THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL BELIEFS AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES TOWARD RELATIONAL AGGRESSION AND REPORTED CHILD USE OF RELATIONAL AGGRESSION

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Abstract

of

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Relational aggression is a known form of aggressive behavior in which the relationship is used as the tool to inflict harm. Previous research indicates that relational aggression is predictive of maladjustment in children, is present in early childhood, and is linked to parental attitudes and practice. Using questionnaires, this study examined the relationship among parent beliefs and reported intervention strategies for relational aggression and teacher and parent reported levels of relational aggression in children. Findings indicated that parents and teachers rated preschool-aged (2-5 years) boys as more physically aggressive than preschool-aged girls, and rated older preschool-age children as more relationally aggressive than younger children. Parents rated their children lower in relational and physical aggression than their teachers did. In addition, there was a significant correlation between parental beliefs about relational aggression and how they rated their child’s level of aggression. Parents who viewed relational aggression as a typical/normal behavior also rated their child lower in prosocial skills and
higher in relational and physical aggression than parents who viewed relational aggression as abnormal. Suggestions for future research are discussed.

_______________________, Committee Chair
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_______________________
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Current research on young children supports the assertion that aggressive behavior manifests in early childhood and can have lasting negative psychosocial effects on children (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Crick, Casas & Mosher, 1997; Crick, Ostrov & Werner, 2006; Park, Essex, Zahn-Waxler, Armstrong, Klein & Goldsmith, 2005). In fact, aggressive behavior has been found to be one of the most accurate predictors of future maladjustment, including poor academic achievement, peer rejection, increased aggression, depression, delinquency, risky sexual behavior, and peer victimization (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). In the absence of treatment or intervention, aggression can persist and worsen through childhood into adulthood, impairing future relationships and achievement (Coie & Dodge, 1998).

Additionally, there is a more subtle type of aggression, termed relational aggression, which is distinguishable from physical aggression. Relational aggression, as opposed to physical or overt aggression, causes harm through damage to, or threats of damage to, relationships, and is characterized by social exclusion, rumor spreading, “dirty looks,” gossiping, manipulation, and verbal assaults (Crick, 1996; Crick et al., 1997).

Although relational aggression tends to be subtler than overt physical aggression, it has the potential to be emotionally damaging and may be a powerful predictor of future psychological, social, and academic maladjustment (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Crick, Ostrov&
Werner, 2006). Young children who use relational aggression as a tool to accomplish social goals, as well as the victims of relational aggression, can have adjustment problems (Bowie, 2007; Sebanc, 2003). For example, school-aged children who consistently express relational aggression are more likely to have significant unstable relationships and underdeveloped prosocial skills (Crick, Ostrov & Werner, 2006). They may perform poorly in school and may also have internalizing problems such as depression and anxiety, as well as somatic problems (Bowie, 2007; Coie & Dodge, 1998; Crick et al., 2006; McEvoy, Estrem, Rodriguez & Olson, 2003).

The current study was undertaken to address the problem of relational aggression in young children. Specifically, this researcher aimed to address possible risk factors that may lead to the development of this negative behavior. The targeted risk factors investigated in this study were parental beliefs and responses to their child’s use of relational aggression, and how these possible risk factors may actually be predictors of the child’s use of relational aggression as reported by preschool teachers.

**Significance of the Study**

Crick (1997) determined that children as young as three years of age express relational aggression. Such early relational aggression is more direct in nature than it is in older children (e.g., "I won't be your friend unless..."), and with age, relational aggression increases and becomes more sophisticated (Ostrov & Bishop, 2007; Park et al., 2005). As children mature, relational aggression becomes more difficult for parents and teachers to notice and address. Therefore, the study of relational aggression in preschool-age
children is vital to understanding how and why this negative behavior develops so that appropriate intervention strategies can be developed.

According to Crick, Ostrov, Appleyard & Jansen (2004) and Werner, Senich & Przenpyszny (2006), one of the most important areas for understanding the developmental trajectory of relational aggression is the investigation of family factors linked to relational aggression. For example, Casas, Weigel, Crick, Ostrov, Woods, Jansen Yeh, & Huddelton-Casas (2006) found that specific parenting styles are connected to children with relational aggression. Parents (mothers and fathers) with authoritarian parenting styles were more likely to have children who engaged in relational aggression. Characteristics of these parenting styles include psychological control or coercion, corporal punishment, negativity, and low warmth and openness. Similarly, children who experience high parent-child conflict are more likely to express relational aggression in their peer relationships (Ostrov & Bishop, 2007). Additionally, several studies have found that family dynamics with obviously negative or passive forms of communication may result in children who are relationally aggressive (Casas et al., 2006; Nelson, Hart, Jin, Yang, & Olsen, 2006; Park, Essex, Zahn-Waxler, Armstrong, Klein, & Goldsmith, 2005).

Clearly, a key consideration for understanding why some children express relational aggression and others do not, is the degree to which family factors may contribute to the development of relational aggression. Parental beliefs about their child’s behavior can be implicitly interpreted by the child through the parent’s body language, facial expressions, or even by not reacting to the child’s negative behaviors. Additionally, parental beliefs can also be interpreted through explicit actions such as their
verbal communication or modeling strategies (Buschgens et al., 2010). However, parents may claim they have a belief (“Hitting, teasing, etc., is not acceptable!”), but that belief may not be reflected in their actions. It is important that parental beliefs are reflected in the parent’s actions and communication with their children. The messages parents send through reacting (talking, reflection, providing scaffolding when they witness their child engaging in aggressive behavior) or by not reacting to their child's negative peer interactions, can be powerful and may impact their child’s further use of relationally aggressive behavior (Buschgens et al., 2010; Underwood et al., 2008).

It is vital to the understanding of childhood aggression to examine the role that parental beliefs and responses toward aggressive behavior play in the development of aggressive behavior. The current study investigates that role by measuring associations between parental responses to aggressive behavior and the child’s reported level of aggressive behavior by parents and teachers.

The current study also investigates whether parents perceive relational aggression similarly to teachers. Parents and teachers have significantly different opportunities to observe relationally aggressive behavior. When parents observe their child’s social behavior, they are often limited by the lack of social dynamics they are able to witness. They may observe their child’s social behavior at home with siblings, at the playground with a few children they may not know very well, or a one-on-one interaction with an adult. In many preschool settings there is a large amount of peers close in age in which they are familiar with, in an environment where the children are comfortable and where it is designed to foster social interaction. In settings such as these, it is much more likely to
observe relational aggression (Casas et al., 2006). Additionally, parents and teachers naturally view a child’s behavior through a different lens. It is often challenging for parents to view their child’s behaviors objectively. Similarly, the same could be said of a teacher who may have subjective opinions of their students and who knows them very well. However, teachers still have a unique social venue in which to observe their students, which allows for a variety of social behaviors to emerge, and they are typically more objective observers than are parents. One goal of the current study is to examine similarities and differences in the perceptions that parents and teachers have of the same child’s aggressive behavior.

**Research Questions**

The aim of this study was to investigate the role parents play in the development of relational aggression. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed:

(a) Are there associations between parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of relational aggression in young children?

(b) Are demographic factors such as child gender and parent education associated with children’s use of relational aggression?

(c) Are parental beliefs about relational aggression and reported intervention strategies associated with the child’s level of relational aggression as reported by parents and preschool teachers?

It was predicted that certain demographics would play a role in the way parents view and respond to relational aggression. Specifically, parents with a lower level of
education may not view relational aggression as a negative behavior, therefore they may not respond negatively toward it. Conversely, parents with a higher level of education would be more likely to view relational aggression as a negative behavior. Additionally, it was hypothesized that parents and teachers would rate girls as more relationally aggressive than boys. It was also hypothesized that, because of their observations of children in different environments, parents and teachers would have a low level of agreement on how they would rate the same child’s social skills and aggressive behavior. Finally, it was predicted that children whose parents do not react strongly or negatively towards relational aggression, or who may model relational aggression within the parent-child relationship would be more likely to use relational aggression in their peer relationships than children whose parents do react strongly or negatively toward relational aggression and who do not model this negative behavior in the parent/child relationship.
Method

The present study employed a non-experimental design with correlational and comparative analyses. All data were collected through parent and teacher questionnaires and analyzed quantitatively.

Participants

Forty-four participants (34 parents and 9 teachers) from 5 different preschools within the greater Sacramento area completed questionnaires for this study. The mean age of parent participants was 36.9 years. Mothers and fathers were both invited to participate. The mean age of teacher participants was 32.0 years, and all 9 teachers were female, 8 were Caucasian and 1 was African American, 7 had an AA degree, and 2 had a BA degree. Target children included 14 boys and 15 girls, ranging in age from 3 to 5 years, M = 3.6 years. Parent education ranged from all the way from a high school diploma to a Ph.D or other doctoral degrees. 5.8% of parents had a high school diploma or GED, 9.7% held an AA/AS degree, 9.7% had some college beyond and AA/AS degree, 4.1% held a BA/BS degree, 5.9% held a MA/MS degree, and 4.8% of parents held a Ph.D or other doctoral degrees.

Three of the preschools from which families were recruited were privately owned, serving a diverse population of families ranging from lower to upper socio-economic status. One of the preschools was a federally-funded center serving predominantly lower socio-economic status families, and the last preschool was a co-operative preschool serving families from middle to upper socio-economic status.
Data Collection

At all five sites, a packet was sent home to each family of a child between the ages of 3-5 years. Each packet contained an introductory letter, consent form, demographic survey, and two different parent questionnaires regarding their child’s social skills and parental response to their child’s aggression. The families were also notified that their participation meant their child’s teacher would be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their child’s social skills.

For each participating family, a questionnaire concerning the child’s social skills and relational aggression, with a corresponding ID number, was provided for the target child’s teacher to complete. The teachers also received an introductory letter, consent form, demographic survey, a questionnaire regarding the social skills of their students, and an envelope with paid postage and the researcher’s address. As an incentive, each participating family had their name entered in a raffle to win a $25 Target gift card. Teachers who participated also had their names entered in a separate raffle to win a $25 Target gift card.

Measures

Parents and teachers completed questionnaires for this study. The teachers filled out two different assessments: a demographic survey (see Appendix G), and the Preschool Social Behavior Scale-Teacher Form (PSBA-T- see Appendix I) to assess the preschoolers’ social skills and level of relational aggression. The PSBA-T provided
statements such as “This child hits or kicks other children.” and “This child is helpful to peers.” with a Likert scale response format.

Parents were asked to fill out three different questionnaires: a demographic survey (see Appendix C), the Preschool Social Behavior Scale-Parent Teacher (PSBA-PT- see Appendix D), which is similar to the teacher version of this questionnaire; and The Parental Response to Aggression (PBA-P- see Appendix E). The PBA-P gave the parents hypothetical situations in which they were supposed to imagine it was their child engaging in relational forms of aggression, and they were asked to describe how they would respond to the various situations. For example, “Why do you think your child behaved this way?” or “How common or typical is this behavior?” Some of these questions were answered using a Likert scale, and in others the parents were able to use their own words to describe their feelings or reaction in an open-ended format.

**Analytical Methods**

Data were analyzed using correlational and comparative methods. Pearson correlations were used to identify associations between demographic variables, parent responses to relational aggression, and parent and teacher assessments of aggression. Paired t-tests were used to compare parent and teacher reports of aggression.
Definition of Terms

In the current study, Relational Aggression refers to using the relationship as a tool to inflict harm on a peer. This negative behavior is characterized by social exclusion, rumor spreading, dirty looks, gossiping, manipulation, verbal assaults, etc. (Crick et al., 1996, 1997). Overt Aggression refers to the act of inflicting pain or harm to another through physical means such as hitting, kicking, punching, pinching, etc., or through verbal assaults such as shouting profanities or insults.

Internalizing Problems are the physical and mental repercussions associated with aggressive behavior such as somatic problems, depression, and anxiety. Externalizing Problems are social and academic repercussions resulting from aggressive behavior such as poor/unstable friendships and relationships, poor academic performance. Prosocial Behavior is a positive style of communication, interaction, and problem-solving such as talking calmly to express one’s feelings, sharing, taking turns, and making others feel included in social activities.

Parental response to aggression is the manner in which a parent reacts to their child’s aggressive behavior. They may intervene after witnessing their child’s aggressive behavior, provide scaffolding for their child to solve their problems through prosocial means, give consequences, redirect the child, or not intervene at all.
Limitations

One limitation of this study is the small sample size. Although 227 participants were invited, only 35 chose to participate. This small sample size and low response rate limits the generalizability of any findings. Of those 35 participants only 7 were fathers, making it impossible to control for or test for gender differences in parental responses to child aggression. Another possible limitation of this study is the data collection technique. Due to time and financial constraints, data could only be gathered through questionnaires. To get a more accurate measure of the child’s social skills, as well as the parent response/intervention strategies to their child’s aggressive behavior, natural observations and interviews are needed. Additionally, much of the data were analyzed using correlational methods. Correlations only show associations or relationships between variables (parent response to behavior and child’s behavior), but do not rule out other possible factors that could affect the outcome. Therefore, it is not possible to state whether any association found between parent beliefs and intervention strategies and relational aggression is a causal relationship.

Organization of Study

The current chapter has provided an overview of the study. Chapter 2 provides an historical and theoretical review of research in childhood aggression, particularly relational aggression, supporting the importance of the present study. Chapter 3 describes the research methods including the purpose of the study, the design, the participants, and data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 provides information about the statistical analyses,
significant as well as non-significant findings, and tables that illustrate those findings.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of study findings, limitations of the study, possible implications and recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Childhood aggression is one of the strongest predictors of future emotional and social maladjustment (Crick et al., 2006), in that it is linked to instability in relationships, depression, anxiety, and many other internalizing and externalizing challenges (Coie & Dodge, 1998). However, much of this research continues to focus on physical or overt aggression, while research on relational aggression is still in the early stages. Many important questions remain unanswered, including the origins of relational aggression. The current study addresses one such factor, the family.

The goal of this chapter is to provide a review of research on relational aggression, with a focus on the preschool context. The chapter begins with a discussion of the theoretical basis for the study, then provides an historical overview of research in relational aggression. Next, a review of relational aggression in the school-age context and the preschool context is provided, which addresses the origins of relational aggression with a focus on family and parenting as predictors of relational aggression.

Theoretical Basis

Family factors are currently being investigated in connection to relational aggression and young children. This is not only because it is an area of study recommended by leading researchers in the field (Crick et al., 2004; Crick et al., 2006), but also because there is strong theoretical evidence indicating the influence the parent/child relationship has on the child’s social/emotional development.
One theory that researchers use to understand development is the
Bioecological model described by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006). The
Bioecological model describes the human developmental process as a system of complex
relationships formed by the interaction between multiple levels of the child’s
environment and the child. In these interconnected systems, development is defined as “a
phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human
beings, both individuals and groups” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 794). This is
process is occurs throughout the life span.

The most intimate of these systems is referred to as the microsystem. The
microsystem is comprised of the child’s most immediate relationships, surroundings, and
activities such as the home, family, primary caregivers, siblings, and peers. The activities
and relationships experienced in the microsystem occur in a face-to-face setting with a
particular engagement that either invites or inhibits progressively more interaction with
the environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 798). The current study is examining
the impact that the microsystem (parents) has on the development of a know negative
behavior, childhood relational aggression.

The mesosystem is an interaction of multiple settings and/or relationships within
the microsystem. An example of this is the combined affect that peers and parenting
practices may have on development. Because humans are multi-dimensional it is often
necessary to investigate the multiple variables that may have a combined developmental
affect on an individual. Because there are multiple influences on a child’s development,
the current study investigates both mother and father impact on child behavior, as well as
the impact of their beliefs and intervention strategies on child behavioral outcomes.

Beyond the microsystem/mesosystem is the exosystem. Keeping in mind that these systems are all interwoven, the exosystem encompasses the connections between the different settings and relationships. This is a setting, factor, or relationship that does not contain the developing person but has an indirect influence on his/her development. For example, this setting could be a peer’s parenting practices. The child is not physically or directly involved with their peer’s parenting practices, but ultimately the peer’s parenting practices will impact how the peer interacts with the individual, resulting in a developmental change (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.802).

Finally there is the macrosystem which is the most loosely woven of these interconnected systems of development. These are relationships, rituals, and practices that may impact the exosystem and trickle down to the microsystem, but do not directly interact with the individual. Examples of the macrosystem are laws, religion, culture, and history. The macrosystem, albeit significant, is far removed from the developing individual and is often intangible. Impact from the macrosystem has a direct affect on those individuals and environments within the child’s exosystem and microsystem, resulting in an indirect developmental affect on the child.

According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), relationships and functions within the child’s microsystem have the most profound impact on their psychological development. An environment that has responsive caregivers, low level of noise, and encourages exploration will foster cognitive development. Conversely, an environment characterized by unresponsive caregivers, noise, restriction, and chaos will have a
negative effect on the child’s psychological development. Similarly, the infant’s physical and emotional attributes will impact how adults in their environment will respond and interact with him/her. Babies that are mild tempered and have a pleasant physical appearance will likely get a positive response from caregivers. It is the early relationships and interactions a child has in their life that will have the most dramatic impact on their psychological development (Bowlby 1969).

The term *proximal processes* is used by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) to describe the complex reciprocal interactions between child, adult and environment that promote development. To be effective, such interactions must occur regularly for extended periods of time. This can include feeding an infant, playing with them, talking to them, or learning new skills. Children who grow up in a disadvantaged home (single parent or low income) may suffer from lack of proximal process with an attentive adult, resulting in developmental challenges such as cognitive, social/emotional, or physical differences (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). There is also empirical evidence suggesting that such processes encourage strong emotional attachment between the child/caregiver. Essentially, available and responsive caregivers promote secure feelings of self for the developing child (Bowlby, 1969). The proximal process is closely related to the current study and how parent/child interaction, and the quality of that interaction directly effects behavior.

When thinking about aggressive behavior in children and the possible risk factors that lead to this negative behavior, the *Bioecological model* can be applied to help explain the impact parents have on child behavioral outcomes. Within the microsystem, parents
Historical Overview of Research on Relational Aggression

Relational aggression is the purposeful intent to cause emotional damage to a peer by using the actual relationship as the tool to inflict harm (Bowie, 2007; Coie & Dodge, 1998; Crick, Casas & Mosher, 1997; Crick, Ostrov & Werner, 2006; McEvoy, Estrem, Rodriguez & Olson, 2003). This type of aggression can include threats of ending the relationship, social exclusion, rumor spreading, and social manipulation to achieve a goal (Crick & Gropeter, 1995).

Relational aggression was first identified as a negative behavior by researchers in Finland. Fleshbach (1969) described the concept of relational aggression, although at the time it was referred to as “indirect” aggression (Bowie, 2007; McEvoy et al., 2003). Through observation, Fleshbach (1969) noticed that first grade girls were more likely than their male counterparts to socially exclude an unfamiliar peer. This act of exclusion was identified as aggressive behavior, but indirect in nature (i.e., non-physical). The researchers speculated that more girls expressed indirect aggression because they were...
more concerned with social interactions and interpersonal relationships, while their male counterparts were more concerned with physical dominance. This explanation of gender differences and aggressive behavior has been found to be accurate over time, cross-culturally, and through many different experimental designs (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Crick, 1996; Crick & Bigbee, 1996; Crick, Werner, Casas, O'Brien, Nelson & Grotpeter, 1999; Crick, Casas & Mosher, 1997; Crick, Ostrov & Werner, 2006).

Two decades later, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, and Peltonen (1988) continued to study “indirect aggression” in middle school-aged girls, asking if this behavior was “normal.” Lagerspetzet al. (1988) developed a peer rating scale to identify different types of aggression in order to study them independently. He investigated middle-school aged boys’ and girls’ use of direct and indirect aggression when mad at a classmate. Lagerspetzet al. (1988) found that boys reported being angry more often and expressed it through physical means, but when girls were angry they were more likely to use indirect aggression to express it (e.g., peer exclusion or telling lies about the targeted peer). These results provided further support that girls were more likely than boys to express non-physical forms of aggression.

Osterman (1998) conducted an international study on relational aggression with samples from Finland, Poland, and Israel. Researchers looked at children aged 8, 11, and 15 years and studied the different conflict resolution styles the participants utilized in response to aggressive behavior. Osterman found that females, across different age and ethnic groups, used indirect forms of aggression significantly more than their male counterparts. Similar to studies conducted with American participants, the different forms
of aggression (overt/relational) each provided unique information about adjustment, meaning that each form of aggression (physical/overt and relational) could be measured separately and function as a predictors of future adjustment outcomes. Findings from this large study reinforced the idea that relational aggression was more common in girls than boys, and could be measured alone to predict adjustment outcomes. Cross-cultural studies on relational aggression such as these are important because they suggest that this negative behavior is not simply an American phenomenon, but a more universal challenge.

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) were some of the first researchers to develop reliable peer-rating scales to assess relational and physical forms of aggression. Four hundred ninety-one children from third through sixth grade participated in their study. Students were given a peer nomination instrument used to assess aspects social behavior such as relational aggression. The social behavior as rated by peers was then used to evaluate adjustment. This particular instrument included 19 items and four sub-scales: physical aggression, relational aggression, prosocial behavior, and social isolation. During the administration of the peer nomination instrument, each student was given a class roster and was asked to rate up to three peers after reading descriptions of relational and physical aggression. Based on the peer nomination scales, students were then classified into positive or negative social groups. These groups included: popular, average, neglected, rejected, and controversial. Each student was also asked to complete a self-assessment of social/psychological adjustment. Subscales of this self-assessment included loneliness, social anxiety and avoidance, and perception of peer relations. A correlational
analysis was then conducted to assess associations between social behavior (self and peer reported) and adjustment.

Findings indicated that relational and physical aggression each emerged as independent factors. This was the first time these different forms of aggression were analyzed in the same study as separate and unique. Additionally, results indicated that each subscale of both relational and physical aggression were highly reliable. Also, relational aggression was strongly associated with girls’ social/psychological adjustment. Girls who scored higher in relational aggression were more likely to have social/psychological maladjustment problems. Conversely, physical aggression was more prevalent among boys and highly predictive of social/psychological maladjustment.

Although it was clear that overt/physical forms of aggression were more salient amongst boys, and relational forms of aggression were more salient amongst girls, the question arose whether relational aggression was related to adjustment in children. Using peer and teacher assessments, Crick (1996) studied a large sample of 245 children in the third, fourth, and fifth grades over a six-month period to investigate aggressive and prosocial behavior, and how they predicted adjustment. Peer and teacher questionnaires were used to gather data at three different times during the school year. The first and second time data were gathered during the year, aggression (overt and relational) and prosocial behavior were measured and used as predictors of peer acceptance/rejection. At Time 3 data were gathered to measure adjustment. The peer nomination measurement consisted of three scales: relational aggression, physical aggression, and prosocial behavior. Similar to Crick and Grotpeter (1995), children were asked to nominate three
peers after reading descriptions of relational aggression, physical aggression, and prosocial behavior. Teachers completed The Children’s Social Behavior Scale-Teacher Form (CSBS-T) to assess the same behaviors in the students. The items in the teacher measure were designed to parallel those in the peer nomination scale. This allowed for a comparison analysis of the peer ratings and the teacher ratings.

Crick and Grotpeter (1995) found that physical aggression in boys was positively correlated with peer rejection and negatively correlated with peer acceptance. Prosocial behavior was positively correlated with peer acceptance. Relational aggression did not provide unique information about the adjustment of boys in this study. However, relational aggression did provide unique information about the future adjustment of girls. Relational and physical aggression were both reliable predictors for the future adjustment of girls. Similar to boys, prosocial skills seemed to be a strong predictor of peer acceptance amongst girls. These findings were important because for the first time (a) a large sample of females were sampled and, (b) relational and physical aggression were separated and used to predict future adjustment. The results of this study, although important, suggested that more research to examine different aspects of relational aggression, including predictors and the effects of interventions.

These early studies on relational aggression were significant in adding to the understanding of how aggression predicts social-emotional development. Prior to 1996, studies strongly indicated that physical aggression was the best behavioral predictor of future maladjustment, but in fact, relational aggression has been found to be a unique predictor for future maladjustment as well, more than overt aggression alone (Crick,
1996). Further, these separate forms of aggression (overt/physical vs. relational) were typically gender specific. For example, girls tended to be more relationally aggressive, and boys tended to be more physically aggressive. However, each negative behavior has significant impact on social/emotional development (Crick, 1996). One of the remaining unanswered questions in the field was how early relationally aggressive behavior showed up in a child’s social skill set.

Crick, Casas, and Mosher (1997) addressed this previous limitation of only including school-age children in research on aggressive behavior by including young children in their study. This study was designed as an initial attempt to assess relational aggression in preschool-age children. Crick et al. (1997) were able to develop reliable measurements that assessed relational aggression in preschoolers in order to investigate its impact on social-emotional adjustment. The items on the measure used to assess social behavior were adapted from measures designed by Crick and Grotpeter (1995) that were used to assess social skills in older children. Adaptation of this measurement was aided by observations of preschool-aged children’s social behavior, as well as pilot testing before use the actual study.

Crick et al. (1997) administered a peer nomination questionnaire to 65 preschoolers to assess relational aggression as well as adjustment. Descriptions of behavior were given to children such as “…tells peers they can’t come to their birthday party unless they do what they say…” (relational aggression), or “…is nice to peers” (prosocial behavior). The participant was asked to identify three peers by picture who acted that way. Subscales measuring peer acceptance were also included and used to predict adjustment,
supplemented by the assessment of behavior by teachers. Teachers were administered the Preschool Social Behavior Scale-Teacher (PSBS-T) to assess social skills, relational aggression, and adjustment. Results from this study showed that both preschoolers and teachers viewed relational aggression as a behavior distinct from overt aggression, and that relational aggression is present in the social skill set of young children as young as three.

This was the first time very young children were included in research on relational aggression, advancing this area of research tremendously and pointing toward many new areas of research on relational aggression. One such area is possible predictors of relationally aggressive behavior in young children. The current study is an investigation of family precursors of relational aggression in preschool children.

**Relational Aggression and Adjustment**

It has been well documented that relational aggression is negatively associated with adjustment in school-aged children. Children who both express relational aggression and who are victims of relational aggression are more likely to experience psychological and social difficulties than their peers who do not display such behavior (Coie & Dodge, 1990; Crick, 1996; Crick, Ostrov, & Werner, 2006).

The results of early studies of relational aggression and adjustment indicated that relational aggression was more likely to be displayed by girls than boys, and such aggression predicted later peer rejection and that without intervention aggressive children were likely to remain aggressive (Crick, 1995; Crick & Groteter, 1995). More current
research has added to our understanding of the nature of this relationship. For example, Crick, Ostrov and Werner (2006) highlighted the possible adjustment outcomes for children who exhibit negative behaviors such as relational and physical aggression. Crick et al. (2006) conducted a longitudinal study in which data were gathered over a full calendar year (two different grades). The extra time meant that students were followed during two different school years, with two different teachers, and two different classes. This extended time frame provided a more accurate measure of adjustment. Also, peer assessments were used to measure aggressive behavior (not future adjustment), and teacher assessments were used to measure subsequent psycho/social adjustment. In addition, internalizing and externalizing adjustment problems were measured. A limitation of past research was that only externalizing difficulties (peer rejection/acceptance) were used to gauge adjustment. Internalizing difficulties as a result of aggressive behavior may include depression, anxiety, poor academic performance, social isolation, risky sexual behavior, delinquent behavior, somatic problems, and loneliness (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Crick, 1996; Crick et al., 2006; Sebanc, 2003).

Crick et al. (2006) demonstrated that participants who were both relationally aggressive and physically aggressive displayed withdrawn, anxious, and depressive behavior significantly more than their peers who only displayed either relational or physical aggression, or who displayed neither. Additionally, the relationally aggressive and the co-morbid (relationally and physically aggressive) participants had a significant amount of somatic complaints. Further, when controlling for physical aggression it was found that relationally aggressive students tended to be more withdrawn and anxious,
and exhibited delinquent behavior more than students who were not relationally aggressive.

In a longitudinal study of kindergarten age children, Ladd and Burgess (2001) investigated multiple behavioral risk factors associated with psycho/social maladjustment problems. The behavioral risk factors investigated in this study included relational and physical aggression, teacher/child conflict, and peer rejection/victimization. Teachers completed questionnaires enabling researchers to assess risk factors, as well as cognitive and school adjustment. The researchers administered questionnaires to the kindergartners to measure peer victimization/rejection. The total sample used in this study was 396 kindergartners. Data were gathered at Time 1 in the fall of their kindergarten year, and time 2 during spring of their first grade year.

Findings from this study added greater perspective to the kinds of relationships and behaviors that are related to poor school performance and psycho/social maladjustment for young children in their first two years of school. It seemed that children who were relationally aggressive (either the perpetrator or the victim) suffered from adjustment outcomes more than children who were not. These children were rejected and victimized by peers, their relationships with teachers were characterized by conflict, and they were also less well adjusted cognitively and academically. Findings from Ladd and Burgess (2001) added significantly to the body of research investigating childhood behavior and adjustment outcomes. Particularly, it was suggested that relational forms of aggression are strong predictors of early maladjustment problems.

Relational aggression seems to be a strong predictor for maladjustment across
Ellis, Crooks and Wolfe (2009) studied relation aggression and adjustment outcomes in peer and dating relationships of teenagers. The participants for this study included 1896 ninth grade boys and girls. Peer and dating relational aggression was measured using self-reports given to the teenagers. Psychological adjustment was measured by the teens’ self-reported depression and anxiety, and social adjustment was measured by self-reports of delinquent behavior.

Findings from this study revealed that teenage relationships are complex in nature, but provided a wealth of information about individual’s psycho/social adjustment. For example, girls who exhibited relational aggression in peer or romantic relationships were likely to exhibit delinquent behavior. Also, those who experienced relational aggression in romantic relationships were at an elevated risk for emotional difficulties such as anxiety, depression, and poor academic performance. Overall, this study indicates that during teenage years, relational aggression puts children at high risk for significant social and psychological difficulties.

Studies have indicated that relational aggression is equally if not more psychologically damaging than physical aggression (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Crick, 1996; Crick, Ostrov & Werner, 2006). For school-age children, however, relational aggression is often difficult for parents and teachers to notice or address because it emerges in a covert manner (threatening body language, social exclusion, dirty looks, or rumor spreading). Thus, relational aggression is particularly dangerous because observers of this behavior often do not know if or how they should intervene.

Empirical evidence suggests that relational aggression in middle childhood will
likely lead to internal and external adjustment problems as well as future psychopathology. The question to be answered is when and why children begin to engage in relationally aggressive behavior. To understand the origins of relational aggression, developmental researchers should investigate the earliest signs of relational aggression, when children are initially forming peer relationships and learning important social skills. Therefore, researchers need to investigate early childhood to better understand relational aggression and the factors that lead to its development.

**Relational Aggression in Preschool-Age Children**

For decades research has shown that aggressive behavior has detrimental effects on school-aged children and their future adjustment. But it has only been in the past few decades that researchers have begun to examine how early in development aggressive behavior emerges in a child’s range of social tools. In the preschool setting, relational aggression tends to be expressed more openly and verbally than in the elementary school setting, making it easier to observe (Crick et al., 1997). Compared to school-aged children, very young children are not yet as aware of social norms, and what is/is not acceptable behavior. However, preschool-age children *are* capable of maintaining meaningful relationships, as well as being socially manipulative (Burr, Ostrov, Jansen, Cullerton-Sen, & Crick, 2005; Crick, Werner et al., 1999). For example, Crick, Casas, and Mosher (1997) established that children as young as three years old do in fact express both relational and physical aggression and that relational aggression was related to peer rejection and maladjustment. Both preschool-age children and teachers viewed relational
aggression as distinct from overt aggression.

Developmentally, preschool-age children are beginning to explore friendships and the purpose they serve (Sebanc, 2003). Friendships can provide rich cognitive, social, and emotional learning experiences for the young child. However, there are also many potentially negative effects that come from preschool friendships. A young child’s social play experiences are not always characterized by prosocial behavior, but rather by conflict and negative interactions. And often, relational aggression is the preschool child’s mode of inflicting harm or achieving a goal.

Sebanc (2003) examined the role that different friendship features play in the development of relational aggression in preschool-age children. Ninety-eight preschoolers were interviewed and asked to rate they “liked” or “disliked” their peers. This measure was used to establish peer acceptance and rejection, but also to measure mutual friendships. Teachers reported characteristics of those mutual friendships such as: exclusivity, intimacy, conflict, or supportiveness. Results showed that friendships that were characterized by high levels of conflict, exclusivity, and intimacy were positively correlated with high levels of relationally aggressive behavior, overt aggression, and peer rejection. However, mutual friendships characterized by supportiveness were associated with prosocial behavior.

Such findings added support to the idea that some preschool-age children (boys and girls) do in fact have meaningful friendships, and that they also use relational aggression to protect their friendships as well as to control their friendships. As a result, if a dyadic relationship is characterized by highly negative features such as name-calling,
exclusion, uninviting to birthday parties, those children are likely to continue to be relationally aggressive as they get older (Crick et al., 2006; Sebanc, 2003).

Burr, Ostrov, Jansen, Cullerton-Sen, and Crick (2005) also investigated associations between relational aggression and dyadic friendships in early childhood. The researchers collected data during one school year through naturalistic observations (16,160 minutes of total observation), interviews with children and teachers, and questionnaires. One hundred and one preschool-age children and their head teachers participated. Observations were used to assess mutual/dyadic friendships, as well as if those friendships were characterized by positive or negative interactions, and by the relational aggression of the participant. Teacher and peer questionnaires were used to assess reciprocal-dyadic friendships. Results of this study indicated a strong association between relational aggression and reciprocal/dyadic friendships. Burr et al. (2005) observed that as the year progressed, children got to know their peers better, formed more dyadic friendships, and levels of relational aggression increased, meaning that preschool-age children who have dyadic friendships are more likely to engage in relational aggression to protect and control that relationship.

As more data are collected in the field of research looking at young children and relational aggression, more is understood about this negative behavior and the effect it has on adjustment. However, a critical area that still needs attention is to understand why and how some children develop relationally aggressive behavior.
Predictors of Relational Aggression

Previous research has clearly demonstrated that relational aggression is a strong predictor of social-emotional maladjustment. Because aggressive behavior has negative effects on development, the logical area for researchers to investigate is the possible predictors of this negative behavior. One of the possible predictors of relational aggression that requires more research is the parent-child relationship (Ostrov & Crick, 2005).

In one such study, Casas et al. (2006) investigated associations between the quality of the parent-child relationship and the development of the child’s use of relational aggression. Aspects of the parent-child relationship that researchers specifically examined were parenting styles, parent use of psychological control, and attachment, which was assessed by parent-child reunion. Mothers and fathers from 122 families, and 23 teachers participated in this study. Parents were given a packet with four different questionnaires. The first was to assess their child’s level of aggression (The Children’s Social Experience measure), the second to assess their own parenting style (Parenting Practices Questionnaire), the third to assess the use of psychological control by parents (The Psychological Control measure), and the fourth to assess attachment (Parent/Child Reunion Inventory). Teachers were given the Preschool Social Behavior Scale to report their student’s level of relational aggression.

Findings indicated that boys with mothers with a permissive parenting style and fathers with an authoritarian parenting style were more likely to display relational
aggression. For girls, authoritarian styles by both parents, and permissive parenting styles from mothers were positively correlated with relational aggression. Similarly, parents’ use of psychological control (withdrawing love, inducting feelings of guilt) was also positively correlated with relational and physical aggression in young children. Use of psychological control by fathers with their daughters was highly correlated with the use of relational aggression by young girls.

Results from this study suggest that parents do have an impact on their child’s development and use of aggressive behavior, but they also suggest the need for more research in this area. For example, in this particular study there was a high level of agreement between teachers, mothers, and fathers about physical aggression, but a much lower level of agreement on relational aggression in the home and school settings. This suggests that researchers studying relational aggression need to take into account who is reporting the child’s level of aggression, and look for agreement across all parties measuring behavior. Also, Casas et al. (2006) found that authoritative parenting style (positive, egalitarian parenting) was negatively correlated with mother, father, and teacher reports of girls’ physical aggression, but there was no such significant relationship with relational aggression. Additional research is needed to investigate these particular findings, but they do indicate that a more positive, proactive parenting style may lead to less aggressive behavior in young children. In the current study this particular question is investigated. We are examining the relationship between parental beliefs and responses toward relational aggression and the child’s level of relational aggression as reported by teachers. Understanding the impact parents have on childhood
aggression outcomes is critical for this body of research.

In a longitudinal study, Park et al. (2005) analyzed the early child and family risk factors associated with later relational and physical aggression. Data were collected from 207 children starting at birth and continuing through fifth grade. Child risk factors were assessed during infancy and preschool, and aggression was measured in 1st, 3rd, and 5th grades. The child risk factors considered were; gender, cognitive factors (language delays), and temperament, and family risk factors included negative and hostile family environments, harsh authoritarian parenting, and parental hostility.

Assessments were conducted eight different times (1, 4, and 12 months, 3 and 4 years, and 1, 3, and 5 grades) during this study. A variety of instruments were used to measure the child’s risk factors, the parent-child relationship, the home environment, and later aggression levels. For example, to measure the child’s receptive language abilities, The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised was administered. The parent-child relationship and temperament were also assessed during two one-hour long sessions of in-home observations. Parents also completed questionnaires to measure the child’s level of relational and overt aggression, as well as their own maternal and paternal depressive symptoms.

Results from this study indicated that as relational aggression decreased with age for both boys and girls, physical aggression remained stable over time. However, it is possible the reason for the decrease in relational aggression was due to teachers and parents not being able to observe relational aggression in older children due to its covert and sophisticated nature (Park et al., 2005). Also, children with higher levels of
aggression came from families that displayed more negative affect, and had mothers who displayed more depressive symptoms. The latter findings are significant for the current study because they indicate that parental behavior is related to their child’s level of aggression.

Similarly, Nelson, Hart and Jen (2006) examined the relationship between Chinese parenting styles and their preschool-aged child’s peer-reported physical and relational aggression. One hundred and eighty mothers and 167 fathers participated by filling out measurements that assessed the parenting style of their spouse, and whether they had an authoritarian or authoritative approach. Two hundred and fifteen children rated their peers’ aggressive behavior. Researchers found that physically coercive and psychologically controlling parenting predicted aggression in Chinese children. More specifically, girls whose mothers were more physically coercive had higher levels of relational aggression. Fathers’ psychological control with daughters led to more relationally aggressive behavior in those girls. For boys, physically coercive parenting predicted higher levels of physical aggression.

Findings from Nelson et al. (2006) indicated strong combined parental contributions to childhood aggression. Mothers and fathers who both had psychologically controlling parenting styles (instead of physical coercion) had daughters who were more likely to engage in physical and relational aggression. Mothers and fathers who were both more physically coercive had sons who were more likely to be physically aggressive. Even having one parent (the mother or the father) who engaged in psychologically coercive behavior, was predictive of daughters who were more likely to be relationally
aggressive. These findings support assertions that parenting styles characterized by negative and controlling behaviors tend to encourage aggressive childhood behavior.

With numerous studies indicating the relationship between parenting styles and the parent-child relationship, and relational aggression, this is clearly an area of research that must be investigated to further understand how and why children develop aggressive behavior. To explore a different aspect of how parents contribute to their child’s aggressive behavior, Werner, Senich, and Przepyszny (2006) examined mothers’ responses to hypothetical situations of their child engaging in relational and physical aggression. Eighty-seven mothers of preschool-age children participated in this study. Mothers responded to hypothetical vignettes of their child engaging in either relationally or physically aggressive behaviors and then explained how they would feel about the behavior, and how they would intervene. The mothers’ responses were then classified into intervention strategies and coded into different categories (intervention, nonintervention, removal/distraction, punishment, reprimand, reparations, appeal to feelings, direct involvement, explanation, problem solving, and information seeking). Each mother was then assigned a score based on their responses, which was compared to social behavior scores assigned to the child by teachers. Child social behavior was assessed using the Preschool Social Behavior Scale-Teacher Form (PBS-T; Crick et al., 1997).

The findings indicated that warm, responsive mothers with lower levels of coercion displayed a negative effect when responding to hypothetical displays of relational aggression. Mothers with these kinds of responses had children who were more
socially competent and displayed lower levels of aggressive behavior. This is in contrast to children with mothers who demonstrated less of a negative effect in response to their child’s hypothetical displays of relational aggression. Mothers who felt that relationally aggressive behavior was less hurtful, more normative, and that less of a rule had been broken, had children who displayed higher levels of aggressive behavior. These findings suggest that mothers who do not respond negatively to their child’s display of relational aggression send the message to their children that relational forms of aggression are not that bad and also are acceptable. Also, participants as young as three years old reported to researchers that they believed relational aggression was less hurtful and more acceptable than physical aggression.

The present study aimed to further address the role parents play in their child’s development of relationally aggressive behavior. Specifically, it was hypothesized that how parents respond to their child’s aggressive behavior would either inhibit or encourage future aggressive behavior. Parents who help their child problem-solve prosocially and think critically about how to positively treat others, would have children who are less relationally aggressive than peers whose parents do not use such scaffolding techniques.

The current study was also an investigation of the possible relationships between demographic factors (parent educational level and child gender) and reported child relational aggression. Research has indicated that parents of low socio-economic status often have higher levels of stress, depression, anxiety and often exhibit harsh parenting techniques (Kupersmidt, et al., 1995; Malik et al., 2007; Stefan & Miclea, 2010). As a
result, children suffer many developmental difficulties including aggressive behavior. Low socio-economic status and low parent educational level are often related (Stefan & Miclea, 2010). It was expected that parents with a lower education level would be less likely to engage in constructive conversations with their child about their behavior, they may themselves exhibit relationally aggressive negotiation strategies within the parent/child relationship, modeling the use of this negative behavior.

Child gender was also considered in the current study due to numerous studies reporting girls exhibiting more relationally aggressive behavior, and boys exhibiting more physically aggressive behavior (Burr, Ostrov, Jansen, Cullerton-Sen, & Crick, 2005; Crick, Werner et al., 1999; McEvoy et al., 2003; Nelson, Hart & Jen, 2006). Similarly, it was predicted that parents and teachers would report girls as more relationally aggressive than boys.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The current study aimed to address whether the beliefs of parents about aggression (either it is normal behavior, or it is an abnormal behavior for young children) are related to a child’s relational aggression. Do parents who intervene in their child’s peer conflicts or model prosocial problem-solving skills have children who are less relationally aggressive than their peer counterparts? These questions were addressed by exploring parents’ responses to their child’s relational aggression, and comparing that response to how teachers rate the child’s social skills. Additionally, we examined relations between demographic variables such as age and gender in relational aggression and parents’ reported responses to aggression, as well as differences and similarities between parent and teacher assessments of the child’s prosocial behavior, physical aggression, and relational aggression.

Design

All data were collected through parent and teacher questionnaires and analyzed quantitatively. Correlational and comparative analyses were used to explore associations between parental attitudes/responses toward relational aggression, parent and child gender, and the child's expression of relational aggression.
Participants

Two hundred and twenty-seven parents and ten preschool teachers from five different preschools in the Sacramento area were invited to participate in the present study, with 35 parents and 9 teachers choosing to participate. Two of the preschools from which participants were drawn are privately owned, serving families of varied socio-economic backgrounds, based on the percentage of families receiving state subsidized childcare tuition. The first private school had a total of 13% of students receiving state subsidized tuition, and the second private school had 18% of students receiving state subsidized tuition. The third preschool was a co-operative preschool, with a less diverse population of families. The co-op parents were typically white with a college degree, and many of these participants held an advanced degree beyond a bachelor’s degree. The fourth preschool was a Head Start preschool (federally-funded preschool for low-income families), which served a racially diverse population of parents who typically had lower levels of education.

The resulting sample included 27 mothers and 7 fathers from a total of 29 families. The mean age of responding parents was 36.9 years. Eighty-five percent of participating parents were Caucasian, and the remaining 15% were Hispanic/Latino. 23% of these mothers had only a high school education, 35% held an AA/AS degree, 23% held a BA/BS degree, 12% held MA/MS degrees, and 12% held PhDs or other advanced degrees. Too few fathers returned questionnaires to allow for parent gender comparisons and mother and father data from the same family were therefore combined by creating a mean score from the mother/father data.
Nine preschool teachers also participated in the study by completing assessments on target children in their classrooms. The mean age of teacher participants was 32.0 years, and all 9 teachers were female, 8 were Caucasian and 1 was African American, 7 had an AA degree, and 2 had a BA degree. Target children included 15 boys and 14 girls, ranging in age from 3 to 5 years with a mean age of 3.6 years.

As an incentive, each participating family had their name entered in a raffle with the other participant to win a $25 Target gift card. Teachers who participated also had their names entered in a separate raffle to win a $25 Target gift card.

**Procedure**

At each site a packet was sent home with each family with a child between the ages of 3 to 5 years enrolled in the school. Included in the packet was an introductory letter (see Appendix A) introducing the study; a consent form (Appendix B); a demographic survey (Appendix C); and two questionnaires, the Preschool Social Behavior Scale-Parent Teacher (Appendix D), a rating of the child’s social skills, and the Parental Response to Aggression Scale (Appendix E), which measures how parents feel about their child’s relational aggression and how they respond.

Each parent was invited to complete the consent form and the three different questionnaires. The families were also notified that their participation meant their child’s teacher would be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their child’s social skills.

The teachers at each school received a research packet and were invited to participate in the current study. Included in the teacher’s packet were a recruitment letter.
(see appendix F), a consent form (see appendix G), one demographic survey (see appendix H), and one questionnaire for each participating student in their class (see Appendix I) if there were multiple teachers in a class, the student questionnaires were divided between the teachers.

All parent and teacher questionnaires were coded with corresponding ID numbers to ensure confidentiality as well as to enable the researchers to match parent and teacher data. Included in each parent/teacher packet was an envelope with paid postage and the researcher’s address. Parents and teachers were instructed to mail all questionnaires back to the researcher.

**Measures**

Both parents and teachers were asked to complete questionnaires for this study. The teachers completed two different assessments: a demographic survey (appendix H) and the Preschool Social Behavior Scale -Teacher Form (PSBA-T- see appendix I) for each participating child in their classroom to assess the social skills and relational aggression of the preschool-age children. Parents were asked to fill out three different questionnaires: a demographic survey, the Preschool Social Behavior Scale-Parent Teacher (PSBA-PT- see appendix D), and Parental Response to Aggression Scale (PBA-P- see appendix E).
Demographic Surveys

The demographic survey was used to record teacher age, gender, race, number of years teaching, and education level. Parents completed a similar survey to assess family demographics, including parent age, gender, race, their educational level, and their child’s age, gender, and race.

Teacher Report of Social Skills

The Preschool Social Behavior Scale-Teacher Form (PSBA-T) was used by the preschool teachers to assess each child’s social skills and aggressive behavior. This questionnaire was developed and revised by Crick, Casas, and Mosher (1997) and has shown reliability in numerous studies (Crick 1997; Crick & Werner, 1998; Crick, Werner, & Casas, 1999).

The measure contains 25 statements with a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “never or almost never true,” and 5 being “always true.” There are 6 subscales: relational aggression (e.g., “This child tells peers that he/she won’t play with that peer if unless that peer does what the child asks.”), physical aggression (e.g., “This child hits or kicks peers.”), prosocial behavior (e.g., “This child is good at sharing and taking turns.”) child’s acceptance by same sex peers (e.g., “This child is well liked by same sex peers.”), and child’s acceptance by opposite sex peers (e.g., “This child is well liked by peers of the opposite sex.”).

In order to allow for comparisons between teachers and parents on the children’s social behavior, only items that corresponded to the parent items on the same scale were
used, and only the physical aggression, relational aggression, and prosocial behavior subscales were used. Scale scores were obtained by taking a mean of the relevant items so that the subscale scores were on the 5-point scale. Resulting internal consistency for the scales was good. Cronbach’s Alphas was .89 for relational aggression, .91 for physical aggression and .84 for prosocial behavior.

Parent Report of Social Skills

Similar to teachers, parents filled out the Preschool Social Behavior Scale-Parent Teacher (PSBA-PT) for their child. This instrument also had 6 sub-scales: relational aggression physical aggression, prosocial behavior, child’s acceptance with same sex peers, and child’s acceptance with opposite sex peers. The items are similar to the teacher form and only those items with corresponding teacher items were used in the current study. Scale scores were obtained by taking a mean of the relevant items so that the scores were on the 5-point Likert scale. Resulting internal consistency for the scales was good. Cronbach’s Alphas was .78 for relational aggression, .81 for physical aggression and .75 for prosocial behavior.

Parent Response to Relational Aggression

A modified version of the Parental Response to Aggression-Preschool (PBA-P; Werner et al., 1999) was used to assess parental beliefs and practices related to relational aggression. The original instrument measured feelings/responses of parents to both overt
aggression and relational aggression. The modified version used in the present study included parent beliefs and responses only to relational aggression vignettes.

The PBA-P measure gives hypothetical situations in which a child exhibits relational aggression. The parent is asked to imagine the situation involves his or her child and predict how he or she would react. For example, one such situation states:

Two kids are playing in the dramatic play corner at preschool. Your child approaches them and asks if he/she can join. The kids say no, explaining that there are only two chairs at the table where they are sitting. Your child says, “If you don’t let me play, you can’t come to my birthday party.”

The parent is then asked to explain why she/he thinks his/her child behaved that way, at what age he/she thinks a child should know this behavior is hurtful to others, what he/she would do or say if they witnessed a situation like this numerous times, and what he/she might accomplish by intervening.

For each of the four vignettes, several questions are rated on a Likert scale of 1-to-7 (1 being “not common at all”, and 7 being “extremely common”). Parents rate how common this behavior is among children of this age, if they think their child was acting badly/improperly, if their child knows they are acting badly/improperly, and how likely it was that that their child was intentionally trying to harm their peer, how likely it was that their child would act similarly in the future. Ratings from Likert questions across each of the vignettes were combined into a single score by taking a mean of the items.

**Coding for Open-Ended Responses**

For the vignette portion of PBA-P, responses to child behaviors were coded using a coding scheme developed by Werner and Casas (1999). Four different constructs were
coded on a 1 to 3 scale by the researcher. A score of three reflected a high level of involvement/interaction/discussion/collaboration/or power assertion by the parent in that specific construct. A score of 2, or 1 indicated a lower level of interaction by the parent.

The first construct was “discussion”, which measured the extent to which the parent engaged in discussion with the target child about the specific social problem/conflict, consequences, emotions and solutions. The second construct was “encouragement”, which measured the extent the parent encourages the target child to engage in ongoing, positive play with peers. The third construct was “power assertion”, which measured the extent to which the parent used her authority in attempt to change the target child’s behavior. The fourth construct was “rule violation”, which measured the extent to which the parent communicated clearly to the child through words or actions that his/her behavior violated a social or moral convention. To assess observer agreement, six of the open-ended protocols were coded by a second coder and compared. Resulting Weighted Kappas ranged from .57 to .84.

**Analytical Plan**

Data were analyzed using correlational and comparative analysis. First, we examined associations between demographic variables (parent age, parent education, child gender, child age) and parent responses to relational aggression and parents’ and teachers’ ratings of aggression and prosocial behavior. Next, we compared parent ratings of child behavior (prosocial skills, relational aggression, and physical aggression) with teacher ratings of the same child’s behavior (prosocial skills, relational aggression, and
physical aggression), using correlations and paired-t analyses. Finally, correlational analyses were used to measure possible associations between parent’s reported beliefs about their child’s aggressive behavior and their reported intervention strategies, and parental reports of intervention strategies with their child’s use of relationally aggressive behavior as reported by teachers.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

The present study aimed to answer the following questions: (a) What are the differences and similarities between parents’ and teachers’ reports of a child’s relational aggression? (b) Are there associations between demographic variables and incidence of relational aggression and parents’ responses to relational aggression? and; (c) Are parent reported beliefs and intervention strategies toward relational aggression associated with the child’s level/use of relational aggression as reported by the teacher? These questions were addressed through the use of t-tests and correlational analyses.

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses were conducted to create composite variables and to test associations between demographic variables and parent response and social behavior scores. Several of the parental response variables were intercorrelated. First, parents’ use of discussion and encouragement in response to relational aggression were significantly correlated, $r(20) = .79, p = .001$. Parents’ reported use of power assertion and rule violation were similarly correlated, $r(13) = .84, p = .001$. Therefore, discussion and encouragement ratings were combined into a reasoning composite and power assertion and rule violation were similarly combined and into a restrictive response composite. Further, many parental views variables were also intercorrelated. Parental view of aggressive behavior as normal behavior was correlated with the parental view of the behavior as being stable, $r(30) = .70, p < .0001$. Therefore normal and stable ratings were combined
into a *typical* composite. Also, parent rating of relationally aggressive behavior as intentional behavior was correlated ratings of child knowledge of the behavior as harmful, $r(30) = .52, p = .003$. Therefore the two ratings were combined into an *intentional* composite.

Next, associations between family and child demographics and study variables were examined. Because previous research on aggression indicates sex differences in aggression, independent t-tests were used to examine sex differences in both parents’ and teachers’ ratings. These analyses indicated a significant difference in the scores parents gave to boys ($M = 1.92, SD = .71$) and girls ($M = 1.35, SD = .42$) when rating physical aggression ($F = 12.02, p = .002$), indicating that parents rated boys significantly higher on physical aggression than they did girls. No other significant sex differences were found in the ratings of aggression or prosocial behavior.

Next, correlations were computed to test for associations between study variables and parent and child age. The only significant correlation with child age was in relational aggression in that older children were rated as higher in relational aggression by parents ($r = .48, p = .008$). There was not sufficient variability in ethnicity to conduct comparisons in the current study, and there were no other significant associations with demographic variables and study outcome.
Comparisons Between Parents’ and Teachers’ Ratings of Social Behavior

The second research question addressed in this study was whether there is an association between parents’ and teachers’ reports of the child’s prosocial skills, physical aggression, and relational aggression. We compared teachers’ reports of physical aggression, relational aggression, and prosocial behavior with the scores reported by parents. A series of paired t-tests and Pearson correlations revealed significant differences and associations between the parents’ and teachers’ ratings of physical aggression and relational aggression. As shown in Table 1, the mean score for parents’ ratings of physical aggression was 1.60 on a 5-point scale, and the teachers’ mean score was 2.10, with teachers rating children significantly higher in physical aggression ($t = -2.52, p = .02$). For relational aggression, the mean score for parents was 1.70, and this was significantly less than the teachers’ mean score of 2.24 ($t = 2.48, p = .02$). These findings show that parents’ rated their child’s physical and relational aggression significantly lower than the teachers did. Also shown in Table 1, correlations analyses revealed that parents’ and teachers’ scores of prosocial behavior were significantly positively correlated ($r = .63, p = .003$).
Table 1


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Behavior</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
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<td>Prosocial</td>
<td>3.77 (.46)</td>
<td>3.85 (.61)</td>
<td>-.76</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>1.60 (.54)</td>
<td>2.10 (.91)</td>
<td>-2.52*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>1.70 (.64)</td>
<td>2.24 (.96)</td>
<td>-2.48*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05  **p<.01

Note: because of missing data, there were only 20 families for which both parent and teacher ratings were available.

Parents’ Responses to Relational Aggression and Children’s Relational Aggression

The final question asked in this study was whether relational aggression can be predicted by parents’ reported beliefs and practices about a young child’s relationally aggressive behavior. To examine this question, Pearson correlations were conducted between parents’ beliefs ratings, and the teachers’ and parents’ ratings of aggressive and prosocial behavior. As shown in Table 2, parents who viewed relational aggression as more typical/normal had children with lower parent-rated prosocial skills ($r = -.47, p = .012$), and higher rated physical aggression ($r = .68, p = .001$) and relational aggression ($r$
.60, \( p = .001 \). Conversely, children whose parents viewed relationally aggressive behavior as improper rated their child higher in prosocial skills (\( r = .40, p = .036 \)).

Correlations were also conducted between codes of parents’ reported practices related to relational aggression in the vignettes and ratings of children’s social behavior outcomes. As shown in Table 2, children whose parents had more restrictive responses to their child’s behavior had significantly higher teacher reports of physical aggression (\( r = .50, p < .05 \)), and relational aggression (\( r = .60, p < .05 \)).
Table 2

Pearson Correlations Between Parental Responses to Relational Aggression and Children’s Social Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Response Variables</th>
<th>Social Behavior</th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent Report</td>
<td>Teacher Report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prosocial</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Prosocial</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Relational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical</td>
<td>-.47*</td>
<td>.68**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentional</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.21</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improper</td>
<td>.40*</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.24</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrictive Response</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.50*</td>
<td>.60*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasoning</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05   **p<.01
Chapter 5
DISCUSSION

The main purpose of the current study was to address whether parental beliefs and/or intervention strategies about their child’s aggressive behavior are related to their child’s use of relational aggression with peers. Specifically, it was predicted that parents who modeled prosocial skills, intervened during peer conflict and provided positive scaffolding for their child, and thoroughly explained consequences of negative behavior would have children who were rated by teachers as less relationally aggressive and more prosocial. Conversely, it was predicted that parents who viewed relational aggression as normal behavior, did not encourage prosocial skills by providing examples, techniques, or scaffolding would have children who were rated by teachers as more relationally aggressive and less prosocial. In addition, the current study examined whether there were associations between study variables and demographic variables, and compared parents’ and teachers’ ratings of children’s prosocial and aggressive behavior.

There were some significant findings from this study related to demographic variables and the children’s social behavior. Namely, parents and teachers alike consistently rated boys as more physically aggressive than girls. This could be because the boys in this study were actually more physically aggressive, or it could be that the parents and teachers had a biased view of how boys should behave. However, in many studies boys are typically rated as more physically aggressive than girls (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Crick, 1996; Crick, Ostrov & Werner, 2006).
Also, child age was predictive of relational aggression. Parents rated older children as more relationally aggressive. This finding may be attributed to the development of social and linguistic skills that come with age. In general, children who express relational aggression do so more with age (Burr, Ostrov, Jansen, Cullerton-Sen, & Crick, 2005; Crick, Sebanc, 2003; Werner et al., 1999).

When comparing differences in parent/teacher ratings of the child social skills, results revealed that parents rated their child significantly lower on both physical and relational aggression than teachers did. There was a significant correlation between parent and teacher ratings of prosocial skills, but no associations for ratings of aggression. These findings are consistent with previous research by Casas et al. (2006) who also found little agreement among parent and teacher reports on relational aggression. It may be that teachers are more accurate reporters of social skills because they are privy to observations of children in a social environment with peers more often than parents are, or it could be the school context itself that produces more aggression. However, it is challenging to draw clear conclusions from this finding given the absence of observational data. If researchers observed children in their social setting, it would be clearer whether the teacher measurements of relational aggression were accurate.

An interesting finding was that parents who viewed relational aggression as a typical/normal behavior rated their child as lower in prosocial skills, and higher in physical and relational aggression. Additionally, parents who believed relational aggression was a negative/unacceptable behavior rated their children higher in prosocial skills. This finding supports the hypothesis that parents who believe relational aggression
is normal, and not negative, may have children who show more relational aggression. Further, it is possible that if parents view aggressive behavior as normal for young children, they may also be more comfortable reporting their child’s aggressive behavior, whereas parents who view aggressive behavior as abnormal may view it as bad or taboo, and would therefore be less likely to report their child’s aggressive behavior.

It was also hypothesized that there would be an association between parental reported intervention strategies and the child’s level of relational aggression. In the current study restrictive/controlling responses to child relational aggression was correlated with higher levels of physical aggression as reported by teacher. This adds support to the results of previous research conducted by Nelson, Hart and Jen (2006), and Park et al. (2005) who found that authoritarian parenting styles characterized by negativity, psychological control, and physical control were risk factors for children to later display physical and relational aggression. This could be because children will often use skills modeled by their parents in their social world. If parents socialize their child through negative means (psychological and physical control), they are not actually providing their child with any prosocial skills. Even if they are telling their child to be kind and empathetic, what the child will most likely learn is how the parent is problem solving and communicating with them, through highly negative means.

Overall, findings from the present study indicate that parental beliefs and responses to child relational aggression are linked to aggressive outcomes for the child. Parents who believe relational aggression is a serious and negative behavior, and respond to the negative behavior through discussion and support may increase the likelihood that
the child will learn prosocial behaviors. Children whose parents who do not believe relational aggression is negative, or who respond in a controlling manner that does not provide the child with alternative/positive problem-solving techniques, are more aggressive and may have future social-emotional maladjustment.

Limitations

There were numerous limitations to the present study. First, the small sample size was relatively homogenous and unrepresentative of a diverse group of parents. The number of parent participants was very limited with a total of 35. With a limited sample size it is not possible to generalize the findings. Finding a way to get a larger response rate from a diverse SES population of parents is important for future research because it may indicate specific risk factors for childhood relational aggression. In the present study only 7 fathers agreed to participate, and their data were combined with mothers or eliminated from the analyses, limiting generalizability even further. The low response rate of fathers is very problematic as well when trying to understand all aspects of the development of this negative behavior.

Another limitation to the present study was the data collection technique. With only parent and teacher report of behavior, we had to rely on the accuracy of parent and teachers’ perceptions of child behavior. Having unbiased observers also collect data would provide a more accurate measure of the child’s behavior, and also would help measure the dichotomy between parent and teacher beliefs. Supplementing such reports with interviews by researchers and observations of child behavior and parent-child
interactions would have been ideal. It would have increased the reliability and
generalizability of data as well as the amount of data to be analyzed. Due to financial and
time constraints, this was not possible.

Further, it should be noted that parents provided data on both their responses to
hypothetical situations of aggressive behavior and ratings of their child’s social behavior
and aggression. In some cases, there were only associations between parent reports. This
association could simply be an artifact of the respondent rather than an actual relationship
between these constructs.

Finally, much of the reported findings were based on correlational analyses.
Correlations only show associations or relationships between variables, but do not rule
out other possible factors that could affect the outcome. It is impossible to say that
because this study found associations between parent beliefs and intervention strategies
and relational aggression, that it is a causal relationship. The small number of participants
also made more sophisticated multivariate analyses impossible.

**Future Research**

The study of relational aggression is still relatively new. However, current
research (as well as the present study) indicates links between parenting belief and
practice and children’s relational aggression. Previous research indicates that relational
aggression is serious and can have a dramatic impact on child outcome, and needs to be
aggressively researched in the future. Continuing to explore predictors of relational
aggression in young children, such as parental factors, is imperative for understanding
this negative behavior, and ultimately better educating parents and teachers who are modeling social behavior for young children.

Longitudinal studies examining multiple factors in the development of relational aggression such as mother/father role, the role of siblings, and peers environments can more thoroughly answer questions about this negative behavior. With more time and resources it is possible to focus on the effect each of these different variables have on childhood relational aggression.

Expanding the measurement of relational aggression to include interviews and observations, with a more culturally diverse sample will also give more valid, generalizable, and conclusive findings. Future research questions should include multiple predictors of aggressive behavior. For example, instead of simply examining the effect of parenting practices on relational aggression, a combinatory effect of peer, sibling, and teacher relationship should also be investigated. Human relationships and behavior are complex in nature and therefore need to be analyzed in the same way. Educating parents and teachers with specific intervention strategies and alternative problem solving techniques they can use with young children is critical. These intervention tools for childhood relational aggression must also be further researched and made accessible to families in the community.
Appendices
Dear Parents,

My name is Jamison Harnish. I am a preschool teacher and a graduate student in the Child Development department at CSUS. I am inviting you to participate in my Master’s thesis research project that is investigating social and behavioral patterns of preschool aged children. This study involves completing 3 questionnaires. If you are a member of a dual-parent family, one or both parent may participate. However, both parents will receive a packet. The questions you will be asked to answer are about your child’s social behavior. For example, “Your child is good at sharing and taking turns.” If you decide to participate it will take approximately 30-45 minutes of your time, and you will be contributing immensely to an important and growing body of research. In addition, every parent participant will have their name entered into a raffle for a $25 Target gift card as compensation. If you choose to participate in this study, no information that identifies you or your child will be published or shared with anyone. The findings will be reported in a general, non-specific manner.

Thank you so much for your time and support!!! Please remember to send your signed consent, along with the 3 completed questionnaires in the stamped addressed envelope, and keep a copy of the informed consent for your personal records. If you have any questions please contact me at (xxx)xxx-xxxx or jamisonharnish8@hotmail.com

Sincerely,
Jamison Harnish
You are being asked to participate in research conducted by Jamison Harnish, a graduate student in Child Development at California State University, Sacramento. The purpose of this study is to investigate social behavior of preschool age children. After supplying minimal demographic information, you will be asked to complete two other questionnaires. The first questionnaire will ask you to rate your child’s social skills on a scale from 1 (never true) to 5 (always true). The second questionnaire provides you with hypothetical situations your child could be involved in with peers. You will then be asked to give your response to those hypothetical situations. The nature of these questions relates to peer conflict and social/behavioral challenges of preschool age children. It is estimated that your participation will take approximately 30-45 minutes of your time. If you agree to participate your child's teacher will also be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding your child’s behavior. There are minimal risks associated with your participation. Participating in this study may be beneficial to you, or it may be upsetting. If you have any real concerns regarding your child’s behavior or parenting techniques, please consult your child’s pediatrician, preschool teacher, or this website: http://www.new.onetoughjob.org. You are free to decide to not participate, or to stop participating at a later time without any consequences.

All results from both teachers and parent will be kept confidential. Please do not put your name or your child’s name on any of the questionnaires. All questionnaires and consent forms will be stored separately by the researcher in a locked cabinet for three years, after which time all data will be destroyed. All participants will have their names entered in a raffle for a $25 Target gift card as compensation. The recipient of the gift card will be notified after all data are collected. If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Jamison Harnish at (xxx)xxx-xxxx or jamisonharnish8@hotmail.com. By signing below you are saying that you have read this paper and agree to participate in study described.

Signature of Participant __________________________ Date __________________________
APPENDIX C
Demographic Survey-Parent

ID #_______

Today’s Date___________

Your Age?__________

Your gender?  Male or female  Your child’s age? ________

Your child’s gender? Male or female

Your race or ethnicity? _________________________

Your child’s race or ethnicity? _________________________

Your education level? (circle one)

High school diploma/GED
AA or AS degree
Some college beyond AA/AS degree
BA or BS degree
MA or MS degree
Ph.D./J.D. or other doctoral degree
### APPENDIX D
Parent Measure-1

**Preschool Social Behavior Scale – Parent**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Id #</th>
<th>Child’s sex: ________</th>
<th>Child’s Age ________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Your child is good at sharing and taking turns
   - Never or almost never true
   - Not often
   - Sometimes
   - Often
   - Always or almost always true
2. Your child ignores a peer or refuses to listen (e.g. may cover his/her ears) if he/she is mad at the peer.
   - Never or almost never true
   - Not often
   - Sometimes
   - Often
   - Always or almost always true
3. Your child calls others mean names.
   - Never or almost never true
   - Not often
   - Sometimes
   - Often
   - Always or almost always true
4. Your child kicks or hits others.
   - Never or almost never true
   - Not often
   - Sometimes
   - Often
   - Always or almost always true
5. Your child is helpful to peers.
   - Never or almost never true
   - Not often
   - Sometimes
   - Often
   - Always or almost always true
6. Your child tells a peer that he/she won’t play with that peer or be that peer’s friend unless he/she does what Your child asks.
   - Never or almost never true
   - Not often
   - Sometimes
   - Often
   - Always or almost always true
7. Your child verbally threatens to hit or beat up other children.
   - Never or almost never true
   - Not often
   - Sometimes
   - Often
   - Always or almost always true
8. Your child gives mean looks to others to make them feel bad.
   - Never or almost never true
   - Not often
   - Sometimes
   - Often
   - Always or almost always true
9. Your child is kind to peers.
   - Never or almost never true
   - Not often
   - Sometimes
   - Often
   - Always or almost always true
10. Your child pushes or shoves other children.
    - Never or almost never true
    - Not often
    - Sometimes
    - Often
    - Always or almost always true
11. Your child tells others not to play with or be a peer’s friend.
    - Never or almost never true
    - Not often
    - Sometimes
    - Often
    - Always or almost always true
12. Your child makes faces at kids he/she is mad at.
    - Never or almost never true
    - Not often
    - Sometimes
    - Often
    - Always or almost always true
13. Your child says or does nice things for other kids.
    - Never or almost never true
    - Not often
    - Sometimes
    - Often
    - Always or almost always true
14. When mad at a peer, your child keeps that peer from being in the play group.
    - Never or almost never true
    - Not often
    - Sometimes
    - Often
    - Always or almost always true
<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Your child verbally threatens to physically harm another peer in order to get what your child wants.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Your child tells a peer they won’t be invited to their birthday party unless he/she does what your child wants.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Your child sticks out his/her tongue at a kid when he/she doesn’t like what the kid is doing.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Your child throws things at others when he/she doesn’t get his/her own way.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Your child walks away or turns his/her back when he/she is mad at another peer.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Your child verbally threatens to push a peer off a toy (e.g. tricycle, play horse) or ruin what the peer is working on (e.g. building blocks) unless that peer shares.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Your child tries to get others to dislike a peer (e.g. by whispering mean things about the peer behind the peer’s back).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Your child puts others down by insulting them.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Your child verbally threatens to keep a peer out of the play group if the peer doesn’t do what your child says.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Your child hurts other children by pinching them.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Your child is well liked by peers of the <strong>same</strong> sex.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Your child is well liked by peers of the <strong>opposite</strong> sex.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Your child is disliked by peers of the <strong>same</strong> sex.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Your child is disliked by peers of the <strong>opposite</strong> sex.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**APPENDIXE**

**Parent Measure-2**

Id ____________

**Parents’ Responses to Preschoolers’ Behavior**

**Instructions:** Please read the following descriptions of children’s behavior. As you read them, try to imagine vividly that the things in the story have just happened. Then answer the questions below. Some questions ask for your opinion by circling the single best number on the scale after the question. Other questions require that you write out your response. Please provide as much detail as you can on these questions. Your answers are important to us! Remember, all of the questions refer to your child’s behavior.

Two kids are playing in the dramatic play corner at preschool. Your child approaches them and asks if he/she can join. The kids say no, explaining that there are only two chairs at the table where they are sitting. Your child says, “If you don’t let me play, you can’t come to my birthday party.”

1. **Why** do you think your child behaved in this way? (please describe)

2. In general, how typical or common is your child’s behavior among children of this age?

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
   1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  |
   Not at all common |   |   |   |   |   | Extremely common |

3. **Do you think** your child is acting badly or improperly?

<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
   1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  |
   Definitely NO |   |   |   |   |   | Definitely YES |
4. **Does your child think** (or know) that he/she is acting badly or improperly?

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Definitely **NO**                  **YES**

5. **How likely is it that your child was trying to harm** the peer in the situation?

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not at all; this was an accident
   Very likely; my child acted intentionally and hurtfully

6. **At what age do most children** understand that this type of behavior might be hurtful to others? Please write in the age _____

7. **How likely is it that your child would behave in a similar way in this kind of situation in the future?**

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not at all likely; this is definitely a temporary stage
   Extremely likely that my child will act in this way in the future

8. **How would you feel** if you saw your child act this way several times in a row? (please describe)

9. **How important** is it for you to respond to this behavior?

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not at all important
   Extremely important
10. What would you do or say, if anything, if you witnessed this situation happen several times in a row? (please describe)

11. What would you hope to accomplish by handling the situation in this way? (please describe)
Your child is playing with a classmate on the playground. Another child from the class approaches them and asks to join their play. Your child says, “Let’s not let him/her play,” and both children turn away from the peer.

12. Why do you think your child behaved in this way? (please describe)

13. In general, how typical or common is your child’s behavior among children of this age?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all common
Extremely common

14. Do you think your child is acting badly or improperly?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Definitely NO
Definitely YES

15. Does your child think (or know) that he/she is acting badly or improperly?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Definitely NO
Definitely YES

16. How likely is it that your child was trying to harm the peer in the situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all; this was an accident
Very likely; my child acted intentionally and hurtfully
17. At what age do most children understand that this type of behavior might be hurtful to others? Please write in the age: _____

18. How likely is it that your child would behave in a similar way in this kind of situation in the future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all likely; this is definitely a temporary stage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely likely that my child will act in this way in the future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. How would you feel if you saw your child act this way several times in a row? (please describe)

20. How important is it for you to respond to this behavior?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21. What would you do or say, if anything, if you witnessed this situation happen several times in a row? (please describe)

22. What would you hope to accomplish by handling the situation in this way? (please describe)
Your child and another child in the classroom are playing with blocks together. The child knocks down your child’s tower. Your child says, “I’m not your friend anymore.”

23. Why do you think your child behaved in this way? (please describe)

24. In general, how typical or common is your child’s behavior among children of this age?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all common
Extremely common

25. Do you think your child is acting badly or improperly?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Definitely NO
Definitely YES

26. Does your child think (or know) that he/she is acting badly or improperly?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Definitely NO
Definitely YES

27. How likely is it that your child was trying to harm the peer in the situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all; this was an accident
Very likely; my child acted intentionally and hurtfully

28. At what age do most children understand that this type of behavior might be hurtful to others?

Please write in the age ______
Your child and another child in the classroom are playing with blocks together. The child knocks down your child’s tower. Your child says, “I’m not your friend anymore.”

29. Why do you think your child behaved in this way? (please describe)

30. In general, how typical or common is your child’s behavior among children of this age?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all common</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely common</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

31. Do you think your child is acting badly or improperly?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definitely NO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Definitely YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

32. Does your child think (or know) that he/she is acting badly or improperly?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definitely NO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Definitely YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

33. How likely is it that your child was trying to harm the peer in the situation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all; this was an accident</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Very likely; my child acted intentionally and hurtfully</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34. At what age do most children understand that this type of behavior might be hurtful to others? Please write in the age _____
35. **How would you feel** if you saw your child act this way several times in a row?  
(please describe)

36. **How important** is it for you to respond to this behavior?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

37. What would you **do or say**, if anything, if you witnessed this situation happen several times in a row?  
(please describe)

38. **What would you hope to accomplish** by handling the situation in this way?  
(please describe)
39. What would you do or say, if anything, if this situation really happened?

40. How likely is it that your child would behave in a similar way in this kind of situation in the future?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all likely; this is definitely a temporary stage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely likely that my child will act in this way in the future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

41. **How would you feel** if you saw your child act this way several times in a row? (please describe)

42. How **important** is it for you to respond to this behavior?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Extremely important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

43. What would you **do or say**, if anything, if you witnessed this situation happen several times in a row? (please describe)
44. **What would you hope to accomplish** by handling the situation in this way? (please describe)

45. What would you do or say, if anything, if this situation really happened?

46. How likely is it that your child would behave in a similar way in this kind of situation in the future?

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not at all likely; this is definitely a temporary stage
   Extremely likely that my child will act in this way in the future

47. **How would you feel** if you saw your child act this way several times in a row? (please describe)

48. How **important** is it for you to respond to this behavior?

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7
   Not at all important
   Extremely important
49. What would you do or say, if anything, if you witnessed this situation happen several times in a row? (please describe)

50. **What would you hope to accomplish** by handling the situation in this way? (please describe)

51. What would you do or say, if anything, if this situation really happened?
The children are working on art projects. Your child says to the child sitting next to him/her, “If you don’t give me the red paint, I won’t be your best friend.”

52. Why do you think your child behaved in this way? (please describe)

53. In general, how typical or common is your child’s behavior among children of this age?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all common Extremely common

54. Do you think your child is acting badly or improperly?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Definitely NO Definitely YES

55. Does your child think (or know) that he/she is acting badly or improperly?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Definitely NO Definitely YES

56. How likely is it that your child was trying to harm the peer in the situation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all; this was an accident Very likely; my child acted intentionally and hurtfully

57. At what age do most children understand that this type of behavior might be hurtful to others?
   Please write in the age _____
58. How likely is it that your child would behave in a similar way in this kind of situation in the future?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7
Not at all likely; this is definitely a temporary stage
Extremely likely that my child will act in this way in the future

59. How would you feel if you saw your child act this way several times in a row? (please describe)

60. How important is it for you to respond to this behavior?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7
Not at all important
Extremely important

61. What would you do or say, if anything, if you witnessed this situation happen several times in a row? (please describe)
62. What would you hope to accomplish by handling the situation in this way? (please describe)

63. How likely is it that your child would behave in a similar way in this kind of situation in the future?

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Not at all likely; this is definitely a temporary stage
Extremely likely that my child will act in this way in the future

64. How would you feel if you saw your child act this way several times in a row? (please describe)

65. How important is it for you to respond to this behavior?

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7
Not at all important
Extremely important
66. What would you do or say, if anything, if you witnessed this situation happen several times in a row? (please describe)

67. What would you hope to accomplish by handling the situation in this way? (please describe)

68. How likely is it that your child would behave in a similar way in this kind of situation in the future?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all likely; this is definitely a temporary stage
Extremely likely that my child will act in this way in the future

69. How would you feel if you saw your child act this way several times in a row? (please describe)

70. How important is it for you to respond to this behavior?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7
Not at all important
Extremely important
71. What would you do or say, if anything, if you witnessed this situation happen several times in a row? (please describe)

72. What would you hope to accomplish by handling the situation in this way? (please describe)
APPENDIX F
Recruitment Letter-Teacher

Dear teachers, My name is Jamison Harnish. I am a preschool teacher and a graduate student in the Child Development department at CSUS. I am inviting you to participate in my Master’s thesis research project which is investigating social and behavioral patterns of preschool aged children. This study involves completing 2 different kinds of questionnaires. One is a demographic survey, and the other is a questionnaire about your students’ social behavior. However, it is possible that you may be asked to fill out multiple questionnaires for different students. You may choose to fill out questionnaires for some of your students and not others. If you decide to participate it will take approximately 5-to-10 minutes of your time for each survey, and you will be contributing immensely to an important and growing body of research. In addition, every teacher participant will have his or her name entered into a raffle for a $25 Target gift card as compensation. If you choose to participate in this study, no information that identifies you or your student’s will be published or shared with anyone. The findings will be reported in a general, non-specific manner. Your name will only appear on the consent form that you sign (for your protection and mine) prior to filling out the questionnaires.

Thank you so much for your time and support!!! Please remember to send your signed consent, along with the 2 completed questionnaires in the stamped addressed envelope. And keep a copy of the informed consent for your personal records.

Sincerely,

Jamison Harnish

*If you have any questions please contact me at (xxx)xxx-xxxx or jamisonharnish8@hotmail.com
APPENDIX G
Consent To Participate In Research-Teacher

You are being asked to participate in research that will be conducted by Jamison Harnish who is a graduate student in Child Development at California State University, Sacramento. The purpose of this study is to investigate social behavior of preschool age children as viewed by parents and teachers. After supplying demographic information, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding your preschool age student’s social and behavioral skills. You will be asked to answer the questions by using a scale from 1 (never true) -to- 5 (always true). It is possible that you will have to fill out multiple questionnaires for multiple students. Parents may choose to participate even if you choose to not fill out questionnaires for that child. It is estimated that each questionnaire will only take 5-to-10 minutes of your time. However, you may choose to fill out questionnaires for some of your students and not others. Your information will contribute to the better understanding of young children’s social interactions, providing insights for early childhood educators. Although there are minimal risks associated with parents participation, there are few risks are anticipated with teacher participation. It may actually be beneficial for you to think about your student’s social behavior in a focused way, or it may not. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, and you may discontinue participation at any time. All results obtained in this study will be confidential. Please do not put your name on any of the questionnaires. Questionnaires and consent forms will be stored separately by the researcher in a locked cabinet for three years, at which time all data will be destroyed. All teacher participants will have their names entered in a raffle for a $25 Target gift card as compensation. The recipient of the gift card will be notified after all data are collected. If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Jamison Harnish at (xxx)xxx-xxxxjamisonharnish8@hotmail.com

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate, or to decide to stop participating at a later time without any consequences. By signing below, you are saying that you have read this paper and agree to participate in the study described.

____________________________________________________
Signature of Participant

Date
APPENDIX H
Demographic Survey-Teacher

ID #____

1. Your age? __________

2. Your gender? Male or female

3. Your race or ethnicity? ________

4. How many years have you been teaching at the preschool level? __________

5. How many long have you been teaching at this center? __________

6. Your educational level? (circle one)

   High school diploma/GED

   AA or AS degree

   Some college beyond AA/AS degree

   BA or BS degree

   MA or MS degree

   Ph.D./J.D. or other doctoral degree
## APPENDIX I

Teacher Survey

### Preschool Social Behavior Scale – Teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Id #</th>
<th>Child’s sex: _______</th>
<th>Child’s Age: _______</th>
<th>Never or almost never true</th>
<th>Not often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Almost always true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. This child is good at sharing and taking turns

2. This child kicks or hits others.

3. This child is helpful to peers.

4. This child tells a peer that he/she won’t play with that peer or be that peer’s friend unless he/she does what this child asks.

5. This child verbally threatens to hit or beat up other children.

6. This child is kind to peers.

7. This child pushes or shoves other children.

8. This child tells others not to play with or be a peer’s friend.

9. This child doesn’t have much fun.

10. This child says or does nice things for other kids.

11. When mad at a peer, this child keeps that peer from being in the play group.

12. This child verbally threatens to physically harm another peer in order to get what they want.

13. This child tries to embarrass peers by making fun of them in front of other children.

14. This child ruins other peer’s things (e.g. art projects, toys) when he/she is upset.
<p>| | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>This child tells a peer they won’t be invited to their birthday party unless he/she does what the child wants.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>This child looks sad.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>This child throws things at others when he/she doesn’t get his/her own way.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>This child smiles at other kids.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>This child walks away or turns his/her back when he/she is mad at another peer.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>This child verbally threatens to push a peer off a toy (e.g. tricycle, play horse) or ruin what the peer is working on (e.g. building blocks) unless that peer shares.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>This child tries to get others to dislike a peer (e.g. by whispering mean things about the peer behind the peer’s back).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>This child verbally threatens to keep a peer out of the play group if the peer doesn’t do what the child says.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>This child hurts other children by pinching them.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>This child is well liked by peers of the <strong>same</strong> sex.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>This child is well liked by peers of the <strong>opposite</strong> sex.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


