Parent and Child Engagement in Early Childhood

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Early Socialization

• Children’s exposure to socialization begins within the family, mainly through direct parent-child interaction (Fabes, Gaertner, & Popp, 2005).

• Early childhood marks a unique period in the development of parent-child relationships.
Some theorists argue that the main task of parenting is to help children experience **competence** (i.e., being successful), **autonomy**, and the **ability to relate** (and feel related) to others (Grolnick, 2003; Pomerantz, Grolnick & Price, 2007).

There are three main ways in which parents help their children fulfill these innate psychological needs that are fundamental for healthy social emotional development, through parental **behaviors, cognitions** (parents perceptions of their own parenting and beliefs about children), and **relatedness or affect** (Pomerantz et al., 2007).
Rationale for Study

• First, not all positive parenting is related to positive child outcomes (Davidov & Grusec, 2006).

• Second, good parenting in one situation is not necessarily good parenting in another situation (Maccoby, 2007).

• Third, children are active agents in their own socialization (Maccoby, 2007) and they too respond differently in different situations.

• Fourth, the majority of parenting research has largely been based on mothering (i.e., parenting by mothers).
Mutuality in Parent-Child Relationships

- **Mutuality** is a strong indicator of the parent-child relationship quality, yet has not been adequately reflected in empirical investigations (Lindsey, Cremeens, & Cladera, 2009; Lollis & Kuczynski, 1997).

- **Positive mutuality** has been defined as consisting of parent-child cooperation and shared positive emotion, as well as parent responsiveness to the child and child responsiveness to the parent.

- **Negative components** of parent-child interaction include mutually coercive parent-child or disrupted mutuality (Field, 1995; Patterson & Fisher, 2002).
Parenting across settings

• There is evidence that cross-contextual comparisons of parent-child interactions reveal differences in relationship quality (Harel & Scher, 2003; Volling, McElwain, Notaro, & Herrera, 2002).

• Parenting is a dynamic mechanism of socialization and tends to be situation-specific (Grusec & Davidov, 2007).
Including Fathers

• The role of fathers in the family system has evolved in recent decades.
• Based on North American statistics, father involvement in primary care activities has increased (Marshall, 2006; Pleck, 2010, Statistics Canada, 2012).
• Our main assumptions about the impact of parenting styles on young children’s social outcomes are largely derived from mother-child relationships.
Including Fathers

• Fathers play an important role in children’s development (Lamb, 2010; Parke & Buriel, 2006; Statistics Canada, 2012).
• Fathers’ warm, autonomy supportive parenting as well as strategies such as responsiveness and stimulation favor positive behavioral and cognitive child outcomes (NICHD ECCRN, 2005).
• In contrast, fathers’ low warmth parenting was uniquely associated with externalizing behaviors, while authoritative parenting predicted adaptive behaviors; the same associations were not found with mothers (Rinaldi & Howe, 2012).
• Martin et al. (2010) found that fathers’ supportiveness mattered most when mothers’ supportiveness was low.
The major research objectives:

- Identify how mothers and fathers uniquely support their children’s social and emotional development through their own parenting (a) behaviours, (b) cognitions (views and beliefs on parenting), and (c) mutuality (through relatedness and affect quality); and

- Examine how parent-child dyadic processes across contexts (play, clean up, and teaching) at Time 1 predict social and emotional outcomes for children at Time 1 and also one year later (Time 2).
Methods

Participants

• 87 Mother-child dyads
• 87 Father-child dyads
• Children’s age: 25-50 months
  • $M = 33.87$ months ($SD = 5.68$)
  • Caucasian (75%), Asian (10%), Hispanic/Latino (2%), mixed ethnicity (10%) and other (2%)
• Low, middle, and upper-middle class sample
Methods
(for larger study)

• **Time 1**
  • Home visits to conduct parent-child observations (4 tasks)
  • *Adapted Mutually Responsive Orientation Scale (MRO)* (Aksan et al. 2006):
    • Each task coded for: Harmonious Communication, Mutual Cooperation and Emotional Ambiance on a 5 point Likert scale (1 = very not true; 5 = very true of dyad). Scores averaged to create a total MRO score.
  • *Autonomy Support and Controlling Behaviors* (Clark & Ladd, 2000; Dix & Branca, 2003; Grolnick et al., 2002; Pratt et al., 1992)
  • *Temperament and Atypical Behavior Scale* (Bagnato, Neisworth, Salvia, Hunt, 1999)
  • *Behavior Assessment Scale for Children – 2* (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004)
  • *Parenting Styles & Dimensions Questionnaire* (Robinson et al., 2001)
  • *The Parent Attribution Test* (PAT; Bugental, Blue & Cruzcosa, 1989)

• **Time 2** (12-month follow-up) – final months of data collection
  • *Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Social Emotional* (Squires et al., 2002)
  • Early Childhood Behavior Questionnaire (Gartstein & Rothbart, 2003) (for ages 3 to 7 years)
  • *Behavior Assessment Scale for Children – 2* (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004)
  • *Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Short Form* (LaFreniere & Dumas, 1996)
Methods

Procedure

• Parent and child dyads were videotaped playing together with a set of toys for 15 minutes. Following the play session the dyad was asked to clean up the toys, which took anywhere between 1-7 minutes.

• Both mothers and fathers independently completed questionnaires about their parenting and their children’s social and emotional functioning.
Snapshot of Results

Observational Data of Mutuality

• Mom-Child Harmonious Communication was slightly higher in the play task than during cleanup

• Dad-Child Harmonious Communication & Emotional Ambiance:
  • In play, Dads & daughters had higher scores than Dads & sons
  • In clean up, Dads & sons had higher scores than Dads & daughters
Results

Dad and Child’s Average Mutuality

Mutuality Scores

- Male
- Female

Play    Cleanup
3.5     3.75
4
Snapshot of Results

- **Play Task**
  - Higher mother-child MRO scores in the play task were found to be predictive of children’s adaptive functioning.
  - Lower father-child MRO scores in the play task were found to be predictive of children’s externalizing behaviours.

- **Clean Up Task**
  - Lower mother-child MRO scores in the clean up task were found to be predictive of children’s internalizing and externalizing behaviours.
  - Father-child MRO scores in the clean up task showed no predictive significance.

*Our findings suggest that mother-child and father-child mutuality during play and clean up differentially predict children’s social and emotional functioning*
**Parenting styles and early childhood behavioural functioning: A comparison between self-reported and observed parenting styles (Sheh, 2013)**

- **Observational Data of Parenting (with sub-sample n=31)**
  - Using Parents' ratings of their own parenting styles and Observations of parents' parenting styles – low correspondence was found
  - Mothers' correspondence between measures was stronger than fathers'
  - Self-reported parenting styles were stronger predictors of parent reported children’s behavioural functioning
Mixed Methods Analysis of Autonomy Support and Control during Puzzle Teaching \((n=59)\)

- An explanatory mixed methods design was used to (a) quantify autonomy supportive and controlling parent behaviors and (b) examine the qualitative features of these parenting behaviors.

- **Quantitative analyses**
  - Mothers were significantly more likely to provide autonomy support than fathers (justifications, directives, positive reinforcement)
  - Fathers’ use of child-centered language was negatively associated with externalizing behaviors, whereas justifications and praise were positively linked with adaptive child behaviors.

- **Qualitative analyses**
  - Exemplars of high and low on autonomy support and control
  - What the numbers didn’t tell us
What Did We Learn?

• Parents alter their behaviors across settings (and therefore considering parent-child interaction context is important)

• Moms and dads parent differently

• Using dyadic measures in addition to individually-derived data is useful in making recommendations for practice

• The benefit of using different methods and informants (questionnaires, observations, performance tasks)
**Recommendations**

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

- Encourage positive parenting across settings with examples and practice in identifying situation-specific triggers.
- Support parents to experience mutual engagement with their children (through modelling, handouts, video supports).
- Protecting parent-child time (beyond caregiving).
- Encourage parents to reflect upon their parenting behaviors, beliefs, and practices.
Where do we go from here?

- We will investigate parent-child relationships in clinical and at-risk populations and to compare these with data obtained from a community sample.
- Feedback with partners, community groups, families, and academic communities.
- Create parent resources on mutuality.
Thank you!