

UB Early Child Development Project

Volume 1, Issue 2

Fall 2009

UB Social Development Laboratory

Letter from the Director:

Hello from UB and the Social Development Lab! We have finally completed the long process of coding and processing the data that we collected last spring and we are pleased to share some of the final results with you. We were able to assess 96 children last fall and 78 of those children again in the spring. Please note that space does not permit a full presentation of all the findings and I would encourage you to visit our website for the latest peer-reviewed publications as they become available. Our findings focus on the role of anger and emotion regulation in the development of aggressive behavior. We also report our new findings related to sharing and cooperative behavior. The findings are important for further helping us understand the development of young children's social behaviors and, in particular, the development of different forms of aggressive behavior. I hope we will see you soon for one of our two new laboratory studies (see pages 5-6 for invitations and information).

Thank you again for your participation and support!

Best wishes for a wonderful year,

-Dr. Jamie Ostrov

Assistant Professor of Psychology

Director, UB Social Development Laboratory



Special points of interest:

- Thank you for your participation!
- Are you moving? Please contact us to tell us how to send you future updates (we never sell or distribute your information).
- See Page 2 for more findings
- Ask the Developmental Psychologist (page 3)
- New studies (page 4 and see pages 5-6)

Inside this issue:

Findings	1-2
Recent publications	2
Ask Dr. Ostrov	3
Staff updates	3
Website	4
New Lab Projects	5-6



Findings: Anger predicts increases in physical aggression over time!

Anger and frustration were positively associated in the study, so some children who were angry also tended to be frustrated.

Teacher-reported anger and frustration were associated with both physical (e.g., hitting, kicking peers) and relational (e.g., social exclusion) forms of aggression (from observations) in the fall and spring.

Anger displayed in the spring was also associated with observations of verbal aggression (e.g., mean names and verbal insults) in the spring.

Children who were displaying anger in the fall were more likely to do so in the spring.

Importantly, teacher-reported anger and frustration (e.g., "Expresses anger with peers" and "Uses toys and classroom materials roughly") was associated with statistically significant increases in observations of physical aggression (e.g., hitting, kicking peers) across the academic year. This association was strong and was found even after accounting for children's other types of aggressive behavior and possible gender differences. Thus, we find that displaying anger and frustration with peers during play is a risk factor for increases in physical aggression among young children.

Emotion Regulation was associated with prosocial behavior (sharing, cooperating)

According to teachers, 57% of children are “good at sharing and taking turns” often or almost always; whereas, an additional 28% are sometimes seen sharing and taking turns.

Teachers reported that 63% of the children are helpful to peers often or almost always and 33% are helpful to peers sometimes.



Importantly, we found that teacher-reported emotion regulation skills (e.g., “can say when s/he is feeling sad, angry, or mad, fearful or afraid”) in the fall and spring was positively and strongly associated with observations of prosocial behaviors or sharing, co-

operating and including other children in play and activities. This finding suggests that when children display appropriate negative emotions in the appropriate context and have a general command of their feelings they are more likely to be engaged in prosocial behavior with their peers.

We found that those children who were initially aggressive (e.g., physical, verbal) were more likely to also be aggressive in the future. We also discovered that children who are prosocial are more likely to be the recipient of sharing in the future.

Even more findings...our interviews with young children seemed to be working well...

Children who are observed as aggressive (i.e., physical or relational) are not well liked by their peers (according to teachers). This finding replicates prior literature on this topic and underscores the importance of early intervention programs to improve young children’s aggressive behavior and peer relationships.

Our preliminary research with our interviews seemed to suggest that our improvements in the spring may have helped some children better understand the questions about their social experiences with peers. That is, children were less confused, took less time (on average), and provided higher quality data. Our initial evidence suggests that despite reports in the literature, young children are not accurate reporters of their own social experiences. If developmentally appropriate measures are used and interviews

are kept short, engaging and fun, we may be able to obtain accurate information from children (the true “experts”) that corresponds with what teachers and research assistants tell us about the children’s social behavior and thoughts. We hope to use this information to continue to refine and develop our interview approach, which we will be using in our two new laboratory-based studies this year.



Our recent publications from past studies (all available on our website)...

- Ostrov & Godleski (2009). Impulsivity-hyperactivity and subtypes of aggression in early childhood: An observational and short-term longitudinal study. *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 18, 477-483. (now posted on the laboratory website, see bottom of page 4 for the address)
- Ostrov (in press). Prospective associations between peer victimization and aggression. *Child Development* (coming soon to the laboratory website).

Ask the Developmental Psychologist

“How much media exposure is too much for my child?”

Our past research on media effects was recently featured in a new book “Nurture Shock” by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman. The premise of this book is that many contemporary parenting strategies are not working because new findings in developmental psychology are being ignored. One such finding is that exposure to high quality “educational” or “prosocial” media may actually be associated with some types of aggressive behavior. In this study, my colleagues (Dr. Douglas Gentile and Dr. Nicki Crick) and I demonstrated that exposure to high quality programs lead to future relational aggression (social exclusion) among peers. This was a surprising finding for us because we have also found that exposure to high quality programs is associated with positive outcomes like sharing and

cooperating. When we looked closer we realized that a number of the programs (e.g., Arthur on PBS) were frequently showing children engaged in peer conflict situations that often included social exclusion. At the end of the program the characters resolved their differences and reconciled their friendship. We believe that young children (3-5 year-olds) are focusing on the social exclusion behaviors and not the positive message at the end of the program. Our idea was confirmed in another study that we conducted in WNY.

We also agree with the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendation that children younger than two years not have screen time (computers, TV) due to pos-

sible language delays and children older than 24 months be limited to no more than 1 hour per day. Importantly, we recommend that parents know what children are watching and if they are able to scaffold or help the child connect the friendship conflict and the conflict resolution scenes, we believe exposure to this content might be beneficial (this last hypothesis stems from our prior intervention work in which we conducted developmentally appropriate puppet shows in early childhood classrooms and saw a decrease in social exclusion—see Ostrov, Masetti et al., 2009, on our website). We suggest parents follow-up with their pediatrician if they have questions about media exposure.

Staff Updates

- Alyssa Tevens, Ed.M., is now employed at Summit.
- Nicole Sloatsky, B.A., will be starting an MSW program this fall.
- Rebecca Mazzullo, B.A., is now a Ph.D. student in Clinical Child Psychology at Florida State University .
- Rebecca Norton is now in the UB School Psychology graduate program.
- Kristyn Gergelis is now studying abroad for the fall semester in Spain prior to medical school.
- Becky Cullen, B.A., is now working full time with children in the Buffalo area.
- Lauren Kneussle, B.A., is completing coursework at Harvard and working in the area prior to graduate school.
- At UB: Jamie Lee Mancuso is returning to the social development laboratory for her senior year. Rachel Kasperek and Leah Allen are now seniors studying psychology.



**“Given the harmful effects of both subtypes of aggression and victimization it is crucial that early childhood directors and teachers adopt evidence based programs for reducing aggression and promoting prosocial behavior and friendship formation skills”
-Ostrov, Masetti et al., (2009, Early Childhood Research Quarterly)**

Staff Members

Director:

- Jamie M. Ostrov, Ph.D.

Graduate Students and Coordinators:

- Stephanie Godleski, M.A.
- Emily Hart, A.B.
- Rebecca Mazzullo, B.A.
- Adam Mullins, M.A.
- Nicole Slootsky, B.A.
- Alyssa Tevens, Ed.M.

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Please let us know if you
are moving—We want to be
able to send you future
updates and news from the
Social Development lab!

You are invited to participate in two new projects in the Lab!

We are currently recruiting for two new laboratory-based studies.

The first study will address how media exposure and family relationships can impact young children's social development. If you have a 3-5 year-old child and are willing to participate in a 30-45 minute one time visit to the laboratory, please contact us via email at amullins@buffalo.edu or devlab@buffalo.edu



The second study will address how family factors as well as social-cognitions or the way that children think about their relationships with others and social situations may impact the development of social skills and peer interactions. We are looking for families with a 3-5-year old child and a parent/legal guardian willing to visit our laboratory. This is a one time visit to the laboratory and will take about 30-45 minutes per family visit. For information please contact sg72@buffalo.edu or devlab@buffalo.edu



Both projects will take place in our UB South Campus (Main Street) Lab.

We are on the web: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/psychology/labs/SocialDevLab/home.htm>



UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO'S
PARENT-CHILD MEDIA PROJECT



Do you have a child between the ages of 3- and 5-years-old?

If so, you may be eligible to participate in a new study being conducted by the Social Development Laboratory at the University at Buffalo! We are interested in how parents interact with their child's media use and their child's social development.

If you decide to participate, you and your child will be asked to:

- ◆ Come to our lab located on the University at Buffalo South Campus. Participation should last approximately 45 minutes.
- ◆ Complete several surveys regarding your child's social development, their media use, and your behaviors regarding your child's media use. Your child would also answer some brief questions regarding their social behavior, as well as watch a brief video clip of Sesame Street. After viewing the clip, your child would answer some additional questions and participate in a helping task. It is also possible that you may be asked to view the brief video clip with your child.
- ◆ For your participation, you will receive a \$10 Target gift card.

If you and your child are interested in learning more about our project or would like to find out if you are eligible to participate, please call the project coordinator, Adam Mullins, at 716-645-2541 x709, or send us an email at amullins@buffalo.edu

UB Early Childhood Thoughts and Behaviors Project



Do you have a child between the ages of 3- and 5-years-old?



If so, you may be eligible to participate in a new study being conducted by the Social Development Laboratory at the University at Buffalo! We are interested in learning more about how children's thoughts about social situations and social behaviors develop.

If you decide to participate, you and your child will be asked to:

- ◆ Come to our lab located on the University at Buffalo South Campus
- ◆ You will be asked to answer some questions about you and your child's thoughts and behaviors and your child will also be asked about his/her own thoughts and behaviors
- ◆ For your participation, you will receive a \$20 gift card and your child will receive a small toy

If you and your child are interested in learning more about our project or would like to find out if you are eligible to participate, please call the project coordinator, Stephanie Godleski, at 716-645-0171, or send us an email at devlab@buffalo.edu

