PEER RELATIONS
EDHD 421
(3 CREDITS)

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Office hours:
Tuesday: 10:30 AM-Noon.

Class Meetings:
Tuesday: 1:15-4:00 PM.

Course Content:
The typical child and adolescent spends significant periods of time, each day, in the company of peers. With increasing age, these periods of time with peers lengthen and extend beyond formal settings such as school and adult-led extracurricular activities. Significantly, it is within these various peer contexts that children and adolescents acquire a wide range of skills, attitudes, and experiences that influence their adaptation across the lifespan. Accordingly, peers are viewed as powerful socialization "agents," contributing well beyond the collective influences of family, school, and neighborhood, to child and adolescent social, emotional, and cognitive well-being and adjustment.

The content of this course will focus on both historical accounts and state-of-the-art descriptions of contemporary thinking about children’s and adolescents’ peer interactions, relationships and groups. The course will provide a detailed description of what we know at this moment about the features, processes and effects of children’s and adolescents’ experiences with their peers. Historically, research on the child’s world of peers was initially motivated by four distinct ideas. One idea derived from social learning theory. Studies in the 1960's used the concepts of reward and imitation to understand how peers could shape each other’s behavior and act as agents of socialization. Researchers typically used laboratory contexts or controlled observations in preschools to demonstrate that peers could influence each other through their experiences in, or observations of, basic forms of social interaction. These effects could be seen on such broad and disparate behaviors as cooperation, altruism, and aggression.

A second idea was that of sociometry. The central concept of sociometry was that in order to fully understand group membership and individual placement or status within groups, one had to recognize the attractions and repulsions between individuals. Sociometry was both an idea and a technique as it provided researchers with ways of thinking about groups and ways of developing measures of groups per se and of the individuals comprising any a group. More often than not, the groups that were of interest to the practitioners of sociometry comprised children.

A third idea was that relationships were significant for normal and abnormal development. This idea was apparent in the writings of: (1) Mary Ainsworth and John Bowlby, who emphasized the value of security in relationships as a critical determinant of well being (2) Robert Hinde, an
ethologist who recognized that in order to fully understand animal (and human) development, one must understand how animals (humans) interact with one another, form (and dissolve) relationships with one another, and how the groups within which animals (and humans) are members can influence or be influenced by its members, their interactions and relationships with each other; and (3) Harry Stack Sullivan, a psychiatrist who believed that the study of personality and the study of interpersonal relationships could not be separated.

The fourth seminal idea was drawn from the observations and research of clinical psychologists and other behavioral scientists who found that assessments of peer relations taken in childhood could predict adjustment and maladjustment in adolescence and adulthood. They interpreted these findings to indicate that, at the least, the assessment of problematic experiences with peers could be regarded as risk indices for unhealthy psychological development. Together, the aforementioned four ideas provided researchers with significant conceptual insights for conducting research on the world of peers, new user-friendly methods and measures to assess children’s experiences with peers, and a new motivation to inspire and guide research on peer interactions, relationships, and groups.

Nearly 30 years ago these four ideas came together to help create the beginnings of a vibrant and ever expanding literature on the features and effects of peer interactions, relationships, and groups. The confluence of developmental scientists interested in basic developmental processes and the child clinical psychologists interested in the origins of behavioral and affective maladjustment occurred at about the same time that persons were reconsidering the concept of psychopathology during childhood. Central to this “new” approach known as “developmental psychopathology” was the idea that the study of normal developmental processes and the study of psychopathology were mutually enriching activities. Research on peers was ideally suited to this approach, perhaps more so than for most other developmental topics.

But 30 years ago, research on the topic of the child’s world of peers was relatively homogeneous and focused. Other than emerging work on infant and toddler peer interaction; altruistic and agonistic behavior; young children’s social pretense; and early adolescent friendship and moral development, most research on peers that appeared in archival journals centered on a concern with sociometric rejection. Since then, peer research has become highly differentiated in the questions it asks and the measures used in these studies have become increasingly refined. Development is an issue. How does the child’s social life with peers develop? What accounts for normalcy and deviation from the norm in the expression of social behavior and the experience of social relationships? The use of broadband measures of such constructs as social competence, aggression, and withdrawal have been replaced by the use of nuanced and specific measures that reflect sensitivity to the distinctions between phenomena that had been bundled together within a single domain. For example, measures of aggression were developed to distinguish between whether an act was proactively or reactively aggressive, whether it was relational or physical, and whether it was direct and indirect. Social withdrawal was reconceptualized as reflecting the child’s emotion-based withdrawal from the peer milieu or the child’s isolation and rejection by peers. There was a clearer recognition of the distinction between acceptance and friendship, between peer rejection and exclusion, and between social and emotional competence. Not only were group acceptance and rejection or dyadic friendship considered to be of significance in typical and atypical development, so too were romantic relationships as well as the groups and networks within which friendships and romantic relationships occurred. For all-of-the above, new measures and methods were developed. This relatively recent expansion in peer related constructs and refinements in measurement have significantly broadened and enriched the study of peer interactions, relationships, and groups. And each of these refinements and expansions will be highlighted in this course.
This course is organized topically and developmentally. It begins with a discussion of historical and theoretical underpinnings to contemporary research on peer interactions, relationships, and groups. This is followed by a section on methods and measures centered on each of peer interactions, relationships, or groups. Thereafter, several themes will run through the course material: (1) the interdependencies of individual characteristics (e.g., gender; age; personality), social behaviors (e.g., aggression; exclusion; victimization; prosocial behavior), social relationships (e.g., friendships), and social groups (e.g., peer networks); (2) the relations between familial factors (e.g. attachment; authoritarian parenting) and extra-familial peer interactions and relationships; (3) proximal and distal causes and consequences of normal and abnormal peer relationships (e.g., the developmental “costs” of peer rejection); and (4) cross-cultural universals and differences related to “all of the above”.

**COURSE READINGS**


2. Empirical research studies to be assigned.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

Upon satisfactory completion of the course requirements for EDHD 421, students will:

1. demonstrate knowledge of the major theories and methods in the study of peer interactions, relationships, and groups;

2. demonstrate knowledge of the unique developmental processes that occur in peer interactions, relationships, and groups from infancy through adolescence;

3. demonstrate the ability to link, conceptually and scientifically, associations between different types of relationships (parent-child and peer relationships; friendships and romantic relationships); links between early demonstrations of behavior (e.g., aggression; social competence) and later experiences of peer rejection/acceptance, friendship prevalence and quality; links between group characteristics and peer exclusion; links between peer relationships and standing in the peer group; links between peer interactions, relationships, and groups and civic engagement and competence.

4. demonstrate the ability to complete well-written brief literature reviews on the topics of peer acceptance/rejection; friendship; peer exclusion; and the effects of the peer group.
5. demonstrate the ability to lead a group discussion about the scientific rigor of empirical studies pertaining to the study of peer interactions, relationships, and groups.

6. be able to identify career paths that require knowledge of peer interactions, relationships, and groups.

Each student is expected to:

1. Be an active participant in class discussions and activities (15% of final grade). Each student is required to attend each meeting of the seminar and to play an active role in class discussions. Active participation includes discussing the presentations given as well as demonstrating that the assigned readings have been read. Active participation also means providing feedback to fellow students during the presentation of their research proposals. Every unexcused class missed by a student will result in the loss of 5 percent of the final grade.

2. Assignment 1. (30% of final grade). The purpose of this assignment is to explore the similarities and/or differences in the types of parenting advice that parents may receive from different sources about children’s peer relationships. “Hot” topics include popularity, bullying, friendship, the groups in which children and/or adolescents participate. Your first task is to find a piece of “parenting advice” from the popular press (i.e., magazine, newspaper article, website, etc). This should not prove to be difficult - my Google search of the term “parenting advice” yielded over 21 million hits! Your popular press article can be from recent years or historical.

   After reading the popular press article you selected, your must then find a recent (i.e., last 10 years) empirical research article (i.e., a study with data and results – NOT a book chapter or review of several studies with no new findings) published in a refereed Psychology/Human Development journal. This article should involve research on some aspect of parenting that relates in some way to the content of the popular press article you have chosen. To locate an appropriate research article, use the Psych-Info journal search-engine available at the Library or via the Library Web Page.

   After reading both articles, prepare a short essay (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, one-inch margins, MAXIMUM 8 pages). The report should consist of three sections.

   SECTION 1 (suggest 1-2 pages) – Briefly describe and summarize the contents of the popular press article you have chosen. In particular, focus on a specific aspect of parenting advice that can be derived from the article. Also, clarify who exactly was giving the advice, and (if possible): What were their qualifications? Was their advice based on personal experience? If not – on what basis were they providing this advice? Who was this advice meant for? etc...

***ATTACH A COPY OF THE FIRST PAGE OF THIS ARTICLE WITH YOUR ASSIGNMENT***

   SECTION 2 (suggest 2-3 pages) – Link the topic of your research article to the popular press article you have chosen. Describe and summarize the recent research article. Include a description of the research question under investigation, the methodology (subjects, measures), a report of the major findings, and a discussion of the implications. Also, make sure to discuss the specific implications for advice to parents arising out of the findings.
SECTION 3 (suggest 2-3 pages) – Synthesize, speculate, and integrate and discuss! Compare and contrast the parenting advice conveyed in the popular press and journal article you have read. Why do you think they are they so similar or different? What do you think parents would do after reading both of these articles? You may also speculate as to how various factors (e.g., historical, cultural, societal, religious) may have contributed towards these similarities/differences.

The first assignment will be due on March 10, 2015 @ 1:15 pm. The assignment may be e-mailed prior to the due date. It will not be accepted after the due time and date. “MSGE” (Major Scheduled Grading Event).

3. Assignment 2 (15% of final grade). The purpose of Assignment 2 is to demonstrate the ability to present, to an audience of peers, critical thinking pertaining to topics, methods, and conclusions of two empirical studies that have been published in the area of children’s peer relations, interactions, or groups. Each student will lead a class discussion on two empirical papers (selected by Professor Rubin). The student will (a) describe the topic of the study and the methods used; (b) discuss her/his perspectives on the significance of the study, the appropriateness of the methods used, and the conclusions drawn by the authors. She/he will engage all the students in the class in a discussion of each of the two studies.

   a. Total time allotted for each student presentation = 10 minutes per paper.

4. Final Examination (40% of final grade).

   PURPOSE: To provide an in-depth examination of a research topic in the area of children’s peer relations. You may select any topic you wish related to children’s peer relationships – but you must have your topic approved by me beforehand (e-mail is the best way to do this – or you can ask me before or after class). Topics may be related to any aspect of peer relationships (e.g., friendship, popularity/rejection, peer interaction, cliques/crowds, aggression, bullying, shyness, loneliness, peer pressure, social skills, special populations, interventions, etc.).

   Your paper should be no more than 15 pages long – not including the title page and reference section – typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, one-inch margins, and in APA format. Include a reference section with the complete citations of all your cited articles.

   Your paper should consist of three sections:

   Section 1 (suggested length: 1-2 pages) – Introduce your topic. Give definitions of the key terms. Why is this topic important? What are some of the major issues related to this topic? In this section – make sure to clearly specify two or three research questions that you will be exploring in this assignment.

   Section 2 (suggested length: 5-7 pages) – Give a summary of 5 recent (last 15 years) empirical research articles from psychology journals. Include a description of the research
methodologies employed, a discussion of the findings and their implications, and an evaluation of the studies. Focus on the points relevant to your specific topic – you will not have space to give all the details about everything!

Section 3 – *(suggested length: 3-4 pages)* – Discuss your findings. Speculate, synthesize, extrapolate...etc. Relate the results to your specified research questions. Highlight any major flaws or areas of controversy. Discuss the direction that future research might take.

In order to achieve a cohesive paper based on only 5 articles, it is essential to select a *narrow* topic with specific research questions (I can help you focus your topic) and that you present only what is integral to your thesis or argument.

The *final examination* will be due on May 19, 2015 @ 1:15 pm. The exam may be e-mailed prior to the due date. It will not be accepted after the due time and date. “MSGE” (Major Scheduled Grading Event).
TOPICS

Jan 27  Introduction to course and course requirements

Feb 3   History, theories and guiding principles (Chapters 1 and 2)
         Ken Rubin

Feb 10  Measuring/Assessing peer interactions and relationships
         (Chapters 3, 4, 5)
         Ken Rubin

Feb 17  Measuring/Assessing peer relationships and groups
         (Chapters 4, 5, 6)
         Ken Rubin

         Toddlers: Interactions, relationships, and groups
         (Chapter 7)

Feb 24  Preschoolers: Interactions, relationships, and groups
         (Chapters 8, 9, 10)

Mar 3   Middle Childhood and Early Adolescence: Acceptance, Rejection, Perceived Popularity
         (Chapters 13, 30)

Mar 10  Middle Childhood and Early Adolescence: Friendship
         (Chapters 12, 31)

Assignment 1 Due

Mar 17  Class is cancelled. Spring Break

Mar 24  Middle childhood and adolescence: Aggression and Bullying
         (Chapters 16, 18)

Mar 31  Middle childhood and adolescence: Social isolation and withdrawal
         (Chapter 17)
         Ken Rubin

Apr 7   Proximal Correlates of Children’s Social Skills and Peer Relations: Genetics, Temperament, and Personality
         (Chapters 25, 26)
Apr 14  Proximal Correlates of Children’s Social Skills and Peer Relations: Parenting, Parent-Child Relationships, Families
       (Chapters 27, 28)

Apr 21  Distal Correlates of Children’s Social Skills and Peer Relations: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture
       (Chapters 22, 23, 24)

Apr 28  Early adolescence: Romantic relationships; cliques, groups, crowds
       (Chapters 19, 20)

May 5   Translation and policy
       (Chapters 29, 32)

May 12  Presentations of graduate research projects

May 19  FINAL EXAM due
TIPS AND SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- If you don’t know, ask
- Type everything; Copy everything! Do not turn in your only copy of something.
- Your task of learning children’s social development will be easier if you ask me questions about the readings and lectures, take part in class discussions, suggest alternative viewpoints that supplement or contradict ideas presented in lectures or readings, and try to think like a developmental psychologist by applying course material to your day-to-day life.
- Inevitably, circumstances arise that make it advisable to deviate slightly from the schedule. Sometimes, students themselves are important in determining this. Some classes gallop along at a fast pace, whereas others move slowly. Some classes develop great interest in one topic, others in another. Expect me to stick by announced deadlines and schedules; At the same time, if I must make a change, expect me to be open to your needs. If a change poses a particular problem for you, let me know, and we’ll see if something can be worked out.

CLASS POLICIES

Academic integrity: The University of Maryland, College Park has a student-administered Honor Code and Honor Pledge. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit [http://www.studenthonor council.umd.edu/whatis.html](http://www.studenthonor council.umd.edu/whatis.html). This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. The code prohibits students from cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and plagiarism. Instances of this include submitting someone else’s work as your own, submitting your own work completed for another class without permission, or failing to properly cite information other than your own (found in journals, books, online, or otherwise). Any form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated, and any sign of academic dishonesty will be reported to the appropriate University officials.

Special needs: If you have a registered disability that will require accommodation, please see the instructor so necessary arrangements can be made. If you have a disability and have not yet registered with the University, please contact Disability Support Services in the Shoemaker Building (301.314.7682, or 301.405.7683 TTD) as soon as possible.

Religious observances: The University of Maryland policy on religious observances states that students not be penalized in any way for participation in religious observances. Students shall be allowed, whenever possible, to make up academic assignments that are missed due to such absences. However, the must contact the instructor before the absence with a written notification of the projected absence, and arrangements will be made for make-up work or examinations.

Course evaluations: As a member of our academic community, students have a number of important responsibilities. One of these responsibilities is to submit course evaluations each term through CourseEvalUM in order to help faculty and administrators improve teaching and learning at Maryland. All information submitted to CourseEvalUM is confidential. Campus will notify you when CourseEvalUM is open for you to complete your evaluations for fall semester courses. Please go directly to the website (www.courseevalum.umd.edu) to complete your evaluations. By completing all of your evaluations each semester, you will have the privilege of accessing
online, at Testudo, the evaluation reports for the thousands of courses for which 70% or more students submitted their evaluations.

**Missed single class due to illness:** Once during a semester, a student’s self-authored note will be accepted as an excuse for missing a minor scheduled grading event in a single class session if the note documents the date of the illness, acknowledgement from the student that information provided in the note is correct, and a statement that the student understands that providing false information is a violation of the Code of Student Conduct. Students are expected to attempt to inform the instructor of the illness prior to the date of the missed class.*

**Major scheduled grading events:** Major Scheduled Grading Events (MSGE) are indicated on the syllabus. The conditions for accepting a self-signed note do not apply to these events. Written, signed documentation by a health care professional, or other professional in the case of non-medical reasons (see below) of a University-approved excuse for the student’s absence must be supplied. This documentation must include verification of treatment dates and the time period for which the student was unable to meet course requirements. Providers should not include diagnostic information. Without this documentation, opportunities to make up missed assignments or assessments will not be provided.

**Non-consecutive, medically necessitated absences from multiple class sessions:** Students who throughout the semester miss multiple, non-consecutive class sessions due to medical problems must provide written documentation from a health care professional that their attendance on those days was prohibited for medical reasons.

**Non-medical excused absences:** According to University policy, non-medical excused absences for missed assignments or assessments may include illness of a dependent, religious observance, involvement in University activities at the request of University officials, or circumstances that are beyond the control of the student. Students asking for excused absence for any of those reasons must also supply appropriate written documentation of the cause and make every attempt to inform the instructor prior to the date of the missed class.