children Prefer?* (Vivian Mitchell); *Toddlers Expectations about Information and Social Hierarchy* (Will Adams); *Connecting Imitation with Comforting; evidence that infants track relationships instead of traits* (Vanessa Kurdrnova)

TRAINING

- Addressing Diversity: What Sets UCI students apart from others
- Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Teaching of 1st Generation College Students
- Academics for Black Survival and Wellness Anti-Racism Training
- Diversity: A Workshop and Forum of Ideas

MEDIA INTERVIEWS AND COVERAGE

- **NPR** Even babies and toddlers know that swapping saliva is a sure sign of love
- **Science Fridays** Saliva Sharing Might Help Kids Identify Their Closest Relationships
- **MIT News** Babies can tell who has close relationships based on one clue: saliva
- **New Scientist** Babies can tell who's closely related from whether they share saliva
- **CTV News** Kiss and tell: study says saliva sharing a signal for babies learning about relationships
- **The Economist** Babies learn about the world by looking at who shares saliva
- **STAT** Kisses, licks, and drool: Study shows how 'saliva sharing' shapes babies' understanding of the closest relationships
- **INVERSE:** Pioneering study reveals how babies work out who they can trust.
- **Science** Spit take: Even young infants know we only swap saliva with the ones we love
- **UPI** Babies identify close relationships by saliva, study suggests
- **Philly Voice** Kissing and food-sharing help babies identify close relationships, study shows
- **Science News** Babies may use saliva sharing to figure out relationships
- **Scientias:** baby's weten wie innige relaties hebben op basis van speekseluitwisseling
- **APF:** The dribble test: How toddlers spot close social ties
- **ScaryMommy:** Even Babies Get That Sharing Food Shows Intimacy
- **The Naked Scientists:** Infants spot sharing saliva in relationships
- **Quirks and Quarks:** Kids take note of who you kiss and who shares your ice cream
- **Psychology Today:** Slobbery Secrets: Sharing Saliva Is Surprisingly Significant
- **NPR** Toddlers Like Winners, But How They Win Matters. 27 August 2018.
- **NPR** Why Do We Judge Parents for Putting Kids At Perceived — But Unreal — Risk? 22 August 2016.
- **Rising Up with Sonali on KPCC Radio** No Child Left Alone: Moral Judgments About Parents. 29 August 2016.
- **Top of Mind with Julie Rose, BYU Radio** Sepsis a Medical Emergency, Judging Parents, Thai Fractures. 29 August 2016.
- **KUCI** Ask a Leader. 27 September 2016.
- **Bloomberg View** Don't Leave Your Kids Near Judgmental Strangers. 12 September 2016.
- **Quartz** Parents' judginess of other parents is making their kids less able to deal with life. 7 September 2016.
- **Psychology Today** Young Children Value Kindness Over Winning in a Conflict. 12 September 2018
- **NPR** Unlike Humans, Bonobos Shun Helpers And Befriend The Bullies. Work on toddlers mentioned by Hamlin. 4 January 2018
- **Washington Post** The perils of condemning parents for exposing kids to supposed dangers that aren't real. 23 August 2016.
- **Psychology Today** Unattended Children, Harm, and the Nature of Moral Judgment. 23 August 2016.
- **New York Magazine** The Surprising Way We Judge Who's a Bad Parent. 26 August 2016.
- **Scientific American Mind** When Can You Leave a Child Unattended? 1 January 2017.
- **Toronto Star** If you leave your kids alone, it's not predatory strangers who are a risk. September 13, 2016.
- **Athiestically Speaking** No Child Left Alone. 21 September 2016.

- **KPCC AirTalk** with Larry Mantle. 25 August 2016.
- **Savage LoveCast** Episode 515. September 2016.
- **Radio Calgary** Danielle Smith News Talk 770. 15 September 2016.
- **CBC The Current**. 8 November 2016.
- **Bad Mother Podcast** Episode 186. 05 January 2017.
- **Feminist Philosophers** Judgments of risk to children and parental culpability. 22 August 2016.
- **UCI News** Why are we so afraid to leave children alone? 23 August 2016.
- **Science Daily** Why are we so afraid to leave children alone? 23 August 2016.
- **Washington Post** The perils of condemning parents for exposing kids to supposed dangers that aren't real. 23 August 2016.
- **Slate's XXfactor blog** Our Assessment of Parents Is More Informed by Moral Judgment Than Actual Risks. 24 August 2016.
- **Babble** Why are we so Irrationally Afraid of Leaving our Kids Alone? 24 August 2016.
- **The Daily Mail** Leaving a child at home alone ISN'T always unsafe - it's just socially unacceptable, study claims. 25 August 2016.
- **NostroFiglio.it** Perché i genitori hanno così tanta paura a lasciare un bambino da solo? 25 August 2016.
- **New York Magazine** The Surprising Way We Judge Who's a Bad Parent. 26 August 2016.
- **Univision** ¿Por qué tenemos tanto miedo de dejar a los niños solos? 26 August 2016.
- **Consumer Affairs** Why parents are afraid to leave their kids alone? It's judgment, not danger, that parents fear most. 29 August 2016.
- **WRDW News 12 NBC 26 This Morning** On Your Side News Program. 29 August 2016.
- **Fox 29** Good Day Philadelphia. 30 August 2016.
- **FreeRangeKids.com** Our Moral Judgement Influences How Dangerous We Believe The Situation Is. 30 August 2016.
- **The Psychology Community** I'm Morally Outraged, Therefore That Child is in Danger. 31 August 2016.
- **Vital** Veszélyben van az egyedül hagyott gyermek? 1 September 2016.
- **The Federalist** How Judging Other Parents Can Equal Class Warfare. 2 September 2016.
- **The American Spectator** Mothers are the Worst....to Other Mothers. 6 September 2016.
- **The Library of Economics and Liberty** Helicopter Parenting and Moral Causation .6 September 2016.
- **The New York Post** Why parents need to judge other parents. 8 September 2016.
- **Reason.com** Former Latch-Key Kids Who Are Now Parents, Unite! 15 September 2016.
- **Treehugger** Why do we judge parents for leaving kids unattended when it's perfectly safe? 20 September 2016.
- **Fast Company** Why Do We Punish Parents For Letting Their Kids Go Outside Unattended? 26 September 2016.
- **Huffington Post** Fact-Checking Is Largely Irrelevant Because Deceit Is Not What's Causing Moral Outrage, Clinton's Gender Is. 27 September 2016.
- **Psych Central** What 'Stranger Things' Can Teach Us about Parenting. 28 September 2016.
- **The American Spectator** New laws continue to embolden a growing legion of moral busybodies. 29 September 2016.
- **Hartford Courant** How Did Unsupervised Kids Become A Moral Failing? 18 December 2016.
- **Psychology Today** Social Norms, Moral Judgments, and Irrational Parenting. March 2017