



## Maternal Peer Management 2

### Abstract

The present study will examine how maternal stress and the amount of time a child spends in child care may influence the mother's ability to facilitate peer encounters for her child. Mothers of 38 preschool children completed a daily peer log for five consecutive nights that asked questions about maternal facilitation of peer encounters for their child. The mothers also completed " The Hassles and Uplifts Scale " each night. The subjects were placed into categories according to the amount of time the child spent in child care per week. Results showed that mothers with children in the full-time child care group responded less positively to their child's play requests than mothers with children in the part-time/mother care child care group. Total hassle scores and play requests of the child had significant relationships with maternal initiation of peer encounters. Also, child care time and play requests of the child had significant relationships with maternal positive response to peer encounters.

Researchers have expanded their interests to observe the interdependencies of the various influences on a child's peer competence; however, much of this literature examines a child's peer relations at school and has failed to consider the contributions of peer experiences at home ( Asher, Renshaw, and Hymel, 1982; Dodge, 1983). The family is the child's initial social world and plays a very important role in the socialization of children. Today researchers are beginning to look at how the family environment affects the child's social development in other social environments, especially relationships with peers ( Hartup, 1979; Hartup, 1983; Finnie and Russell, 1988; Ladd and Golter ,1988 ; Liberman, 1977 ; MacDonald and Parke, 1984 ; Pettit and Dodge ,1988 ; Putallaz, 1983 ; Rubin and Sloman,1984 ).

Several studies have examined the variety of influences the parents have on their child's peer experiences. Parke and his associates (1988) observed the different parental influences and grouped them into 2 distinct categories: direct influences and indirect influences. The *indirect* family influences are those that "result in an orientation to the social world that generalize overtime and across different situations and interactional systems, including the peer system" (p.19). This means the parents are not purposefully controlling their child's social encounters. A *direct* parental influence is one in which "the parent's goal is explicitly to actively select and structure the child's physical and/or social environment in order to enhance peer relationships" (p.18). In this case, the parents are monitors who control the frequency and quality of their child's peer interactions. Parents use both of these forms of influence daily when interacting with their children.

Although research has been exploring parental effects on children's social behavior for several years, most of the studies have been in the area

of indirect influences. These studies of indirect influences have focused on the quality of the relationship between parent and child, especially with mothers, and how attachment and security may influence a child's social competence. One of the first people to study this relationship was Liberman (1977), who found 3 year old children who had secure attachments with their mothers were more likely to interact more socially than insecurely attached children. Hartup (1979) found similar results in an older population of children and adolescents; secure family relations were more likely to produce socially competent children. Hartup (1983) later wrote that for children to succeed in the peer endeavors there needs to be security within the family conditions. This security should continue throughout childhood and adolescence.

A more recent approach to understanding parental influence is to observe the parents' direct actions with their children. There have been two areas of research looking at the parents' direct behavior with their children. The first area has focused on how parents play with their children. MacDonald and Parke (1984) videotaped fathers and mothers playing with their child to observe the parents' style of play and their control and directiveness during the play session. The results showed that higher social competence among the children was associated with more paternal physical play and maternal verbal responses. The fathers' directiveness was associated with the lower social competence in both boys and girls while the mothers' directiveness had a positive relationship with the girls. Putallaz (1987) compared high social status children's play with their mothers to lower social status children. She found that mothers of high social status children appeared to be more positive and focused on feelings while the mothers of low social status children were more disagreeable and demanding of their child.

The second area studying parental influences examines the way in which parents structure their child's peer experiences. Rubin and Sloman (1984) defined this direct parental influence by giving parents the title of "social managers" for their children. The role as manager has 5 duties: setting the stage, providing a "home" base, modeling, coaching, and arranging social contacts. Rubin and Sloman found that modeling had the more direct influence on the quality of peer encounters while the duty of arranging social contacts had the more direct influence on the frequency of peer interactions.

Other studies have also demonstrated the importance of these managerial duties. For example, Finnie and Russell (1988) did an extensive study on modeling by looking at the mother's supervisory role by determining her social knowledge of how she and her child would act in hypothetical social situations. Modeling is defined as providing an example of how to act in social situations, whether the acts are deliberate or natural. The children were then rated by their classmates with a sociometric status rating. Mothers of high social status children had more skillful and rule-oriented suggestions while the mothers of low social status children gave responses that were inappropriate for the situations.

Another recent study focused on the role of arranging social contacts, which involves the parents supporting or initiating peer interactions outside the school environment through the parents' calling, scheduling, and even transporting for their child. Ladd and Golter (1988) had parents complete a log of their child's peer interactions that required the parents to be actively involved. The study documented that the initiating and monitoring of the parents had an influence on the peer's interactions, such as, less initiating but more direct monitoring resulted in less socially competent children.

All of these studies have shown the importance of family experiences in developing a child's peer competence; however, these studies have failed to study what variables may be affecting the parental influences. This study will focus on two variables that may influence the parent's direct role in their child's peer encounters. These two variables are maternal stress and child care experience.

Previous research has shown that these two variables do have a significant relationship with family experiences. For example, DeLongis, Folkman, and Lazarus (1988) had married couples complete "The Hassles and Uplifts Scale" across 20 assessments over a six month period. The results revealed that higher hassle scores tended to be associated with a decline in health and mood; in turn, this association was reflective in the quality of the married couples' relationships. Another study that focused more on the child care aspects within the family environment was conducted by Belsky and Rovine (1988). They did two longitudinal studies to observe if extensive nonmaternal care in the first year is associated with heightened risk of insecure attachment. They found infants who were exposed to 20 hours or more a week of nonmaternal care were more likely to be classified as insecurely attached.

From this research, parental stress and child care experience do play a role in the family environment. The present study will examine how maternal stress and the amount of time a child spends in child care may influence the mother's ability to facilitate peer encounters for her child. Facilitation will be measured through how the mother supports and initiates peer encounters for her child. We recognize the fact that fathers play an important role in the socialization of children; however, due to time and limited resources, observing only maternal influences was sufficient for this study.

The first objective was to study how different amounts of child care may be associated with different levels of maternal stress and various styles of facilitating peer encounters. I predict that mothers with children in full-time child care will have higher maternal hassle scores due to the fact these mother work. Also, I predict that children enrolled in full-time child care will experience less maternal facilitation of peer encounters due to time constraints and the fact that these children have been around other children all day.

The second factor that will be addressed is how do maternal stress and child care time, in general, affect the number of peer encounters the child has and the mother's facilitation of these peer encounters. If a mother has a high amount of maternal stress, this may reflect in her ability to facilitate her child's peer experiences.

Two other variables will also be considered with maternal stress and child care time: 1) sex of the child and 2) play requests of the child. Boys and girls have been noted to play differently, which may influence how the mother facilitates peer encounters ( MacDonald and Parke,1984.) For the mother to respond or support her child, the child should first request to play with a peer.

## PROCEDURE AND MEASURES

### Subjects

The subjects were the mothers of 38 preschool children, recruited from various child care centers in the Bryan-College Station area. There were 16 3 year-olds ( Mean age of the children = 42.5 months, range = 38 - 47 months ) and 22 4 year-olds ( Mean age of the children = 56.2 months , range = 49 - 59 months ). Among the children, there were 15 females ( 7 were 3 year-olds, 8 were 4 year-olds) and 23 males ( 9 were

3 year-olds, 14 were 4 year-olds). Sixty-eight of the children were from church-based programs, 20% were from middle class daycare centers, 8% were from half-day Montessori schools, and 5% were from arranged home care. The church-based establishments offered both mother day-out programs and full-time child care. Among the mothers, 84% were between the ages of 28-34. Over 90% of the mothers and their children came from two parent families with income levels ranging from middle to upper middle class.

The mothers and their children were placed into one of three categories based on the number of hours the child spent in alternative care during the week. In order to ensure a broad range of child care experiences, subjects were grouped according to Belsky and Rovine's (1988) child care scale. The three groups were full-time experience ( 30 hours or more per week ), part-time experience ( 9-29 hours ) and mother-care ( 0-8 hours ). Sixty percent of the children were in child care full-time while only 16% were in part-time and 24% in mother care. The children in the part-time group were not in child care for more than 15 hours a week. The children in the mother-care group were obtained through the mother day out programs at the church-based establishments.

### Subject Selection

At the beginning of September 1989, mothers were contacted either in person at the child care center or through an explanatory letter left at the center to see if they were interested in participating in the study.

Two different approaches in seeking mothers were tried at the beginning to find the most efficient approach. The first one involved a group of undergraduate research students to approach mothers at both "drop off" and "pick up" time and to explain all that was involved in the study.

These students had been previously trained to approach the mothers in the appropriate manner. If the mothers were interested in participating in the study, they were given a self-addressed packet that contained the first part of the study. The packet contained a written explanation of the study and a consent form for the mothers to sign that they agreed to the procedures explained in the letter. There were two other items in the packet for the mothers to complete: 1) a demographic information sheet and 2) a child care record for their child. These items will be described in further detail in the measures section. The mothers had been asked to complete these items and return the information in the provided self-addressed packet within a two-week period. In a few weeks, the second part of the study that consisted of the daily log was mailed to the mothers. Once again they were to complete the materials and mail them back in the provided stamped envelope.

The second approach involved leaving the explanatory letters with attached consent forms with the centers' directors to pass out to all the mothers. The mothers were instructed to leave their signed consent forms with their center's director. The project coordinator then collected the consent forms and contacted the mothers to schedule an individual meeting time. This meeting allowed the coordinator to deliver the entire packet (the general information sheet, the child care record, and the daily log), to discuss the study in further detail, and to answer any questions or concerns the mother had. When the mother had completed these materials, she mailed the information in the provided stamped envelope.

Although the first approach did draw in a few mothers, overall this approach proved to be insufficient. The research students were not able to make contact with all the available mothers. Of the packets given out, few were returned. Effort and materials were lost. This approach also did not

provide for personal contact between the mothers and the project coordinator. The second approach proved to make more efficient use of time and resources. All of the qualified mothers were informed of the study. Materials were only given to those mothers who were sincerely interested in participating. This approach allowed for personal contact between the project director and the mothers.

Fifty-eight consent forms were returned while only 38 mothers completed the entire study. The mothers were under the belief this was a study on children's friendships. Their participation was needed to give an accurate description of their child's peer interactions since their children did not have the oral or written ability to keep their own accurate account. The mothers were not aware that their own behavior was being observed to see how they may influence their child's peer interactions.

## Measures

### General Information Sheet

The mothers were asked to complete questions pertaining to the demographics of her family, such as, identifying the family members and their ages, parental education level, marital status, income level, work status, etc. Except for the listing of the family members and their ages, each question was presented as a statement with a list of descriptions to choose. For the education levels and work status, rankings were based on Hollingshead's scale (1978) of the four factor index social status. All of the information provided by the mothers in this section was used to describe the environment for the mother and her child.

### Child Care Record

Within the general information sheet, there was a section that

pertained to child care. The mother was asked to report the days and hours per day the child attended child care. In the daily peer log, the mother was also to indicate the number of hours the child went to child care for each of the five days observed. From this information, the child care category for the child could be determined.

### Daily Peer Log

The mothers were asked to complete a daily peer log of their child's peer interactions for five days to help learn about children's at-home play encounters with peers by sharing their own daily experiences with their child and their child's playmates. The log had the first day begin on a Wednesday and continue for five consecutive days. These days were chosen in order to observe peer interactions on both weekdays and the weekend. Different colored sheets were used to represent the different days; the days were listed at the top of all the pages. When the project coordinator met with the mother individually, the instructions for the log were reviewed. The mother was given a phone number to call if any problems arose. The booklet contained a peer interaction log modeled after Ladd and Golter's (1988) peer log and the revised version of "The Hassles and Uplifts Scale" ( DeLongis, Folkman, and Lazarus, 1988.) The mothers were to answer both sections of questions every night before going to bed.

### Peer Interaction Questions

The daily peer checklist consisted of questions asking to describe the child's peer interactions for the day. Four key issues were recorded in order to learn how the mother is involved in her child's peer experiences: 1) the total number of peer encounters for the five day period, 2) the total number of times the mother supported play at her house for the five day period, 3) the total number of times the mother supported play at a peer's

house for the five day period, and 4) the total number of times the mother initiated peer encounters for the five day period. The *total number of peer encounters* was determined through the mother's report of the total number of children her child played with over the five day period. The mother also indicated these children's age, sex, and type of relationship ( i.e., a school friend, a neighbor friend, or a sibling. ) Supporting play referred to the mother's responding positively to her child's play requests. The *total number of peer encounters the mother supported at her house* was determined by how many times over the five day period she agreed to having a friend over to play at the house with her child. The *total number of peer encounters the mother supported at a peer's house* was calculated by how many times over the five day period the mother agreed to let her child play at a friend's house. Maternal initiation related to the mother actually arranging or suggesting to her child to have a friend over to play. The *total number of maternal initiations* was reported from how many times the mother initiated for her child to have a playmate over for the five day period.

These questions were mixed in with a variety of other questions so that not all the questions pertained to only the mother's role in the peer interactions. The nature of the child's requests were also recorded. The *total number of child requests to have a peer over* and *total number of child requests to play at a peer's house* were recorded by the mother. As stated previously, in the checklist the number of hours the child had been in child care for that day was recorded. Time factors and transportation were issues also presented in the log.

#### Hassles and Uplifts Scale

The revised version of "The Hassles and Uplifts Scale" was used for this study (DeLongis et al.,1988). The mothers completed this scale along with

the peer log for the five consecutive nights. The scale contained 53 items that referred to day-to-day living. The instructions included the definitions of a "hassle" and an "uplift". The mothers were to rate each item as a hassle and/or an uplift; some items could be both a hassle and an uplift. The mothers were to rate the item according to a 4 point scale (0 - none or not applicable, 1 = somewhat, 2 = quite a bit, and 3= a great deal). For the purpose of this study, the hassle scores were the only scores that were analyzed.

## RESULTS

### Differences between Child Care Groups

The part-time and mother care groups were combined to form one child care group when the analyses began. The main reason for this combination was that the children in the part-time group did not attend child care for more than 15 hours a week. This part-time group actually represented a very low amount of part-time child care. Analyses were conducted to ensure that the combination of these two groups would not alter the final results. The analyses showed overall that the results of the two groups combined were actually very similar to the results of the groups separated. Combining these two groups produced a larger **N** and greater statistical power.

T-tests were run to observe if the maternal hassle and the peer encounters variables differed significantly between the child care groups. The means and standard deviations of the child care groups for the maternal hassles and the peer encounter variables are presented in Table 1.

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Table 1 about here

When the study began, the full-time group was predicted to have a higher mean for the total hassle score. The mean of the full-time group's total hassle score for the five day period was 29.48 while the part-time/mother care only reported a mean of 24.50. Although the higher total hassle score mean was in the hypothesized direction, the difference between the groups' means was not significant.

The next variable that was considered was the actual number of children with whom each child played with over the five day period. At the beginning of the study, the part-time/mother care group was expected to have higher mean for total number of peer encounters. The means for the total number of peer encounters for both groups showed that part-time/mother care group did have a higher mean of 4.67 while the full-time group's mean was only 3.57. Once again this difference did not prove to be significant between these groups.

Although this difference in the total number of peer encounters was not significant, there was a significant difference in how the mothers responded to their child's requests to have a friend over to the house to play ( Total at-home "YES" ) ,  $t(35) = 2.30, p < .03$ . The mothers in part-time/mother care group responded more positively to their child's request (  $M = 1.29$  ) than the full-time mothers (  $M = .61$  ).

Further analyses were run on this variable to determine if this group difference would remain when the total number of responses to the child's requests of having a peer over to play were divided into weekday responses and weekend responses. Once again, a significant difference between how the mothers responded to their child's requests was shown in the weekday

responses,  $t(35) = 2.02, p < .05$ . These differences were not found between the groups for their weekend responses. This indicates that for the positive response of the mothers in the full-time group depends on whether the request was made during the week or on the weekend.

In order to determine if the mothers respond differently because of different rates, another analyses was conducted to determine if the children in each group were requesting to have a friend over to play at a different rate. There were no significant group differences; children in both groups were asking at the same rate. This finding reinforces that the mothers in the full-time group were responding differently to their child's requests, especially on the weekdays, compared to mothers in the part-time/mother care group.

The next variable considered was how mothers responded to their child's request to play at a peer's house ( Total away - home "YES" .) The mothers in both groups responded at an almost equal rate with the part-time/mother care group scoring a mean of .73 while the full-time group had a mean of .82. This difference was not significant.

The last analyses of the peer encounter variables focused on the total number of times the mother initiated peer encounters for her child. The part-time/mother care was expected to initiate more peer encounters over the five day period than the full-time mothers. The results revealed higher initiation rate for the part-time/mother care group (  $M = .87$  ) compared to the full-time group (  $M = .61$  ); however, this difference was not significant.

### Regression Results

The next analyses looked at the relationships of the independent variables with each of the maternal peer encounters variables. The four independent variables were the maternal hassle score, the child care time,

the sex of the child, and the play requests of the child. Two of the dependent variables were shown to have significant relationships with these independent variables. The results are shown in Table 2.

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Table 2 about here

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The total number of positive responses by the mothers to their child's request to have a friend over to their house to play did show a significant relationship with the independent variables,  $F(4,31) = 17.41$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Two of the independent variables were significant contributors to the mothers' total number of positive responses. Child care time had a negative relationship with positive response,  $t(36) = -2.76$ ,  $p < .01$ . The more time a child spends in child care, the less likely the mother will respond positively to the child's request to have a friend over to play. This relationship confirms the earlier differences that were found between the child care groups in how mothers respond to the child's play requests.

Play requests of the child also proved to be a significant predictor of maternal responses,  $t(36) = 6.70$ ,  $p < .0001$ . Mothers who respond positively to children's requests have children who request at higher rates.

The number of times a mother initiated peer encounters for her child also was significantly related to the independent variables,  $F(4,31) = 3.80$ ,  $p < .01$ . For this equation, two independent variables had significant relationships with the maternal initiation variable. Total hassle score proved to have a positive relationship with maternal initiation,  $t(35) = 2.22$ ,  $p < .05$ . Higher maternal hassle scores are associated with more initiating on the mother's part.

Play requests of the child also resulted in a significantly positive relationship with maternal initiation,  $t(36) = 3.10$ ,  $p < .01$ . The more the

child requests about peer encounters, the more likely the mother is to initiate peer encounters for her child.

## DISCUSSION

The original intent of the study was to learn how maternal stress and the amount of time a child spends in child care may influence the mother's role in her child's peer encounters. The results show that these two variables have a relationship with maternal management of peer experiences.

The amount of time a child spends in child care during the week influences how a mother responds to her child's request of having a friend over to play. The children who are in full-time child care have mothers who are less likely to respond positively than the mothers in the low part-time and mother care, primarily during the week. There are several plausible ways to interpret these findings . Maybe those mothers with children in full-time child care feel since their child was around other children all day that there was no need for their child to have a friend over to play. These mothers may want to use the time at home to spend quality time with their child after being apart all day. The responses could also be due to a time factor. Full-time mothers are on a different time schedule during the week and there may not be enough time during the day to accomplish all the tasks. The fact that full-time mothers did respond differently during the week than the part-time/mother care group reinforces that the amount of child care is an important variable in determining daily maternal management of peer experiences.

Although there was not a significant difference in the hassle scores between the child care groups in this study, it does not necessarily mean that hassle levels do not differ according to the amount of time a child

spends in child care. At the beginning of this study over 200 mothers were asked to participate; only 38 mothers completed the actual study. These 38 mothers are probably the few mothers who had time to participate in a study that required completing a log for a five day period. Both the full-time and the part-time/mother care groups' means for the total hassle scores were compared to the earlier study conducted by DeLongis et al. (1988) when "The Hassles and Uplifts Scale" was first introduced. The DeLongis' study asked parents to complete the scale for 4 consecutive nights. The comparison showed that the means for this study actually fell into the low to moderate range for hassle scores.

The fact that these mothers had low to moderate hassle scores could be the reason that the hassle scores had a positive relationship with maternal initiation. This could indicate that mothers have an optimal hassle score in which they are able to function effectively; however, if these scores were higher or lower, these scores could result in a less positive and less responsive role for the mother.

The maternal initiation also had a positive relationship with the child's play requests. Although the mother is the one initiating the peer encounters, a relationship between these two variables is still very likely. This finding may be representing a certain quality of the mother-child relationship. If the child is social and active and often ask to play with friends, the mother may feel comfortable in initiating peer encounters. She may see this as an opportunity to please her child and fulfill the child's needs. This significant finding may be reflecting a social cycle that is fueled by both mother and child. Ladd and Golter ( 1988 ) found that children who seek variation in play experiences elicited higher levels of parental initiation.

If this study were to be replicated with a much larger sample pool that

had equal numbers of mothers in each child care group, more significant results may occur, especially with the maternal hassle scores and the total number of peer encounters.

Another approach to this study may be to categorize mothers according to their hassle level as opposed to the child care time of their child. Child care time indicates that hassles are due to working, which could be true; however, there are many other hassles that could be influencing the mother's responsiveness to her child besides working. Grouping mothers according to their hassle scores may indicate if hassles are related to other variables of interest.

Although there were no significant differences in the actual number of peer encounters between the child care groups, the type of children both groups are playing with would be interesting to observe. There would be differences if a child was playing with a school friend, a neighbor friend, is a sibling; each one of these types represents different amounts of efforts needed by the mother. Perhaps those children in the full-time group were actually playing with siblings or neighbor friends while part-time/mother care groups played with school friends. The part-time/mother care mothers would be exerting more effort because school friends would require arranging the encounter, looking at the time factor, and the possibility of transportation. Although both groups had the same rate of peer experience, one group of mothers may really be putting forth more effort and playing a larger facilitating role in her child's peer experiences.

This study should be considered as a preliminary study that found that maternal hassles and child care time have an influence on the mother's role in her child's peer encounters. A more sophisticated study with a larger sample pool should investigate further to learn how significant these influences may be on a child's social competence. Now that some variables

are known to influence the mother's role, research should continue identifying other variables to examine if these variables are enhancing or hindering the mother's ability to be directly involved with her child's play experiences. These identifications may make it easier to help prevent or to intervene to ensure children are given quality environments to become socially competent.

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TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Child Care Groups  
for Maternal Hassles and Peer Encounter Variables

	<u>Part-time/Mother care</u>	<u>Full-time</u>
<u>Total Hassle Score</u>	24.50 (13.18)	29.48 (16.01)
<u>Total Number of Peer Encounters</u>	4.67 (6.44)	3.57 (4.77)
<u>Total at-home "Yes"</u>	1.29 (.91)	.61 (.84)*
<u>Weekday "Yes"</u>	.79 (.80)	.30 (.63)*
<u>Weekend "Yes"</u>	.50 (.65)	.30 (.63)
<u>Total away home "Yes"</u>		
<u>Mother Initiated Peer Encounters</u>	.87 (.83)	.61 (1.23)

Note: Standard deviations are represented in the parantheses.

TABLE 2

STANDARD REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS

	<u>Total At-Home "Yes"</u>	<u>Maternal Initiations</u>
<u>Total Hassle Score</u>	-.01	.33*
<u>Child Care Time (CCT)</u>	-.29**	-.13
<u>Sex of child</u>	.02	.14
<u>Play requests of child</u>	.70***	.47**
<u>F (4,31)</u>	17.41***	3.80**
<u>R2</u>	.69	.33

\*p&lt;.05

\*\*p&lt;.01

\*\*\*p&lt;.001 or better