Measuring Young Children's Parasocial Relationships:
The Stability of Parent Report Measures

Naomi R. Aguiar, Melissa M. Richards, Bradley J. Bond, Kaitlin L. Brunick, & Sandra L. Calvert

Children's Digital Media Center
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Introduction

- Parasocial relationships (PSRs): one-way, emotionally tinged relationships that children form with media characters.[1]

- Parent surveys indicate that PSRs are multidimensional constructs consisting of three dimensions[1,2]:
  - Social realism, attachment, character personification[1] or
  - Social realism, attachment & character personification, humanlike needs[2]

- Little known about stability & change in PSRs as children age

Research Questions (RQs):

- **RQ_1:** What are the dimensions of children's PSRs that emerge with a parent report measure[1]?

- **RQ_2:** To what extent do these dimensions remain stable or change at a later point in development?

- **RQ_3:** Do any new dimensions of PSRs emerge as children age and do they vary by gender?

Method

- 154 parent respondents recontacted from two past studies (65%[1] & 35%[2])
- n = 91 parents reporting on children's current *favorite* media character (M_{age} = 6.27 yrs.; 41 boys & 50 girls)
- Completed online Parent Parasocial Relationship Measure[1] 3 years after initial participation (M = 3.02 years, SD = 0.50)

Results

Figure 1: Popular favorite media characters gender stereotyped

Boys **Girls**

Figure 2: Changes in favorite characters over time (N = 91)
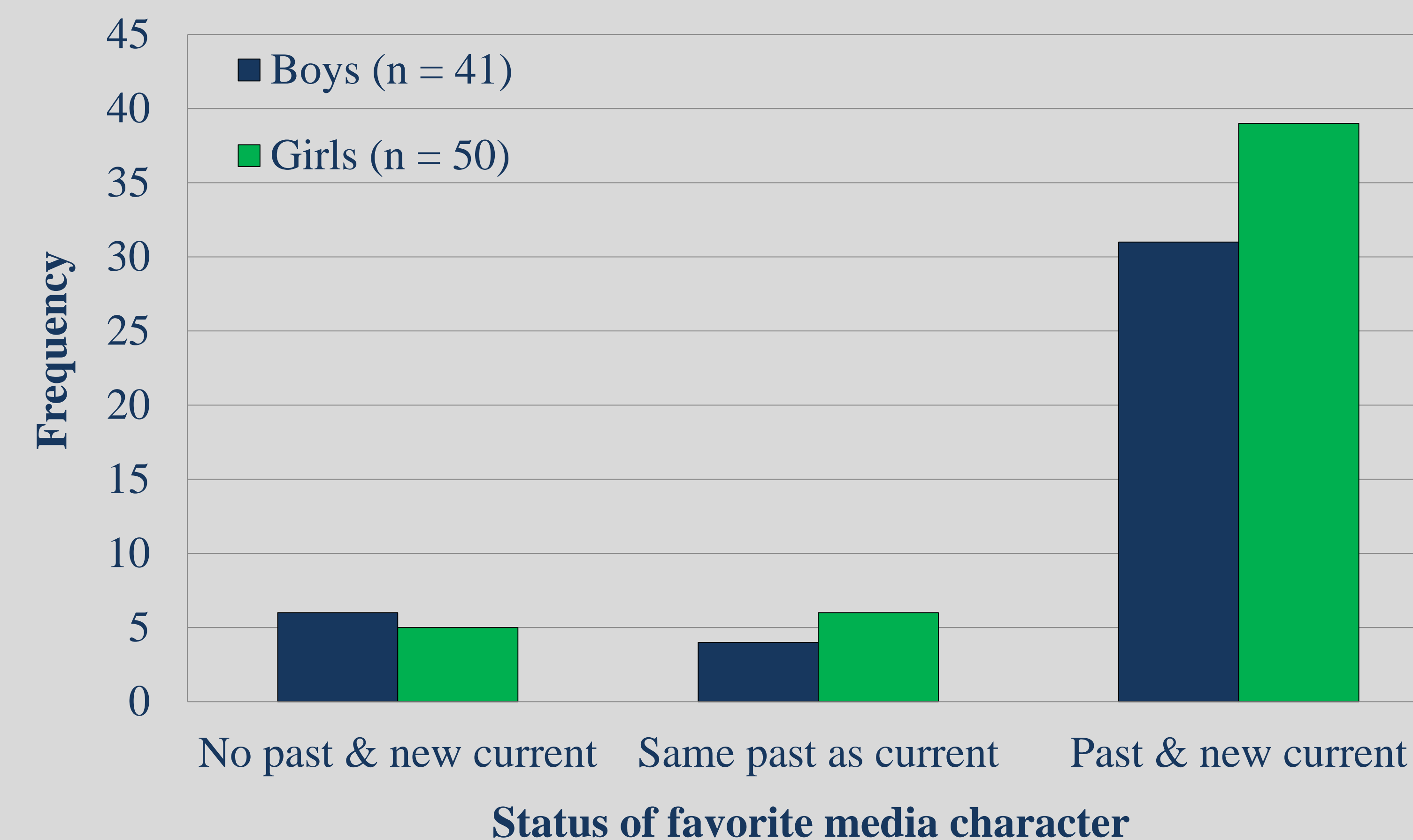
Table 1: Dimensions of older children's PSRs (N = 91)

| Factor	Eigen values	Sample items
Attachment & Character Personification α = .80	4.91	Child views character as comforting, safe, soothing, trustworthy, & friend.
Character Attributes α = .78	2.18	Child views character as smart, cute, nice, & strong.
Social Realism α = .87	1.73	Child views character as real or pretend, as doing actions in real life.
Humanlike Needs α = .83	1.36	Child believes character has wants & needs.

Table 2: Average composite scores by gender

	Social Realism	Attachment & Character Personification	Character Attributes	Humanlike Needs
Male	2.24 (1.06)	3.22 (0.72)	3.85 (0.64)	3.56 (1.05)
Female	2.14 (0.94)	3.05 (0.75)	4.20* (0.74)	3.64 (0.99)

* t (86) = -2.31, p = .02, Cohen's d = .50

Figure 3: PSR Variance components across three studies

Bond & Calvert (2014)   Richards & Calvert (2016)   The Current Study
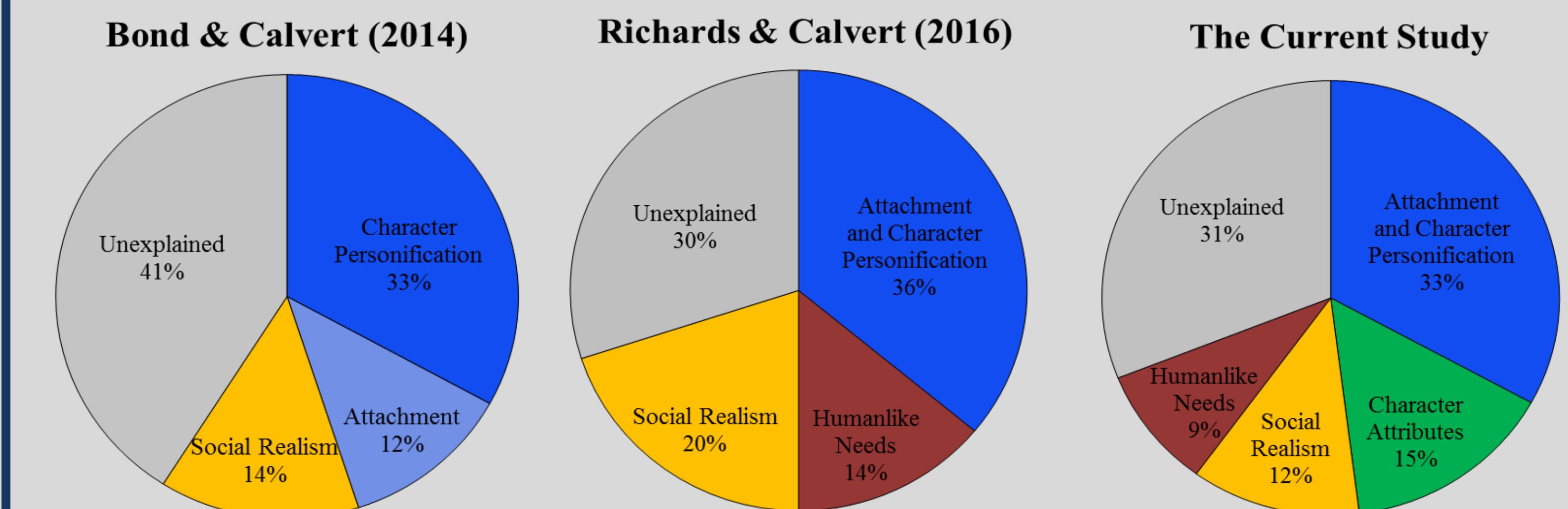
Discussion

- Stability in PSR dimensions: social realism, attachment & character personification & human-like needs.

- New PSR dimension emerges: character attributes
  - Gender differences on characters' physical attractiveness (Girl > Boy).

- Stability & change parallels developmental changes in real & imaginary friendships[3]

- Highlights importance of media characters in children's larger social networks.

References

1. Bond, B. J., & Calvert, S. L. (2014). A model and measure of US parents' perceptions of young children's parasocial relationships. *Journal of Children and Media, 8*(3), 286-304.
2. Richards, M. N., & Calvert, S. L. (2016). Parent versus child report of young children's parasocial relationships in the United States. *Journal of Children and Media, 10*(4), 462-480.
3. Gleason, T. R., & Hohmann, L. M. (2006). Concepts of real and imaginary friendships in early childhood. *Social Development, 15*(1), 128-144.