**Research Statement**

My proposed project will examine cross cultural variation in mothers' communication strategies to direct their infants' attention to objects. Engaging in joint attention; where individuals share information about objects and events in the environment; is a crucial predictor of children's later language and social cognition development. Children start to share attention from nine months and these interactions are underpinned by the ability to follow the gaze and pointing gestures of others to coordinate attention. Most research around this has been conducted in the lab, where infants follow a controlled set of gaze and pointing cues. However, this may not be representative of how mothers attract infants' attention in everyday naturalistic interactions. It is unknown whether certain maternal strategies in directing infants' attention are more effective than others or help scaffold the emergence of attention following skills more successfully. To understand these issues within naturalistic mother-infant interactions, Professor Slocombe's team asked British and Ugandan mothers to direct their infants' attention to interesting objects when their infants were six, ten and twelve months old.

So far, their results suggest that Ugandan infants follow their mothers' attention directing signals earlier than British infants. In order to explore this cross cultural difference in communication development, I would like to investigate the attention-directing strategies used by the British and Ugandan mothers when their infants were six months. This would allow us to understand whether Ugandan mothers use different strategies to British mothers. As well as if mothers from both groups differ in the frequency and duration at which they use these strategies, and whether their use at six months predicts the age that infants reliably follow their mother's attention directing signals. Finding answers to these questions will help my quest to better understand child development and to address personal curiosity as whether certain strategies can facilitate communication, given my own premature birth which resulted in physical delays, but no communication deficits.

To ensure the project is successful I will implement this plan: In week one, I will be trained to use the video-coding software "Observer XT" and I will then lead the development of a coding scheme to capture the range of maternal strategies used in Uganda and the United Kingdom. In week two, I will code a set of videos alongside another member of the lab. I will be trained to calculate inter-observer reliability scores and will work with the other coder to discuss and resolve discrepancies. In the next three weeks I can then independently code maternal attention directing strategies for 20 videos per culture. In week 6, I will extract the data and look at potential patterns, applying statistical models to examine differences in strategies of the two cultures where appropriate.

There may be the opportunity (COVID-dependent) to develop a related leadership opportunity in Uganda for summer 2022, working alongside Prof Slocombe's team and the participant families. Leadership activities could involve disseminating research results and leading focus groups to help determine future directions for infant research that community members would particularly value.