

The Imaginary Companion Project

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We are still looking for preschool-aged children to participate in the Imaginary Companion Project! Children with and without imaginary companions are needed. If you know any families who might be interested in the study, please have them contact Dr. Tracy Gleason at (781) 283-2487 or email tgleason@wellesley.edu.



July, 2007

You haven't heard from us in a while--progress on the Imaginary Companion Project was slowed over the past year or so by the arrival of twins in the Gleason household! Parental leave and sheer exhaustion took their toll on this research; however, we are still gathering data and we so appreciate your participation in this work. Here is a brief update on what we have been doing:



Personality and Friendship

Just under 50 families have participated so far, which is about half of the number we are hoping to have participate in this project. These families include children with invisible imaginary friends, imaginary companions that are objects like stuffed animals or dolls, and families with children without imaginary companions.

By including both children with and without imaginary companions, we have been able to do some comparisons of personality characteristics of these two groups. In general, we have found that children with and without imaginary companions are much more alike than they are different in terms of personality. We also looked at similarities and differences between children with invisible versus object companions and again, we found no differences.

The lack of differences in personality between these groups of children is not surprising to us. We don't think that children do or do not create imaginary companions because of personality factors per se. Instead, we

What's Next?

Over the next few months, we plan to recruit more participants and take a closer look at the details in the diaries parents have kept for us on imaginary friends. Stay tuned...

expect to find that creation of an imaginary companion is a function of how much a child enjoys engaging in two things: imaginative activities and social interaction. Those children who love both, we hypothesize, will be the children who create pretend friends.

Another aspect of this investigation is focusing on similarities and differences in parents' and children's descriptions of relationships with real and imaginary friends. We are still processing these data, but we were pleased (and a little surprised) to find a lot of similarity between parents' and children's descriptions of imaginary relationships. Getting to know someone else's invisible friend is no small feat, but parents seem to have it mastered.

If you would like to learn more about any of this work, please feel free to contact us at (781) 283-2487 or email tgleason@wellesley.edu.

Thanks again for all of your help with the project!