



Family Context and Child Development

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Monday 10:00am–1:30pm | 335 (Greinstraße 2) | 0.12 (Seminar room)

Office hour (*Please, make an email request in advance!*):

Monday 3:30pm–4:30pm | 335 (Greinstraße 2) | 0.05

CONTENT AND OBJECTIVES

Child development is the combination of processes through which children (more or less successfully) acquire the skills and competencies that enable them to engage in human societies, socially, culturally, and economically. As opposed to the traditional dichotomy between “nature” and “nurture” recent conceptual and theoretical work postulates that individual (and often inherited) characteristics of children and contextual factors, such as parenting, work together to shape the developmental outcomes of children.

The course begins with a discussion of the different dimensions of child development and different ways to measure them empirically. Thereafter, we will focus on current theoretical conceptualizations of developmental processes and their determinants. The first part of the course concludes with an overview of different research designs to study how contextual factors influence development. The second part of the course is devoted to a critical discussion of recent studies on the influence of selected contextual factors on child development, such as parenting style, maternal employment, parental relationship, siblings, and the neighborhood in which children grow up. Besides providing students with an overview of the current research on contextual influences on child development, a main aim of the course is to further stimulate students’ curiosity and interest in studying social phenomena and to deepen their understanding of the basic logic and difficulties of empirical social research.

COURSE READINGS AND FURTHER MATERIALS

The course is based on three types of readings: overviews, empirical studies, and blog posts. Most of the overview texts come from the following book (available as free download here), released in 2000 by an expert committee as a summary of the state of knowledge on child development (in the following abbreviated by FNTNH):

Shonkoff, J. P. and Phillips, D. A. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: the science of early child development*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Other overviews are taken from academic journals that publish review articles such as *Annual Sociological Review* or *Future of Children*. The empirical articles are taken from academic journals that publish research on child development. The blog posts then summarize these articles for an interested general audience.

For a more comprehensive overview about research on child development, including various subareas not covered in the course, I recommend the following handbook series available at the sociology library (GreinstraÙe) if you ask for the literature for this course:

Lerner, R. M. (2015). *Handbook of child psychology and developmental science*. Seventh edition. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

For some sessions, I also provided links to magazine articles or videos related to the topic. Please consider these links as supplementary for the course readings, not as a substitution. All overviews and empirical studies along with the course slides are on *Ilias*.

REQUIREMENTS FOR COURSE COMPLETION

There are two requirements for completing the course successfully: two group presentations, and two, single-authored written assignments.

1. One presentation is about summarizing the state of research for a specific substantive course topic (i.e., one of the last four topics) based on the overview text. This includes a summary of the theoretical background for a specific topic as well as the current state of knowledge and open questions. The other presentation is based on the respective empirical study. But the aim is not to "recount" each detail of the article. Instead the presentation should highlight the attempted contribution of the paper and how the authors go about achieving it. In other words, the presentation should answer the following questions: What is the specific research question of the article? What does the article do different than previous studies to answer this question and why? What are the gaps in the literature that the article addresses? Is the article successful in making the proposed contribution?
2. The written assignments consist of an 8-12 page summary of 4 recent articles on one particular seminar topic and a 1-2 page blogpost-style summary of one article on another seminar topic. In each case, you are also free to choose a topic not covered in the seminar such as family income or child care, but please consider this requires extra time and effort. The first assignment is in much the same vein as the presentation of the empirical study only with 3 additional studies of your choosing. For the second assignment, you take the blogposts listed on the syllabus as a template and write a layperson summary of an article not covered in the seminar.

SCHEDULE¹

24 APRIL I • INTRODUCTION AND ORGANIZATION

Overview

FNTNH: Ch. 1

Media

Interview with Dalton Conley in „The Sun“ (Feb. 2015)

https://www.dropbox.com/s/60ks9vcrnvhv20i4/conley_sun_interview.pdf?dl=0

4 min. talk by Jack P. Shonkoff

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLiP4b-TPCA>

24 APRIL II • MEASUREMENT OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Overview

FNTNH: Ch. 5-8

8 MAY I • THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Overview

FNTNH: Ch. 2-3

Aber, J. L. et al. (1997). "Development in context: Implications for studying neighborhood effects". In: *Neighborhood Poverty Volume 1: Context and Consequences for Children*. Ed. by Brooks-Gunn, J., Duncan, G. J., and Aber, J. L. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 44-61.

Blog

<http://goo.gl/TkJtvcv>

Media

15 min. talks by Dalton Conley (second one more extensively about genes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AMYM1SXDefQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=to3ylsypmKo>

8 MAY II • STUDY DESIGNS

Overview

FNTNH: Ch. 4

Media

¹Subject to change.

Essay by Dalton Conley in „The Chronicle“ (Dec. 2003):
https://www.dropbox.com/s/whyuob3fvk3ovxc/conley_nat_exp.pdf?dl=0

15 MAY • READING AND REVIEWING EMPIRICAL STUDIES: PARENTING

Overview

FNTNH: Ch. 9

Study

Altschul, I., Lee, S. J., and Gershoff, E. T. (2016). “Hugs, Not Hits: Warmth and Spanking as Predictors of Child Social Competence”. In: *Journal of Marriage and Family* 78 (3), pp. 695–714. DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12306.

Blog

<http://goo.gl/6iu8E9>

22 MAY I • MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT

Overview

Heinrich, C. J. (2014). “Parents’ Employment and Children’s Wellbeing”. In: *Future of Children* 24 (1), pp. 121–146.

Study 1

Lombardi, C. M. and Coley, R. L. (2017). “Early Maternal Employment and Children’s Academic and Behavioral Skills in Australia and the United Kingdom”. In: *Child Development* 88 (1), pp. 263–281. DOI: 10.1111/cdev.12588.

Blog 1

<https://goo.gl/8sPkLm>

Study 2

Miller, D. P. and Chang, J. (2015). “Parental work schedules and child overweight or obesity: Does family structure matter?” In: *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77 (5), pp. 1266–1281. DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12215.

Blog 2

<https://goo.gl/nGu35i>

22 MAY II • PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP

Overview

Ribar, D. C. (2015). “Why marriage matters for child wellbeing”. In: *Future of Children* 25 (2), pp. 11–27.

Study 1

Lee, D. and McLanahan, S. (2015). "Family Structure Transitions and Child Development". In: *American Sociological Review* 80 (4), pp. 738–763. DOI: 10.1177/0003122415592129.

Blog 1

<https://goo.gl/A0c5jd>

Study 2

Golombok, S. et al. (2014). "Adoptive Gay Father Families: Parent Child Relationships and Children's Psychological Adjustment". In: *Child Development* 85 (2), pp. 456–468. DOI: 10.1111/cdev.12155.

Blog 2

<https://goo.gl/06R1W0>

29 MAY I • SIBLINGS

Overview

Steelman, L. C. et al. (2002). "Reconsidering the effects of sibling configuration: Recent advances and challenges". In: *Annual Review of Sociology* 28, pp. 243–269.

Study 1

Workman, J. (2017). "Sibling Additions, Resource Dilution, and Cognitive Development During Early Childhood". In: *Journal of Marriage and Family* 79 (2), pp. 462–474. DOI: 10.1111/jomf.12350.

Blog 1

<https://goo.gl/EWzD9n>

Study 2

Fomby, P., Goode, J. A., and Mollborn, S. (2016). "Family complexity, sibling, and children's aggressive behavior at school entry". In: *Demography* 53 (1), pp. 1–26. DOI: 10.1007/s13524-015-0443-9.

Blog 2

<https://goo.gl/oZ2X8h>

29 MAY II • LOCAL CONTEXT

Overview

FNTNH: Kap. 12

Study 1

Sharkey, P. and Elwert, F. (2011). "The Legacy of Disadvantage: Multigenerational Neigh-

borhood Effects on Cognitive Ability". In: *American Journal of Sociology* 116 (6), pp. 1934–81. doi: 10.1086/660009.

Blog 1

<http://goo.gl/tGd9Hp>

Study 2

Donnelly, L. et al. (2016). "Cohesive Neighborhoods Where Social Expectations Are Shared May Have Positive Impact On Adolescent Mental Health". In: *Health Affairs* 35 (11), pp. 2083–2091. doi: 10.1377/hlthaff.2016.0721.

Blog 2

<https://goo.gl/XmRON7>