Measuring Friendship Understanding: Children with Albinism

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ABSTRACT

The use of Selman's stages of interpersonal awareness of friendship facilitated a study of the friendship patterns of young people with albinism. The findings add to those of previous studies that suggest a relationship between vision loss and the formation and maintenance of friendships. Where this study differs is in its focus on young people with oculocutaneous albinism: tyrosinase negative (OCA1); oculocutaneous albinism: tyrosinase positive (OCA2); and ocular albinism (OA). The examination of specific factors that have the potential to influence peer interaction and peer relationships adds to the understanding of important dynamics that impact on the social development of this group of children. The findings show that children with albinism vary in their stages of friendship understanding, both in relation to sighted peers and in relation to students with other forms of vision impairment.

An important aspect of social competence is the formation of friendships. Friendships provide individuals with invaluable contexts in which they form attachments and develop a deep understanding of another person. Participation in friendships enables children to practise social skills, collaboration, cooperation and communication. It is through friendships that children learn and practise trust, reciprocation, intimacy and self-disclosure (Duck, 1983, 1991, cited in Rosenblum, 1997). Friendships also facilitate a sense of belonging and a reassurance of worth (Rosenblum, 1997). Friendships do not just happen, their development involves learning, nurturing and practice, as well as skill in cooperation, interaction, and the use and comprehension of nonverbal behaviour. Palmer (1998) emphasises that it is through quality relationships established with peers, that children develop concepts of mutual respect, sensitivity to others, empathy and collaboration.

Friendship, according to Lindsay (2002), is a "close dyadic relationship between two individuals" (p. 145). He differentiates between friendship and acceptance, which he defines as "generally well liked by a group of peers", and suggests that each is "unique, but related to domains of children's peer relationships" (p. 145). Friends are important to the wellbeing of children. According to Hartup and Stevens (1999), friends foster self-esteem, engage in social interaction, socialise each other, and support each other in transition periods and stressful situations. Hartup (1992) claims that children's attachment to their friends tends to be relatively enduring, rests on a relatively equal power base, and is not usually exclusive. He refers to the main themes in friendships as "affiliation and common interests", which he believes are understood by children from an early age (p. 177). Hartup (1992) notes that the friendship expectations of young children centre on "common pursuits and concrete reciprocities" (p. 177). However, he suggests that by the time they are in the upper primary grades their views of friends and friendships focus on "mutual understanding, loyalty, and trust" (p. 177). He claims that young people of this age also expect to have time with their friends, have common interests, enjoy each other's company, care about each other, and "engage in self-disclosure" (p. 177).

Denham, Blair, DeMulder, Levitas, Sawyer, Auerbach-Major and Queenan, (2003) also discuss the development of friendships and peer relationships in children. Their focus is on young children, and they argue that a child's ability to interact and form relationships with others is dependent on their emotional competence. These authors view emotional and social competence as two highly related but separate constructs, and they refer to Rose-Krasnor's (1997) theory to define social competence as "effectiveness in interaction, the result of organized behaviours that meet short- and long-term

developmental needs" (Rose-Krasnor, 1997, cited in Denham et al., 2003, p. 238).

The Research

This study sought to measure young people with albinisms' understanding of friendship. Two research questions guided the study.

* At what stage of interpersonal awareness of friendship are the participants with albinism?
* How does their stage of interpersonal awareness of friendship compare with that of the participants with vision impairment and those with no vision problems?

Participants in the Study

Ten students with albinism participated in the study. They were selected by type of albinism. Three had oculocutaneous, albinism, tyrosinase negative (OCA1), four had oculocutaneous, albinism, tyrosinase positive (OCA2), and three had ocular albinism (OA). The nature of the students' condition was established from medical reports from their ophthalmologist, and from the Vision Impairment Services' database. To help interpret the findings, two other groups of students were investigated: seven students with vision impairment but not albinism, and nine students with no known vision problems.

Method

Children's stages of interpersonal awareness of friendship were measured using Selman's Friendship Dilemma (Selman, 1979) for girls and boys. The data collection was conducted in three phases. The first phase with students with albinism. The second phase with students with vision impairment (not albinism), and the third phase with students with no known vision problems.

A story was read to students about a friendship dilemma followed by an interview consisting of open-ended questions produced by Selman (1979). The questions probed Formation [of friendship], Closeness and Intimacy, Trust and Reciprocity, Jealousy and Exclusion, and Resolving Conflicts. When completed, each interview was recorded and transcribed. Students were categorised in terms of five of Selman's six stages of interpersonal awareness of friendship (termination of friendships was not a focus of this research) that he claimed followed a hierarchy in which each lower level represented a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the next higher level (Keller & Wood, 1989). The five stages as outlined in Selman and Selman (1979) are momentary playmates [ages 3-7 years], one-way assistance [ages 4-9 years], two-way cooperation [ages 6-12 years], mutual sharing [9-15 years], and autonomy and interdependence [12 years and older] (Selman, 1979). Placement in a particular stage was based on the average of the total scores obtained and calculated according to Selman's guidelines.

Results of the Study

Young people with albinism varied in their stages of friendship understanding, both in relation to sighted peers and to students with other forms of vision impairment. When the scores of the three groups of students in the five areas (Formation of Friendships, Closeness and Intimacy, Trust and Reciprocity, Jealousy and Exclusion and Resolving Conflicts) were averaged and compared, half (50%) of those with albinism were at an appropriate stage of friendship understanding across the areas, compared with less that one third (29%) of the students who had vision impairment (not albinism) and two thirds of the students with no vision loss (67%).

Selman's stages of friendship understanding are closely linked with the age of students. In this present study, because of the low incidence and, therefore, low numbers of students with albinism available for the study, the ages of the participants range from 8 to 16 years.

Three eight-year-old students took part in the study. One student had OCA2, one had OA, and the other had no vision problems. Two students were male and the other was female. The two students with albinism performed at a considerably lower level than their peer with no vision problems (average issues scores 1.4 and 1.6 compared with 2.8). The student with no vision problems was skilled at a level that was well above the average for his age in all five areas measured. The two students with albinism performed at least at an average level in the five sections of the Dilemma. One was above average in Closeness and Intimacy, and the other in Trust and Reciprocity, Jealousy and Exclusion and Resolving conflicts.

Five 9-year-old students were tested. Three 9-year-olds had OCA1, and two had no vision problems. Three were boys and two were girls. The students with OCA1 achieved lower average issues scores than their sighted counterparts, (1.4, 1.0. 1.3) compared with 1.9 and 2.3. The three students with albinism and one of the students with no vision problems scored markedly lower than one male student with no vision loss in the Formation of Friendships and Closeness and Intimacy [stages 0(1), 1(2), 1(0) & 1(2) compared with Stage 2]. The three 9-year-olds with albinism scored lower than both students with no vision loss in Trust and Reciprocity but one of the students with OCA1 achieved at the same higher level as one of the students with no vision loss in Resolving Conflicts [3(2)]. The weakest areas for the 9-year-olds with OCA1 were Closeness and Intimacy (3 students), Friendship Formation (2 students) and Trust and Reciprocity (2 students). All achieved at an age appropriate level or above in Resolving Conflicts. By comparison, the two 9-year-old boys with no vision loss functioned at an age appropriate level at least for each of the areas tested. One of these two boys was above average in Trust and Reciprocity and Resolving Conflicts. The other demonstrated above age level functioning in Closeness and Intimacy, Trust and Reciprocity and Jealousy and Exclusion.

The two 10-year-olds had no vision problems. One student operated below his age level in all areas assessed. He attained the lowest average issue score when compared with all other participants in the study. The other sighted 10-year-old,

by comparison, performed at an above average stage for his age in all areas of the test with the exception of Jealousy and Exclusion in which he was at a borderline stage.

Four 11-year-olds took part in the study. One had OCA2, one had OA, and the other two were vision impaired (not with albinism). The student with OA performed at an average or above average level on all five areas assessed. The student with OCA2 operated at a borderline level in Trust and Reciprocity and below his age level in the Formation of Friendships and Resolving Conflicts. He was at an average level in the other two areas. By comparison, the two students with vision impairment (not albinism) operated at a Stage 2 level in most areas. They were both average for their age, in the Formation of Friendships. One was at an appropriate stage also in Closeness and Intimacy and Resolving Conflicts, and the other in Jealousy and Exclusion. Both were borderline or below in the other areas.

A comparison of the two 12-year-olds with vision impairment (not albinism) with their two sighted peers revealed that all were operating at a slightly above average level in all areas with the exception of two students, one with vision impairment (not albinism) and one with no vision loss, who were on the borderline for their age in the area of Jealousy and Exclusion.

The six 13-year-old students included one with OCA2, three with vision impairment (not albinism) and two with normal sight. The student with albinism was assessed within the appropriate stage for his age in Friendship Formation and Closeness and Intimacy. He was on the borderline in the other three areas. The three students with vision impairment (not albinism) were all at least one stage below in all sections of the test. Their average issues scores were 1.3, 1.4, and 1.6, placing them between the stages of One-way Assistance (ages 4 – 9) and Two-way Cooperation (ages 6-12). One student in the sighted cohort was assessed as average in the areas of Formation of Friendships, Closeness and Intimacy and Resolving Conflicts. He was below average (Stage 2: ages 6-12) in the other two stages. The other sighted student was on the borderline for Formation of Friendships, and Jealousy and Exclusion, and at Stage 2 (ages 6-12) in the other three areas.

One 14-year-old with OCA2 and one 16-year-old with OA, also participated in the study. The student with OCA2 was assessed at an age appropriate level in Closeness and Intimacy and a borderline stage or below in all other areas. The 16-year-old with OA operated at a borderline stage in Closeness and Intimacy and Formation of Friendships, and at a lower stage than was age appropriate in the other areas. The Stages of friendship understanding across the five areas assessed are presented in Table 1.

If a comparison is made of the mean stages by vision status, it can be seen from Figure 1 that students with OA attained the highest average score followed by students with no vision impairment, students with OCA2, then students with vision impairment (not albinism) and finally those with OCA1.

Table 2 shows whether or not students in all three groups were at an age appropriate level or above across the five areas of friendship understanding.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of students according to vision category and Figure 2 shows the spread within which the majority within which the majority of each student group is contained.

Table 1: Results across five areas of friendship for all groups of participants (students with albinism, students with vision impairment but not albinism and students with no vision loss) using Selman's Stages of Friendship Understanding (Selman & Selman, 1979)

Name	Formation of Friendships	Closeness & Intimacy	Trust & Reciprocity	Jealousy & Exclusion	Resolving Conflicts	Average Issues Score	Range	Age in Years
OCA -								
Sam	Stage 0(1)	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 2	Stage 2(1)	1.4	0-2	9
Jan	Stage 1(2)	Stage 1	Stage 1	Stage 0(1)	Stage 1(2)	1.0	0-2	9
Trish	Stage 1(0)	Stage 1(0)	Stage 1	Stage 1(2)	Stage 3(2)	1.27	0-3	9
OCA2								
Tim	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 3(2)	Stage 2(3)	Stage 2(3)	2.5	2-3	14
John	Stage 1(0)	Stage 2	Stage 2(1)	Stage 1	Stage 2(1)	1.4	1(0)-2	8
Josh	Stage 3	Stage 3	Stage 3(2)	Stage 3(2)	Stage 2(3)	2.7	2(3)-3	1
Don	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 2(1)	Stage 2(3)	Stage 1	1.6	1-2(3)	11
OA								
Sara	Stage 1	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 2	Stage 2	1.6	1-2	8
Tom	Stage 3(2)	Stage 2(3)	Stage 2	Stage 2(3)	Stage 3(2)	2.4	2-3(2)	11
Jim	Stage 3(4)	Stage 4(3)	Stage 3(2)	Stage 2(3)	Stage 3	3	2(3)-4(3)	16
VI								
Judy	Stage 1(2)	Stage 1(2)	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 2(1)	1.5	1-2	13
Tessa	Stage 2	Stage 2(1)	Stage 1	Stage 2(3)	Stage 1(2)	1.4	1-2(3)	11
Ian	Stage 2	Stage 2(1)	Stage 0(1)	Stage 2	Stage 2	1.6	0(1)-2	13
Alice	Stage 1	Stage 1(2)	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	1.3	1-2	13
Toby	Stage 3	Stage 2(3)	Tape problem	Stage 2	Stage 2(3)	2.4	2(3)-3	12
Travis	Stage 2(3)	Stage 2(3)	Stage 3	Stage 3	Stage 3	2.7	2(3)-3	12
Kim	Stage 2	Stage 2	Stage 1(2)	Stage 2(1)	Stage 2	1.8	1(2)-2	11
No VI								
Jesse	Stage 1(0)	Stage 1	Stage 1(0)	Stage 0	Stage 0	0.5	0-1	10
Ben	Stage 1(2)	Stage 1(20	Stage 3(2)	Stage 1(2)	Stage 3(2)	1.9	1(2)-3(2)	9
Mat	Stage 3(2)	Stage 3(2)	Stage 3(2)	Stage 3	Stage 3	2.8	3(2)-3	8
Luke	Stage 2(3)	Stage 2(3)	Stage 2(3)	Stage 1(2)	Stage 3(2)	2.2	1(2)-3(2)	10
Dennis	Stage 3(2)	Stage 3(2)	Stage 3(2)	Stage 2	Stage 3(2)	2.5	2-3(2)	12
Ray	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 2(3)	Stage 2(3)	Stage 2	2.3	2-3	9
Gill	Stage 3	Stage 3(2)	Stage 3	Stage 3	Stage 3	2.9	3(2)-3	12
Jay	Stage 3(2)	Stage 2	Stage 2	Stage 3(2)	Stage 2	2.2	2-3(2)	13
Mark	Stage 3	Stage 3	Stage 2	Stage 2	Stage 3	2.6	2-3	13

In Figure 1 the mean of the Average Issues Scores are shown on the Y-axis and the vision status (OCA1, OCA2, OA, vision impairment, but not albinism, or no vision impairment) is shown on the X-axis. The Average Issues Scores were calculated according to the procedure outlined in Selman and Selman (1979).

The diamonds in Figure 2 show graphically the means of each group. The vertical part of each diamond shows the

Table 2: showing the students' levels of friendship understanding in relation to their ages

Category	Formation of Friendships	Closeness and Intimacy	Trust and Reciprocity	Jealousy and Exclusion	Resolving Conflicts
OCA-	Below	Below	Average	Average	Average
OCA-	Average	Below	Below	Below	Average
OCA-	Below	Below	Below	Average	Above Average
OCA+	Below	Average	Borderline	Below	Below
OCA+	Average	Above Average	Average +	Average	Average+
OCA+	Average	Average	Borderline	Borderline	Borderline
OCA+	Below	Average	Borderline	Average	Below
Ocular	Average	Average	Above Average	Above Average	Above Average
Ocular	Above Average	Average +	Average	Average +	Above Average
Ocular	Borderline	Borderline	Below	Below	Below
VI	Below	Below	Below	Below	Below
VI	Average	Borderline	Below	Average	Borderline
VI	Below	Below	Below	Below	Below
VI	Below	Below	Below	Below	Below
VI	Average +	Average	Tape problem	Borderline	Average
VI	Average	Average	Average +	Average +	Average +
VI	Average	Average	Borderline	Borderline	Average
No VI	Below	Below	Below	Below	Below
No VI	Average	Average	Above Average	Average	Above Average
No VI	Above Average	Above Average	Above Average	Above Average	Above Average
No VI	Average	Average	Average	Borderline	Above average
No VI	Average	Average	Average	Borderline	Average
No VI	Average	Above Average	Average+	Average +	Average
No VI	Average +	Average	Average +	Average +	Average +
No VI	Borderline	Below	Below	Borderline	Below
No VI	Average	Average	Below	Below	Average

spread within which 95% of each group is contained. The outliers are shown by the vertical dots and a line indicates the extremes. There are significant outliers, both top and bottom in the group of students with no vision impairment. The horizontal spread of each diamond represents the number of students in each group. The position of the diamonds in relation to each other, demonstrates visually that students with OA rated more highly (mean 2.3) than the other groups in their formation of friendships. The students with OCA1 were the lowest (Mean 1.2 shown by the central dot) closely followed by students with vision impairment but not albinism (Mean 1.6).

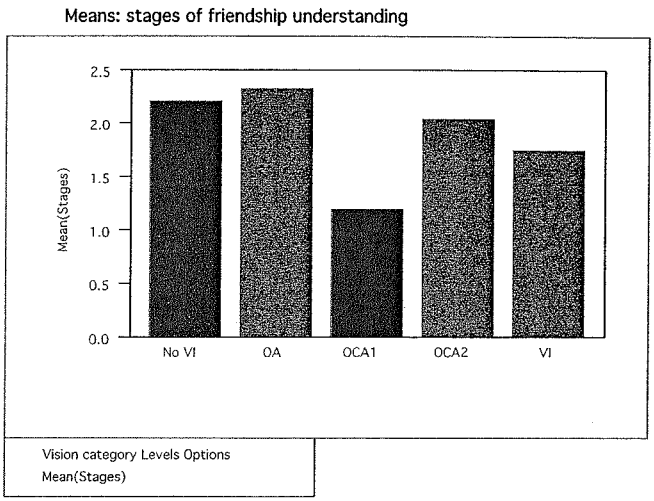
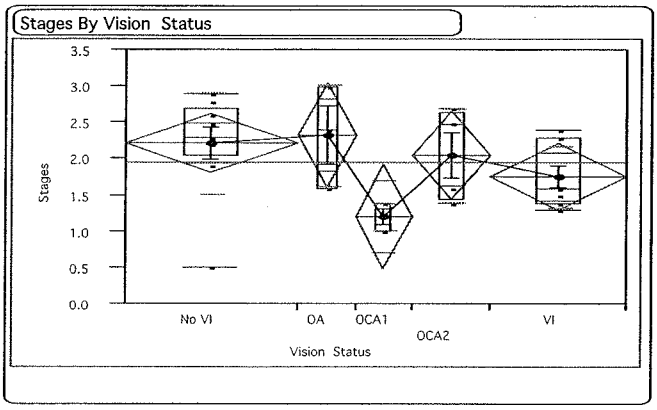


Figure 1 (above): The distribution of the mean of the average issues scores by vision status

Figure 2 (below): Analysis of variance for Stages of friendship formation by vision status (Students with albinism, students with vision impairment [not albinism] students with no vision impairment



Discussion

An examination of the performance of children with albinism in the five areas of interpersonal awareness of friendship: Formation of Friendship, Closeness and Intimacy, Trust and Reciprocity, Jealousy and Exclusion, and Resolving Conflict revealed that children with albinism varied from above average to below in all five areas. These variations occurred, not only between groups of students, but also between types of albinism. Of the three groups of students with albinism, more than half showed immaturity in some aspects of their friendship understanding.

Students with OA overall had the most age appropriate understanding of friendship with two-thirds (67%) being located in an average or above average stage for their age. On the other hand, the students with OCA1 and OCA2 were performing at a more immature stage in this area. All three participants with OCA1 attained below age level scores in closeness and intimacy while two of the three showed below average scores in the formation of friendships, and trust

and reciprocity. Of the students with OCA2, one was at an average or above average stage in all four areas, half showed immaturity in both Formation of Friendships and Resolving Conflicts and three quarters were at a borderline stage in. Trust and Reciprocity.

When the findings were interpreted in relation to the other groups of students it was found that those with albinism were generally operating at a more appropriate stage of friendship understanding than students with vision impairment (not albinism). The students who were the most consistently above average were the students with no vision problems.

Conclusion

The formation and understanding of friendship is an important aspect of social competence. This study used Selman's Friendship Dilemma (Selman, 1979) for girls and boys to measure five areas of interpersonal awareness of friendship: Formation of Friendship, Closeness and Intimacy, Trust and Reciprocity, Jealousy and Exclusion, and Resolving Conflicts.

Children with albinism differed in their understanding of friendship, and the Selman questionnaire assisted in locating participants at their approximate stage of development in this area. According to the data, the majority of the students with albinism showed immaturity in some aspects of their friendship understanding even though two of the three students with OA performed at an average or above average stage in all areas.

The major areas of concern for young people with albinism were in Trust and Reciprocity and Jealousy and Exclusion where two thirds of the participants were located at a borderline or below stage for their age, and in the formation of friendship where half the group performed below or at a borderline stage.

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