

Social Development Lab University at Buffalo, SUNY

Summer 2008

Early Childhood Play Project- Continuation Study Newsletter

Letter from the Director

We recently finished collecting data for our continuation portion of the Early Childhood Play Project. This was an exciting change to our project. As you know, this most recent assessment occurred in the laboratory. Despite a blustery winter and some difficult driving conditions, a number of families made the drive to our laboratory on the UB south campus. We are so thankful for your participation. We had fun working with your children and we hope your recent visit to our laboratory was a positive experience. This newsletter will summarize some of the recent findings as well as results across all three time points. We are very excited by these findings and we hope you are as well. We want to personally acknowledge your time and commitment to science and the child development field! As always we have enjoyed working with you and seeing how much your children have grown socially, emotionally and even physically these past few years. We look forward to hearing from you and possibly seeing your children again in the future. **Thank you!**

Best wishes for a relaxing and enjoyable summer!

-Dr. Jamie Ostrov

Assistant Professor of Psychology
Director, Social Development Laboratory



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- Please email our lab at devlab@buffalo.edu to update our records in the event that you ***move or change your email address***

- We have a number of new studies featured on our laboratory website.

- We also plan to conduct a project in our laboratory investigating the strategies parents use to mitigate (protect against) negative effects of media on their children. If you are interested in hearing more about this or other studies please email us at

devlab@buffalo.edu.

Time 3: Winter 2008

We had 41 families participate in our third time point in our laboratory. If you recall approximately 119 families participated in our first two

time points. Thus, about 35% of the families were willing to return to the laboratory several years later. We know that many of our former

participating families have moved from the area so we believe our participation rate, considering all of the possible families, was actually higher.

What we learned about Media Exposure at Time 3

The most popular TV program for the children participating in the study was Hannah Montana, followed by Sponge Bob and Curious George. The most popular movie was Cars, followed by High School Musical, Star Wars, Pokemon, and Cinderella.

How often do your children watch educational TV? (80.5% reported Sometimes or Often; 12.2% stated Rarely and 7.3% reported Always).

How often do your children copy characters they have seen on TV? (7.3% Never; 22% Rarely; 70.7% Sometimes or Often)

How often do your children do activities that do not include electronic

media? (9.8% Sometimes; 68.3% Often; 22% Always)

How often do your children watch violent TV/Movies ? (12.2% Almost never; 26.8% Never; 26.8% Rarely; 29.3% Sometimes; 4.9% Often)

During the school year how many hours per day does your child watch TV/movies? (53.7% 0-1 hr; 41.5% 1-2 hrs; 4.9% 3-4 hrs).



Summary: These statistics suggest the potentially important role that media exposure may play in the lives of young children. Our past work with other samples and this one (see next page) highlight that both violent and educational media are important for understanding the development of aggression.



More Time 3 Results

An association was found between children’s use of physical aggression with peers and their overall adjustment problems and the need/desire for potential intervention (according to parents). There was no corresponding association for relational aggression.

Children’s behavior was consistent in the “try not to look” and “try not to touch” the surprise toy tasks, which

were believed to be tasks associated with emotion regulation ability. These

“Parental beliefs about the importance of prosocial skills was related to lower levels of relational aggression”

two sessions were not associated with aggressive behavior. In keeping with past research with this age group , most children looked at the surprise toy

after 1 minute. Most children touched the surprise toy after 2 minutes.

Child-reports of relational aggression were associated with parent-reports of child’s impulsive behavior.

In sum, both physical and relational aggression seem to be associated with an increased risk for adjustment problems, but prosocial behavior and parental beliefs about sharing and including others may reduce these outcomes.



Results Across the Entire Study (Time 1 to Time 3)

The more prosocial children were at time 1 (according to observations & teacher-reports) the less relationally and physically aggressive (according to parents) they were.

The more prosocial children were at time 2 (according to teachers) the less physically aggressive (according to parents) and the less relationally aggressive (according to child-reports) they were.

Thus, initial prosocial behavior may serve as an important “protective” factor or reduce the probability of

future aggression.

Physical aggression was stable from time 2 (according to observations) to time 3 (according to parent-report), suggesting that without intervention the behavior will likely stay the same.

Time 1 physical aggression (teacher-report and observations) was associated



with time 3 parent-reported impulsivity and attention problems as well as parent-reported deceptive behaviors displayed by their child at time 3.

Time 1 prosocial behavior was associated with less deception reported at time 3. Prosocial behavior at time 2 was associated with less parent-reported deception and less parent-reported impulsivity/attention problems at time 3.

Thus, whereas physical aggression was associated with future problems at time 3, prosocial behavior was associated with positive outcomes.

Summary of recent findings and publications...

In an ECPP paper currently under review for publication we documented that educational media was associated with an increase in relational aggression over time. We believe that children are attending to the behaviors (i.e., relational aggression models), but are not attending to or remembering the conflict resolution behaviors at the end of such programs.

We have previously found this effect (see Ostrov, Gentile & Crick, 2006, *Social Development*) and this is an important extension of the prior study. We recommend that parents monitor to what their children are watching, playing and listening. We further recommend that parents scaffold or talk with children about relationship problems they see depicted on TV or in movies and facilitate the connection to the conflict resolution skills at the end of the

program. Further, we suggest parents help children to understand that these behaviors are harmful and should not be copied or modeled.



Recent Publications

In a recent publication from the ECPP (Ostrov, Ries, Stauffacher, Godleski, & Mullins, in press, *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*) we published some of our prior findings that we have shared with you in previous newsletters. For example, teachers and observers agreed for their ratings of relational and physical aggression. In addition, observations of relational aggression were associated with increases in deception over time. What does this mean? We believe that children prac-

tice telling lies within the context of relational aggression and overtime their deceptive behavior "spills over" into other areas such as cheating at games, lying to peers, teachers and parents in general. Although some decep-



tive behaviors are typical during early childhood, children that engage in

extensive lying, cheating or deceiving of others may be at risk for other more serious problems

"Relational aggression (social exclusion) was associated with increases in deception over time".

that will

manifest in later developmental periods.

Recent Publications (Continued)

In a second recent ECPP publication (see Ostrov, 2008, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*) we published findings indicating that children that are aggressive are at an increased risk for peer victimization (or receiving aggression from their peers). In particular, we found evidence that peer re-

jection is an important variable. That is, children that are relationally aggressive may be rejected by their peers and it is these children who are at an increased risk of being relationally victimized by their peers. These children may require an intervention to learn more prosocial skills.



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Ask the Developmental Psychologist

My child has a hard time taking another person's perspective. Is this typical of children this age?

Children in early childhood (from about 24 months to 8 years) are well known for their egocentric beliefs and difficult time with perspective taking. Many studies have documented that for most children a general beginning shift in their capacity for perspective taking or what we call "theory of mind" occurs between 3-and 5-years-old, but we know that children continue to have some issues with this until the end of early childhood. One way that we study this capacity is with the

unexpected contents task. In this task, we first shown a child a box of candy and we ask them what is inside. They usually become rather excited and report that candy is in the box. When we open the box and show them that in fact paper clips and not candy is inside they are typically rather surprised. We then ask them to tell us what they think a friend or puppet in the hallway (who was not in the room and couldn't see what we just showed them) will think is inside the box. The young child with typical poor perspective taking abilities will say that their friend will think there are paper-clips in the box. They are not able

to understand that others have different beliefs and experiences. A child with well developed "theory of mind" will say that the friend didn't see the "trick" so they will think that there is candy inside the box. Recall it is typical that children during early childhood do not have well developed perspective taking. When we acknowledge the limited perspective taking capacity of children, we may begin to treat them in a more developmentally appropriate manner. After early childhood, it is reasonable to expect that children will have the capacity for perspective taking. They may not always think about the feelings and beliefs of others, but they should be capable of doing so if needed.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

To date, your participation has lead to 4 publications in peer-reviewed journals and several more are currently under review. The ECPP study serves as an important training opportunity for many UB students. For example, two honors theses were conducted using the ECPP dataset. Two preliminary research projects for PhD students were also completed and one is in progress.

Staff Updates: *The following members of our team are graduating and moving on.*

Emily E. Ries, M.S., *After 4 years in the laboratory is moving on with a degree in Mental Health Counseling from UB*

Alyssa Tevens, B. A., *After 3 years in the laboratory is moving on to obtain an M.A. in School Counseling at UB. Recipient of the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence*

Nicole Slootsky, B. A., *Highest Honors in Psychology, (Research Technician at Research Institute on Addictions at UB)*

Michelle Boehm, B.A., *(Ph.D. in School Psychology at Arizona State University)*

Melissa Buchman, B.A., *(MSEd in School Psychology at Queens College)*

Jessica Blose, B. A., *(MA in School Counseling at UB)*