



Parent Versus Child Report of Young Children's Parasocial Relationships

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Background

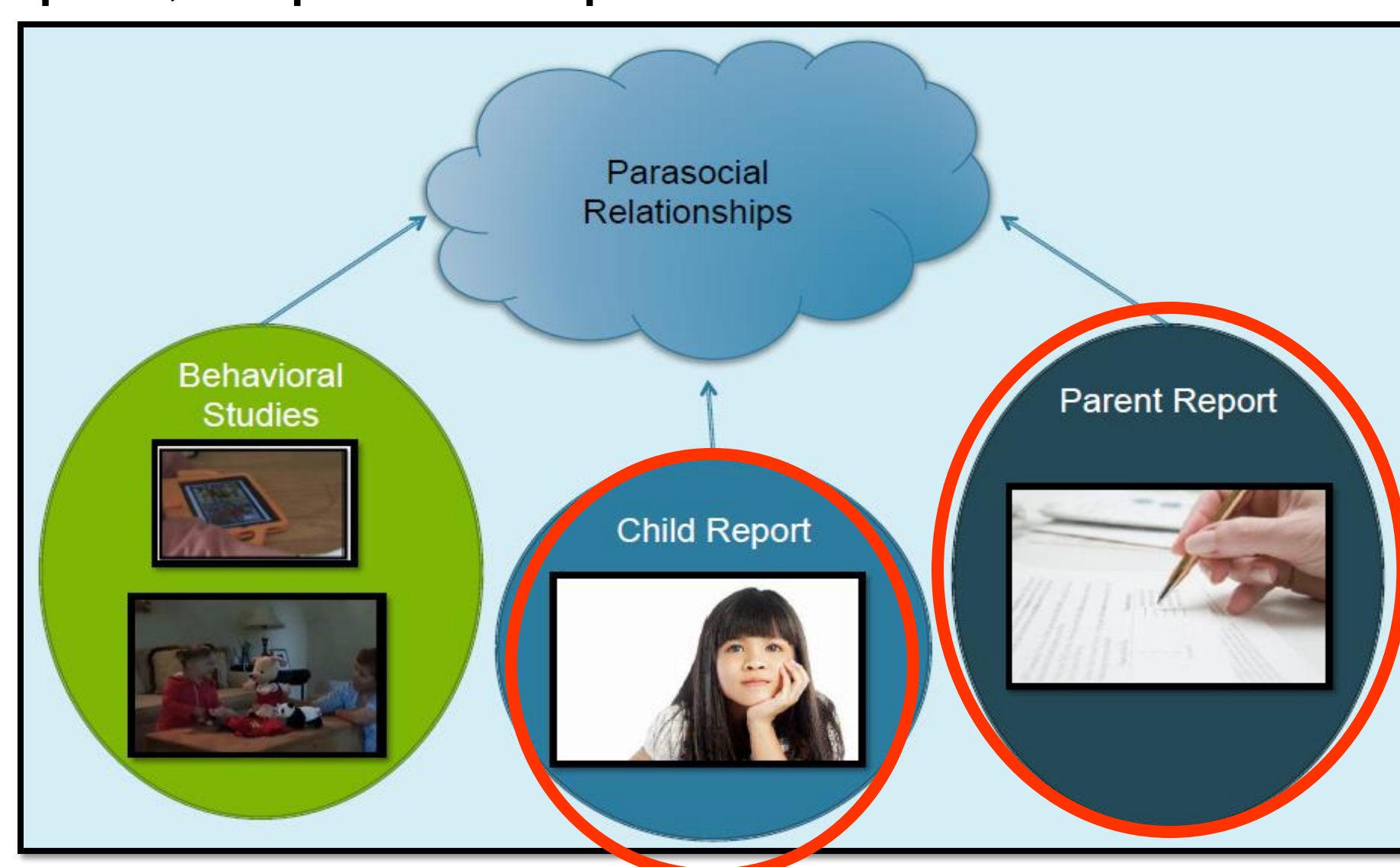
- Media characters are ubiquitous
- Powerful, informal friends for children
- Children form *parasocial relationships* (Horton & Wohl, 1956)
 - One-sided, emotionally tinged relationships with media characters
- Why study parasocial relationships?**



Center of transmedia environment

Characters may aid in learning (Calvert, Richards, & Kent, 2014; Gola, Richards, Lauricella, & Calvert, 2013).

- Research on young children's parasocial relationships is scant (Giles, 2002).
- What exactly is a parasocial relationship during childhood?**
- Recent research has quantified parasocial relationships through behavioral observation, child report, or parent report



- Goal of the current study:** Compare parent and child report within dyads about children's parasocial relationships with favorite media characters.

Methods

Participants:

- 2-6 year olds ($n=229$; 45.4% male)

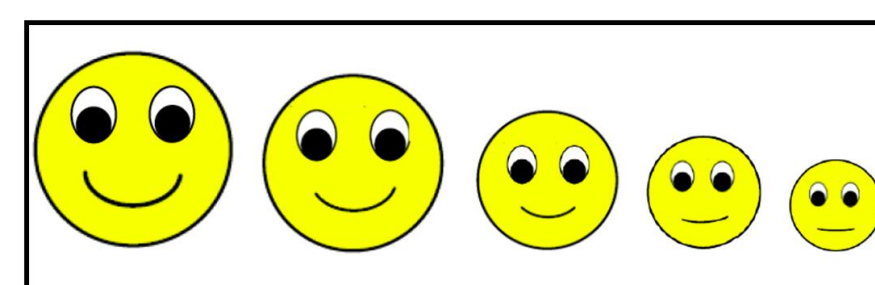
- Childcare centers and preschools in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area

Procedure:

- Children were asked to answer questions about their favorite media character
- Their parents surveyed separately on the child's favorite media character

Child Questions

- Adapted from a parent report survey (Bond & Calvert, 2014)
- Parent survey questions simplified
- Children responded using a Smiley Face Likert Scale:



Parents

- Answered survey after their child visited in school
- Parasocial relationship questions from Bond & Calvert (2014)

Measures

Item	Child Question	Parent Analog
Trust	Do you believe what _____ tells you all of the time--> not at all?	"[Child] trusts [character]"
Pretend	Is _____ totally pretend --> totally real	"[Child] knows that [character] is imaginary"
Safety	How safe does _____ make you feel when you are scared? Really safe --> not safe at all	"[Character] makes [child] feel safe"
Cuteness	Is _____ really cute --> not cute at all	"[Child] thinks that [character] is pretty, cute, or attractive"
Hungry	Does _____ get really hungry --> not hungry at all	"[Child] believes that [character] has needs"
Sleepy	Does _____ get really sleepy --> not sleepy at all	"[Child] believes that [character] has needs"
Real	Is _____ totally real --> totally pretend	"[Child] believes that [character] is real"
Feelings	Does _____ have a whole lot of feelings --> no feelings at all	"[Child] thinks that [character] has thoughts and emotions"
Sadness	How do you feel when _____ makes a mistake? Really sad --> not sad at all	"[Child] gets sad when [character] gets sad or makes a mistake."
Friendship	Is _____ your best friend --> not your friend at all	"[Child] treats [character] as a friend"

Results

- $n = 194$ children had clear favorite character (88 boys, 106 girls)
- $n = 35$ had ambiguous responses

Most Popular Characters

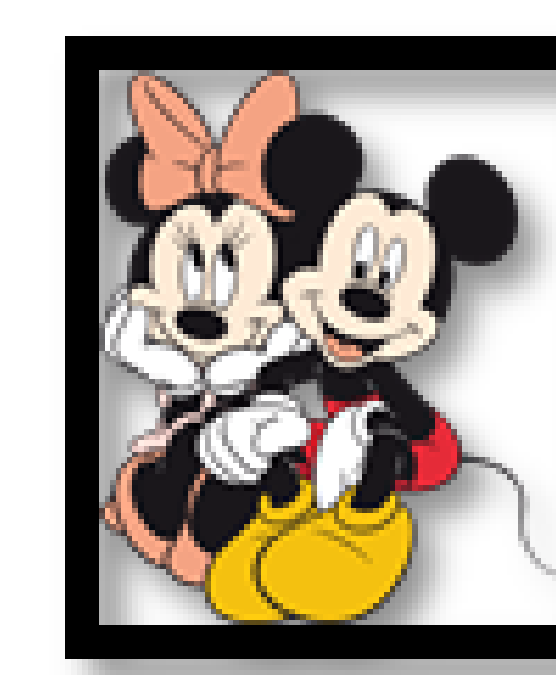
- Dora (9.8%)
- Minnie/Mickey Mouse (5.6%)
- Lightning McQueen (4.6%)
- Elmo (4.1%)

Gender Differences

- Girls chose a favorite female character more often than a male character, (73.6% versus 26.4%, respectively), and boys chose a favorite male more often than a female character (94.3% versus 5.7%, respectively), $\chi^2(1, N=194) = 90.57, p < .0001$
- Girls ($M=3.61, SD=1.50$) were more likely to rate their character as cute than boys were ($M=2.91, SD=1.85$), $t(167) = -2.87, p = .005$

Parent-Child Matching

- Only 32 parents reported exact same character as child
- No significant difference between matching and non-matching dyads on mean parent report composite scores on *attachment and character personification*, *social realism*, or *human needs*
- Internal consistency still high on factor within the matching and non-matching dyads ($\alpha's = .71-.85$ versus $\alpha's = .78-.91$, respectively).



Factor Analysis-- Parent Report:

Factor Name	Eigenvalue	Percent Variance Explained	Question	Factor Loadings
Attachment and Character Personification	3.97	36.12%	"[Child] trusts [character]"	0.71 0.24 0.14
			"[Character] makes [child] feel safe."	0.81 0.03 0.18
			"The voice of [character] soothes [child]."	0.67 -0.04 0.07
			"[Child] gets sad when [character] gets sad or makes a mistake."	0.44 0.24 0.31
			"[Child] thinks that [character] has thoughts and emotions."	0.58 0.15 -0.07
Social Realism	1.97	17.90%	"[Character] makes [child] feel comfortable."	0.82 0.04 0.14
			"[Child] knows that [character] is imaginary."	0.03 0.91 0.00
			"[Child] believes that [character] is real."	0.10 0.90 0.13
Humanlike Needs	1.46	13.30%	"When [character] acts out a behavior on screen (like dancing, singing, or playing a game), [child] believes that [character] is performing the behavior in real life."	0.23 0.85 0.20
			"[Child] believes that [character] has needs."	0.10 0.17 0.92
			"[Child] believes that [character] has wants."	0.16 0.06 0.94

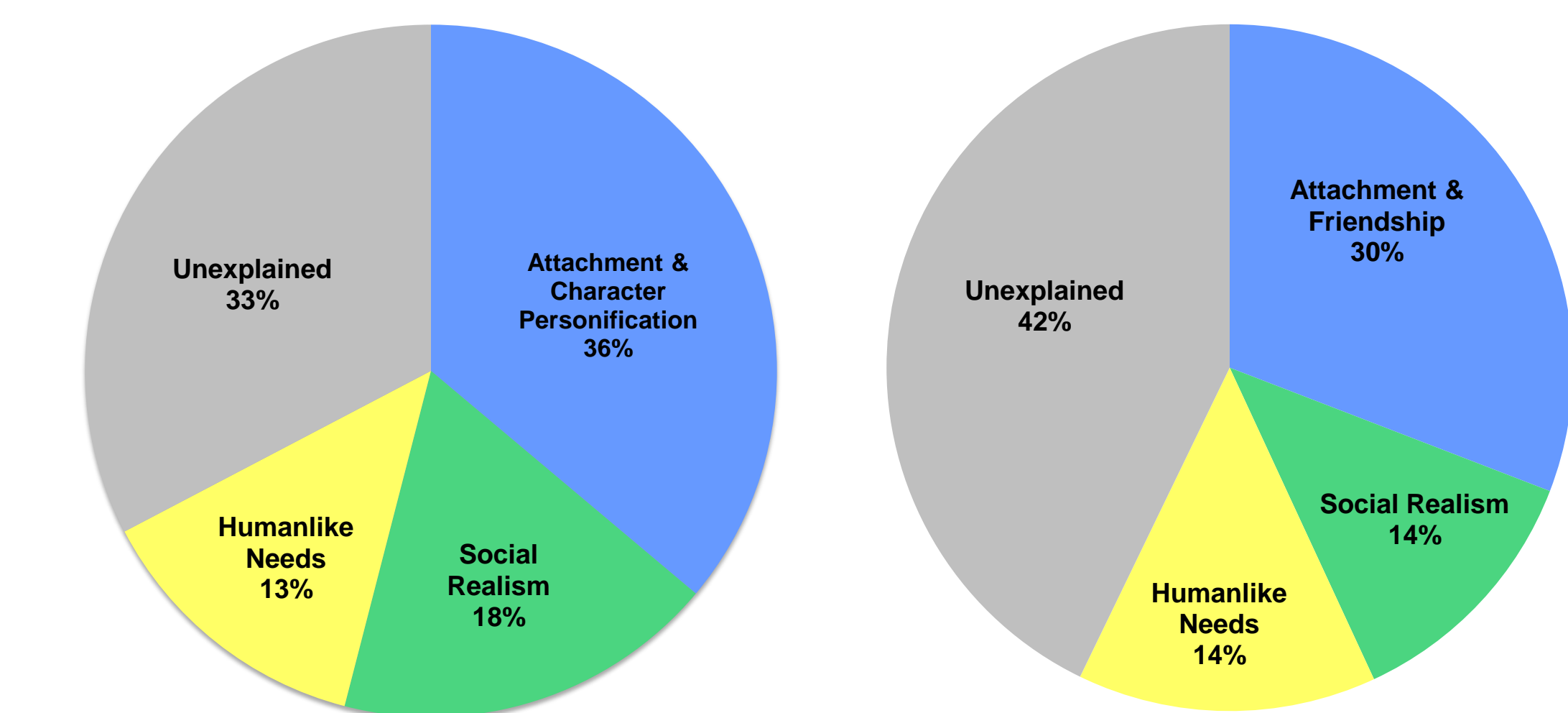
Factor Analysis-- Child Report:

Factor Name	Eigenvalue	Percent Variance Explained	Question	Factor Loadings
Attachment and Friendship	2.66	29.52%	Character is a friend	0.79 -0.09 -0.02
			Character is trustworthy	0.58 0.23 0.08
			Character makes child feel safe	0.74 0.14 -0.14
Humanlike Needs	1.3	14.39%	Character is cute	.699 0.06 0.04
			Character gets hungry	0.36 0.61 0.20
			Character gets sleepy	0.12 0.78 -0.12
Social Realism	1.24	13.82%	Child feels sad when character makes mistake	-0.07 0.68 -0.01
			Character is real	0.22 0.09 0.86
			Character is pretend*	-0.42 -0.17 0.68

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

Results

Child Report vs. Parental Report



- Overall, the results between parent & child surveys are consistent and three major factors emerged— Attachment (linked with Character Personification for parents and Friendship for children); Social Realism; and Humanlike Needs
- Key difference:** Humanlike needs found in the parent and child dyad samples, but children also grouped the feelings they felt when the character made a mistake as part of this humanlike needs factor, while parental report categorized this question in the attachment & character personification group.

Discussion

- Similar and consistent factors of parasocial relationships emerge during parent and child dyad reports.
- Child report, as well as parent report, explains a similar percent of the variance in children's parasocial relationships.
- Parents and children usually report a different favorite character, but internal consistency and means of composite factors do not differ significantly between parents who matched with their child and those who did not.
- Children develop parasocial relationships with characters that are the same gender as them

Future Directions

- Use of this scale to understand the impact of parasocial relationships on STEM learning and food choices
- Investigate why parents and children mismatch when reporting favorite character
- Children's early relationships extend beyond real people to those that exist primarily in a digital world
- These new measures are a way to tap into the 21st century media friends that are an uncharted source for understanding early learning, health, and behavior

Conclusion

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Acknowledgements

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