

Gender Differences in Adult-Child Interactions: Evidence from non-parent undergraduate students



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Background

- Parent-child interactions have been found to predict subsequent development (Stright, Gallagher, & Kelley, 2008; Dodici, Draper, & Peterson, 2003).
- Parent-infant interactions have been found to differ systematically between mothers and fathers (Starrels, 1994; Lin, Xie, Li, 2019).
- It remains unclear what causes differences between mothers and fathers
- Primary caregiver may have more experience with the child
- Societal norms and expectations may influence mothers and fathers behaviors
- Gender stereotypes and expectations may affect parent-child interactions
- Previous work has examined parent-child interactions only in actual parents with their own children. Therefore, the unique impact of adult gender and child gender on interactions remains unknown.

The current study examines spontaneous language use during adult-child interactions between a non-parent adult and a toddler. Further, we examine the impact of gender-related experiences, interests, and perceptions on adult-child exchanges.

Participants

- Participants were 82 undergraduates enrolled in Intro to Psychology course (41 female) who interacted with a non-relative 15- to 17 month-old toddler (female).
- Dyads engaged in free-play for 15 minutes in a standardized playroom. The father of the toddler was present in the room at all times but pretended to read a book.

Word Category	Examples
Sounds	"hm", "ooh", "ahh", " <u>wooho</u> "
Number (excl. "one")	"zero", "four", "ten", "double"
Quantifier	"larger", "many", "least", "none"
Noun	"cow", "baby", "daddy", "car"
Verb	"play", "do", "can", "feel"
Name calling	"Sammy", "you", "Sam",
Space	"narrow", "up", "left", "inside"
Question	"what", "where", "who", "how"
Color	"red", "silver", "gold", "white"
Shape	"triangle", "square", "circle"
Mental	"think", "want", "like", "feel"
Praise	"yes", "cool", "wonder", "strong"
Self	"me", "I", "mine", "my"

Note: Only results for highlighted categories are presented.



Measures & Manipulation

- Undergraduate interactions with the toddler were fully transcribed by trained coders.
- Extracting meaning, word counts and word categories
- Students completed the new Experiences, Perceptions, and Interests Questionnaire (EPIQ)
- Based on findings by Baber and Tucker (2006), and Leversen, Torsheim, and Samdal (2012).
- Validated on a separate sample of undergraduates
- Gender of the toddler was manipulated by dressing the child in pink or blue. The child was referred to as "Sammy".

Results

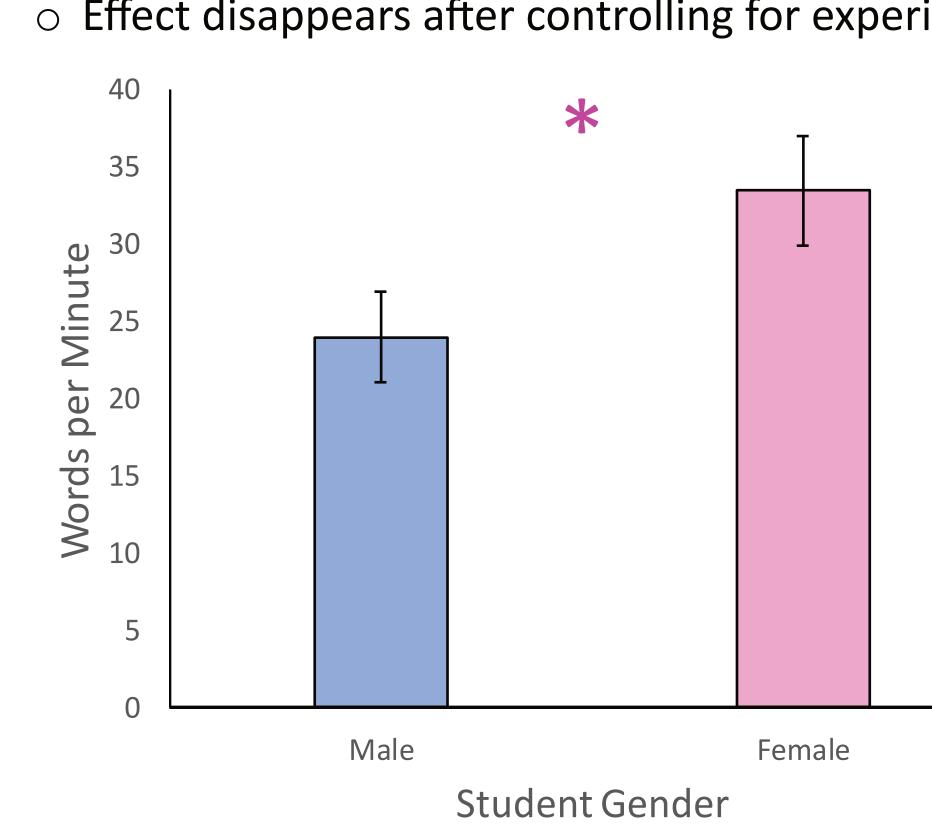
Both genders aggressive and nurturing Men equally effective stay-at-home parent Girls taught to be emotional and boys strong Biologically, mothers more nurturing than fathers Stay-at-home parenting more fulfilling for women Treat people same regardless of sex sehold tasks shared equally btw men and women We should focus on other characteristics over male/female Father's major responsibility is to provide financially Mothers should work only if necessary Birls should be protected and watched over more than boys For important jobs, better to choose men instead of women Female teachers more effective than male teachers Some types of work are not appropriate for women* Self-id masculine Interest in choir nterest in cycling Interest in hiking** Experience babysitting 0.24

EPIQ Construction

- Original 44 items with three theoretical dimensions
- Factor analysis informs reduction to 36 items and three dimensions (see Table on the left)
 - *originally Perception dimension items ** originally Interest dimension items
- Continuous variable rather than binary gender Control for experiences, correlation analyses

Communication Quantity

- Words per minute spoken by participants
- Significant effect of Student Gender Females talk more than males
- No effect of Baby Gender
- Effect disappears after controlling for experiences



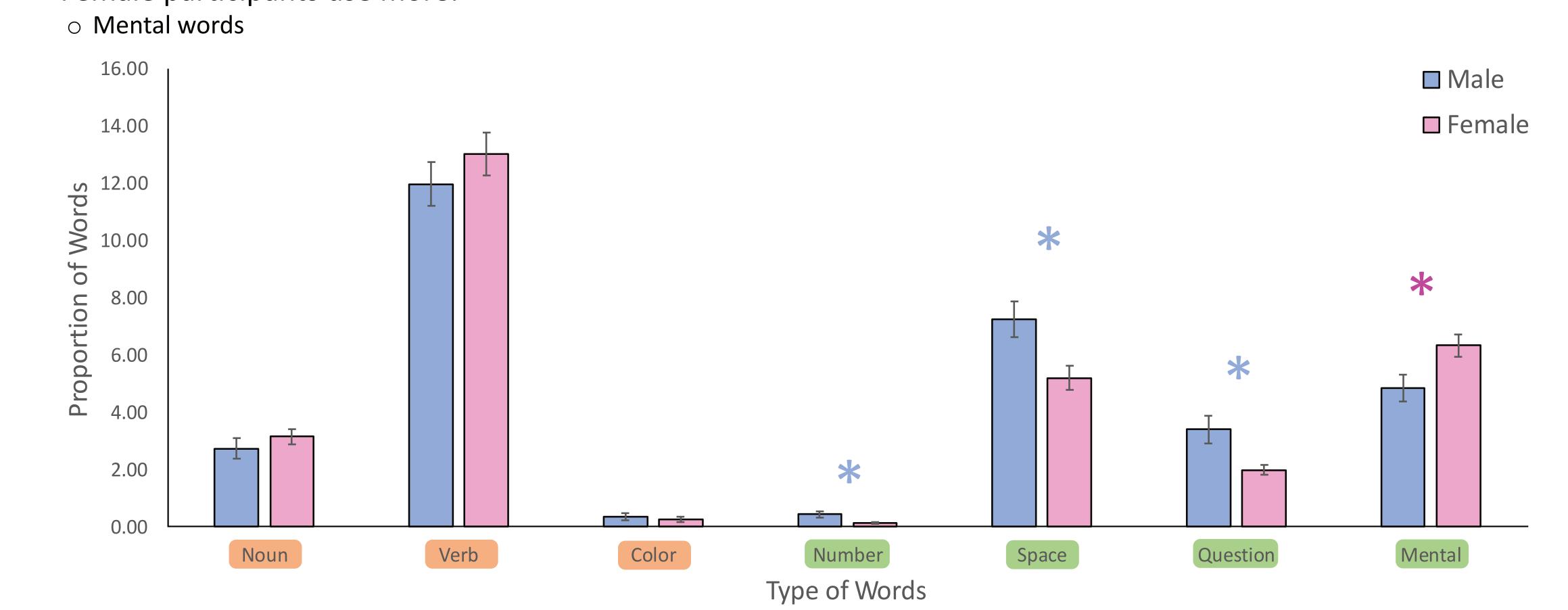
Communication Quality

- Proportion of words used by category (including 10 different categories or language) MANCOVA reveals significant effect of Student Gender, but no effect of Baby Gender
- All analyses are controlling for participant's experiences with children
- Male participants use more:

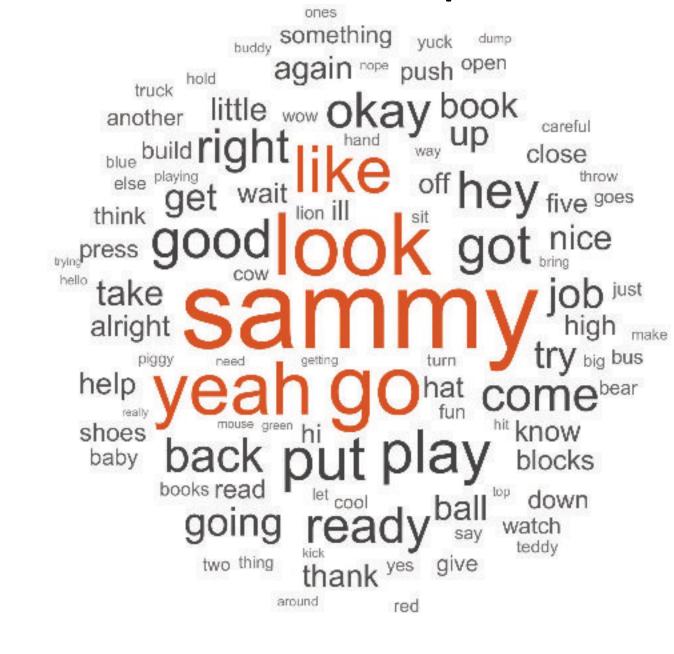
Experience teaching

Number of younger sibs

- Number words, space words, and question words
- Female participants use more:



Male Participants

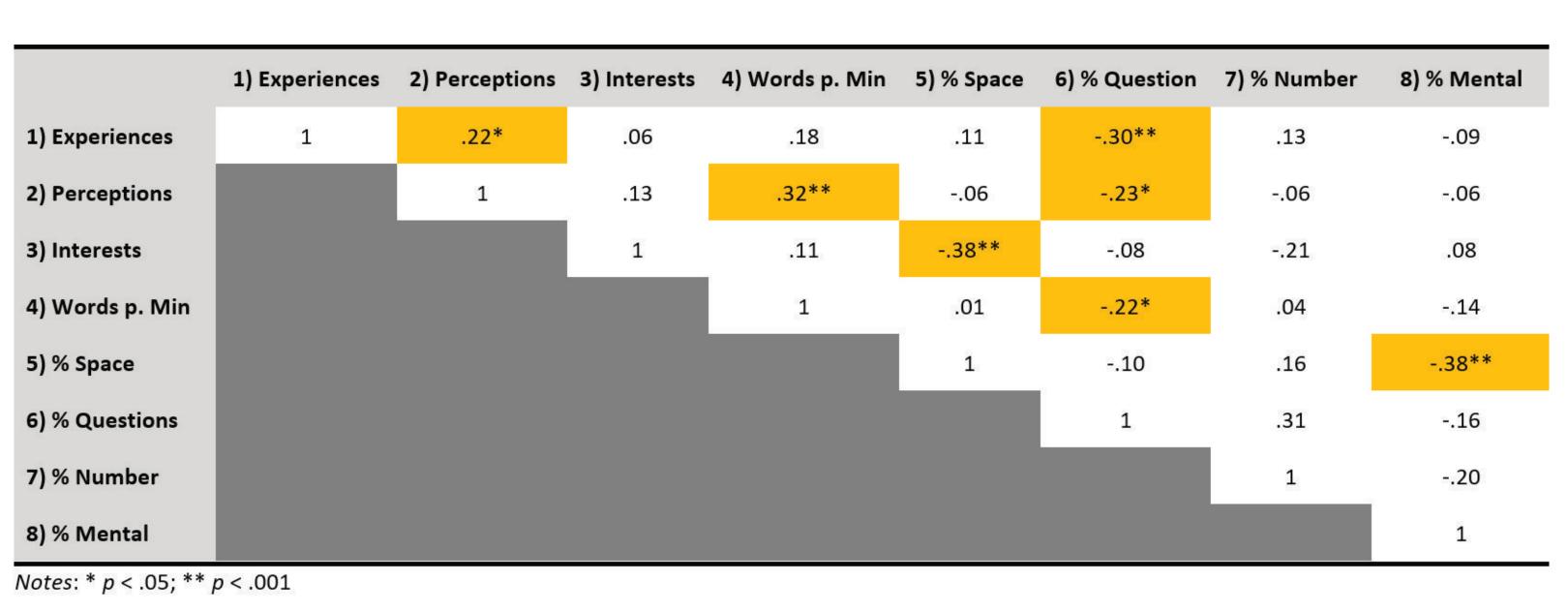


Female Participants



Correlations

- EPIQ dimensions correlate with participant's use of
- Question words
- Fewer questions asked with lower experience ratings
- Fewer questions asked with lower perception ratings
- Space words
- Fewer space words used with higher feminine interest ratings
- Overall words per minute used
- Fewer words produced with more gendered role perceptions
- Asking more questions correlates with producing fewer words Evidence for impact of gender-related factors on adult-child interactions.



Conclusions

- Child-directed language differs between male and female undergraduate students
- Experiences, Interests, and Perceptions explain some of the differences in communication quantity and quality between males and females
- Results suggest that differences between mothers and fathers are not due to day-to-day experiences with the child
- Rather, due to gender specific differences in interaction style
- Differences exist independent of parenting experiences or roles
- Males and females both offer important verbal stimulation that is likely to complement each other during a child's daily interactions.

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