

Undergraduate Honors Projects – 2007-2008

Rose Boyer

Literacy Markers in Adults at Lane County Drug Court

Advisors: Dr. Robert Mauro and Michael Hibbard

A lack of basic literacy may increase the likelihood that individuals will fail to complete drug and alcohol treatment programs. To explore the relation between literacy and success in drug court, we collected reading and math scores using the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) and tracked success through the program. In addition, we obtained information on the motivations clients had for pursuing the program. Individuals with higher literacy tended to be more likely to successfully complete the program; however, the effect was not statistically significant. Participants who either engaged in, or expressed an interest in education, graduated more often than those who did not. These results may provide justification for developing interventions designed to increase the literacy of individuals referred to Drug Court.

Wei-Ning Chang

The Bilateral Advantage in Visual Short-Term Memory

Advisors: Dr. Ed Awh, Edward Ester, Akina Umemoto

Alvarez and Cavanagh (2005) found that people performed better in a multiple objects tracking (MOT) study when the items were split into both visual fields rather than into a single visual field. They suggested that there are independent resources for tracking in each hemisphere. Although Drew and Vogel (in press) showed a positive correlation between MOT ability and capacity in visual short-term memory (VSTM), past studies have not found a bilateral advantage in VSTM. However, performance in those memory tasks was limited by the maximum number of items that could be stored. In the present study, we investigated the bilateral advantage in an orientation change detection task where the resolution was the primary limiting factor. The findings revealed a bilateral advantage in the resolution-limited change detection task but not in a number-limited task with the same stimuli.

Melissa Davis

The Psychology of Risk Perception and Product Liability

Advisor: Dr. Robert Mauro

This research explores the relations between individual differences and risk perception related to warning labels attached to common household products. Participants rated potential hazardousness, harmfulness, and intended carefulness with 8 common household products. Participants also completed a risk-taking behavior scale, 2 brief sensation-seeking scales (BSSS, SS2) and the Big 5 Mini-marker. Results comparing product ratings with the other 3 measures indicated that low and high risk-takers will rate products generally the same in perceived risk as measured by potential hazardousness and harmfulness. High risk-takers will not be as careful handling products. A significant correlation was found between higher sensation-seeking needs and lower perceptions of risk. Current research on warning labels assume the problem is attending and comprehending the warning to assure

compliance. These results indicate that variations in compliance may be due in part to individual differences in risk-seeking and/or risk tolerance. Implications for designing warning labels are discussed.

Karen Hudson

Expert Witnesses in the Courtroom: The Impact of the Role of the Defendant and Expert Witness Type on Evaluations of Procedural Justice

Advisors: Dr. Robert Mauro and Christina Sheppler

People tend to cooperate with and defer future decisions to authorities when those people perceive the authorities as fair (Tyler, 2003). In the current experiment, the effects of expert witness type (adversarial, neutral court appointed, biased court appointed) and class of defendant (individual, corporation, government agency) on perceived fairness were explored. Participants were given a pre-trial questionnaire to control for the trial experience, provided with a court transcript, and then filled out a post-trial questionnaire composed of procedural justice evaluations. Neutral observers rated cases with adversarial testimony as more procedurally fair than cases with court appointed testimony, and found cases against corporations to be more procedurally fair than cases against government entities. As hypothesized, perceived fairness judgments were lowest when the plaintiff lost to more “powerful” entities and when the loss was coupled with testimony by court appointed expert witnesses. The present research continues to highlight the concern about the use of court appointed experts in the courtroom.

Autumn Lee

The Psychology of Film: How Theory of Mind and Empathy Affect Perceived Acting Performance

Advisor: Dr. Bertram Malle

The current study was interested in how empathy and theory of mind affect film viewers’ opinions of real and fake characters. The authors posited that viewers would empathize and imagine the mind of a real character better than with a fake character. Specifically, the authors hypothesized that participants would find the acting more believable and in turn, rate acting ability higher for actors portraying real characters. University psychology students participated in watching clips and filling out questionnaires regarding empathy, theory of mind and acting ability. The students were shown 4 fictional clips and 4 biographical clips, but told that 2 of each of the clips were the reverse (i.e., they were told that a fictional clip **was** biographical). The authors did not find a difference in ratings for the portrayal of the clips, but they did find that biographical films were liked more than fictional films.

Candice Mottweiler

Imaginary Companions and Narrative Creativity

Advisor: Dr. Marjorie Taylor

Although most young children engage in pretend play, there are individual differences in the form that this activity takes. Some children create imaginary companions, characters that they interact with or talk about on a regular basis. We investigated the extent that having an invisible friend (i.e., an imaginary companion not based on a toy) is associated with narrative creativity. Fifty-nine 4- and 5-year-old children and their parents were interviewed about

pretend play. 30% of the children were identified as having invisible friends. To measure creativity, children heard the beginning of a story and were asked to finish it. The results showed that although children with and without invisible friends produced stories of equal length, the stories of the children with invisible friends had a greater number of story elements as well as more unique elements. In addition, their stories were rated as more creative than those of the other children.

Mary Pisegna

I Think I Can: Prenatal Expected Parental Competency as a Predictor of Postnatal Competency and Maternal Sensitivity

Advisors: Dr. Jennifer Ablow, Dr. Jeff Measelle, Erica Musser

Observed sensitivity and self-reported parenting competency were examined in a longitudinal study of a sample of 107 first-time mothers and their infants. These mothers were all considered to be at a high risk for parenting problems. Prenatally, the mothers filled out the Becoming a Parent scale (BAP) to measure the expected competency as parents. When the infants reached 5 months of age, the mothers and infants participated in the Still Face paradigm as an assessment of maternal sensitivity. The mothers were administered the Being a Parent scale to measure the self-reported parenting competency of these mothers, as well as another measure of their current relationship with their parents. It was found that prenatal expected competence did predict postnatal self-reported competence, and that both prenatal expected competence and prenatal social support from the mother's own parents marginally predicted maternal sensitivity at 5 months.

Margaret Sels

Family History of MDD Related to Pubertal Timing

Advisors: John Seeley and Adam Kramer

This study is designed to determine levels of depression comparing adolescents with off-pubertal timing and a familial history of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) to those adolescents without these qualities. It looked at the rates of depression, off-pubertal timing, and a familial history of MDD when comparing males to females. Adolescents were assessed at three periods of time using a KSADS interview process. 940 students from western Oregon and 1782 family members participated at assessment three of the Oregon Adolescent Depression project. Few significant results were found, but trends showed signs that late pubertal timing in both males and females were related to a family history of MDD. Future studies using this data set should weigh analyses for a larger chance of significant results.

Anna Spece

Relational Aggression in Relation to Friendship Quality in Adolescent Females

Advisor: Dr. Thomas Dishion

Understanding relation aggression within adolescent relationships can provide information about reasons why teens engage in antisocial or prosocial behavior, and may lead to better solutions for controlling deviant acts. This study

investigated how relational aggression affects friendship quality in female adolescent dyads and how relational aggression determines perceptions of the quality of friendship. Data for the study consisted of videotaped interactions of 138 female participants, ages 16 to 17, from the Project Alliance Peer Interaction Task from the Child and Family Center, as well as questionnaires completed by coders, assessors and the dyads about the friendship quality and regarding relational aggression present within the friendship. Results showed both assessor and dyad rating of low friendship quality correlated significantly with high coder ratings of relational aggression, suggesting that a high level of relational aggression contributes to negative friendship quality in the dyad.

Alex Stanton

Self Other Overlap: The Mechanisms Behind the Noun Recall Task

Advisor: Dr. Sara Hodges

Self-other-overlap is an idea that explores the idea that people who are close actually become more similar. Here we examine the mechanisms behind the concrete noun recall task, a popular measure of this phenomenon. The current study has subjects participate in the noun recall task; however, new conditions have been added to examine the question: Is the noun recall task an actual measure of self-other-overlap or just a function of better memory associated with greater depth of processing? This study found that participants using novel prompts had poorer recall than those in the replication, suggesting that the manipulation significantly affected memory but in the opposite way as predicted. Future studies of this measurement should explore using an empirically validated manipulation of depth processing.