

Undergraduate Honors Projects – 2008-2009

Anna Bell

The Cost of Being Close: Self-Other Overlap and Domestic Violence

Advisor: Dr. Sara Hodges

The social psychological concept of self-other overlap describes how identities and cognitive representations of people tend to merge as they become closer to one another. Because greater self-other overlap tends to be associated with such positive characteristics as closeness and intimacy, it has generally been considered a desirable trait in relationships. However, these positive characteristics of self-other overlap have yet to be explored in situations that are less than ideal, such as relationships with domestic violence. This study explores the possible negative consequences of having self-other overlap in these relationships, including having greater difficulties removing oneself from the relationship, getting over the abusive partner, and having lower levels of self-esteem and well-being.

Heather Bell

Gaze Cues in Mother-Child Dyads for Generic Noun Phrases

Advisors: Dr. Dare Baldwin and Meredith Meyer

Parents are known to offer rich pragmatic information such as pointing and gaze that assists children's language learning. Such cues might even help children to distinguish when parents are referring to something as particular (e.g., That dog is black) versus a generic kind (e.g., Dogs have four legs), which is a basic conceptual distinction children must make across many language-learning contexts. This study investigated if parents were giving children gaze cues that indicated this language distinction. Mother-child dyads were videotaped while discussing hand drawn pictures of child recognizable things (e.g., seals, an airplane, a couch). The results showed a trend for parents to look at their children more when saying a generic utterance. These results suggest that parents may use gaze as a language "teaching" cue.

Ashley Berns

Child Behavior and Parenting

Advisors: Dr. Michael Posner and Dr. Mary Rothbart

This study examined the role of the child in hostile interactions with the parent between ages 2 and 4. Data were from a longitudinal study conducted with 61 children at ages 2 and 4. Data included a videotaped parent-child interaction (coded with the NICHD Maternal Sensitivity Scale), child temperament questionnaires (ECTQ at age 2, CBQ at age 4), parenting quality questionnaire (parent self report), and genetic information. We hypothesized that between ages 2 and 4 there will be a decrease in observed parental hostility. This was confirmed by analysis of parent child interaction at the two ages. The drop in hostility was accompanied by an increase in observed child's persistence but no change in child negativity. We also examined whether children high on a risk-taking scale (combined activity level, high intensity pleasure, and impulsivity scales) will be more likely to experience hostile

interactions at age 2. A correlation found that risk taking was not related to hostility at age 2. While risk taking is higher for children with the 7-repeat allele of the Dopamine 4 Receptor gene, when parenting was of lower quality, we did not find evidence that this gene influenced the reduction in hostility or the increase of child persistence between age 2 and 4. We conclude that, at least in the free play situation, increases in child persistence is related to reduced hostility on the parents' part at 4 years of age. Lastly, we found that children with the 7-repeat allele had a slight decrease in negativity between the ages of 2 and 4, whereas children without the 7-repeat allele had a slight increase in negativity between ages 2 and 4.

Elif Cakir

Parent Training Improves Parents' Executive Attention

Advisor: Dr. Helen Neville

The efficiency of executive attention is closely linked to the regulation of cognition and emotion. Recent research has demonstrated that executive attention can be improved by training self-regulation skills. The present study investigated whether different types of parent training programs designed to enhance parent's and children's self-regulation skills would also improve parents' executive attention. The same included parents of typically developing Head Start children who received parent training either in the Attention Boost for Children program (n=12) or in the Parents & Children Making Connections – Highlighting Attention program (n=9). Alerting, orienting, and executive attention were assessed with the Attention Network Test (ANT). Following training, both parent groups showed improvement in executive attention network related to self-regulation, while no significant changes were observed in either orienting or alerting attention networks. These results suggest that receiving parent training with a focus on self-regulation can enhance executive attention. Ongoing research with parents assigned to a control group will enable further investigation of how executive attention is affected by these parent-training programs.

Lisa Chinn

The Relationship Between Empathic Concern, Antisocial Traits, and Helping Behavior: Effects of Emotionality, Relationship, Time, and Gender

Advisors: Tasha Oswald and Dr. Lou Moses

Previous research has shown that antisocial traits are negatively related to empathy, empathy is positively related to helping behavior, and females help others more than males. The current study examined the relationship between antisocial traits, empathic concern, gender, and helping behavior. Participants completed questionnaires that measure empathic concern and antisocial traits. Additionally, participants read short hypothetical scenarios in which a person asked for their help, under different circumstances, and answered questions about whether they would help and the level of effort they perceived to be involved in these scenarios. Researchers assessed the hypothesis that antisocial traits are negatively related to empathic concern and willingness to help with favors, and predictions that participants are less willing to help with emotional favors than nonemotional favors, strangers than close friends, and with 30-minutes favors than with 5-minutes favors. Researchers also predicted that females would be more willing to help than males. All of these hypotheses were supported and future research could investigate these relationships more deeply.

Phillip Getty

Autistic-like Personality Traits in Neurotypical Adults: Examining Possible Differences in the Ease, Speed and Hierarchy of Social Inference

Advisors: Dr. Bertram Malle and Dr. Gerard Saucier

This study tested the hypothesis that traits associated with high-functioning autism or Asperger's syndrome exist in normally-functioning adults and that people with pronounced traits of this kind show a systematic deficit in the ease, speed and hierarchy of social inferences (i.e., of intentionality, goals, thinking, emotion, and personality). I also explored whether these traits related to other known measures of personality. A sample of fifty-nine undergraduate and graduate students at a public university participated by completing five social inference tasks, the Autism Spectrum Quotients (AQ), and the Big-Five Mini-Markers. Comparisons of these measures failed to support the proposed hypothesis, but the results raise questions about the validity of the AQ, which appears to be a measurement of known personality types.

Brandon Gibson

Autistic Traits as a Predictor of Friendship Quality, Loneliness, and Depression in Young Adults

Advisors: Dr. Lou Moses, Tasha Oswald, Mary Ann Winter-Messiers

Autism is characterized by difficulties in social interaction, communication, and dealing with change. The intention of this study was to investigate an autistic phenotype, i.e., social skill, communication, and attention switching deficits, as a predictor of friendship quality, loneliness, and depression in a typically developing college sample. Autistic traits were measured as well as loneliness, depression, and quality of best friendship. Results indicate that a stronger autistic phenotype is predictive of higher levels of loneliness and depressive symptomatology, and lower quality of best friendship. Findings support the interpersonal model of depression and suggest that even within the typically developing population, autistic traits may contribute to depression. Implications and restrictions of these findings are discussed and possible communication, social, and executive function training is explored.

Kenny Hartline

Controlling for Language to Observe Memory Reorganization of Action

Advisors: Dr. Dare Baldwin and Jeff Loucks

The current study investigated how people organize memories of action and specifically, whether organizational effects observed in previous research arose from encoding of action, rather than linguistic content into which action information may have been recoded. Participants were shown videos of an actor completing two simple action tasks in which components of each task happened to be intermingled in the actual motion stream. During video presentation, participants completed a verbal shadowing task, designed to block linguistic recoding of the motion stream. Participant's reaction times to target frames were then measured in relation to the type of prime — primes close in the actual temporal structure of the video, versus primes reflecting the underlying goal structure — that preceded the target frames. Results showed that reaction times were quicker when target frames were primed by goal-related primes in comparison to being primed by temporally-related frames. These results, along with findings from previous studies, demonstrate that goal-oriented memory organization is specific to action processing and that blocking the linguistic system does not undermine a goal priming advantage. Future investigations could look at other ways of blocking the linguistic system and greater complexities of the action being perceived.

Jennifer Knowles

Looking at Status Quo Bias: The Effects of Incidental Emotions and Numeracy on Status Quo Preference

Advisors: Dr. Ellen Peters and Dr. Paul Slovic

This paper is an examination of the effects of emotion and numeric ability on preference for the status quo. Ninety-three undergraduates participated. All participants were randomly assigned to complete a writing task that required them to describe an event that either made them happy, angry, or afraid in detail. Next, participants answered a series of three decision making problems evaluating their preference for a target item and the Lipkus 11 and CRT questionnaires to evaluate number ability. A significant three way interaction reveals that participants in the fear condition who have low number ability prefer the target item in the status quo condition, while participants with high number ability prefer the target item when it is not in the status quo condition ($B = -.266$, $Wald = 5.758$, $p < .05$).

Winnie Lam

Do Hypercompetitive Individuals Behave Impulsively? An Examination of Hypercompetitiveness in Interpersonal Interactions

Advisors: Dr. Sanjay Srivastava and Jessica Tipsord

Do hypercompetitive individuals behave impulsively? Social and self-perceptions of hypercompetitive attitudes and its association with hypercompetitiveness were investigated in a leaderless group discussion study. One-hundred sixteen students provided data by responding to personality and trait emotions inventories measuring hypercompetitive attitudes, positive and negative affects, and depression, and then participating in leaderless group discussion. Pearson correlations revealed that hypercompetitive individuals were high in neuroticism and low in agreeableness. They were likely to be perceived as assertive and impulsive but not hypercompetitive, whereas they perceived their own behaviors as hypercompetitive and uncooperative. The current study provided a deeper understanding to hypercompetitive attitudes and introduced some possible contributing factors to trait hypercompetitiveness. Findings are beneficial for clinical and counseling therapeutic designs.

Nathen Lester

Differentiating the Effects of Social and Personal Power

Advisors: Dr. Sara Hodges and Sean Laurent

The current research attempted to differentiate the effects of social power (i.e., having control of others' outcomes) from personal power (i.e., control of one's own outcomes) on variables related to perspective-taking. Using methodology adapted from Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld (2006), participants were primed with high social power, high personal power, or low power, and then completed two perspective-taking measures. While these measures did not significantly vary with condition, evidence was found that supports the differentiation of personal power from social power. Low power, as experienced (rather than manipulated) by participants had a strong negative correlation with personal power, and a weak negative correlation with social power. Personal power and social power were not significantly correlated.

Blake Locher

Empathic Accuracy and the Use of Stereotypes in Inferring the Thoughts and Feelings of Others

Advisors: Dr. Sara Hodges and Karyn Lewis

Past research has suggested that perceivers construct a schema of a target in order to accurately infer that person's thoughts and feelings (Myers & Hodges, 2009). The current study was designed to test whether more general schemas boost accuracy in inferring thoughts and feelings that are stereotypic of a salient target group. Participants (145 undergraduates) inferred the thoughts and feelings of a woman discussing her experiences as a new mother. We hypothesized that perceivers would have great empathic accuracy on thoughts and feelings that were more stereotypical of the salient target group (e.g., new mothers). Results supported our hypothesis: even when controlling for inferential difficulty, thoughts that were more stereotypical were easier to infer. This effect was moderated by participants' emotional stability, as measured by the Big Five. Additional effects of participant variables are also discussed, along with directions for future research.

Brittany Lukens

Arabic Numeral Influence on Product Preference

Advisors: Dr. Ellen Peters and Dr. Paul Slovic

This study was performed to examine the effect of low and high digit presentation on product preference as predicted by previous research on spatial shifts of attention. Participants were asked in two separate choices to make a choice between two identical products in the presence of varying digits, i.e. one (1) or nine (9). It was predicted that the number one (1) would evoke preference for the product on the left and the number nine (9) would evoke preference for the product on the right. First choice results across both products and regarding one product, specifically, revealed preferences in the direction predicted though these results failed to reach conventional statistical significance. Second choice results were inconclusive.

Marcus Mayorga

Assessing the Risk of Suicide: An Investigation of Antidepressant Medication Information and Decision Making

Advisors: Dr. Ellen Peters and Dr. Anne Simons

Risk of antidepressant use for adolescents has been a topic of worthy investigation for modern psychology and psychiatry. Rates of adolescent suicide were on a steady decline until 2003 when a sharp increase occurred following the FDA issue in a health advisory and the "black box warning". Given the lowered rates of antidepressant use for adolescents and the rising rate of adolescent suicide, it is questionable whether parents are supplied adequate information to assess the risks and benefits of antidepressants for adolescents. This study is aimed towards developing more universally comprehensible materials for parents by assessing the roles of the provision of numerical information and of numeracy (number ability) as factors in comprehension and perceptions of antidepressant information. In addition, we are interested in how these factors affect the likelihood of parents with depressed adolescents to approve antidepressants as an option for treatment. Results were mixed, showing both consistent and conflicting effects compared to previous findings. The effects of these findings on consumer health are discussed.

Joshua Pritikin

Theory of Mind in Cognitive Antecedents of Prohibition, Self-Sacrifice, and Protest

Advisors: Dr. Dare Baldwin and Kimberly Angelo

Valuations in the context of joint attention are likely antecedents of prohibition, self-sacrifice, and protest (the target affective themes). Forty-seven University of Oregon undergraduates (38 female, 9 male; $M_{\text{age}} = 19.5$, $SD = 3.5$) wrote open-ended stories for each of the target themes. Prohibition, self-sacrifice, and protest vignettes were coded with 7, 11, and 10 intention probe sentences, respectively. Most of the 22 directional and 14 correlational hypotheses exhibited a significant effect in the hypothesized direction. Findings suggest that the target themes are associated with antecedent valuations situated in a theory of mind context. Implications for empathy and downstream psychological processes contingent on empathy, such as coping and altruism, are discussed.

Adelle Pushparatnam

Special Interest Areas and Theory of Mind in Children with Asperger Syndrome

Advisors: Dr. Lou Moses and Mary Ann Winter-Messiers

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between Special Interest Areas (SIAs) and the expression of Theory of Mind (ToM) in children with Asperger syndrome (AS). Transcripts from a previous study in which children with AS were interviewed about their SIAs (Winter-Messiers, 2007) were coded for expressions of ToM. It was found that participants whose SIAs involved mentalistic agents expressed more ToM than children whose SIAs involved non-mentalistic agents, but that there was no difference whether they interacted with or observed the mentalistic agents. More female participants had SIAs that involved mentalistic agents, and more male participants had SIAs that involved non-mentalistic agents, but there was no gender difference in the expression of ToM. Participants expressed more knowledge-related statements than belief-, desire-, and emotion-related ones, and age did not predict the participants' expression of ToM. Implications for the use of SIAs in ToM and other interventions for children with autism are discussed.

Miranda Rieter

What the Eyes Tell Us About Task Switching

Advisor: Dr. Ulrich Mayr

We used eye-tracking to test a two-stage model of task switching (e.g., Mayr & Kliegl, 2003) that proposes a first state during which external cues are used to load relevant rules into working memory, a process that can occur proactively, prior to stimulus presentation. During the second stage, these rules are used to filter out task-irrelevant information once the stimulus is presented. It has been difficult to decide between this and alternative models on the basis of behavioral data alone (e.g., Logan & Bundesen, 2003). Eye-tracking provides fine-grained temporal information and therefore potentially more direct evidence about stages of task selection. We asked subjects to select between responding to the color or the gap position of objects on the basis of visual cues. Each task feature was present in one of three equidistant objects (one object was neutral, object locations were randomized). Consistent with the working-memory stage we found the eye's trajectory to the task-relevant object was delayed by 150 ms on switch trials, but only if there was no opportunity to prepare. Consistent with the filtering

stage, there was a persistent tendency of the eye to return to the irrelevant task feature on switch trials, and this tendency was resistant to effects of preparation.

Kevin Wiles

Examining the Disclosure Practices of Military Veterans

Advisors: Dr. Sara Hodges and Jocelyn Barton

Disclosure of stressful events, such as those experienced by veterans, has been linked to psychological health (Pennebaker & Susman, 1988). Although current research on veterans' disclosure emphasizes disclosure to close others or in group settings, few studies have directly explored the relationships between veterans and the people to whom they disclose. In a non-veteran sample, Stinson and Ickes (1992) showed that greater objective understanding was demonstrated between people who had deeper specific knowledge of each other's life experiences. Another study found that while veterans rely highly upon family and partners, veterans tend to not discuss past traumatic military related events with them (Hunt & Robbins, 2001). Using a sample of 48 veterans, we explored whether veterans would be more likely to disclose specific military service related traumatic events to a fellow veteran than to a non-veteran, based on the idea that shared experiences will play a key role in disclosure. As hypothesized, results showed veterans were likely to disclose more to other veterans with similar experiences, followed closely by disclosure to close others. This study suggests the need for disclosure targets to have knowledge of the veterans' experiences, and the potential importance of therapist-client matching policies for clinicians treating veterans.

Carrie Williamson

Visual Processing Mechanisms Underlying the Rod-and-Frame Illusion

Advisor: Dr. Paul Dassonville

When a vertical rod is presented within the context of a tilted frame, observers typically perceive the rod to be tilted in the opposite direction of the frame. Two possible visual processing mechanisms have been proposed to underlie this rod-and-frame illusion (RFI): visuo-vestibular effects (the tilted frame causes a distortion of the observer's perceived gravitational vertical), and local interaction effects (mutual inhibition of populations of visual neurons encoding the tilt of the rod and the frame's contours). The present study examines the extent to which these mechanisms are responsible for the RFI at different frame sizes. The results indicate that as frame size increases, visuo-vestibular effects are most prominent, while local interaction effects drive the RFI with small frames.

Alisha Wimberly

Examining the Pursuit of Nutritional Goals: Affect, Goal type, and Future Thought-Orientations as Predictors

Advisors: Dr. Sanjay Srivastava and Kimberly Angelo

The United States is faced with an obesity epidemic, and it is becoming increasingly beneficial to understand successful dieting and preventative nutrition practices. The current study attempted to understand how goal type, affect and thought orientation predicted goal success. The 112 participants thought of personal nutritional goals they

could accomplish in two weeks. The study consisted of three short online surveys composed of questions regarding diet and lifestyle, thought orientation (Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory), negative and positive affect (Adult Temperament Questionnaire), optimism (Life Orientation Test) and psychological well-being. No significant predictor was observed during the two-week goal pursuit; however, many participants said they would continue to work on their goal after the two-week study had ended. The participants that reported less negative affect during the first and second surveys were more likely to report they would complete their goal sooner than participants that had more negative affect. Even lacking statistical significance, this research helps us understand a little more about the psychology of nutrition.