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This was the second time I attended and presented a poster at IMFAR. After a phenomenal meeting in Montréal last year, I had high expectations for Seattle. IMFAR 2007 had no problem maintaining and exceeding my expectations for breadth and quality of research.

Each morning began with an address from an advocate group. Every speaker was inspiring. Their talks put the research I was learning about into context; what will it mean for individuals and their families? The three keynote speakers were remarkable experts in their respective fields. Each one had a gift for providing enough background information for all attendees to understand how their specific research fits into the bigger picture of autism. Dr. Anthony Bailey spoke about the neuroscience of autism, its complexities, and changes with development and task complexity. There is no signal brain lesion that leads to autistic behaviour, therefore neuroscientists have the complex job of deciphering how the brain communicates and integrates activity in multiple regions. Dr. Kuhl presented strong support for the amazing ability of toddlers to learn languages and evidence to support that *some* children with autism prefer what sounds like computer beeps to human speech. These results could lead to innovative

approaches for teaching language to children with autism, although at least for normal children a key component of learning is social interplay (more research needs to be done with children who have or are at risk for autism). After the recent explosion of genetic research Dr. Geschwind gave a (much needed) summary and explanation of this area. The connecting theme of the keynotes' presentations was: genes are risk factors and a number have been linked to autistic behaviour. However our environment and behaviour impact how genes are expressed and more research is needed to understand how the gene-environment-behaviour interplay works.

A particular highlight for me was the opportunity to meet Dr. Stewart Mostofsky from Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Mostofsky consistently investigates and publishes research exploring how children with autism learn and control motor movements. I have followed his work closely because of the immediate relevance to my own research. It was key for me to learn what his *current* research program is investigating (and finding) by listening to his presentation and reading through the various posters from his lab. It was exciting to share the results I have been working on and to discuss what we believe

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accounts for the difficulties each of us has observed with learning and performing only certain motor tasks. I am in the process of writing my dissertation and had been thinking about what theory was consistent with my findings and could provide a unifying explanation. One poster from Dr. Mostofsky's group reported increased white matter in the motor cortex of children with autism predicts poorer motor performance (based on the PANESS, a widely used standardized test of motor skill). This new report is pivotal for me because the results provide direct evidence to support the explanations I have proposed in my dissertation.

IMFAR 2007 was an exciting and enlightening experience, with *plenty* of relevant and useful presentations. I left Seattle with new ideas for research and a renewed feeling of the importance for a collaborative and inclusive approach to autism research. Thank you for making this trip possible! (& if you're in Seattle I highly recommend the underground tour in Pioneer square)