4th Year Seminars

Undergraduate Psychology Poster Session

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Undergraduate Psychology Poster Session
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Man’s Best Friend? Exploring Children’s Preferences for Stories with Animal Companions or All Human Characters
Laura Albert, Bessie Miller, Brett Nicol, and Aleeza Villena

Previous research has shown that children do not prefer books with solely human characters over books with solely anthropomorphic (nonhuman characters with human-like traits) characters (Guillot, unpublished dissertation). However, children’s media often contains both human and anthropomorphic characters. For example, most Disney princesses are seen with an animal sidekick (e.g., the Little Mermaid, Ariel, has Flounder the fish). We investigated whether children show a preference for books with solely human, or human and anthropomorphic characters. Forty-three 3 to 6-year-old children ($M = 60.61$ months, $SD = 13.67$ months; 30 female), were presented with three pairs of stories and asked to choose which they liked. Children showed no significant preference for stories with both human and anthropomorphic characters ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 0.15$), $t(42) = .39$, $p = .70$, Cohen’s $d = 0.06$. However, a significant preference was found for two of the three story pairs: In one pair, children significantly preferred the human and anthropomorphic character story, $X^2(1, N = 43) = 8.40$, $p = .004$, and in another pair, children significantly preferred the solely human story, $X^2(1, N = 43) = 3.93$, $p = .047$. These conflicting findings suggest that the activities presented in each story, rather than the characters themselves, were more salient and might have had a greater effect on children’s choices. Future research can further explore children’s character preferences through better balancing of the activities presented in the stories.

Keywords: anthropomorphic, fiction preferences, children’s literature

Children’s Fiction Preferences: Anthropomorphic or Species-Typical Animal Protagonists?
Elizabeth Beverly, Taylor Morgan, Evelyn Powell, and Cameron Sims

Children’s fiction often includes animal protagonists that behave as humans, a feature referred to as “anthropomorphism.” Previous research regarding anthropomorphism and children’s fiction preferences has indicated that children prefer reading stories about characters with whom they can identify (i.e., gender; Guillot, unpublished dissertation). In this study, we examined whether children prefer stories about anthropomorphic characters or stories in which the same animal demonstrates species-typical behavior. Consistent with the aforementioned research, we predicted that children would prefer the anthropomorphic stories since the characters exhibit more human behavior, and thus, more relatable behavior. Researchers presented 43 participants between the ages of 3 to 6 ($M = 60.61$ months; $SD = 13.67$ months; 30 female), with three pairs of books, each pair featuring a different animal character (dog, horse, duck). For each pair, the researcher read aloud the two book titles and gave their respective descriptions, one featuring typical animal behavior and the other exhibiting anthropomorphic behavior. The children were then directed to choose which book they liked. Children did not significantly prefer anthropomorphic books, $t(42) = 1.03$, $p = .311$, Cohen’s $d = 0.16$. Interestingly, the children did tend to prefer the anthropomorphic duck item in comparison to the species-typical duck item, $X^2(1, N = 43) = 10.26$, $p = .001$. In retrospect, this item was the most descriptive and portrayed a more fun, recreational activity than the other pairs. Therefore, research into the use of imagery in books may reveal more about children’s fiction preferences.

Keywords: fiction, children, anthropomorphism, animals
Children Prefer More Fantastical Fiction Stories  
Miranda A. Pfister, Michelle L. Cox, and Justin H. Lagbo

Prior research on children’s fiction preferences has demonstrated that children prefer realistic stories over ones with fantastical elements (Barnes, Bernstein, & Bloom, 2015). This study utilized a forced-choice paradigm and included items such as “an alien eating a cookie” versus “a boy playing hide and seek.” We hypothesized that with stronger examples of fantasy in stories, children would be more inclined to choose the fantastical over the realistic. We aimed to include a more diverse, exciting set of fantastical versus realistic choices, such as “flying to the castle with your dragon” versus “racing to the park with your dog.” Participants were 43 children between the ages of 3 and 6 years old ($M = 60.61$ months, $SD = 13.67$ months; 30 female) who participated either in the Early Development Laboratory at the University of Virginia or in the Virginia Discovery Museum located in downtown Charlottesville. Participants were read a sentence about two different stories, one realistic and one fantastical, and then were asked to choose which story they liked. Children significantly preferred the fantastical stories, $t(42) = 2.98$, $p = .005$, Cohen’s $d = 0.45$. There was no significant correlation between age and preference, $r(42) = .20$, $p = .207$. Our results indicate that children may prefer fantasy literature. Perhaps these contradictory findings are due to the increase in fantastical elements within items. However, given that there are contradictory results, replication and further studies are necessary.

Keywords: fiction, children, fantasy, preference

Boys’ and Girls’ Fiction Preferences Differ with the Manipulation of Protagonists’ Gender and Gender-Stereotyped Activity  
Brooke Ellis, Sarah Kolodzik, Bridget Moran, Peri Oxford, and Sarah Woods

Kropp and Halverson (1983) found that children preferred storybooks in which protagonists matching their own gender performed gender-stereotyped activities. When analyzing the effect of gender on these results, they found that this preference was stronger for boys than girls. We conducted a study to determine whether the same-gender protagonist or the gender-stereotyped activity was more influential in children’s preferences. Forty-three children ($M = 60.61$ months, $SD = 13.68$ months; 30 female) were shown pairs of storybooks with male and female protagonists performing non-gender-stereotyped activities and asked which storybook they liked. Children preferred storybooks with a female protagonist engaging in a stereotypically-male activity, $t(42) = 2.10$, $p = .042$, Cohen’s $d = 0.32$; this preference increased with age, $r(41) = .35$, $p = .02$. Contrary to Kropp and Halverson’s results (1983) and our hypothesis, girls showed a significant preference for storybooks with a female protagonist engaging in a stereotypically-male activity, $t(29) = 2.62$, $p = .014$, Cohen’s $d = 0.48$, whereas boys did not show a significant preference, $t(12) = 0.12$, $p = .904$, Cohen’s $d = 0.03$. By manipulating the protagonist’s gender and activity to not correspond, boys’ preference for same-gender protagonists (shown in Kropp and Halverson [1983]) disappeared, and a stronger preference for same-gender protagonists emerged in girls. These results suggest that gender-stereotypical activities might be particularly salient to boys, whereas gender of the protagonist might be more salient to girls. Future studies addressing why children made their choices will help to determine whether this is the case.

Keywords: gender-stereotyped activity, fiction preferences, children, gender
The Effect of Race on Children’s Fiction Book Preferences

Benjamin Goldberg, Janetta Parker, and Moksha Sharma

Previous research has indicated that reading books with characters of different races improves children’s tolerance toward people of other races (Lichter & Johnson, 1969), but it is unclear whether children’s own race affects their preference for books with characters of different races. Do children prefer fiction books with a main character that is the same race as them? Thirty-eight children aged 3-6 years old (\(M = 60.23\) months, \(SD = 13.89\) months; 28 female) were shown two book covers that differed only in title. One book was described as having a Black child doing an activity, such as playing soccer or eating a sandwich, and the other was described as having a White child doing the same activity. Children were then asked which of the two books they liked. White children showed no significant preference for books with White or Black characters (\(M = 1.30, SD = 1.10\)), \(t(32) = -1.03, p = .31\), Cohen’s \(d = 0.18\). Black children also showed no significant preference for books with White or Black characters (\(M = 1.40, SD = 1.52\)), \(t(4) =-.15, p = .89\), Cohen’s \(d = 0.36\). Our findings suggest that children’s own race does not affect their preference for books with same- or other-race characters. Although children’s race does not directly appear to affect their fiction book preference, prior research suggests that exposure to books with racially diverse characters remains beneficial to their cognitive and social development. Future studies will benefit from a more racially diverse sample.

*Keywords:* race, books, fiction preferences
**Parent-Child Relationship Quality and Life Satisfaction Among Children of Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Parents**

*Jei-Si Ang*

This study examined parent-child relationship quality and its association with life satisfaction among adopted adult children of lesbian, gay, and heterosexual (LGH) parents. As such, our research questions are: does parent-child relationship quality differ as a function of parents’ sexual orientation, does children’s life satisfaction differ as a function of parents’ sexual orientation, is parent-child relationship quality associated with life satisfaction, and is this association moderated by parent’s sexual orientation? We predict that parent-child relationship quality will differ as a function of parents’ sexual orientation and that children’s life satisfaction will not differ as a function of parents’ sexual orientation. We also predict that positive parent-child relationships are associated with greater life satisfaction and that this association is not moderated by parents’ sexual orientation. This research simultaneously helps expand our knowledge on the experiences and psychosocial adjustment of adult children who were adopted during childhood and helps fill in the overlapping gaps in the research on adopted children in their adulthood, adopted children raised by lesbian and gay parents, and adopted children’s overall well-being.

*Keywords*: adoption, adult children, lesbian and gay parents, life satisfaction, parent-child relationship

**Association Between Single-Parent Income and Their Gender on Their Children’s Academic Performance**

*Carolina Cordova*

The present study examines academic performance amongst children of single parents and its association with income and the parent’s gender. The sample consisted of single-parent households with children ages 5-11, all of which had different levels of income. We predict that the results will reveal that although there isn’t a direct association between the gender of the single parent and the academic achievement of their children, there is an indirect relationship mitigated by a third variable: the single parent’s income. Following this logic, we believe that children of single father households will fare better academically than children of single mother households. This prediction bases itself in the fact that single fathers tend to have a higher income than single mothers, and as a result, their children will have more access to education and higher academic performance. Therefore, we also foresee that as the single parent’s income increases, the academic achievement of their children increases as well, according to our results. This study will have important implications on research of single-parent families with children and the influence of different household factors on the wellbeing of the children themselves.

*Keywords*: single parents by divorce or separation; academic performance; gender of single parent; single-parent income
The Effect of Child Age at Time of Parents’ Divorce on Child Outcomes

Catherine Foliaco

The purpose of this study was to address child outcomes after their parents’ divorce. Several individual differences can impact child outcomes, as several factors come into play when talking about divorce and how it might affect children. Specifically, this study addressed the age of the child at the time of divorce, and how that age affects their behavioral and academic outcomes. The specific question addressed by this study is “Does the age of the child at the time of the divorce affect behavioral and academic outcomes?” This study examined children under age 18 and their report cards as well as an online Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). We expected to find that children who are in elementary school (6-10) or middle school (11-13) at the time of their parents’ divorce will have worse outcomes than children who are younger or older. The implications and benefits of this study include clinical implications for helping children who are coping with divorce. Information about the ages at which divorce is most difficult for children can help parents and practitioners understand the troubles children face.

Keywords: academic outcomes, age of the child, behavioral outcomes, Child Behavior Checklist, divorce

Race of Adoptive Parents and Location of Upbringing in Relation to Self-Esteem Among Transracial Adoptees

Mariana Fraser

A majority of research on adoptions has focused on general adoptions, and not as much on the specifics of transracial ones. Even less of this research has focused on the relation of these transracial adoptions with the self-esteem of the adopted children, specifically as it relates to the location of the children’s upbringing. Transracial adoptions, for the purpose of this study, will look at White families who have adopted Black children, and inracial adoptions will look at Black families with adopted Black children. While many studies have shown that there aren’t significant differences in self-esteem between transracial adoptees and inracial adoptees, not as much research has pointed towards these results when looking at transracial adoptions in urban versus rural settings. I will thus be looking at whether transracial adoptees in rural areas report lower self-esteem than those in urban areas. The difference in self-esteem between transracial and inracial adoptees will also be studied. Both questions will be answered using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. Overall, it is expected that transracial adoptees will display similar levels of self-esteem as their inracial counterparts, and transracial adoptees will display lower levels of self-esteem when residing in rural areas.

Keywords: transracial adoption, inracial adoption, self-esteem, location of upbringing (rural vs. urban)
The Role of the Siblings in Varying Family Structures: The Correlation Between Number of Siblings and the Well Being of Children

Olivia Frierson

This study plans to examine children’s well-being and its associations with number of siblings and family structure among children ages 8-15 years old. Well-being will be measured with the Stirlings Children’s Well-Being Scale (SCWBS; Liddle, 2015). I expect that children with more siblings will have lower SCWBS scores than children with few siblings. However, I think that children with more siblings will have higher scores than only children (children without siblings). I expect to find this due to the resource dilution theory and prior research about family size but also because of the research that shows the benefits of sibling relationships. When examining the interaction between number of siblings and family structure, I expect to find that the difference in number of siblings will have more of an effect on SCWBS scores in single parent homes and blended families than in two biological parent families. This may be found due to instability of certain family types as well as the lack of another adult or invested adult, so the siblings may end up filling other roles. This study could be another stepping stone into highlighting the importance of the role of siblings in a family system.

Keywords: siblings, well being, family complexity, family size

Lack of Mental Health Services Provided to Children of Immigrant and Undocumented Parents Despite Elevated Levels of Anxiety and Depression

Ramsha Hamid

This study will examine the availability of mental health services for children of immigrant and undocumented parents. Previous research shows that children of immigrant and undocumented parents endure more stress compared to children of families with legal status. Although these children face higher levels of anxiety and depression, they have limited access to proper mental health care. The purpose of this specific study will be to compare the levels of anxiety and depression that affects children of immigrant and undocumented parents to children of families with legal status and whether these children have proper access to care if needed (if they have ever been, or considered going, to a therapist). Children from immigrant families and undocumented parents in the same county, that are part of their school’s free-meal program (of lower socio-economic status), will be surveyed for this study. Results are expected to show that children of immigrant and undocumented parents have significantly higher levels of anxiety and depression yet do not have proper access to psychological care. These findings can put pressure on government officials to start programs for these children to lower the rate of negative outcomes and provide better psychological care for those who desperately require it.

Keywords: mental health services, immigrant parents, undocumented parents, children with anxiety and depression, lack of legal status, anti-immigration policies
Ecological Climate and Relationship Stability Amongst Couples in New York  
Maho Hayakawa

The study will examine the causal relationship between ecological climate and relationship stability for couples living in New York. While there have been many studies proving the importance of family stability in the well-being of their children, there has been little study that tested what specific factors threatened the positive relationship within the parents. Ecological climate is controlled by the different seasons that the surveys will be given, while the context of the surveys will measure for relationship stability. I expect warmer ecological climate to negatively impact relationship stability. There are previous studies that support the hypothesis. However, at the same time, there are counterarguments from past research. All in all, the area of study requires more attention and focus from psychologists, as it lacks sufficient sources that seems to validate the outcome.

Keywords: ecological climate, relationship stability, Experiences in Close Relationships Scale, Big Five Inventory

The Impact of Availability and Use of Mental Health Resources Among Young, Single Mothers  
Sarah Heier

This study examined the impact that the availability and use of mental health resources had on psychological disorders and symptoms of these disorders for young, single mothers. Young mothers face many challenges adjusting to parenting on their own and to understand the impact of these challenges we studied participants that became mothers between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four. We analyzed the availability of mental health resources and other supports made evident to participants by their physician or other community forums as well as their use of these resources to observe the potential impact they had on the participants’ mental well being in terms of the presence and severity of psychological disorders. We predicted that the availability of mental health resources will be associated with an increase in the use of these resources and that the use will have a positive impact on the mental health of young, single mothers. Not only is this research important in understanding how best to support young single mothers for their own benefit, but also for their children’s benefit.

Keywords: mental health, single mothers, teen pregnancy, psychological disorders, mental health resources
Internalizing Behaviors in Children of Single Mothers by Choice
Grace Howie

Single mothers by choice are generally older than single mothers not by choice, are more educated, and more frequently hold professional occupations. These qualities lessen the likelihood of financial difficulties for single mother by choice families, thereby decreasing the cause of some psychological stress associated with single mother not by choice families. This study aims to examine if (1) children of single mothers by choice show different rates of internalizing behaviors than children of married mothers, and (2) if mothers’ responses on the CBCL internalizing subscale are consistent with the responses given by their children. It is expected that children of both family types will not show significantly different rates of internalizing behaviors, and that mothers will be less accurate in providing information on the CBCL internalizing subscale than their children. Literature surrounding positive outcomes of children raised by single mothers by choice may help to diffuse the bias surrounding this underrepresented family type.

Keywords: single mothers by choice, internalizing behaviors, Child Behavioral Checklist Internalizing Subscale

Single Mothers: The Effects of Age, Income, and Financial Support on Their Child’s Behavior
Rebecca Lass

A majority of research completed on single-mothers has been conducted comparing single-parent families to two-parent families, with little to no focus on the differences between different types of single-parent families. Such within group variation of single-mother families may present different outcomes and implications for their child’s well being than what is typically seen when studying single-parent families as a whole. This study examined single mothers’ age at childbirth, income, and financial support and the associations with their child’s behavior using the Child Behavioral Checklist (CBCL). Results revealed that the mother’s age at the time they had their child, their annual salary, and the amount of financial support they received were all negatively correlated with their child’s behavior. This means that the older the mother, the more money she makes, and the more financial support she receives, the less likely her child is to display problematic behavior in school. This study has important implications for expanding our knowledge of variation among single-mother families.

Keywords: single mother, children’s behavior, Child Behavioral Checklist, age of the mother, income, financial support
Age of Adoption Effects on Adoptive Families

Ebony Logan

The purpose of this study is to see what influences age has on the adoptive parent-child relationship. I will determine whether or not the strength of the attachments formed by adoptive families depends on the age of the child at the time of the adoption. I expect to find that age of adoption is associated with the quality of family attachments. This research is beneficial because there are very few studies on the parent-child relationship within adoptive families (Tan, Major, Marn, Na, & Jackson, 2015). The results of this study will provide more information on what can affect the strength of attachments between adoptive parents and their children.

Keywords: adoption, age effects, attachment, biology, bonding

The Effect of Racial Composition on an Adolescent’s Development of Self-Identity

Lacy McCleskey

While many studies appear to address the development of racial identities for biracial individuals, the meaning of the term “self-identity” has often been unclear and the research has rarely focused on the early adolescents who are actively going through the process of developing their identities. This study examined biracial, multiracial, and single-racial adolescents’ developments of overall self-identity. Results revealed that racial composition was associated with adolescents’ development of self-identities. Adolescents with parents of different races, which included biracial and multiracial individuals, reported more negative perceptions of their self-identities than their peers whose parents were the same race. While all adolescents struggle to develop their self-identities during their middle school years, biracial and multiracial adolescents face additional challenges.

Keywords: racial composition, adolescent, development of self-identity, biracial, multiracial
Challenging Stereotypes: An Experimental Investigation of the Same-Sex Family Dynamic

Madison Neisser

This study will examine children’s peer relationship development and its association with parents’ sexual orientation and parental involvement among parent populations (gay, lesbian and heterosexual) and their adopted children (ages ranging from 3-18). In particular, this experiment analyzes whether parental involvement differs among same-sex families and across different-sex families, and this discrepancy’s hypothesized influence on the quality of peer relationships in children. It is predicted that gay fathers will be associated with higher parental involvement in comparison to heterosexual parent families. However, results are not anticipated to indicate gay fathers’ of having higher parental involvement among LGBT parents, when compared with lesbian mothers. The inferred positive parenting practices are hypothesized to improve social skills development, specifically of peer relationships. This study has important implications in contributing to necessary research for public policies involving gay and lesbian parents, as well as reducing the overall stigmatization faced by this familial structure.

Keywords: sexual minority parents, sexual orientation, coparenting, children’s social development, parenting practices

Adolescent Children’s Happiness and School Behavior: Their Association to the Interparental Conflict of Divorced Parents

Sammi Rappaport

This study will examine associations between levels of divorced couples’ parental conflict and their adolescent (ages 12-17) children’s levels of happiness and behavior in school. To mitigate the potential of receiving inaccurate conflict reports from parents, I will use Grych et al.’s “Children’s Perception of Interparental Conflict” (CPIC) scale, and I will distribute a checklist to teachers to collect data on children’s behavior at school. Additionally, I will measure child happiness via a five-question “Subjective Happiness” scale. I hope to fill the gap in existing literature by addressing two key research questions: (1) Do adolescent children of divorce in homes with high parental conflict behave worse at school than adolescent children of divorce in homes with low parental conflict? (2) Do adolescent children of divorce in homes with high parental conflict experience lower levels of happiness than adolescent children of divorce in homes with low parental conflict? Ultimately, I expect children of divorce with high interparental conflict to misbehave more at school and report less happiness than children with low interparental conflict – a finding that would direct future literature away from simply categorizing divorce as the issue and rightfully placing the onus on interparental conflict instead.

Keywords: divorce, adolescent children’s happiness, adolescent children’s behavior in school, Interparental conflict, divorce effects

Danielle Rodgers

More individuals are self-identifying as multiracial as the years go on, but there is not been an increase of multiracial incorporation into research on well-being and outcomes. This study examines the relationship between single parent ethnic-racial socialization techniques on adolescent behavioral outcomes in terms of internalizing and externalizing behaviors. We are interested to see if the parenting technique of ethnic-racial socialization through cultural assimilation, enculturation, and racial inculcation is related to higher or lower reports of internalizing and externalizing behavior. We expect that techniques of cultural assimilation will relate to the higher rates of internalizing and externalizing behaviors, followed by racial inculcation than enculturation techniques. It is important to incorporate multicultural adolescents from single parent homes into the dialogue of adolescent outcome because they have increased exposure to risk factors that could be detrimental to their outcomes and well-being. This study can be used to expand the field of multiculturalism in fragile family systems as well as provide insight to future implementation of programs that can service parents and adolescents within the multicultural, single parent home.

Keywords: single parent families, ethnic-racial socialization, multiculturalism, adolescent development

What Happens to Military Families When Parents Must Serve?
An Analysis of How Parents and Children Deal with Being Apart from Each Other

Sebastien Simko

This study examines the relationship between a military parent’s deployment on both parents’ stress levels and their children’s anxiety among parents of several different military branches (Navy, Army, Marine, and Air Force) and children (Age 6-12). I question if either the mother or father is deployed for a long period of time, then will this increase the couple’s stress? Furthermore, will the children of this couple have increased anxiety if one of their parental figure is deployed for a long period of time? I expect to find that the longer the deployment is and the more frequent the deployments for either the husband or the wife the more stress there will be for both people in the couple. As for the children, I expect to find that the longer and more frequent the deployment, the more anxiety the children will experience. The stress and anxiety can stem from many factors that I will seek to research before I explain how I will execute my own study. Once my research has been published and recognized for its contributions I hope that counseling programs for military personnel and academic programs for children of these families can offer better support emotionally and academically.

Keywords: deployment, military branch, child anxiety, PTSD, parental stress
Effect of Parent-Child Contact on Child Behavior in Grandparent Kinship Care Families  
*Julia Worley*

Contact between parents and children in foster care is an area of debate because parental contact is recognized to be important in a child’s overall wellbeing, yet can also present challenges. In kinship family environments, these challenges are especially notable because of preexisting family relationships that often have unique complexities. Due to the difficult nature of studying this topic, it is underrepresented in the literature. The current study examines the effect of the consistency and quality of parent-child contact on children’s behavior within families in which the child is being raised by a grandparent. The expected results of this study are that children who experience consistent, high quality interactions with their biological parent will show decreased levels of problem behavior compared to children who experience inconsistent, low quality interactions who are expected to show increased levels of problem behaviors. It is expected that children involved in inconsistent, high quality, or consistent, low quality interactions will show intermediate levels of problem behavior compared with the groups listed above. The results of this study provide important implications for practitioners and policy makers tasked with helping families in providing a healthy environment for children in this type of care.

*Keywords:* child behavior, child welfare, grandparent, kinship care, parent-child contact

Religiosity: Associations with Parenting Attitudes and Adolescent Wellbeing  
*Muna Yusuf*

This study examined religiosity among families and its associations with parenting attitudes and adolescent wellbeing. The study will consist of school-age children, grades sixth through twelfth grade, and their parents. We expect results to show that religiosity will be highly correlated with better parenting attitudes and adolescent wellbeing. Adolescents that participate in religious activities more frequently and have higher religiosity should show higher levels of wellbeing in their health and behavior. Similarly, parents’ that have higher levels of religiosity and more frequently participate in religious activities should have better parenting attitudes also yielding higher wellbeing in their adolescent’s health and behavior. Thus concluding that, religiosity may be strongly linked to better adolescent wellbeing, which in the future could help create better outreach programs for troubled adolescents.

*Keywords:* religiosity, religious activities, parenting attitudes, adolescent wellbeing, health and behavior
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