

CULTURE & SOCIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT LAB



ABOUT OUR LAB & RESEARCH

California State University, Long Beach
Department of Psychology

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Professor of Psychology

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.



NEWSLETTER CONTENTS

3 COMPLETED STUDIES

- Early Friendships Across Gender Lines Linked to Decreased Gender Prejudice and Discrimination
- Variation in When Parents Believe Children are Ready to Discuss Race
- Worrying About Anticipated Racial Discrimination Against Family Members is Associated with Poorer Physical Health Among Asian Americans

6 CURRENT STUDIES

- Children's Beliefs About Love and Marriage

7 SHARING RESEARCH FINDINGS

9 STUDENT AWARDS AND HONORS

10 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

COMPLETED STUDIES

Early Friendships Across Gender Lines Linked to Decreased Gender Prejudice and Discrimination



How can we reduce sexism in society? Past research has established that as early as in preschool and kindergarten, children tend to segregate by gender and show strong favoritism towards children from the same shared gender group. Increased contact with diverse others based on race, via meaningful friendships, has been shown to reduce racial prejudice and discrimination. We set out to test whether the same process occurs for gender. Parents of 534 4- to 6-year-olds from multiple racial/ethnic backgrounds (Asian, Black, Latiné, White,

Multiracial) and US regions (Northeast, Pacific Northwest, West, South, Hawaii) reported the gender of their child's closest friends. We also assessed children on their attitudes and behaviors. Children viewed photos of girls and boys and were asked (1) how much they liked each child, (2) to decide whether a girl or boy should receive an eraser, and (3) where they would sit relative to a girl or boy ("interpersonal distance"). Nearly a quarter of children (24%) had no friends from a different gender group and 29% had only one friend from a different gender group. In this sample, boys had more friendships with girls than girls had with boys. Children with more different-gender friends were more egalitarian in their liking of girls and boys and in their distribution of erasers to girls and boys. Having more friendships with children from a different gender group was unrelated to interpersonal distance, however. Although gender segregation is pervasive and might seem "natural" in childhood, these findings suggest that to reduce gender prejudice and discrimination, early friendships across gender lines might be key. Future work is needed to understand how friendships and prejudice are related (e.g., whether friendships reduce prejudice or whether reduced prejudice motivates children to make more diverse friends).



CSULB Students: Mark Ortiz-Payne, Joshua Diaz; Collaborators: Dr. Adam Stanaland (U. of Richmond), 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.

Variation in When Mothers of Color Believe Children are Ready to Discuss Race

Due to recent racial violence in the U.S., questions about whether, when and how parents should talk about race to their children have once again arisen. This study asked 271 Black-, Chinese-, Dominican-, and Mexican-American mothers of 4-year-olds, “At what age should parents start talking to their child about being [African American/Chinese/Dominican/Mexican]?” and asked about their reasoning. On average, across ethnic groups, many mothers believed that it was appropriate to discuss race when their children were around age 5 or 6 years; however, there was



much variation. About 51% of mothers thought parents should delay talking about race to age 5 or later to correspond with children’s more mature cognitive development later on. In contrast, about 29% of mothers thought parents should talk to their children about race at an early age - by age 4 years. Many of these mothers thought that by age 4, children had the language and cognitive skills to talk about race and ask questions. An additional reason some mothers thought parents should talk to their children early on about race was to foster a connection to and pride in their cultural community. About 21% of mothers did not list any specific age. Some of these mothers thought that children “naturally know about race/ethnicity” and that children “will understand automatically” when they are growing up. Others planned to wait until their children raised the topic of race or asked questions; otherwise, conversations about race might not occur. These beliefs about when children are ready to talk about race showed associations with parenting practices. More specifically, parents who thought it was appropriate to talk about race at earlier ages were also more likely to engage in cultural activities with their 4-year-old (e.g., celebrating cultural holidays) and were more likely to encourage their 4-year-old to make friends with children from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. Thus, there was much variation in when mothers of color believed children were ready to talk about race, and these beliefs had implications for early parenting practices pertaining to racial/ethnic identity.

Lead Principal Investigators: Dr. Yana Kuchirko (Brooklyn University), Dr. Anna Bennet (New York University); Collaborators: Dr. Diane Hughes (New York University), Dr. Erika Niwa (Brooklyn College). Data was collected at New York University Steinhardt Center for Research on Culture, Development and Education with support from the National Institutes of Health.

Worry About Anticipated Racial Discrimination Against Family Members is Associated with Poorer Physical Health Among Asian Americans

Anti-Asian hate crimes increased during the pandemic due to perceptions that COVID-19 originated in China. Stories of startling and sobering attacks against elderly Asian Americans swept over the media. We asked whether worrying about anticipated racial discrimination against their older parents and grandparents would be linked to poorer health. In prior research, perceiving racial discrimination against one's personal self has been linked to poorer physical health due to increased physiological stress responses (e.g., elevated blood pressure and cortisol stress hormones) and engagement in unhealthy behaviors (e.g., increased smoking and drinking). Our research was the first, to our knowledge, to examine risks involved with worrying about anticipated racial discrimination against *others*. During the COVID-19 pandemic, via an online survey, 125 Asian American young adult college students reported the frequency of worrying about anticipated racial discrimination against parents and grandparents (e.g., "In your day-to-day life, how often do you worry that...your parents [grandparents] will be called names or insulted because of their race/ethnicity?"). Young adults also reported their physical health (e.g., frequency of headaches, stomach aches, cold/flu). Asian American young adults' anticipation of racial discrimination against parents/grandparents was associated with worse physical health, as expected. These results emphasize the importance of including worry about family to more fully understand the impact of racial discrimination on physical health.



CSULB Collaborator: Professor Esther Choe, M.A. (alum)
This study was supported by CSULB Associated Students Inc.

CURRENT STUDIES

Waiting for Prince Charming? The “Princess Effect” and Children’s Beliefs About Love and Marriage

Later in life our romantic partners and romantic relationships are incredibly impactful on our health and well-being. 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 beliefs about love and marriage develops. In this study we will interview children to ask them about what qualities they believe are necessary for someone to find love and what their expectations are for love and marriage in the future. 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), it is important to achieve a better understanding of the origins of these beliefs about love and marriage.

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

SHARING RESEARCH FINDINGS

Talks

- **Halim, M. D. (October 2024). A case study of a collaborative project to address replicability in developmental science: Experiences and findings on diverse children's intergroup attitudes.**
University of California, Riverside
Psychology Department, Developmental Colloquium.
- **Halim, M. D. (February 2025). Is ingroup bias a fundamental human tendency: Examining the generalizability of minimal, racial and gender group biases across ethnically-diverse children.**
University of California, San Diego
Psychology Department, Social Colloquium.

Conferences

- **White House Gender Policy Council Office of Public Engagement: Toy and Children's Entertainment Industry Roundtable,** Washington, DC
- **California State University, Long Beach, Psychology Day,** Long Beach, CA
- **Western Psychological Association,** Las Vegas, NV
- **Society for Personality and Social Psychology,** Denver, CO
- **Pediatric Academic Societies,** Honolulu, HI
- **International Congress of Behavioral Medicine,** Vienna, Austria

Media

- Russell, W. T. (2024, September 16). Professor shares gender research at White House event. CSULB Making Waves. <https://www.csulb.edu/news/making-waves/article/making-waves-september-2024>

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- Halim, M. D., Gutierrez, B. C., Ortiz-Payne, M*, Han, K.*, Ahrens, C., & Leaper, C. (2025, Online). Socialization of gender public regard: Family conversations, practices, and routines. *Sex Roles*, 91. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-025-01581-7>
- Kuchirko, Y., Bennet, A., Halim, M. D., Niwa, E. Y., & Hughes, D. L. (2025). “Children understand more at that age”: African American, Mexican, Dominican, and Chinese heritage U.S. mothers’ conceptions of race readiness. *Social Development*, 34, e70020. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sode.70020>
- Muñoz, M., Dunham, Y., Gaither, S. E., Halim, M. D., Pauker, K., & Olson, K. R. (2025). Children’s use of race in their social judgments: A multi-site, multi-racial group comparison. *Collabra: Psychology*, 11, 132489. <https://doi.org/10.1525/collabra.132489>
- Straka, B. C., Jordan, A. E., Osornio, A.*, Halim, M. D., Pauker, K., Olson, K. R., Dunham, Y., & Gaither, S. E. (2025). Testing the generalizability of minimal group attitudes in minority and majority race children. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 252, 106133. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2024.106133>
- Xiao, S. X., Ren, H., Halim, M. D., Martin, C. L., DeLay, D., Fabes, R., Hanish, L. D., & Oswalt, K. (2025, Online). A longitudinal examination of children’s friendships across racial status and gender and their intergroup prosocial behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672251321014>
- Endendijk, J., Antonucci, C., Chadwick-Brown, F., Halim, M. D., & Portengen, C. M. (2024). Gender-typical appearance in early childhood: Roles of parental socialization and children’s gender similarity. *Sex Roles*, 90, 923-937. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-024-01484-z>

—STUDENT AWARDS & HONORS—

- **CSULB CLA Equity Scholar Award:** Mark Ortiz-Payne
- **CSULB Associated Students Inc. Student Research Grant:** Joshua Diaz
- **CSULB Associated Students Inc. Student Research Grant:** Ashley Nguyen
- **Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues Diversity Graduate Student Travel Award:** Mark Ortiz-Payne



SPECIAL SHOUT-OUTS

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

- ***Sophya Ekmekjian*** for her acceptance into Texas Tech's Ph.D. Program in Experimental Psychology
- For graduating with a B.A. in Psychology: ***Julianne Baek, Barbara Mendivil, Madison Rocha, Jannila Te, and Lisbet Wences***

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 year that your 4- to 10-year-old child can participate in related to princess culture and children's ideas about love and marriage.

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.

————— 2024–2025 LAB MEMBERS

Julianne Baek
Joshua Diaz

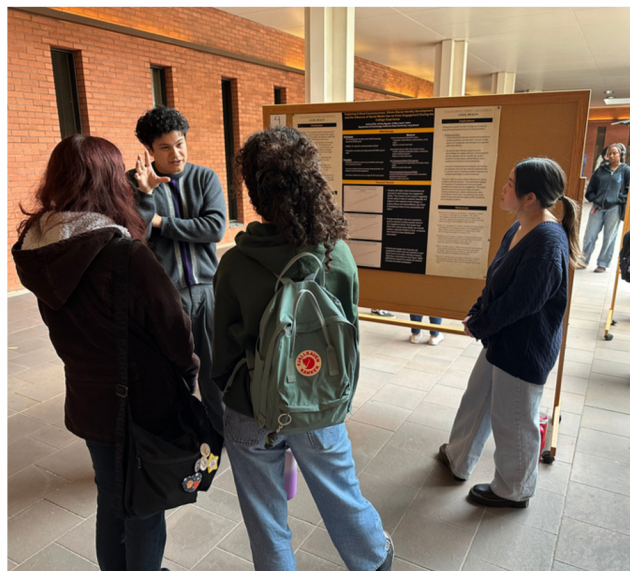
Sophya Ekmekjian
Brianna Gonzalez
Elijah Gutierrez

Barbara Mendivil
Ashley Nguyen
Mark Ortiz-Payne

Madison Rocha
Jannila Te
Lisbet Wences



*Our lab hosted special guest Dr. Joyce Endendijk
from Utrecht University*



Students presenting at CSULB's Psych Day