

Young Adult Career Choice and Early Life Experiences: A Comparative Analysis

Alycia Chmielewski and Molly Harney, PhD
Department of Education, University of Minnesota Duluth



Introduction

The foundation of all behavioral, cognitive and emotional development is deeply tied to early childhood experiences and has long-term life implications.

In order to examine these implications, the following questions must be asked:

1. How do early life experiences, such as sociodemographic factors and early child care, influence the development of personality?
2. How does the development of personality influence college distinction and future career field choice?

Abstract

The foundation of all behavioral, cognitive, and emotional development is deeply tied to the first five years of life. Researchers from various disciplines, such as developmental psychology, early childhood education, and behavioral sciences, strive to make connections between early childhood experiences and implications for lifelong health and development. Longitudinal studies, such as the HighScope Perry Preschool Study, have identified connections between the quality of early childhood care and future career success and reduced crime rates (Schweinhart et. al, 2005). It is assumed but not clearly known if these aspects influence young adult career choice. In order to explore this relationship, a survey of University of Minnesota Duluth undergraduate students was conducted around four categories: personality, early life experiences, undergraduate academics and future career choice. By evaluating the relationship between early life experiences and young adult career choice, the findings will add to a growing body of knowledge in the areas of child development and early career choice. Based on the analysis of 171 UMD student survey responses, a correlation was found between child care distinction and personality indicators as well as personality indicator and college distinction.

Early Life Significance

Foundations of Early Life

Nearly 85% of brain development occurs prior to age 5 (Edie & Schmid, 2007). During the first five years of life, all areas of development, of which we will continue to build upon, are established. In order to best prepare children for the future, they must be properly supported in early child care.

The Science of Early Life

The study of early childhood is the culmination of many disciplines, such as education, healthcare, psychology and sociology. Prominent researchers, including HighScope, UMN's Megan Gunnar's work on the impacts of cortisol (Gunnar et. al, 2010) and University of California Davis' Ross Thompson (Thompson, 2008) work on early personality development, analyze the numerous implications of the early life.

Impact of Early Life

Early life experiences lay the foundation to future adult behavior. The attachment style from the child- primary caregiver relationship influences the abilities to make relationships and interact in social situations. It also establishes the environment one may surround themselves with, as a stressful childhood may contribute to a higher risk of failed careers, domestic violence and substance abuse.

Trajectory of Early Life

The exposures children have during their early life influences their future relationships, career success and overall personality (Nauta, 2010). According to Schweinhart (2005), "long-term effects are lifetime effects", which is why positive life experiences are important to proper development.

Results

171 survey responses were analyzed from University of Minnesota Duluth student participants

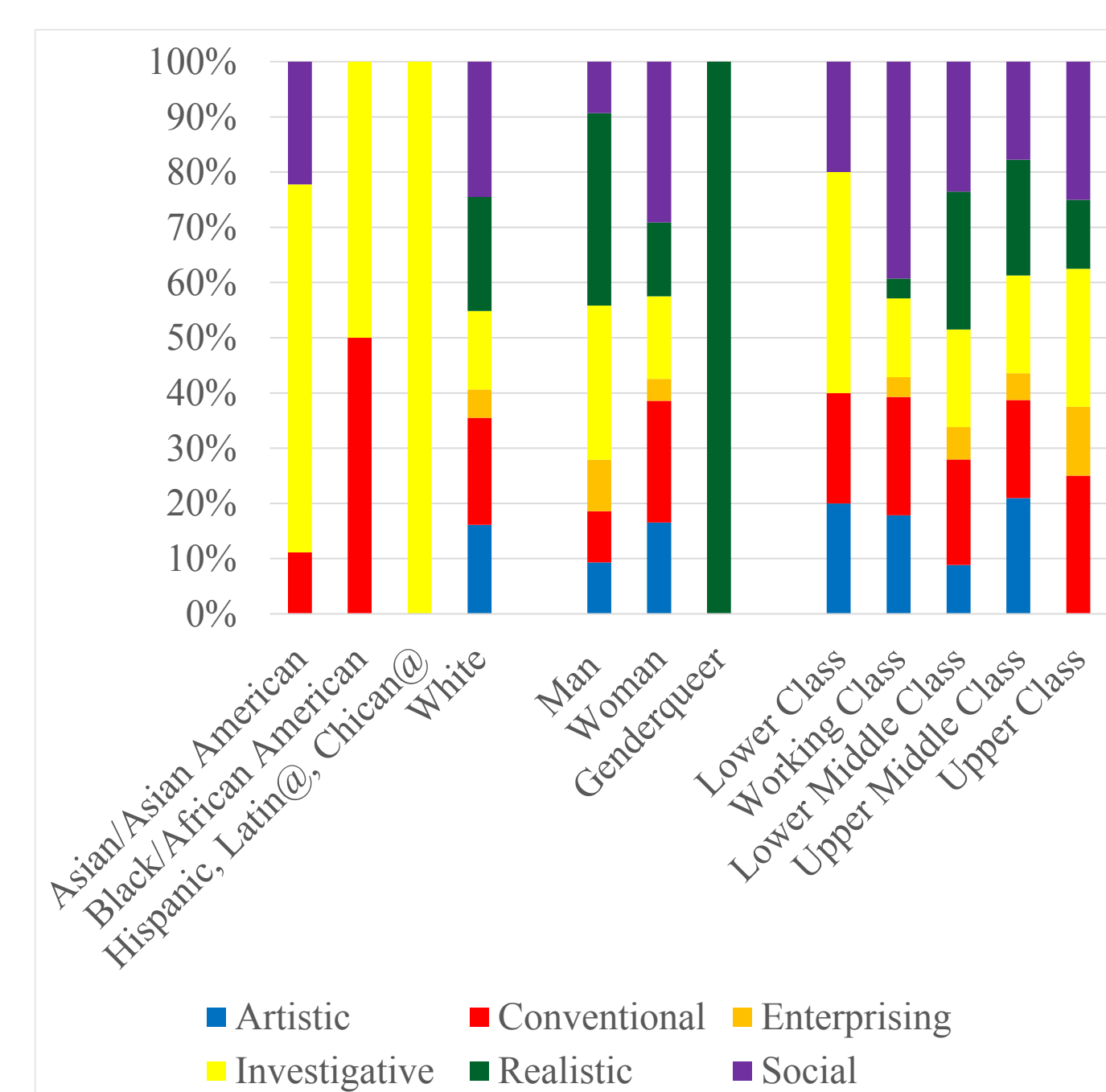


Figure 1. Participant's sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors in relation to the strongest Holland Code personality indicator.

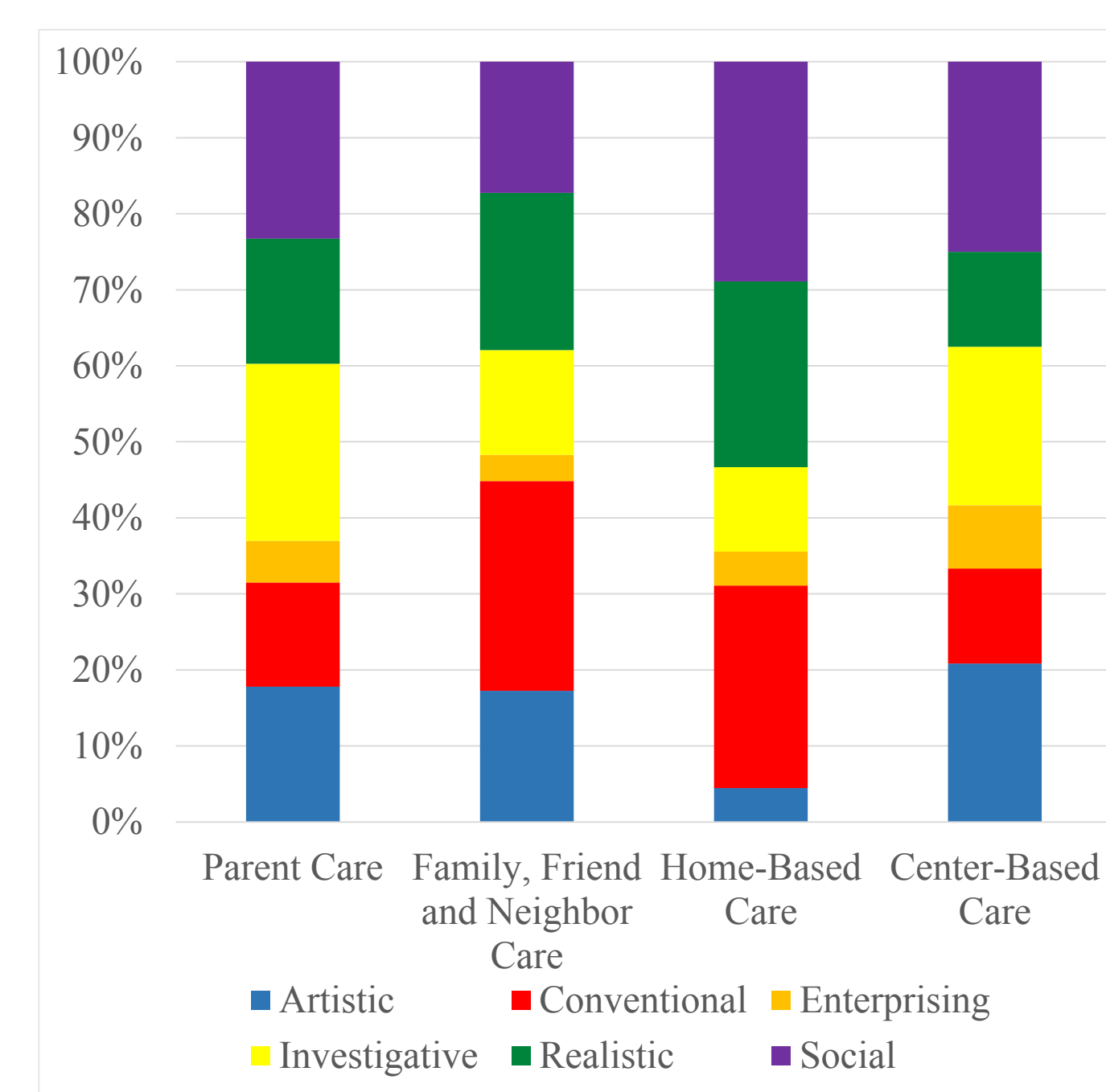


Figure 2. Child-care distinction in relation to the strongest Holland Code personality indicator. Of the 171 participants, 66.1% were enrolled in full-time care (30+ hours per week) and 33.9% were enrolled in part-time care (0 – 29 hours per week).

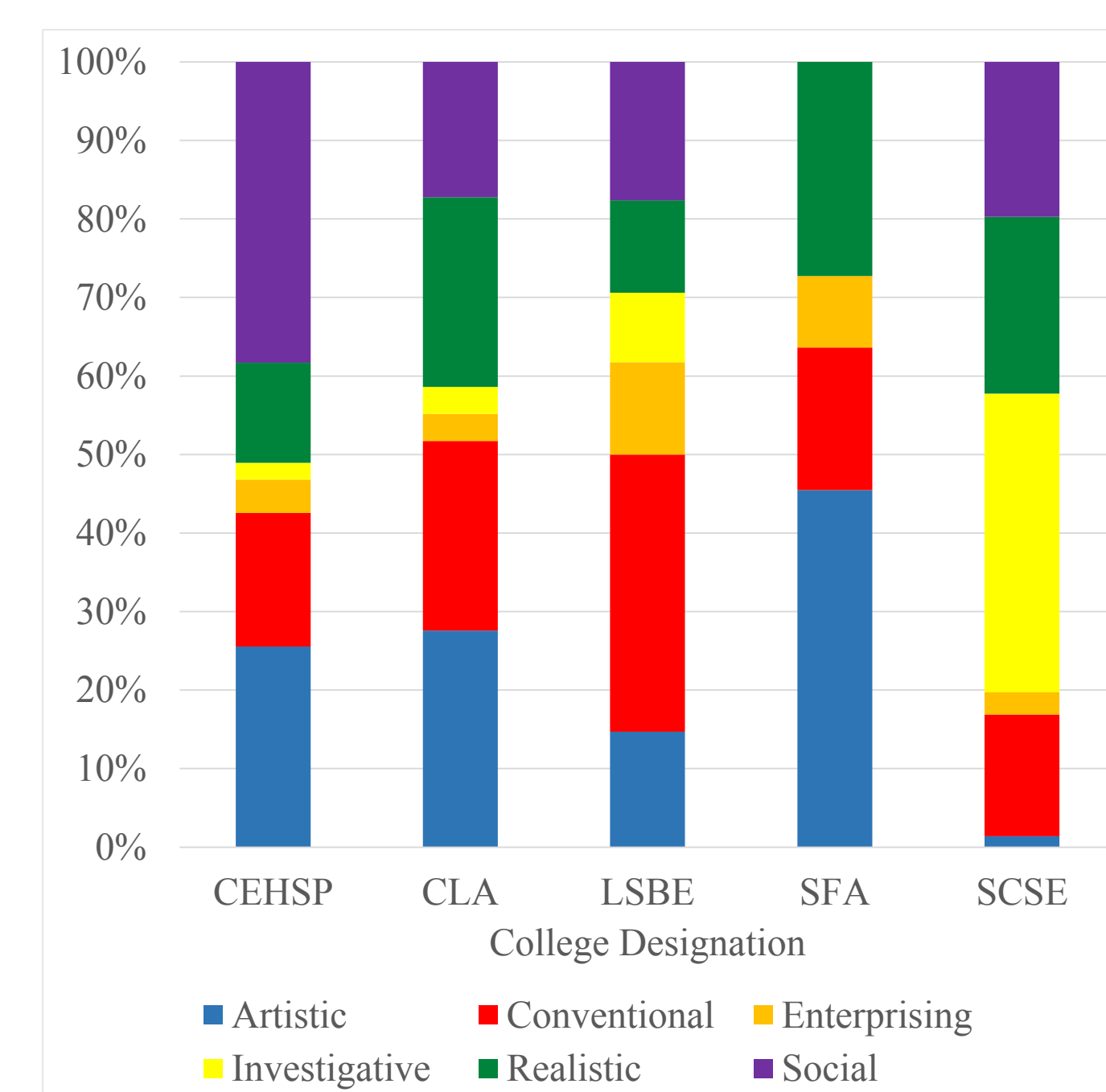


Figure 3. Participant's college designation in relation to the strongest Holland Code personality indicator.

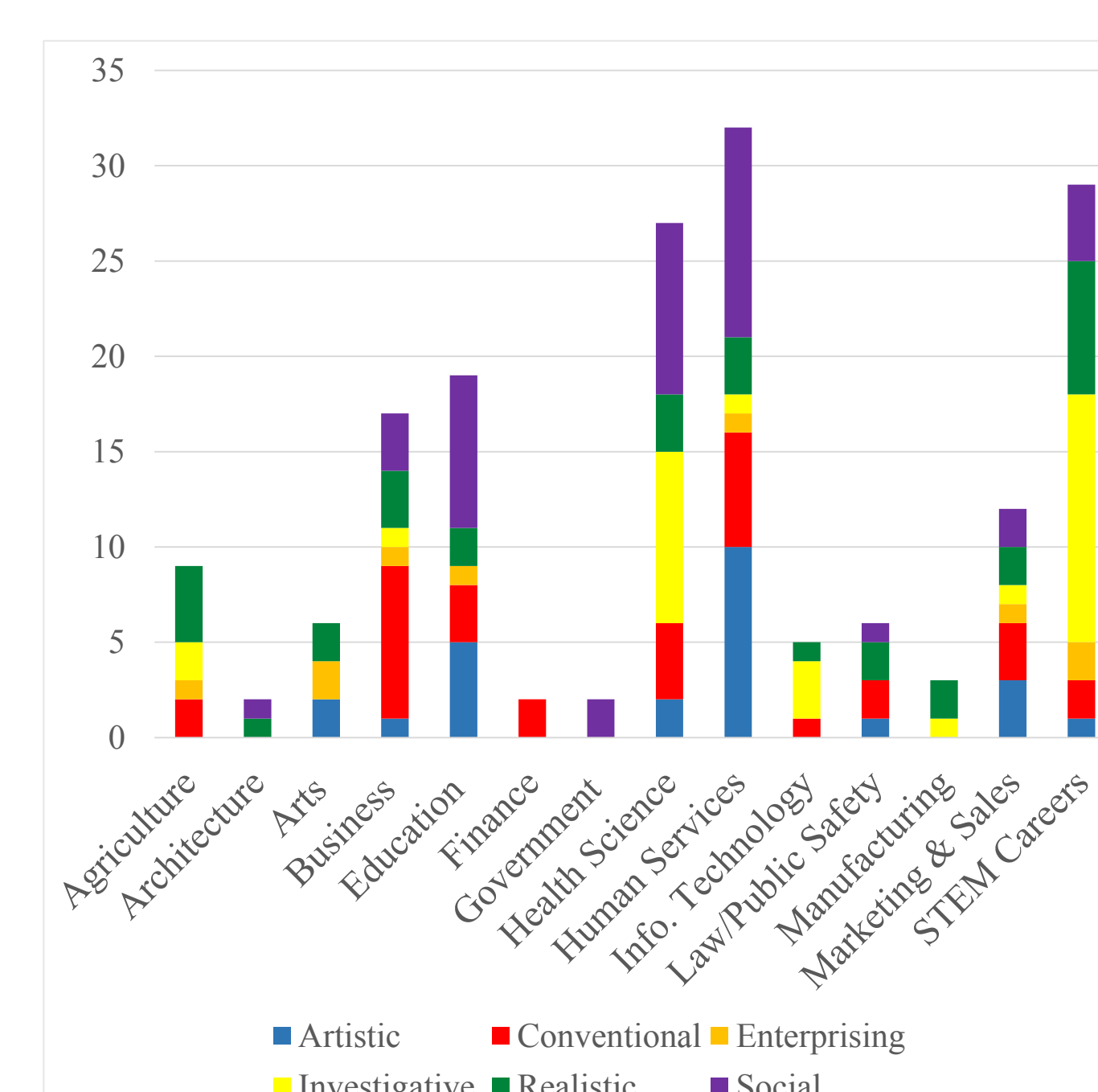


Figure 4. Participant's future career field choice in relation to the strongest Holland Code personality indicator.

Methods

- Three survey questionnaires were designed for current University of Minnesota Duluth students using Qualtrics software
 1. Personality inventory based on Holland Code indicators
 2. Early life experiences inventory to assess the subject's early child care and sociodemographic factors prior to five years of age
 3. Inventory of student's college distinction at the University of Minnesota Duluth, major choice and career field
- Survey was activated after project approval from University of Minnesota's Institutional Review Board
- Recruitment was completed using the online UMD newsletter *Bulldog Update* and through postings on university-related social media sites
- Participants that completed the survey were entered into a gift card drawing
- Analysis of responses was completed with the help of Professor Insoon Han through Microsoft Excel

Discussion

The results from the survey showed a correlation between child care distinction and personality, as well as personality and career field choice.

- **Personality:** The Social personality indicator was ranked highest for 29.1% of women, while the strongest personality indicator for men was Realistic (39.5%) (Figure 1).
- **Child-care:** 4.4% of participants who attended home-based child care ranked Artistic as their strongest personality indicator, compared to center-based child care where 20.8% of respondents ranked Artistic as their highest indicator (Figure 2).
- **College Distinction:** 38% of CEHSP students ranked Social as their highest indicator, and 2% ranked Investigative as their highest indicator. 20% of SCSE students ranked Social as their highest indicator, and 28% ranked Investigative as their highest indicator (Figure 3).

Current research suggests that supportive family dynamics and quality child care influence future social skills and personality traits (Thompson 2008). Although statistical significance was not found based on the sample size and distribution of subjects, this study's findings indicated a trend that supported the work of Thompson.



References

- Edie, D. and D. Schmid (2007) Brain Development and Early Learning, Policy Brief on Early Care and Education, Vol. 1, Madison, WI: Wisconsin Council on Children and Families.
- Gunnar, M. R., Kryzer, E., Ryzin, M. J., & Phillips, D. A. (2010). The Rise in Cortisol in Family Day Care: Associations With Aspects of Care Quality, Child Behavior, and Child Sex. *Child Development*, 81(3), 851-869. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01438.x
- Nauta, M. M. (2010). The development, evolution, and status of Holland's theory of vocational personalities: Reflections and future directions for counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 57(1), 11-22. doi:10.1037/a0018213
- Schweinhart, L. J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W. S., Belfield, C. R., & Nores, M. (2005). *Lifetime effects: The HighScope Perry Preschool study through age 40*. Monographs of the HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 14). Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press.
- Thompson, R. A. (2008). Early attachment and later development: Familiar questions, new answers. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 348-365). New York: Guilford.

Acknowledgments

- Special thanks to:
- Susana Pelayo-Woodward, Director of the Office of Diversity & Inclusion, for assistance in designing the sociodemographic factors questionnaire
 - Professor Insoon Han, Department of Education, for support with data analysis
 - College of Education and Human Services Professions for the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program Grant