

# **Family and Peer Influences on Adolescent Behavior and Risk-Taking**

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***Workshop on Social and Environmental Influences  
and Adolescent Risk Behavior***

# Goals

- 1) Identify key features of families and peers that influence adolescent risk-taking behavior
- 2) Understand underlying processes by which these influences shape risky behavior
- 3) Describe how family and peer influences moderate and mediate genetic and ecological contexts of development
- 4) Understand the interplay between family and peer influences on adolescent risk taking

# Substantive and Methodological Issues

1. Confounds between family and genetic effects
2. Self-selection versus influence
3. Family-peer interplay
4. Moderation by culture
5. Nonlinear effects
6. Influence by perception

# Normal Developmental Process

1. Initial parental influence
2. Growth in peer influence in early adolescence
3. Resolution: Balance between family and peer influence in young adulthood

# Family Influences

**Remarkable convergence of research has identified key family influences that increase propensity for risk-taking**

**Strength and timing of family and peer influence may vary depending on profile of risk-taking**

Early onset = high level of genetic vulnerability interacts with risky family context beginning early in life

Adolescent onset = less influenced by genes, greater relative influence of peer and contextual risk factors (e.g., high risk neighborhood)

# **4 Major Domains of Family Influence Most Supported in Current Literature**

- 1. Hostile, coercive family interactions**
- 2. Parenting styles and practices**
- 3. Family modeling of risk-taking behaviors and values**
- 4. Genetic (confounded with and mediated by family processes below)**

# Family Conflict, Hostility, Aggression

- *High levels of marital, sibling, parent-child conflict*
- *Recurrent episodes of anger and aggression*
- *Coercive family interactions*
- *Hostile, harsh, punitive parenting*
- *Abusive family relationships*

# Family Conflict, Hostility, Aggression

**Link between family hostility and child behavior reflects**

- **passive, evocative, & active genotype correlations**
- **reciprocal influences over time between difficult child and hostile family**

**However, twin and adoption studies show environmental effects above and beyond genetic effects**

**Gene X environment interactions also found, indicating some individuals are genetically/ temperamentally more vulnerable to hostile family context**

# Underlying Mechanisms

1. Intense, recurrent family conflict disrupts
  - emotion processing and behavioral self regulation
  - social information processing (e.g., hostile attribution bias, rejection sensitivity)
  - physiological / neuroendocrine response to stress
2. Hostile family context limits exposure to and practice of complex social skills (e.g., open, effective communication, with mutual sharing and empathy)
3. Hostile families disrupt bonds of attachment and emotional security
4. All of the above make adolescents less able to successfully engage with prosocial peers, more vulnerable to negative peer pressures and more apt to engage in risk-taking to compensate for physiological, social, or emotional deficits

# Parenting Styles and Practices

**Authoritative parenting style (supportive, firm control, appropriate level of maturity demands) associated with reduced risk-taking**

**Specific parenting behaviors associated with risk-taking:**

- 1. Responsiveness, nurturance, acceptance (vs. rejection)**
- 2. Active interest and involvement with child (vs. neglect)**
- 3. Clear, reasonable expectations and consequences**
- 4. Monitoring and supervision of activities and peers**

# Effective Parenting Across Development

- 1. Contingent and responsive parenting in early childhood facilitates*
  - self-regulatory skills*
  - internalization of moral standards*
  - development of empathy*
  - sets stage for parents to have a greater impact in middle childhood and adolescence*
- 2. In adolescence, positive parent-child bonds*
  - provide a source of guidance and protection*
  - reduce salience and value of peer influence*
  - facilitate communication and decision making*
  - enable parents to monitor and manage peer activities*

# Cultural Variations in Parenting

1. Effects of physical discipline are not universal across cultural groups (not as detrimental for African American)
2. Effects of authoritarian parenting also shown to differ across cultural groups (not as detrimental for Asian American youth)
3. Effects may depend on
  - cultural normativeness of parenting
  - whether it occurs in context of supportive parent-child bond
  - broader ecological factors (e.g., neighborhood risk)
  - meaning of the parenting practice to the child
4. Culture specific family influences /protective resources<sup>12</sup> also may be important for diverse populations

# Family Modeling of Behaviors and Values

## 1. Modeling and Behavioral Display

- Children and adolescents are influenced by behavior they observe in home
- Modeling and quality of family relationships and parenting more influential than parent practices specifically targeting risky behavior (e.g., communication about drugs, sex, etc)
- Some evidence that siblings are especially influential models, particularly older siblings of same gender
- Sibling effects found for tobacco, alcohol, illicit substance use, first age at intercourse, and early age pregnancy

# Family Processes Mediate Broader Contextual Factors

- Many social risk factors known to increase risk-taking have been shown to exert their negative effects by disrupting parenting and family processes
  - Poverty and Economic Hardship
  - Single parent family status
  - High risk neighborhoods
  - Parental Separation / Divorce / Death
  - Parental Mental Illness

# Family Influences

**Compelling evidence that adolescent risk-taking is reduced by interventions that target family interactions and parenting practices at different stages of development**

- early interventions (e.g., prenatal home visiting)
- early to mid childhood parenting interventions
- early adolescent family strengthening interventions

**Programs target high risk groups (e.g., behaviorally uninhibited, children of divorce, low income, etc)**

**Several programs show positive effects with diverse ethnic groups**

**Those at highest risk often show greatest benefit**

# Current Gaps

**Research suggests father influences are important but fathers have been understudied**

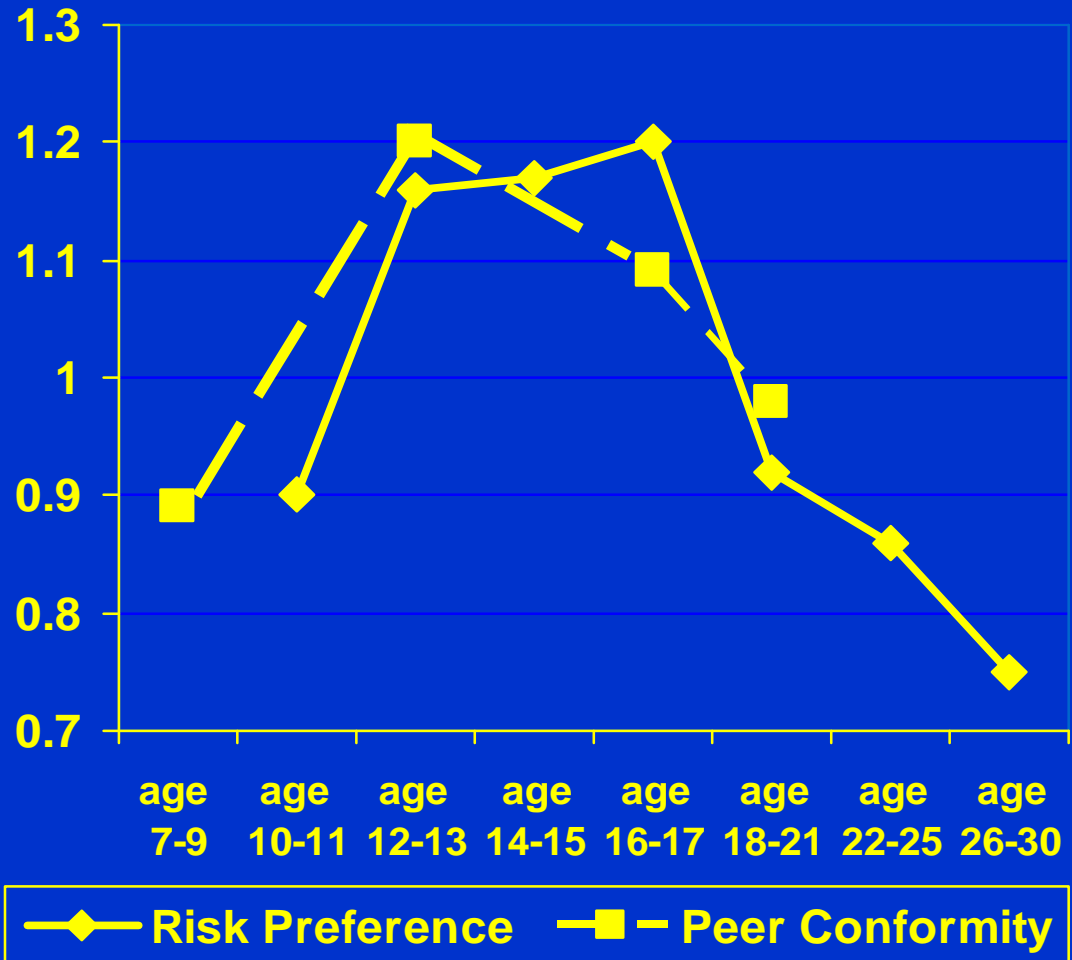
**Role of siblings also important but evidence has been limited due to relative lack of focus on siblings**

**Cultural variations and culture-specific influences are not well understood**

**There is currently a major gap in transporting and implementing efficacious family interventions in real world settings**

# Risk Preference and Peer Conformity

*Steinberg, 2009; and Costanzo & Shaw, 1966*



# Peer Influences

Positive Impact of Peers

Deviant Peer Influences

Schools

Neighborhoods

Community programs

Gangs

# The Magnitude and Costs in Aggregating Deviant Peers in American Society

## **1. Mental Health**

- \* Group therapies, residential milieu; by design
  - \* 120,000 children/year treated in groups (15% of total)
  - \* 52% of all expenditures: > \$6 billion/year

## **2. Education**

- \* Tracking, special ed, in-school suspensions, alternative school
- \* Practice is increasing

## **3. Juvenile Justice**

- \* Training schools, boot camps, incarceration
- \* 93% of all expenditures aggregate youth (> \$ 4.6 billion/year)

# Positive Effects in Peer-Group Interventions

1. Good Behavior Game in elementary school
  - \* Group reward for good behavior in grade 1
  - \* Kellam (2009)
2. Classroom curricula in social-emotional learning
  - \* CPPRG (1999)
  - \* Botvin Life Skills Training (1999; 2003)
3. Mean effect sizes are generally positive but modest:
  - \* Juvenile justice =  $.07$  (Lipsey, 2006)
  - \* Mental health =  $.50$  (Weisz, 1995)
  - \* School-based social skills =  $.55$  (Ang & Hughes, 2006)

# Decrement in Mean Effect Size When Treatment is Administered in Peer Groups

|                                           | Administration |       | Decrement |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------|-------|-----------|
|                                           | Individual     | Group |           |
| Juvenile justice (Lipsey, 2006)           | .10            | .07   | (30%)     |
| Court counseling (Lipsey, 2006)           | .12            | .08   | (33%)     |
| Child mental health (Weisz et al., 1987)  | 1.04           | .62   | (40%)     |
| Child mental health (Weisz et al., 1995)  | .63            | .50   | (21%)     |
| School social skills (Ang & Hughes, 2006) | .78            | .55   | (30%)     |

# Sometimes Peer-Group Interventions Lead to Adverse Effects

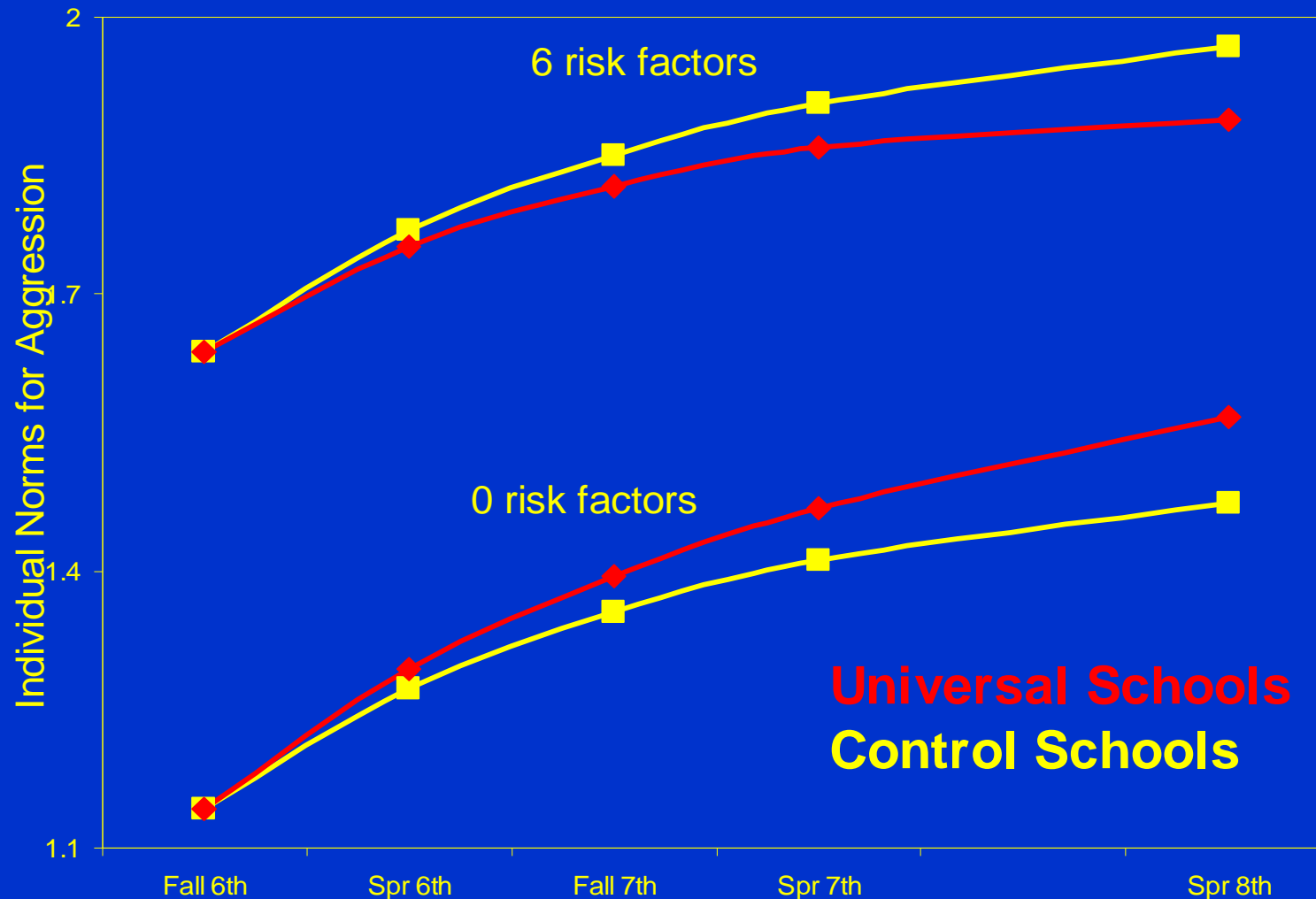
## 1. Juvenile Justice (Lipsey, 2006)

- \* 42% of group prevention programs
- \* 22% of group probation programs

## 2. School-based social skills training (Ang & Hughes, 2001)

- \* 24% of deviant-only groups show adverse effect
- \* Only 11% of individual treatments show adverse effect

# Universal Group Intervention “Homogenizes” Individual Norms for Aggression (MVPP, 2008)



# **Moderators:**

## **Factors Likely to *Increase* Deviant Peer-Influence Effects in Interventions**

### **1. Characteristics of Peers**

1. Slightly older
2. Slightly more deviant
3. Likely to interact outside of intervention setting

### **2. Characteristics of Participants**

1. Early adolescent age
2. Moderately deviant
3. Not yet committed to deviant behavior
4. “Susceptible” to peer influence

# **Moderators:**

## **Factors Likely to *Minimize* Deviant Peer-Influence Effects in Interventions**

### **3. Characteristics of Leaders**

1. Experienced and well-trained
2. Constant monitoring of youth and “hot spots”

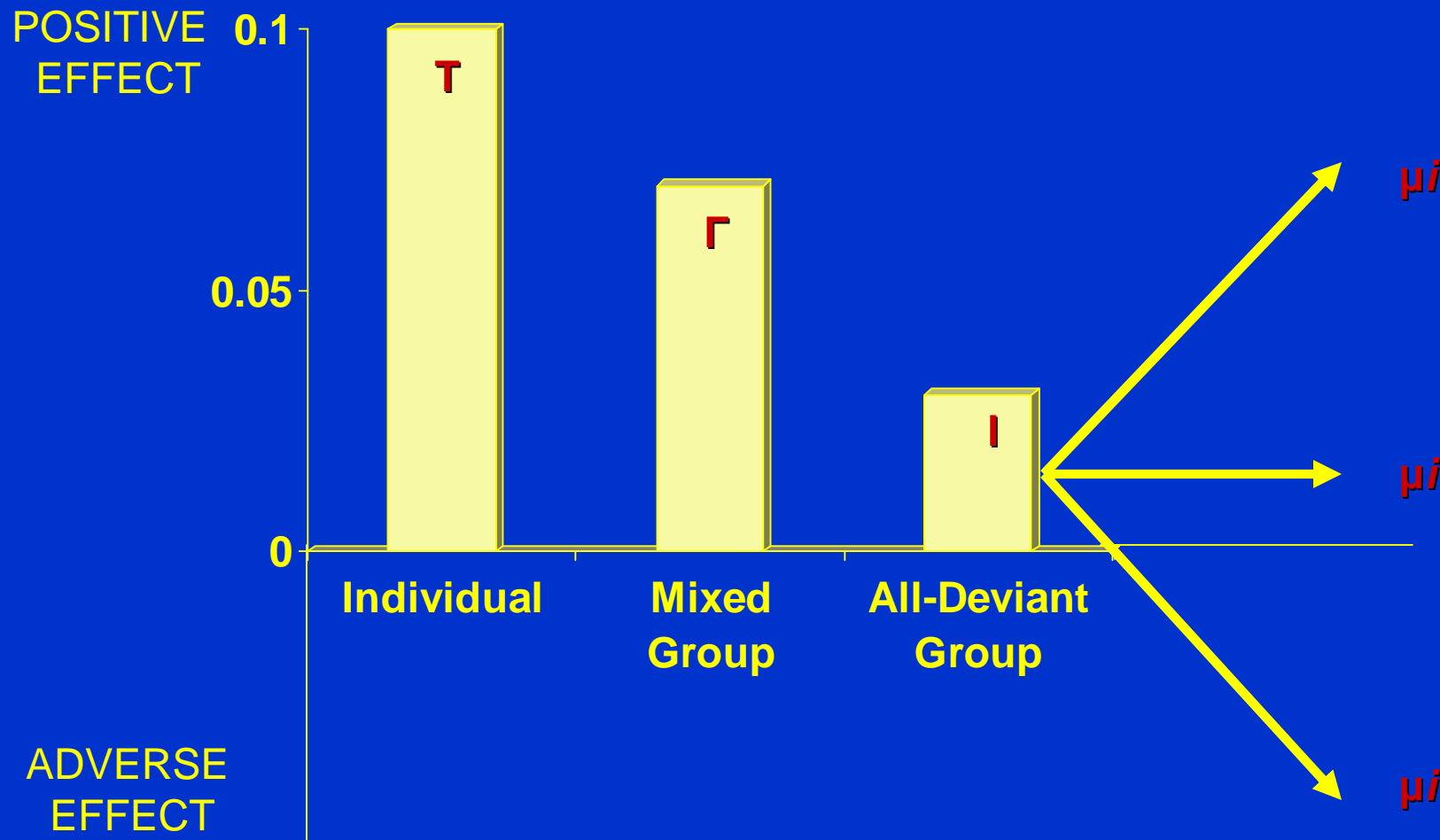
### **4. Characteristics of intervention programs**

1. Behavioral approaches
2. Positive reward structures for desired behavior
3. Little time for unstructured group interaction
4. Promoting a cultural norm of non-deviance
5. Short duration

# Model of Peer-Group Intervention Effects

$$\text{Total Intervention Effect} = (T - \Gamma - I) + \sum (\mu_i * I)$$

*T = Therapy Effect,  $\Gamma$  = Group Context Effect, I = Deviant Peer-Group Effect, and  $\mu_i$  = Moderator Factors*



# Mechanisms of Influence

## Social mechanisms

Peer pressure, antagonistic behaviors

Positive reinforcement

Structuring opportunities

## Deviancy training

## Cognitive mechanisms

Reasoned action

Behavioral willingness

Social information processing

# Final Synthesis

**Research has identified peer settings and processes that serve as a catalyst for risk-taking and other forms of deviant behavior**

**The literature highlights the influence of peer's behaviors and attitudes that operate through processes of deviancy training, modeling, and reinforcement**

**A relative gap concerns the way in which qualities of adolescent peer relationships affect development**

**Evidence also shows that peer influences and family influences are interconnected in complex ways across development**

# Dynamic Cascades in Development

