Developmental Dynamics of Peer Contagion Relevant to Intervention Strategies to Reduce Aggression.

*Thomas J. Dishion*
Arizona State University
Prevention Research Center
Department of Psychology

Presented at:
Building Capacity to Reduce Bullying and it’s Impact on Youth Across the Life Course: Institute of Medicine Workshop: April 9 and 10th, 2014
Three Goals of this Talk.

1- To provide an overview of peer group contributions to aggression and violence in children and adolescence.

2- Describe social and peer dynamics that can amplify aggression in peer interaction.

3- Detail implications for peer group interventions that might reduce bullying and aggression.
Figure 1. A developmental cascade model: parenting contributions and amplifying mechanisms.

(Dodge, Greenberg et al, 2008; Dishion & Patterson, in press)
An Overview of the interplay between Micro social and Macro social Dynamics and the Development of Antisocial Behavior.

(Dishion, 2014)
Three Basic Mechanisms Underlying Amplification of Aggression in Peer Interaction.

- **Coercion**: Negative Reinforcement (escape conditioning) for peer aggression (Patterson, Littman et al, 1967).

- **Contagion (deviancy training)**: Mutual positive reinforcement for antisocial talk and behavior among peers (Dishion, Spracklen et al, 1995; Snyder et al, 2005).

- **Coercive joining**: Aggressive youth joining on aggression achieving status by formation of ‘gang’ (Dishion & Van Ryzin, 2010; Van Ryzin and Dishion, 2012).
The Coercion Model and Escape Conditioning

(Patterson, Littman et al 1967; Patterson, 1982)
Deviancy Training as Portrayed in the Popular Media
Deviancy Training Among Peers

Child deviant talk

Child escalates story

Peer laughs

Peer deviant

Time 1 2 3 4

(Dishion, Spracklen et al, 1995; Snyder, Schrepferman et al, 2005)
Measurement of Deviancy Training for Prediction

(30 minutes of Videotape).
Longitudinal Stability of Deviant Training in Adolescent Friendships
(from Dishion & Owen, 2002)

Deviancy Training (Age 13–14) → Deviancy Training (Age 17–18)

.53∗
Peers and the Emergence of Antisocial Behavior in Middle Childhood.

Dishion, 2014
Predicting Early Adolescent Female Gang Involvement
(Dishion, Nelson, & Yasui, 2004)

Age 11-12

- Antisocial Behavior
- Peer Rejection
- Peer Acceptance
- Academic Grades

Gang Involvement Age 13-14

Correlations:
- Antisocial Behavior: .29*
- Peer Rejection: .22*
- Peer Acceptance: - .39*
Predicting Early Adolescent Male Gang Involvement
(Dishion, Nelson, & Yasui, 2004)

- Antisocial Behavior: .45*
- Peer Rejection: .23*
- Peer Acceptance: .22*
- Academic Grades: -.25*

Gang Involvement Age 13-14
Overview of Model to be Tested

(Dishion & Van Ryzin, 2010; Van Ryzin & Dishion, 2012)
The Cycle of Status and Serious Aggression

Djikstra, Lindbergh et al 2010
Moderators of Peer Influence on Antisocial Behavior and Aggression.

- **Self-regulation**: Youth with higher levels of self-regulation and lower impulsivity are less influenced (Gardner et al. 2008; Goodnight, Bates et al., 2006).

- **Peer rejection**: Youth with a history of peer rejection tend to be more influenced by peer norms (Dishion, Patterson et al., 1991; Snyder, McCeachern et al., 2007).

- **False consensus**: Youth who perceive that peers endorse the deviant norms or more influence by peers (Prinstein, 2007).

- **Adult structure and supervision**: Reduced contagion when adults who skillfully monitor and/or structure peer environments (Kellam, Ling et al., 1998; Laird, Criss et al., 2008).
Interventions that support adult involvement, positive relationships and group management skills are likely to have positive effects on problem behavior as well as reduce peer contagion and coercion.

Instilling non aggressive norms in the context of schools are likely to have positive effects.

More attention needs to be paid on preventing the self-organization of youth into ‘gangs’ that promote aggression and victimization, and these interventions need to start in childhood.