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Announcing the 2021 Recipients of the Small Grants Program for Early Career Scholars

Driven by its Strategic Plan, the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) recognizes the importance of capacity building for early career scholars seeking to establish their research programs, especially considering the limited funding available for conducting exploratory work and particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Small Grants Program for Early Career Scholars addresses this need within developmental science by supporting pilot or small-scale research projects proposed by members who completed their doctoral degree within the last five years.

The Small Grants Program celebrates its fourth year by awarding up to $7,500 USD to each of the thirteen selected projects, directly supporting a diverse group of early career researchers from institutions in the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, and Singapore. The 2021 projects were selected from a highly competitive pool of 144 applications and cover many research areas and topics, including: resilience and coping from the COVID-19 pandemic and social unrest, children's in-group cooperation, communication and vocabulary variability, adolescent mental health and prosocial behaviors, and ethics in biosocial research.

SRCD thanks all 35 reviewers involved in the selection process and congratulates the 2021 Small Grant recipients:

Drs. Sunhye Bai, Ruby Batz, Michelle Desir (with Donte Bernard), Amy Haberle, Juliana Karras-Jean Gilles, Christina Mondi-Rago (with Nicole Kramer), Ana Ortin Peralta, Julie Schneider, Fanita Tyrell (with Arianna Gard), Mark Wade (with Dillon Browne), Nicole Wen, Sonya Xinyue Xiao, and GeckHong Yeo.

The grant recipients will be recognized at the 2023 SRCD Biennial Meeting. Read on to learn more about this year's Small Grant projects and researchers!



Sunhye Bai, The Pennsylvania State University

“Supportive Communication in the Everyday Lives of Youth”

Sunhye Bai is an assistant professor of Human Development and Family Studies at the Pennsylvania State University. She received her MPH degree from UC Berkeley in 2010, specializing in Maternal and Child Health, and received her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from UCLA in 2017, where she also completed her pre-doctoral clinical internship and postdoctoral fellowship. Her research focuses on adolescent development in the context of daily family and school life. Dr. Bai will conduct a naturalistic observational study of supportive communication patterns in the daily lives of parents and adolescents to identify specific behaviors in parents that can be enhanced to promote youth support seeking behaviors and mitigate internalizing symptoms. From observations of naturally occurring conversations, the project will identify parental support using two different data processing approaches and compare them: coding by trained observers and computerized text analysis with Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count.



Ruby Batz, University of Nevada, Reno

“When Being an Expert May Not Be Enough: Understanding the Experiences of Special Education Professionals Parenting Children with Disabilities”

Ruby Batz is an Assistant Professor of Special Education in the College of Education at the University of Nevada, Reno. She obtained her Ph.D. in Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education from the University of Oregon. Her transdisciplinary research agenda centers around exploring the intersection of race/ethnicity, disability, and language in the context of the implementation of family engagement practices in Early Intervention, Early Childhood Special Education, and Early Childhood Education and Care. The 2021 Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support her multi-method qualitative study that seeks to better understand the experiences of special education professionals parenting children with disabilities and identify how ableist practices operate within the special education system.



Michelle Desir, Pennsylvania State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center

“Adverse Police Interactions and Black Adolescent Mental Health”
Co-Principal Investigator: Donte Bernard

Michelle Desir, Ph.D., is a Postdoctoral Fellow in Child Abuse Pediatrics at Penn State Hershey Medical Center. Beginning in August 2022, she will be an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at University of South Carolina. Dr. Desir received her Ph.D. in Child Psychology from the University of Minnesota in 2019 where she completed a joint training program in Developmental Psychopathology and Clinical Science. Her research program seeks to delineate risk and protective factors that influence the developmental trajectory of maltreated children, with a particular focus on the influence of maltreated children’s friendships on subsequent developmental outcomes and factors that influence treatment outcomes for maltreated children receiving evidence-based interventions. This work is currently supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.



Donte Bernard, Medical University of South Carolina

“Adverse Police Interactions and Black Adolescent Mental Health”
Principal Investigator: Michelle Desir

Donte Bernard is an Assistant Professor in the National Crime Victims Research & Treatment Center at the Medical University of South Carolina. He obtained his Ph.D. in clinical psychology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Bernard's federally funded program of research seeks to elucidate culturally relevant risk and resilience factors that inform the association between racism-related stress and mental health outcomes among Black adolescents and emerging adults. The 2020 Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support a project investigating the trauma conferring impact of adverse police interactions on Black youth and the culturally relevant processes that may modulate how youth negotiate these adverse experiences.



Amy Heberle, Clark University

“A Mixed Methods Pilot Study of a Multi-Modal Intervention to Support Anti-Racist Parenting Among White Parents”

Amy Heberle is an Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychology at Clark University. She completed her doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology at UMass Boston under the mentorship of Dr. Alice Carter. Dr. Heberle’s research focuses on children’s mental health functioning within systems of racism and classism. She is interested in how children and families think about their own identities and social systems, how they resist oppression, and how they thrive in spite of oppression. She is particularly interested in how critical consciousness develops and functions in young children. In addition, she is interested in allyship development among children holding positions of privilege and in theoretical considerations of allyship/accomplice-ship as indicators of social-emotional wellness for such children. The 2021 SRCD Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support her allyship work, funding a pilot study of an intervention to foster anti-racist knowledge, commitment, and competencies in White parents of young White children.



Juliana Karras-Jean Gilles, San Francisco State University

“The 2020 Study: Elevating Immigrant-Origin Youth Voices During and After a Year of Social Unrest”

Dr. Juliana Karras-Jean Gilles is an Assistant Professor at San Francisco State University in the Department of Psychology and a Re-imagining Migration Research Fellow. Her Ph.D. is in Developmental Psychology from the Graduate Center CUNY; she completed postdoctoral training in Human Development & Psychology at UCLA. Her multi-method work centers inequality by using a structural lens to study the social development of children and adolescents in context. Specifically: intersections of race, inequality, and civic development; children’s human rights; and ethnic/racial inequality across contexts. The goal of her work is to advance the human rights of children through actionable science by generating empirical knowledge to identify and rectify social systems that reproduce inequality in development. The 2021 SRCD Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support research examining the sociopolitical development of immigrant-origin adolescents, while simultaneously addressing a crucial research gap regarding the intersections of their ethnic-racial identity and critical consciousness.



Christina Mondi-Rago, Boston Children's Hospital & Harvard Medical School

“The COVID-Forward Longitudinal Study of Family Coping”
Co-Principal Investigator: Nicole Kramer

Dr. Christina Mondi-Rago is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Brazelton Touchpoints Center (Division of Developmental Medicine, Boston Children’s Hospital), and a Clinical Fellow in Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. She obtained her Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology (Developmental Psychopathology & Clinical Science track) at the University of Minnesota, where she was supervised by Dr. Arthur Reynolds and was a fellow of the University’s Graduate School Diversity Office, the National Science Foundation, and the Doris Duke Fellowships for the Promotion of Child Well-Being. Her research examines the effects of early care and education programs on lifelong mental health, as well as strategies for tailoring programs to better support child and caregiver well-being.



Nicole Kramer, Dana Farber Cancer Institute

“The COVID-Forward Longitudinal Study of Family Coping”
Principal Investigator: Christina Mondi-Rago

Dr. Nicole Kramer is a Postdoctoral Psychology Fellow in Pediatric Psychosocial Neuro-Oncology at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, and a Clinical Fellow in Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. She earned her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the PGSP-Stanford Psy.D. Consortium, under the mentorship of Dr. Victoria Cosgrove. She also completed her masters in Health Communication at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, advised by Dr. Dale Brashers. Her research focuses on uncertainty management, communication, and family coping with life-threatening pediatric illness and health crises, to inform clinical interventions and promote health equity. As a former management consultant, Dr. Kramer advised federal public health leaders on implementing strategic changes to advance child health initiatives.

Drs. Mondi-Rago and Kramer’s Small Grant will support COVID-Forward, a national cohort study for which they are Principal Investigators through American University. COVID-Forward examines the pandemic experiences of families with children ages 0-18, with particular focus on how families are managing

uncertainty and coping with stressors during the pandemic. In Wave 1 of the study, 374 parents from 46 States, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico participated. SRCD's support will facilitate Wave 2 data collection with this cohort, allowing researchers to examine families' uncertainty management strategies and mental health trajectories during the evolving pandemic.



Ana Ortin Peralta, Yeshiva University

"A Mixed Methods Study on the Relationship Between the Concept of Death and Suicidal Thoughts among Children of Color"

Ana Ortin Peralta is an Assistant Professor at Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology, Yeshiva University. She received her PhD in Psychiatry from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and completed her postdoctoral training under the supervision of Professor Regina Miranda in the Department of Psychology at Hunter College (CUNY). Dr. Ortin Peralta's research aims to identify sensitive periods and developmental risk factors for suicidal behavior to address the challenge of assessing suicide risk in children. The 2021 Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support a mixed-method, multi-informant study to advance our understanding of the interplay between the acquisition of the concept of death, exposure to adversities, and

suicide ideation among Black and Hispanic/Latino children. This study is embedded within a large multi-method research project that examines the nature of suicide ideation and its warning signs among children of color.



Julie Schneider, Louisiana State University

“Informing Interventions: pinpointing how linguistic input contributes to vocabulary variability in the Deep South”

Dr. Julie Schneider is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at Louisiana State University. She completed her Ph.D. in Psychological Sciences under the supervision of Dr. Mandy Maguire at The University of Texas at Dallas. Her research combines behavioral (e.g. observation, language sampling) and biological approaches (e.g. fMRI, EEG) to identify how sociocultural contexts and brain development interact to promote word learning in school. Her broad program of research aims to elicit positive change in our interventions, education system, and communities by pinpointing important individual differences that support a child’s ability to learn and grow. The 2021 SRCD Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will help her to inform existing language interventions by advancing our knowledge of the

home environments, language inputs, and vocabulary abilities of children raised in rural and urban low socioeconomic (SES) communities in the Deep South.



Fanita Tyrell, University of Maryland, College Park

“Ethical Representation in Biosocial Research”
Co-Principal Investigator: Arianna Gard

Dr. Fanita Tyrell is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Maryland at College Park. She received her PhD in Developmental Psychology at the University of California, Riverside and completed her postdoctoral training at the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota. Her research program is focused on elucidating processes of risk and protection among ethnic-racial minority and adversity-exposed populations as they operate within broader cultural contexts. In particular, she is interested in understanding what mechanisms of resilience at multiple levels of analysis can mitigate risk and promote youth’s successful adaptation. The 2021 SRCD Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support research focused on increasing the representation of BIPOC children and families in biosocial research. This study will utilize a community-based participatory research framework to understand how to

mitigate barriers to research participation, strengthen community-based partnerships, and develop a sustaining research registry of BIPOC families.



Arianna Gard, University of Maryland, College Park

“Ethical Representation in Biosocial Research”
Principal Investigator: Fanita Tyrell

Dr. Arianna Gard (she/her) is an Assistant Professor of Developmental Psychology, Faculty Affiliate in the Program in Neuroscience and Cognitive Neuroscience (NACS), and Director of the Growth And Resilience across Development (GARD) Lab at the University of Maryland, College Park. She completed postdoctoral and graduate training at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She is an interdisciplinary scientist with training in affective neuroscience, developmental psychology, clinical science, and survey methodology. Her research examines the neurobiological mechanisms linking socioeconomic adversity to youth socioemotional development, highlighting the complex interplay between risk and resilience factors, genetic predispositions, and brain development. Together with Dr. Fanita Tyrell, the 2021 SRCD Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support research focused on increasing the representation of BIPOC children and

families in biosocial research. This study will utilize a community-based participatory research framework to understand how to mitigate barriers to research participation, strengthen community-based partnerships, and develop a sustaining research registry for BIPOC families.



Mark Wade, University of Toronto

“Family-based mechanisms of resilience and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic”
Co-Principal Investigator: Dillon Browne

Mark Wade is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Applied Psychology and Human Development at the University of Toronto. He completed his predoctoral residency in clinical psychology at the University of Washington School of Medicine, followed by a Banting Fellowship at Harvard Medical School. His research is concerned with the impact of early life adversity on mental health and cognitive development, and the broad biopsychosocial factors that foster resilience among children and youth. The 2021 Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support data collection on two follow-up waves of a longitudinal project designed to explore family-based mechanisms of risk, resilience, and recovery during the COVID-19 pandemic. In partnership with Dr. Dillon Browne at the University of Waterloo, this is a cross-national study that has

collected data every two months from May 2020 to December 2020. The current project will assess factors within families that promote recovery from pandemic-related stress and disruption during a period of widespread vaccine availability, declines in infection rates, and loosening of government restrictions. Using a unique sibling comparison design, the goal is to uncover the various social and relational factors that enable children, youth, and whole families to recover from the pandemic.



Dillon Browne, University of Waterloo

“Family-based mechanisms of resilience and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic”
Principal Investigator: Mark Wade

Dillon Browne is a Canada Research Chair in Child and Family Clinical Psychology and Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Waterloo. He completed his predoctoral residency and postdoc at the University of California, San Francisco with the Child Trauma Research Program. His research focuses on understanding and supporting relationships and child development from family systems and trauma-informed perspectives. The 2021 Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support data collection for an ongoing longitudinal cohort designed to explore family-based mechanisms of risk and resilience

during COVID-19. In partnership with Dr. Mark Wade at the University of Toronto, this cross-national study has measured families every two months from May 2020 to December 2020. The new waves of data collection will assess factors that promote recovery from pandemic-related disruption during a period of widespread vaccine availability, declines in infection rates, and loosening of government restrictions. Using a sibling comparison methodology, the goal is to explore the psychosocial factors that promote well-being in children, youth, and whole families considering the changing pandemic context.



Nicole Wen, Brunel University London

“How Rituals Impact Children’s In-Group Cooperation Across Development”

Dr. Nicole Wen is a Lecturer in Psychology at Brunel University London (Centre for Culture and Evolution, Department of Life Sciences) where she directs the Culture and Minds Lab. In 2018, she received her Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of Texas at Austin under the supervision of Dr. Cristine Legare. She then completed a postdoctoral fellowship with Dr. Felix Warneken at the University of Michigan. Her research program examines mechanisms of cultural learning from a developmental and cross-cultural perspective focusing on the role of cultural conventions in children’s cooperation. The 2021 SRCD Small Grant for Early

Career Scholars will support a project investigating the effect of ritual participation on children's group commitment and prosocial sharing in community-based samples. This project will help us understand how children come to be such proficient cooperators through the lens of ritual as a social lubricant for human life in large groups.



Sonya Xinyue Xiao, Arizona State University

"Early Adolescents' Prosocial Behavior Toward Diverse Others: Predictions from Multiple Social Identities"

Sonya Xinyue Xiao is a postdoctoral scholar in T. Denny Sanford School of Social and Family Dynamics at Arizona State University (ASU). She earned her Ph.D. in Family and Human Development, with a specialization in Measurement and Statistical Analysis, from ASU in 2020. To understand and promote individuals' helpful, empathic, and tolerant behaviors, Xiao's research centers on the role of parents, peers, and individual characteristics in relation to children's and adolescents' prosocial behavior, intergroup attitudes and relations, and well-being. The 2021 Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support Xiao to further examine the theoretical framework on intergroup prosocial behavior that she developed in her

dissertation. This project will allow for deeper understanding of how individuals' social identities, including the intersectional identities of gender and ethnicity/race, are related to U.S. early adolescents' intergroup prosocial behavior.



GeckHong Yeo, National University of Singapore

"Peer Digital Acceset (PDA): Translating Online Peer Support for Adolescent Mental Well-being"

GeckHong Yeo is a post-doctoral fellow at N.1 Institute for Health, National University of Singapore. She received her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her research program centers on the role of social contexts in adolescents' development of psychological well-being. Informed by a contextually-rooted developmental model, her research emphasizes the role of contextual factors and the mechanism of change in psychological adjustment. The practical significance of attending to multiple layers of the social context is that it offers numerous points of possible intervention. The translational nature of her research program involves community collaborations to generate and translate research findings into practices and policies. The 2021 Small Grant for Early Career Scholars will support her to examine the implementation and clinical effectiveness of digital peer support, and the developmental

change linking peer support and adolescents' psychological well-being, that considers the social conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.