

Sarah L Kiefer

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Psychology

Expected 2027

Department of Cognitive & Psychological Sciences, Brown University, Providence, RI
Proposed Dissertation: Children's understanding of productive failure in learning and persistence
Committee: Dr. David Sobel (Chair), Dr. Daphna Buchsbaum, Dr. Julia Leonard

Sc. M. in Cognitive Science

May 2024

Department of Cognitive, Linguistic & Psychological Sciences, Brown University, Providence, RI
Thesis: "I Wanted to Challenge Myself!": Children's Developing Metacognitive Understanding of Effort in a Building Task
Committee: Dr. David Sobel (Chair), Dr. Daphna Buchsbaum, Dr. Amitai Shenhav

Bachelor of Science, Psychology (Psychological Science)

May 2019

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ

HONORS AND AWARDS

Caplan Foundation for Early Childhood. Project title: Children's understanding of productive failure in learning and persistence. \$50,000 in total costs. Role: PI (Co-PI: David Sobel), 2026-2027

John Templeton Foundation Sub-award from the Developing Intellectual Humility Group, Humble beginnings: Exploring the role of intellectual humility in children's developing understanding of productive failure. \$40,000 in total costs. Role: Co-PI (PI: Dave Sobel), 2026-2027

Peter D. Eimas Graduate Research Award, Brown's Department of Cognitive and Psychological Sciences, 2025-2026.

NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program Honorable Mention, 2024.

Graduate Conference Travel Award, Brown University. 2024, 2025, 2026.

PUBLICATIONS

*MENTORED STUDENT

Manuscripts in Preparation and Under Review

Kiefer, S. L., Modesti, G., McHugh, S., & Sobel, D. M. (in prep). Fostering STEM engagement in spatial thinking from parent-child interaction in preschoolers: A remote study.

McHugh, S., Modesti, G., **Kiefer, S. L.**, & Sobel, D. M. (in progress). Parent-child interaction and children's learning and engagement with engineering principles. Brown University.

Modesti, G., McHugh, S., **Kiefer, S. L.**, & Sobel, D. M. (in progress). Parent-child interaction during an online scientific demonstration and children's handwashing: A replication study. Brown University.

McHugh, S. R., **Kiefer, S. L.**, Modesti, G., & Sobel, D. M. (in progress). Children's developing understanding of science as a process. Brown University

Peer-Reviewed

- Kiefer, S. L.,** Sobel, D. M. (2026). Children's decision to challenge themselves on a novel task relates to their metacognitive monitoring of their ability. *Child Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/chidev/aacaf045>
- Vaisarova, J., **Kiefer, S. L.,** Şen, H., Todd, P. M., & Lucca, K. (2024). Where should I search next? Messages embedded in storybooks influence children's strategic exploration in Turkey and the United States. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 153(8), 2174–2192. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0001619>
- Şen, H. H., **Kiefer, S. L.,** Aksu, E., Lucca, K. (2024). Developmental differences in children and adults' enforcement of explore versus exploit search strategies in the United States and Turkey. *Developmental Science*, e13520. <https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.13520>
- Kiefer, S. L.,** Caballero, A.*, Lucca, K. (2023). The role of effort type and intensity in children's decisions about effort-based outcomes. *Infant and Child Development*. <http://doi.org/10.1002/icd.2440>
- Matthews, N. L., Smith, C. J., Skepnek, E., Mammen, M., James, J. S., Malligo, A., Lyon, A., Mitchell, M., **Kiefer, S. L.,** Smith, C. J. (2021). Feasibility and acceptability of a telehealth model for autism diagnostic evaluations in children, adolescents, and adults. *Autism Research*. DOI: 10.1002/aur.2591
- Matthews, N. L., Christenson, K., **Kiefer, S.,** Smith, C. J. (2019). A Mixed-Methods Examination of the Gap between IQ and Adaptive Functioning in Autistic Young Adults without Intellectual Disability. *Autism*. DOI: 10.1177/13623613211018334

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

*MENTORED STUDENT

Oral Presentations

- Kiefer, S. L.,** Sobel, D. M. (2025, May). Children's decisions about difficulty during novel tasks relate to their metacognitive monitoring of their ability. *Talk presented at the Society for Research in Child Development*. Minneapolis, MN, USA.
- Kiefer, S. L.,** Caballero, A.*, Lucca, K. (2022, November). The role of effort type and intensity in children's decision making. *Flash talk at the 3rd annual workshop on mental effort*. Providence, RI, USA.

Poster Presentations

- Kiefer, S.L.,** Vezina, O.*, Sobel, D. M. (2025, May). "That was easy!" Children's definitions and examples of easy and hard experiences. *Poster presented at the Society for Research in Child Development*. Minneapolis, MN, USA.
- Kiefer, S. L.,** Sobel, D. M. (2024, March). "I wanted to challenge myself!": Children's developing metacognitive understanding of effort allocation in a building task. *Poster presentation at the Cognitive Development Society Biennial Meeting*. Pasadena, CA, USA.
- Vaisarova, J. (presenting author), **Kiefer, S. L.,** Şen, H. H., Todd, P., & Lucca, K. (2024, March). Where Should I Look Next? Using a Storybook Intervention to Promote Children's Strategic Exploration in a Virtual Search Task Across Cultures. *Poster presentation at the Cognitive Development Society Biennial Meeting*. Pasadena, CA, USA.
- Özalp, D., **Kiefer, S. L.,** Uğur, G., Hanım Sancar, B., Ateş, S., Selalmaz, E., Uçal, A.,

Nur Deveci, A., Akpınar, B., Karaoğlu, M., Şen, H. (presenting author), Lucca, K. (2023, January). Associations between mothers' and children's curiosity in the Turkish context. *Poster Presentation at the Budapest CEU Conference on Cognitive Development*. Budapest, Hungary.

Kiefer, S. L., Caballero, A.*, Lucca, K. (2022, November). The role of effort type and intensity in children's decision making. *Poster presentation at the 3rd annual workshop on mental effort*. Providence, RI, USA.

Johns, A. (presenting author), Anbar, J., **Kiefer, S. L.**, Smith, C. J. (2022, May). Building inclusive informal STEM learning opportunities for people with ASD. *International Society for Autism Research Annual Meeting*. Austin, TX, USA.

Kiefer, S. L., Şen, H., Akpınar, B., Smith, B.*, Nur Deveci, A., Selalmaz, E., Snodgrass, N.*, Özalp, D., Patel, S.*, Uçal, A., Lucca, K. (2022, April). Navigating the explore-exploit dilemma: a cross-cultural examination of 3–6-year-olds' own behavioral strategies and enforcement of strategies onto others. *Poster presentation at the Cognitive Development Society Biennial Meeting*. Madison, WI, USA.

Kiefer, S. L., Caballero, A.*, Lucca, K. (2022, April). Worth the wait: the role of cognitive and physical effort in shaping children's value judgments, preferences, and behavior. *Poster presentation at the Cognitive Development Society Biennial Meeting*. Madison, WI, USA.

Saguid, L.*(presenting author), Johnson, N.*, **Kiefer, S.**, Scirpo, K.*, Patel, S.*, Hinojosa, A.*, Snodgrass, N.*, Kupfer, A., Lucca, K. (2021, September). Investigating the relations between early creativity, confidence, curiosity, and persistence. *Poster presentation at the Marconi Institute for Creativity Conference*. Online.

Christenson, K., **Kiefer, S.**, Tracey, S., Matthews, N. L., & Smith, C. J. (2019, May). A qualitative examination of the transportation experiences and needs of young adults with ASD without intellectual disability. *Poster presentation at the International Society for Autism Research Annual Meeting*. Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

INVITED TALKS

Kiefer, S., L. (2025, November). Unpacking children's understanding of productive failure in learning and persistence. Invited speaker for the Developmental Brown Bag, Brown University.

Kiefer, S., L. (2022, January). Clues to Explore: The Effects of Linguistic Priming on Children's Exploration in an Online Search Task. Invited speaker for the Cognition and Learning Center, Rutgers University.

MEDIA COVERAGE

Rajpal, A. (2026, March 11). Children seek further challenges when they succeed on difficult tasks, Brown study finds. *Brown Daily Herald*. Available at <https://www.browndailyherald.com/article/2026/03/children-seek-further-challenges-when-they-succeed-on-difficult-tasks-brown-study-finds>

Abrams Gerber, H. (2025, January 27). Playing with their parents: children and the development of scientific reasoning. *COPSY News*. Available at <https://copsy.brown.edu/news/2026-01-27/new-research-professor-dave-sobel-studies-how-we-learn-learn>

Stanford Psychology Podcast. (2024, July 25). 137 – Kelsey Lucca: Unpacking the development of exploration and exploitation [Podcast episode]. In Stanford Psychology Podcast. Available at <https://www.stanfordpsychologypodcast.com/episodes/episode/807a22a2/137-kelsey-lucca-unpacking-the-development-of-exploration-and-exploitation>

Ewing, R. (2022, August 15). Emerging Minds Lab receives NSF CAREER grant to expand access to research. *ASU News*. Available at <https://news.asu.edu/20220815-emerging-minds-lab-receives-nsf-career-grant-expand-access-research>

Greguska, E. (2021, April 6). Tiny volunteers help ASU lab study curiosity. *ASU News*. Available at <https://news.asu.edu/20210405-solutions-baby-einsteins>

PRE-DOCTORAL RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

[Emerging Minds Lab](#) | PI: Dr. Kelsey Lucca | Tempe, AZ

June 2021 – June 2022 | **Lab Manager**

Feb. 2020 – June 2021 | **Project Coordinator**

Oct. 2019 – Feb. 2020 | **Research Assistant**

[Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center \(SARRC\)](#) | Phoenix, AZ

Jan. 2021 – May 2021 | **Research Study Coordinator**

Dec. 2018 – Dec. 2020 | **Research Study Recruiter**

May 2018 – May 2019 | **Research Intern**

[REACH Institute, Bridges to High School Program](#) | PI: Dr. Nancy Gonzales | Tempe, AZ

Jan. 2018 – May 2019 | **Data Management Research Assistant & Phone Interviewer**

Aug 2017 – Dec. 2017 | **In-home Interviewer**

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant

Spring 2026	Children's Thinking: The Nature of Cognitive Development
Fall 2025	Social and Moral Development
Spring 2025	Children's Thinking: The Nature of Cognitive Development
Summer 2024	Psychology Across Species, Summer@Brown pre-college program
Spring 2024	Statistical Methods

Guest Lectures

Jan. 2026	Children's Thinking: The Nature of Cognitive Development Brown University, Dr. Daphna Buchsbaum
Feb. 2025	Children's Thinking: The Nature of Cognitive Development Brown University, Dr. Dave Sobel
Sept. 2021	Cognitive Development Arizona State University, Dr. Kelsey Lucca

Feb. 2020 Cognitive Development
Arizona State University, Dr. Kelsey Lucca

Select Professional Development

Brown University Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning: Sheridan Teaching Seminar Certificate, Fall 2024

Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning (CIRTL):

- Pedagogies of Care Workshop, January 21st, 2026
- Decentering Grades: Getting Started with Ungrading, March 2nd, 2026
- The Joyful Journey: Teaching, Research, and Diversity Statement Workshops (January – March, 2026)

MENTORING EXPERIENCE

Undergraduate Teaching and Research Award Brown University, Students Supervised:

- Similolu Fadel, Brown University (Spring 2026)
- Samaira Gupta, Brown University (Spring 2026)
- Katherine Kupsaw, Brown University (Spring 2024)
- Seidy Idris, Brown University (Spring 2024)

Barrett Honors College Thesis Funding Award, Arizona State, Students Supervised:

- Nicole Johnson, Arizona State University, 2021-2022
- Kaitlin Van Houghton, Arizona State University, 2021-2022
- Sonia Patel, Arizona State University, 2021-2022
- Kalie Scirpo, Arizona State University, 2020-2021

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

Programming: Proficiency in R, Jamovi, JASP, SPSS. Some proficiency in JSON (i.e., for programming experiments on childrenhelpingscience.com)

Computer/Web Applications: Adobe Suite (Illustrator, Photoshop), Squarespace, Datavyu, Salesforce, REDCap, Qualtrics, MTurk

Administration of behavioral experiments with children: over 600 participants tested to date.

Assessments: Experienced in administering cognitive and behavioral assessments with individuals throughout the lifespan, including the Mullen Scales of Early Learning and the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test. Received extensive training on the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule, Autism Diagnostic Interview-Revised, Preschool Language Scales, and Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (full certification not complete due to COVID-19 interruptions).

ACADEMIC SERVICE

Spring 2024 – Present

Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan Committee, Community Outreach Subcommittee, Department of Cognitive, Linguistic & Psychological Sciences at Brown University

Fall 2023 – Spring 2024

Graduate Student Council Representative for the Department of Cognitive, Linguistic & Psychological Sciences at Brown University

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS AND WORKSHOPS

Spring 2025 - Present	Member of the Society for Research in Child Development
Spring 2022 - Present	Member of the Cognitive Development Society
Summer 2023	Computational Cognitive Models of Learning and Development Workshop – Harvard University
Fall 2021 and Fall 2022	Workshop on Mental Effort
Spring 2019 – Spring 2020	Member of the International Society for Autism Research

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Spring 2023, 2024	College Day at Brown facilitator for the Department of Cognitive & Psychological Sciences
Spring 2023 – Fall 2024	In collaboration with Dr. Amitai Shenhav, facilitated motivation and effort guest lessons for 4 th graders at William D'Abate Elementary in Providence. We visited weekly across four weeks with two cohorts of 4 th graders.