

CULTURE & SOCIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT LAB



ABOUT OUR LAB & RESEARCH

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In the Culture and Social Identity Development Laboratory, we aim to understand the experiences of diverse children as they begin to form their gender and racial/ethnic identities. We seek to investigate children's early "intergroup" attitudes (e.g. towards children from various gender and racial/ethnic backgrounds), thoughts and feelings (e.g. belief in gender stereotypes, feelings about their identity), and behaviors (e.g. playing with certain toys) that are linked with their developing identities with the goal of encouraging academic achievement, respectful peer relationships, and a positive sense of self.

This newsletter describes some of the studies that we are currently working on or have already completed. We hope that you and your child have enjoyed being a part of our research.

PARTICIPATING CENTERS

Much of the research described in this newsletter has been made possible by many parents, children, schools, centers, programs, teachers and staff. We thank these schools and centers for their participation.



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COMPLETED STUDIES

Testing Whether Favoritism Towards One's Own Group and Towards One's Own Racial/Ethnic Group is Found Across Diverse Children

To understand the origins of how racial prejudice develops, past research has found that even young children tend to show favoritism towards their own groups (both randomly assigned “minimal” groups according to T-shirt colors and racial/ethnic group). Psychologists have traditionally interpreted these results to mean that we have a basic human tendency to favor our own groups and favor those who are similar and familiar to us. However, past research has predominantly focused on White children. This study asked whether favoritism towards one's own groups would also be found among Asian-, Black-, and Latiné- as well as White-American children living



in 5 US geographical regions - Hawaii, Seattle, North Carolina, Connecticut, and California. Interviewing 716 4- to 6-year-old children, we found that among White children, results replicated past studies. White children showed favoritism towards their own (arbitrarily assigned) T-shirt color group and towards their own racial/ethnic group across all measures (liking of same-group children depicted in photos, giving more erasers to their own group, and closer hypothetical seating distance to a same-group child). Results for children of color were less consistent; sometimes they showed favoritism towards their own group, sometimes no bias, and sometimes even favoritism towards a different group. We speculate that children of color might show less consistent biases due to the internalization of status hierarchies in society that privilege White people. For the sample as a whole, older children generally showed more “minimal group” and racial group bias than younger children did. This study highlights the continued need to include children of color in research to fully understand how racial prejudice develops.



Students: Mercedes Muñoz, Brenda Straka, Ashley Jordan, Elizabeth Enright-Ake, Alisha Osornio (alum), Anais Martinez (alum), Mark Ortiz-Payne (alum); Collaborators: Dr. Yarrow Dunham (Yale), Dr. Sarah Gaither (Duke), Dr. Kristina Olson (Princeton), and Dr. Kristin Pauker (University of Hawaii). This study was supported by the National Science Foundation.

Documenting Changes in Diversity in the Composition of Friend Circles From Early Childhood to First Grade

Friendships with people who are different from us can expose us to new activities and interests, new perspectives, reduce prejudice, increase kindness, and help build a repertoire of skillsets to know how to interact with a wider range of people in our increasingly diverse world. Yet we know little about how prevalent diverse friendships are in early childhood and whether diversity in early friendships impacts later diversity. To address this research gap, we annually asked mothers of 234



Dominican American, Mexican American, and African American children about who their child was friends with from age 1 to first grade. Over this six-year period, we discovered that racial/ethnic diversity in children's friendships (e.g., being friends with a child from a different racial/ethnic background) generally increased over time, but gender and age diversity decreased (e.g., being friends with a child with a different gender or age). In addition, having diverse friends at an early age (at or around ages 2-3 years) was positively linked with having diverse friends at or around first grade. These findings suggest that promoting integration even in very early social settings might benefit later integration at the start of school, conferring numerous benefits to children.

Collaborators: Dr. Anna Bennet (New York University), Dr. Yana Kuchirko (Brooklyn University), Dr. Carol Martin (Arizona State University), Dr. Philip Constanzo (Duke University), Dr. Diane Ruble (New York University), and Dr. Adam Stanaland (University of Richmond). Data was collected at New York University Steinhardt Center for Research on Culture, Development and Education with support from the National Institutes of Health.

Messages About Women and Men Among Middle Eastern–Heritage Families

We were interested in what young adults of Middle Eastern heritage in the U.S. have learned from their family members during childhood about how women and men are valued, as these messages might shape young adults' own views. We asked 88 U.S. university students who self-identified as having Middle Eastern heritage to write about messages they recalled from an influential family member (mostly mothers and fathers). There was variation among families in conveying the worth of gender groups. Participants reported that their



family member generally valued women and men equally (45%), valued women and men equally specifically for fulfilling traditional gender roles (19%), valued men more than women (28%; reported more often by female than male students), or valued women more than men (7%). Many students wrote about how family members emphasized that it was important to respect all genders (45%) (e.g., “My mom...would treat [people] with love and respect...Her views about men and women was consistently the same”). Unique to this sample, parents taught students that women and men were “equal in the eyes of God” and that “God loves us the same.” On the other hand, many young women also wrote about general negative messages they heard about women (14%) (e.g., “My father...wished to have a son...he said that we (daughters) will never be able to provide and take care of him when he gets older”). Many young women also wrote about societal advantages that men have (e.g., “[My parents] give [my brother] more advice and guidance on success in the future because they do not care about women’s as much”).

A second part of the study examined messages regarding women more generally. Many families emphasized that women are and should be homemakers (38%). At the same time, messages about women’s traits were both counter-stereotypical (mothers affirming women’s competence and resilience with their daughters; 10%; e.g., “My mother’s view on women is that we’re strong and can do anything we want to, and that a woman is hardworking and smart whether she works at home as a mother or in a job”), and stereotypical (emphasizing submission and obedience to husbands and fathers; 9%; e.g., “My mother viewed women as support systems for their men...My mother would say that women are the neck of the men. They tell them where to look but men are the head of the household”). Another prevalent message, especially from fathers and directed towards sons, was that women should be respected, protected and treated gently by men (23%; e.g., “[My father said] that the women in our lives are precious and should be respected and cared for unconditionally”). Overall, the emphasis on women’s roles was consistent with the importance of family in Middle Eastern cultures. Religion also shaped messages about gender among many Middle Eastern-heritage families in the U.S. More broadly, this study showed much variation among Middle Eastern-heritage families, helping to address the lack of psychological research on Middle Eastern-heritage populations who are often stereotyped and invisible.

CSULB Students: Rita Butrus, Emily Hermez, Sophya Ekmekjian, and Katherine Erian

Collaborators: Dr. Brenda Gutierrez, Dr. Courtney Ahrens, Dr. Campbell Leaper (UC Santa Cruz)

This study was supported by the CSULB Office of Research and Economic Development, CSULB College of Liberal Arts, and CSULB Associated Students Inc.

COVID-19 Related Racial Discrimination and Health Among Asian American Adult Children and Parents

The perception that COVID-19 originated in Asia incited increased anti-Asian hate crimes during the pandemic. We conducted an interview study with 6 Asian American adult child-older parent pairs (ages 22-67) to understand these COVID-19 related racial discriminatory experiences and examine whether discriminatory experiences were linked with poorer physical and mental health. Interviews revealed that experiencing direct racial discrimination during everyday routines (e.g., commuting to and from work, grocery shopping) was relatively common, and all participants experienced “indirect” discrimination (e.g., hearing about discrimination directed towards friends, neighbors, or others in the media). Although participants often minimized their own experiences with discrimination, participants described discrimination’s significant impact on behaviors (e.g., wearing hoodies to hide their appearance, avoiding public transit, restricting activities and even moving family to another region), perceptions (e.g., increased vigilance) and identity (e.g., exploration of cultural identity). Generational differences were evident. The adult children described many



negative emotions (e.g., sadness, frustration, anger) and mental (e.g., anxiety, depression) and physical health (e.g., sleep disturbances, weight fluctuations) outcomes, especially among those with pre-existing anxiety or depression. The older parents reported making efforts to maintain a positive outlook, consistent with psychological theories about improved abilities to regulate emotions with age. Generally, parent-adult child relationships were strengthened and each provided mutual support to the other.

CSULB Students: Esther Choe (alum), Akashi Suon (alum)

This study was supported by CSULB Associated Students Inc.

CURRENT STUDIES

The Development of Children's Beliefs About Romantic Love

Our romantic partners and romantic relationships are incredibly impactful on our health and well-being. Anecdotally kids sometimes talk about crushes, girlfriends and boyfriends, and “cooties.” In children’s media, romantic themes abound, such as in fairytales with a prince and princess living “happily ever after.” Yet there has been little systematic study of how children’s knowledge of romantic love develops. In this study we will interview children to ask them about what qualities they believe are necessary to find romantic love, what their expectations are for romantic love and marriage, and whether they believe in “romantic ideals” (e.g., love at first sight). We will also survey parents to ask about children’s exposure to media. As certain beliefs about romance can later affect dating behaviors (e.g., waiting for Prince Charming to be rescued; overlooking red flags like jealousy and control because of the belief that love conquers all), it is important to achieve a better understanding of the origins of these beliefs about romance.

- *Children between the ages of 4 to 10 years may participate.*
- *This study is supported by a CSULB University Mini Grant*

SHARING RESEARCH FINDINGS

Talks

- **Halim, M. D. (March 2024). Examining the role of parents and cognition in children's emerging gender intergroup attitudes.** College University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center Colloquium.
- **Halim, M. D. (March 2024). Parent encouragement to have diverse friendships and children's prosocial behaviors.** Cognitive Development Society Meeting, Pasadena, CA.
- **Butrus, R. (March 2024). Socialization messages about the comparative value of men and women among Middle Eastern families.** CSULB ORED Student Research Competition.
- **Halim, M. D. (September 2023). "She's so beautiful, he's so strong": Children's gender identity development and early adoption of gendered values.** New York University, Applied Psychology Department Colloquium.
- **Halim, M. D. (May 2023). Examining the role of parents and social cognition in ethnically-diverse children's early gender bias across the U.S.** University of California, Santa Cruz Psychology Department, Developmental Colloquium.

- **Halim, M. D. (March 2023) Family socialization of gender intergroup attitudes among diverse families.** Brooklyn College, Psychology Department Colloquium.

Conferences

- **California State University, Long Beach, Psychology Day,** Long Beach, CA
- **Cognitive Development Society,** Pasadena, CA
- **Western Psychological Association,** Riverside, CA; San Francisco, CA
- **Society for Personality and Social Psychology,** San Diego, CA
- **Society for Research on Adolescence,** Chicago, IL
- **Society for the Study of Human Development,** Philadelphia, PA

Media



HUFFPOST

- Halim, M. D. (2024, May 29). *My lab conducted a study on preschool girls. What we discovered should disturb you.* Huffington Post. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/lab-preschool-girls-study-beauty_n_663faf84e4b0866a5b2bfb51#
- Halim, M. D. (2024, June 4). *At what age do kids start to value being beautiful?* [Radio broadcast]. Lisa Dent Show WGN Radio 720. <https://wgnradio.com/lisa-dent/at-what-age-do-kids-start-to-value-being-beautiful/>
- Halim, M. D. (2024, July 1). Podcast interview: On the development of preschool girls - what the latest psychology research says. The Perkins Platform. Retrieved from <https://www.blogtalkradio.com/the-perkins-platform/2024/07/03/on-the-development-of-pre-school-girls-what-the-latest-psychology-research-says>

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- Halim, M. D., Russo, L. N.*, Echave, K. N.*, Tawa, S.*, Sakamoto, D. J.*, & Portillo, M. A.* (Online early view, 2024). “She’s so pretty”: The development of valuing personal attractiveness among young children. *Child Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.14104>
- Bennet, A., Kuchirko, Y., Halim, M. D., Costanzo, P., Martin, C. L., Stanaland, A., & Ruble, D. N. (Online early view, 2024). A six-year longitudinal exploration of diversity in ethnic/racially minoritized children’s early peer circles. *Social Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sode.12744>
- Halim, M. D., Atwood, S., Osornio, A. C.*, Olson, K. R., Pauker, K., Dunham, Y., & Gaither, S. E. (2023). Parent and self-socialization of gender intergroup attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors among ethnically and geographically diverse young children. *Developmental Psychology*, 59, 1933-1950. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001586>
- Halim, M. D., Glazier, J., Martinez, M. A.*, Stanaland, A., Gaither, S. E., Dunham, Y., Pauker, K., & Olson, K. R. (Online early view, 2023). Gender attitudes and gender discrimination among ethnically and geographically diverse young children. *Infant and Child Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/icd.2482>

—STUDENT AWARDS & HONORS—

- **CSULB ORED Summer Graduate Assistant Award:** Rita Butrus
- **CSULB Associated Students Inc. Student Research Grant:** Rita Butrus
- **CSULB Psychology Outstanding Seniors in Psychology Award:** Emily Hermez and Sophya Ekmekjian
- **CSULB Psychology Day Completed Undergraduate Research Competition, 1st Place:** Emily Hermez, Sophya Ekmekjian, and Rita Butrus



SPECIAL SHOUT-OUTS

It has been a wonderful year of accomplishments for students in our lab! Congratulations:

- **Benjamin Beyer** for his acceptance into California State University, Dominguez Hills's M.S. Program in Counseling
- **Nancy Giang** for her acceptance into California State University, Dominguez Hills's M.S. Program in Marriage and Family Therapy
- **Emily Hermez** for her acceptance into Azusa Pacific's Psy.D. program
- **Joshua Diaz** and **Mark Ortiz-Payne** (*alum*) for their acceptance into California State University, Long Beach's M.A. Program in Psychological Research
- **Akashi Suon** (*alum*) for his acceptance into California State University, Dominguez Hills' M.A. Program in Clinical Psychology
- For graduating with a B.A. in Psychology: **Joshua Diaz, Sophya Ekmekjian, Katherine Erian, Nancy Giang, and Emily Hermez**
- For graduating with a M.A. in Psychology: **Rita Butrus**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your lab.

- We are researchers from the psychology department at California State University, Long Beach. Dr. May Ling Halim is the director of the lab and the principal investigator. Our research focuses on children's social identity (gender, race/ethnicity) development. All researchers are graduate and undergraduate students that were screened through a competitive application process and were selected by Dr. Halim. They have all been trained specifically to work with children by Dr. Halim. They have also completed IRB ethics training.

2. My child has already participated in one (or more) of your studies, should I still participate this year?

- We have new studies this Fall that your 4- to 10-year-old child can participate in related to the development of romantic knowledge and beliefs.

3. I know of a center that would be interested in your research. Is there a way to put you in contact with each other?

- Yes! We are always interested in working with different institutions and would appreciate a referral. You can send information about the center and your name to ChildDevResearch@csulb.edu.

4. How can I learn more/participate in your studies?

- For more information about our studies and participation, please email us at ChildDevResearch@csulb.edu. You may also visit our website at <http://home.csulb.edu/~mhalim/index.html>.

5. Where can I find the results of the study?

- For past studies, if you'd like to be put on a list for notification of publication, email us at ChildDevResearch@csulb.edu or inform a research assistant. You may also ask to subscribe to our newsletter to keep up-to-date with our research studies. It also allows you to be informed of studies during the research process. For current studies, we are still collecting data. When data collection is complete, we then interpret our data and results and eventually write a report for publication. This may take a long time, as it involves writing, reviewing, editing, and rewriting.

HOW CAN I PARTICIPATE?

If you would like more information on any of our studies or would like to participate, we can be reached through:

Email: ChildDevResearch@csulb.edu

Phone: (562) 985-7195

Thank you so much for your participation and interest in our research! None of this could have been achieved without your participation.

2023-2024 LAB MEMBERS

Benjamin Beyer
Rita Butrus
Joshua Diaz

Sophya Ekmekjian
Katherine Erian

Nancy Giang
Emily Hermez

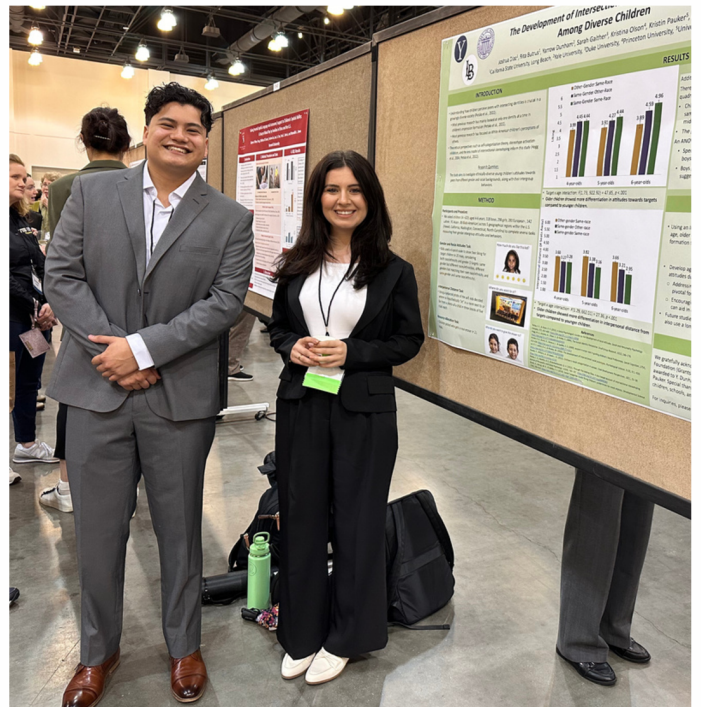
Barbara Mendivil
Jannila Te



Lab social in Seal Beach



A special student research working lunch with guest Dr. Catherine Tamis-LeMonda from New York University



Students presenting at the Cognitive Development Society Meeting