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Ten Scholars Recognized for the 16th Annual Student and Early Career Council Dissertation Research Funding Awards

SRCD congratulates the 2024 Student and Early Career Council Dissertation Funding Awardees.

Established in 2008 by the SRCD Student and Early Career Council (SECC), the Dissertation Research Funding Awards (DFAs) are given to dissertation research proposals that are exceptionally noteworthy and display a strong potential to contribute to the field of child development. Each recipient is awarded $2,000 USD to use for research costs related to the proposed dissertation project.

SRCD is pleased to recognize the following ten scholars as the 2024 awardees: *Samantha Basch, Inés Botto, Linyun Fu, Emma Hart, Yan Jiang, Virnaliz Jimenez, Taehee Kim, Elizabeth Perkovich, Sofia Sebben, Lucinda Sisk*

Given the strength and quality of their applications, SRCD would also like to recognize the following five 2024 Honorable Mentions: *Johana Bernard, Kaitlyn Pritzl, Gayane Baziyants, Minci Zhang, Qingyang Liu?*



Samantha Basch, University of California Santa Cruz

"Supporting Learning in the Second Year of life: Language, Culture, and Context"

Samantha Basch is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz, working under the mentorship of Dr. Su-hua Wang. Her research integrates cognitive and sociocultural frameworks to highlight the strengths young children and their families bring to learning. Specifically, she examines caregiver-child language in diverse contexts to understand how cultural practices foster cognitive development. Overall, her goal is to advance ecologically valid and culturally inclusive understandings of cognitive development in infancy and early childhood. Samantha's dissertation investigates how mothers use different types of language to support learning in various home activities, focusing on how parental ethnotheories are expressed through language practices. This mixed-methods study involves naturalistic home observations of mothers with their 12- to 24-month-old infants collected as part of the PLAY project. Observations are followed by video-cued interviews, where participants watch and comment on videos of mother-child interactions to prompt reflections on cultural practices. The project aims to offer a nuanced view of how culture influences parenting, emphasizing the role of context and within-culture variation in approaches to early childhood learning.



Inés Botto, University of Wisconsin-Madison

“White Children’s Racial Learning in Contexts of Resistance: A Grounded Theory Study”

Inés Botto is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, under the mentorship of Dr. Margaret Kerr. Her research focuses on white children’s understanding of themselves as racialized actors, and their participation in their own racial socialization. Inés’ dissertation will explore young white children’s racial learning within white families who adopt intentional efforts to raise children committed to racial justice. Specifically, her study asks, 1) What understandings about race, personal racial identity, and racism do white children construct when raised in these contexts? 2) How are their understandings informed by the racial socialization practices enacted by their parents? and 3) How do these understandings reinforce or resist hegemonic narratives of race and whiteness? Inés hopes to use the findings that emerge from this study as a basis for future research exploring what moves white individuals from a state of ignorance or ambivalence about racial inequality, and towards a sense of responsibility for racial justice from the earliest stages of development.



Linyun Fu, University of Chicago

“Exploring the Dynamics of a Culturally Sensitive School-Based Social-Emotional Learning Program for Rural Chinese Children: Evaluating Effectiveness, Mediators, and Moderators”

Linyun Fu is a doctoral candidate in social work at the University of Chicago, where she is mentored by Dr. Curtis McMillen and works with Dr. Leyla Ismayilova. As a first-generation college student who grew up in a rural village in China, Linyun is passionate about developing and examining culturally sensitive prevention and intervention strategies for marginalized children in specific cultural contexts. She holds a particular interest in the impact of culturally grounded or adapted Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs for minoritized children. She has been a community-engaged researcher for over six years, working closely with the RICI Foundation, an NGO in China through supporting their SEL program development and program evaluation to promote rural children’s well-being. In partnership with the education bureau, her dissertation adopts a matched-pair, cluster-randomization design in a southwest county of China and seeks to: 1) assess the effectiveness of an 18-session culturally sensitive SEL program, co-developed with local experts, in enhancing rural children’s social-emotional competencies, reducing internalizing and externalizing behaviors, and improving educational outcomes; 2) investigate the mechanisms underlying the program's impact; and 3) identify subgroups of children who benefit most from the intervention. The findings from her

dissertation have the potential to inform a large-scale initiative led by local governments to improve educational and emotional outcomes for marginalized children.



Emma Hart, Columbia University

“Understanding Child Skill Development by Examining Longitudinal Educational Intervention Impacts”

Emma Hart is a doctoral candidate in Developmental Psychology at Teachers College, Columbia University mentored by Drs. Tyler Watts and Kimberly Noble. Her research examines the role that early skills and contexts play in shaping later development. To this end, she studies the short-term and long-term effects of interventions that experimentally aim to modify these early influences. Her work has primarily focused on programs designed to support children experiencing poverty. Her dissertation investigates two unexpected patterns that have emerged from longitudinal intervention evaluations: 1) While interventions often improve child skills in the short term, these effects commonly fade over time, and 2) Despite this fadeout, some interventions have long-term effects on important adult outcomes. Using three unique datasets and meta-

analytic methods, Emma's dissertation seeks to identify the extent to which fadeout and emergence are broadly observed and whether we can forecast when programs are likely to have long-run effects. In doing so, she hopes to test the plausibility of skill-building processes that have been theorized to explain the fadeout-emergence paradox and child skill development more generally. The findings from her work have the potential to refine developmental theory and shape policymakers' investments in programs most likely to benefit children and families.

Follow On X



Yan Jiang, University of California San Diego

"Reimagining Conceptions of Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care in Diverse Societies: A Comparative Analysis Leveraging Computational Methods"

Yan Jiang is a doctoral candidate in Education Studies at the University of California, San Diego, under the mentorship of Dr. Alison Wishard Guerra and Dr. Amanda Datnow. Her research centers on promoting equitable access to high-quality early childhood education and redefining “high-quality” within a global context. As a methodology enthusiast, Yan applies computational social science techniques to social science research, devising innovative approaches to address pressing issues. Her dissertation, conducted in two phases, reimagines conceptions of quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) across diverse societies. The first phase critically and computationally analyzes global ECEC quality research, identifying potential gaps where non-Western, non-middle-class perspectives may be marginalized. The second phase uses a comparative case study to explore educators’ perceptions of quality in preschools serving lower-income families in the U.S. and China, aiming to uncover how sociocultural contexts shape these perceptions. Yan’s findings will contribute to the theoretical, methodological, and practical dimensions of ECEC quality research, promoting a more equitable and inclusive understanding of ECEC quality and offering actionable insights for policymakers and educators.



Virnaliz Jimenez, University of Illinois Urbana Champaign

“Cultural Values and Parental Socialization of Coping in Latine Families: Implications for Adolescent Mental Health”

Virnaliz is a doctoral candidate in Human Development and Family Studies at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign. She works with Dr. Kelly Tu in the Adolescent Development and Parenting during Transitions (ADAPT) lab. Virnaliz’s research focuses on how culture and parenting practices influence the ways that adolescents cope with stress. Her dissertation uses grounded theory methods to explain parent socialization of coping and youth coping processes among Latine families. She examines these processes within interpersonal and academic domains. Findings from her study will contribute to a better understanding of the cultural values that may influence parents’ socialization of coping and Latine youth coping with implications for their mental health. Moreover, knowledge gleaned can inform community interventions aimed at improving coping and mental health among Latine youth.

Virnaliz is also passionate about conducting community engaged research. She has partnered with a Latine parent organization in Illinois to disseminate findings to their network of parents. Her long-term career goal is to become a respected researcher focusing on promoting health equity and improving outcomes for underserved communities. She aims to contribute to evidence-based interventions and programs that support youth and families from diverse backgrounds.



Taehee Kim, University of Georgia

“Role of School and Family Contexts in Shaping Parents’ and Teachers’ Perspectives on Social Skills”

Taehee Kim is a doctoral candidate in the Applied Cognition and Development program at the University of Georgia, under the mentorship of Dr. Kristen L. Bub. Her research centers on improving the measurement and development of social-emotional skills in middle childhood by examining the unique perspectives of parents and teachers. In her mixed-method dissertation, Taehee aims to (1) identify patterns of agreement and disagreement between parents and teachers regarding children’s social skills, (2) explore the contextual factors within families and schools that contribute to their differing views on children's social skills, and (3) delve into the experiences of parents and teachers when communicating their perspectives on social skills. Findings from her dissertation will help expand our understanding of the variations in parents' and teachers' views on social skills and the potential sources of these differing perspectives, thereby improving the quality of discussions about social skills and fostering school-family collaboration in social skill development. Ultimately, Taehee hopes to understand how cultural and linguistic backgrounds influence parent and teacher perspectives and communication about social skills, with the goal of promoting more equitable social-emotional development.



Elizabeth Perkovich, University of Houston, Texas

“How Parents Scaffold Joint Attention For Infants at High and Low Familial Likelihood for Autism”

Elizabeth Perkovich is a doctoral student in the Developmental, Cognitive, and Behavioral Neuroscience program at the University of Houston, Texas, under the mentorship of Dr. Hanako Yoshida in the Cognitive Development Lab. Broadly, her research uses head-mounted eye-tracking during parent-child social interaction to explore the influence of parental social scaffolding behaviors on children's dynamic visual experiences, particularly among families from diverse backgrounds. Her dissertation will use head-mounted eye-tracking among infants with and without a family history of autism to explore: (1) differences in joint attention, (2) differences in parental social scaffolding behaviors, and (3) how parental social scaffolding relates to joint attention as a function of infant familial group. The findings of this project will offer novel insights into the early perceptual and social environments that shape early joint attention behaviors. These insights will serve as a crucial foundation for designing evidence-based interventions tailored to increasing joint attention within play contexts. Furthermore, the results of this unique methodology can provide a new framework for how parents influence early social attention and enhance the ecological validity of using head-mounted eye-tracking among neurodivergent populations.



Sofia Sebben, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

“Parental Reflective Functioning, Child Socioemotional Development and Screen Use in Childhood”

Sofia is a doctoral candidate in Psychology at the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul in southern Brazil. She works under the guidance of Dr. Giana Frizzo in Brazil with co-supervision from Dr. Caroline Fitzpatrick of the Université de Sherbrooke, Canada. Committed to the importance of fostering healthy and happy childhoods, Sofia is dedicated to exploring topics related to child development and family dynamics across various contexts. Her personal and academic experiences intersect with the rise of digital technology, leading her to investigate its implications for early childhood. Adopting an ecological and family approach to understand development, Sofia’s dissertation employs quantitative and qualitative methodologies to investigate young children's screen usage and its interaction with parental and child factors in Brazil. Her aim is to leverage these findings to drive the development of evidence-based early childhood programs and policies that protect children's emotional well-being and assist parents in managing the complexities of parenting in the digital age. Sofia also intends to integrate academic insights into her future practice with children and families, thereby bridging research and practical applications to foster child development.

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Lucinda Sisk, Yale University

“The Role of Adversity Exposure Timing in Shaping Youth Neurodevelopment and Mental Health”

Lucinda Sisk is a Ph.D. candidate in Neuroscience at Yale University, where she is mentored by Dr. Dylan Gee in the Clinical Affective Neuroscience and Development Lab. Lucinda’s program of research is centered on characterizing how the childhood environment, particularly adversity, influences neurodevelopment and risk for future psychopathology. While adversity can increase risk for psychopathology, there is tremendous heterogeneity in outcomes, potentially related to differential effects of adversity depending on the state of the developing brain. Lucinda’s dissertation research seeks to parse this heterogeneity by leveraging multivariate statistical approaches to examine how the timing of early life adversity exposure may inform individual variation in adversity-related changes in neurodevelopment and risk for, and resilience against, future psychopathology. Lucinda’s long-term aim is to enhance mechanistic understanding of individual variation in the effects of adversity on the developing brain, which may one day be applied to improve treatment and intervention options for youth exposed to adversity.

Honorable Mentions

Johanna Bernard, University of Pennsylvania
“Understanding the Conditions and Contexts that Shape Skill Development in Childhood”

Kaitlyn Pritzl, University of Wisconsin - Madison
“Parent-Child Contact During Parental Incarceration: Implications for Individual and Family Well-Being”

Gayane Baziyants, Duke University
“The Impact of an Annual Unconditional Cash Transfer on Child Maltreatment Rates Among American Indian and Alaska Native Children”

Minci Zhang, University of Southern California
“Peer Relationships Across Cultures”

Qingyang Liu, Syracuse University
“Identifying Heterogeneity in the Material Hardship Domains and Children’s Development of Behavioral Self-Regulation: A Multidimensional Person-Centered Approach”