

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SCIENCES**

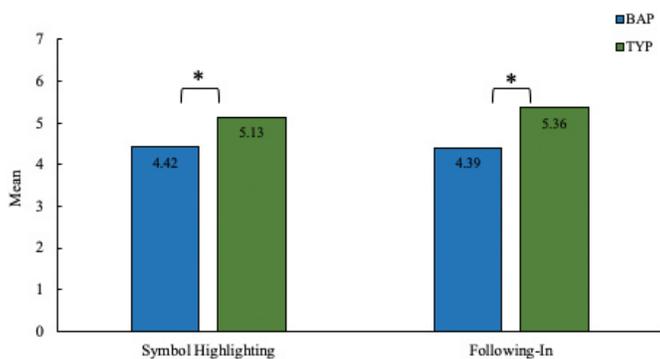
**The Broader Autism Phenotype in Early Childhood: Associations With Maternal Play Behaviors**

**Student researcher: Kezia Setiawan, Junior**

Children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) demonstrate impairments in social communication and engage in repetitive and restrictive behaviors. In families raising children with ASD, younger siblings are also at elevated risk for ASD and other developmental concerns. Previous sibling studies report subclinical ASD traits (i.e., the broader autism phenotype; BAP). Siblings with BAP traits use less joint engagement with their mothers when compared to their typically developing peers (TYP). However, it is currently unclear how mothers' play behaviors, within a social context, may inform child responsiveness in children with BAP traits. To inform this gap, the present study examined whether mothers of children with BAP traits (1) highlight fewer objects and/or are less likely to join in on their children's play schemes, and (2) if these maternal behaviors are associated with child responsiveness. Dyads were recruited as part of a prospective study, tracking developmental milestones in

children with an older sibling with ASD and families with no history of ASD. Between 18 and 24 months, dyads participated in a semi-structured free play task. Child responsiveness, mother symbol highlighting, and joining-in were coded. At their final laboratory visit, children were assigned developmental outcomes following established criteria. A series of analysis of covariance and partial correlations revealed significant differences in maternal behaviors during play, but no significant associations between maternal behaviors and child responsiveness. In sum, providing mothers with concrete ways to highlight/join in during play may be especially salient for ongoing parent-mediated intervention efforts for children at risk of developing an ASD.

*Research advisors Ashleigh Kellerman and A. J. Schwichtenberg write: "Ms. Setiawan grew tremendously over the course of this project. She gained a keen understanding of the importance of mother-child dyadic interactions and simultaneously provided concrete targets for future parent-mediated interventions for children developing at risk."*



Maternal play behaviors stratified by child outcome group mean. Note: \* $p < .05$