

Dear Participant,

Thank you so much for taking part in this study. This debrief will inform you on the exact question I am attempting to answer using data that I have just collected from you.

At the start of the study, I mentioned that the study aims to understand how one's background affects one's cognition. Indeed, research has shown that one's childhood socioeconomic status (SES) has enduring impacts on health, cognitive and socioemotional outcomes even as the child grows up. I have preliminary data to show that a child's cognitive scores are positively correlated with household and maternal income – simply put, a child is more likely to fare poorly in academics if their parents have lower incomes. I wanted to see if that was also the case with an undergraduate population.

Even so, the complexities of life as we grow up probably means that there are probably many more reasons influencing the relationship between childhood SES and academic achievement among undergraduates. One idea put forth was that the effects of childhood SES are enduring because childhood SES forms a basis from which people would consider and make life decisions. Research has shown that people gravitate towards particular cues from one's childhood SES: when primed with a mortality cue (e.g. images of death), a person with a lower childhood SES would be more likely to prefer a faster strategy when making an intertemporal choice (Griskevicius et al., 2011).

This is important: if certain life decisions are made based on cues from one's childhood SES, could it change what life decisions a person makes? Some research suggests that lower SES is associated with greater temporal discounting (i.e., a preference for immediate rewards over delayed rewards), which in turn partly accounted for SES differences in academic achievement (Vuletic, 2020). This has important implications, especially in long-term decisions like education which require time to come to fruition. Individuals who tend towards the present may not think much of their future selves and choose to ignore these decisions even though they may be beneficial in the long run. Important life decisions like going to school seem not to have any visible benefits in the short term, but their long term consequences are in the person's best interests going forward. The importance of such decisions only furthers the need to understand if there exists a psychological mechanism by which one's childhood SES influences academic outcomes, for example.

So...where do I come in? Well, it is still unknown if childhood SES rather than current SES would account for a greater variance of the differences in academic achievement. Moreover, it is unknown if other perspectives of future orientation, like how congruent one's future self is with one's current self, would also account for SES differences in academic achievement: this was why I also measured different paradigms of the future self (vividness, connectedness, and positivity) in the study.

As such, my humble contribution to current research is to find out if the effects of childhood SES could affect academic achievement and/or motivation through one's future self-continuity. At the same time, I would also like to confirm previous research concerning SES, future orientation and academic achievement in a Singaporean context to improve the generalisability of the results. Understanding the psychological mechanism behind this phenomenon would pave the way for future interventions that could be better tailored to tackle these issues.

If you have any comments or questions, please do feel free to contact me at jinjie@u.nus.edu. Once again, thank you for completing the study and contributing to the literature of psychology! All the best for the semester ahead!

Humbly yours,
Lim Jin Jie

References

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- Vuletich, H. A. (2020). *How socioeconomic status shapes perceptions of time: Consequences for decision-making and academic achievement*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, United States of America. <https://doi.org/10.17615/61m2-fj57>