Twenty Studies That Fascinated Child Psychology

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As much as we scientists prefer to view the world from a hard-nosed, empirical perspective in which we sweep any purportive role of aesthetic splendor under our laboratory rugs, there is little denying that we can occasionally revel in the beauty and harmony of a well-designed empirical study. I mean some studies just seem to appeal naturally to our artistic senses. These studies may not be particularly Earth-shattering in their scientific impact (although many certainly are!), but they just seem to resonate with all that’s good and honest in the scientific world.

Of course, from an empirical, analytic perspective, it’s not enough simply to marvel at the magnificence of a well-designed research study, there is also a certain compulsion to understand why we deem such research as fascinating. Or at least, I feel that compulsion. To better apprehend what makes for a fascinating study in child psychology, I undertook the first step of aggregating the opinions of other scientists. As with the other most outstanding studies articles I have reported here, my sampling frame was primarily composed of the doctoral level membership of the

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Society. A preliminary round of randomly sampled respondents first submitted up to three nominations for the “Most Fascinating Studies in Child Psychology.” Then, based on frequency of nomination, a reduced list of 30 studies was distributed to a second round of randomly sampled respondents, who rank-ordered their top 5 most fascinating studies. In this article, I report the fruits of the membership’s recommendations.

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and the Number 1 most fascinating study in child psychology published since 1950 was...