

Thoughts of High School Faze Boys

BY KATE JOHNSON
Montreal Bureau

SAN ANTONIO — The thought of the high school transition is enough to reduce boys' academic effort and performance—whereas for girls, it has no impact on those measures, according to a study presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Prevention Research.

"Boys' self-concepts are more focused on autonomy and social power, whereas girls' self-concepts are more focused on intimate personal relationships. We thought that thinking about going to high school would

The study found that priming boys for the transition to high school undermined their academic effort. For girls, however, priming did not have an impact.

lead boys to think about how people wouldn't know them, and how teachers would be more strict, and that would lead them to disengage academically," said lead investigator Daniel Brickman of the psychology department at the

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

His study included 59 eighth-grade students (32 female). Subjects were randomized to one of three groups. Those in the first group were primed for high school with a message of continuity: "In many ways starting high school is not really that much of a big change. ... List three ways in which next year will be similar to this year." In the second group, subjects were primed with a message of change: "In many ways starting high school is a big change. ... List three ways in which next year will be different from this year." The third group received no priming.

All three groups were then asked to complete written exercises that measured current academic effort, future effort, and willingness to engage.

The study found that priming boys for the transition to high school undermined their academic effort and performance—regardless of whether the prime emphasized constancy or change. In contrast, priming girls did not affect their effort and performance.

Prior research indicates that secondary schools present increased competition for positions of social power and fewer opportunities to express autonomy, compared with primary schools. "This squelching of power and autonomy might be especially detrimental for boys," Mr. Brickman said in an interview.

"It seems like it's not so helpful to focus on the transition to high school without focusing on something else as well," he added. In his next study, he hopes to prime boys with the idea that high school will promote autonomy and social power to see whether this message prevents their academic decline. ■

Foreign Adoptees Close Development Gap

BY ROBERT FINN
San Francisco Bureau

SAN FRANCISCO — Young children adopted from foreign orphanages show initial delays in nonverbal social communication, developmental behaviors, and adaptive behaviors that resolve within 6 months to 1 year, according to two posters that were presented at the annual meeting of the Pediatric Academic Societies.

The results suggest that it may be more

difficult to read the social cues of institutionalized children shortly after adoption and that it may be worthwhile to focus attention on helping these children develop better means of social communication, wrote Dr. Yasmin Senturias of Children's Hospital Medical Center of Akron, Ohio, and Dr. Anne Roth of Yale University, New Haven, Conn., and their colleagues.

Both of the studies were conducted on the same group of 23 adoptees, who were 9-24 months old at the time of

adoption. Eighteen of the children came from China and the remainder came from Russia and other Eastern European countries.

In the study on nonverbal social communication, the children were compared with age-matched controls from a study on nonadopted children.

The assessment involved videotaped observation of 25 semistructured situations designed to elicit interaction between a tester and a child with minimal verbal cueing. The videotapes were

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scored based on the frequency of events showing behavioral regulation, social interaction, and joint attention.

At baseline, the international adoptees showed significantly lower frequencies of social interaction, joint attention, and total nonverbal social communication than the controls. These differences disappeared completely 6 months later, with the adoptees and controls showing virtually identical scores and no statistically significant differences.

The study on adaptive skills and developmental outcomes was based on three measuring tools: International Adoption Questionnaires given to parents; the Bay-

ley Scales of Infant Development, which yielded a Mental Developmental Index (MDI) score and a Psychomotor Developmental Index (PDI) score; and the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale, which measures personal and social skills used for everyday living.

Fifty-two percent of parents reported gross motor delays at the time of adoption, and that declined to 0% at 1 year. Likewise, parents said that 21% of the

children had fine motor delays initially, and that declined to 5% at 1 year. Speech and language delays, however, did not show such substantial improvement. Thirty-four percent of parents reported speech and language delays at the time of adoption, and that declined to 25% 1 year later, wrote Dr. Senturias and Dr. Roth.

The MDI and PDI scores both increased significantly over the course of the study,

from 78 and 79 respectively at baseline to 99 and 104 respectively 1 year later. Both increases were statistically significant. (A score of 100 is considered average, and every 16 points below 100 represents one standard deviation from the mean.)

The Vineland scores demonstrated significant improvement over 12 months in all domains, including communication skills, daily living skills, socialization skills, and motor skills.

The meeting was sponsored by the American Pediatric Society, Society for Pediatric Research, Ambulatory Pediatric Association, and American Academy of Pediatrics. ■

International adoptees' deficits in social interaction, joint attention, and total nonverbal social communication disappeared completely within 6 months.

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