Development of Aggression in Boys: Implications for Interventions

Jim Larson, Ph.D.
School Psychology Program
Department of Psychology
University of Wisconsin – Whitewater
Whitewater, WI 53190
larsonj@uww.edu

and

The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment
6250 Sunset Drive, Suite 204, Miami, FL 33143
Physical Fight – Florida

Youth Risk Surveillance Survey

![Bar chart showing the percentage of students who were in a physical fight by gender and race in 2001 and 2003.](chart.png)
Carried a Weapon – Florida
Youth Risk Surveillance Survey

![Bar chart showing the percentage of students who carried a weapon by gender and race in 2001 and 2003.](chart.png)
Closing the Gap

- In 1983 and 1993, the ratios of male to female youths committing violent acts were 7.4 to 1 and 7.0 to 1, respectively. This means that for every violent act committed by female youths in these years, at least seven violent acts were committed by male youths. By 1998, this ratio had closed to 3.5 to 1.
How Do Boys Become Aggressive?

- Solid research indicates very little gender differences in toddler period.
- Both girls and boys engage in more object-related than person-related aggression.
- Differences begin to emerge at age 4-5.
- Why?
Is it Testosterone?

- The primary *androgen*, a class of steroid hormones that develop and maintain masculine features
- Research is somewhat mixed
- Aggressive effects are predominantly in animal studies
- Better explanations in social – environmental influences
How Do Boys Become Aggressive?

*Differential Parenting*

Keenen & Shaw study of low income families (1994) hypothesis:

- Parent criminality predicts boys’ aggression, but not until age 4-5
- Not biology alone, but also socialization
- Differential parent responses to boys’ aggression
- Influence of aggressive modeling
How Do Boys Become Aggressive?

Social Learning Model  Bandura et al.

- Observation of a Model
  - Observe sib, parent, and peer behavior
  - Observe models in media
  - What behaviors pay-off?

- Direct Experience
  - Can I do it?
  - How did it turn out?
How Do Boys Become Aggressive?

Coercive Family Process – Patterson et al.

- Pre-schoolers acquire aggressive behaviors through social learning
- Sib and parent compliance demands are obtained through threats or physical aggression; *attack* - *counterattack* - *positive outcome*
- Prosocial behaviors ignored or go unrecognized
How Do Boys Become Aggressive?

Coercive Family Process - Patterson et al.

- Punishment paradigms are narrow, inconsistent, and harsh
- Children become increasingly coercive and aggressive
- Process becomes bi-directional as child aggressiveness & non-compliance increases, and parent effectiveness decreases
How Do Boys Become Aggressive?

If the family setting is the early training grounds for aggressive behavior, the school is where the behaviors are practiced, reinforced, and solidified.
How Do Boys Become Aggressive?

*Off to School They Go…*

- Ill-prepared for a rule-governed environment more suited for typically socialized girls
- Hold beliefs that value aggression
- Lack essential pre-academic skills
- Encounter system more concerned with test scores than socio-emotional learning
- Have few if any positive adult male role models
How Do Boys Become Aggressive?

Off to School They Go….

- Encounter peer rejection
- Subjected to unsupported “interventions”
- Referred to special education
- Fail to bond in a meaningful way
- Bi-directional aversion develops
- Drop-out and push-out behaviors escalate
and what happens in MDCPS?

Graduation Rate = regular diplomas from 2004 / 8th grade enrollment from 2000

- The longitudinal 4-year **2000-2004 graduation rate** for White, Non-Hispanic students was **73.1 percent**;
- for Hispanic students the rate was **61.1 percent**;
- and for Black, Non-Hispanic students the rate was **49.5 percent**.

MDCPS Research Brief: **2003-2004 DROPOUT AND GRADUATION RATES** May 2005
Three-Level Prevention Approach

1. Address the needs of ALL
2. Address the needs of a SOME
3. Address the needs of a FEW
What Can Be Done for Boys?
In a culturally-sensitive context...

- Promote community-based parent training
  - Incredible Years
- Support quality mentoring programs
  - Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- Teach socio-emotional competencies
  - Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies
  - Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum
What Can Be Done for Boys?

In a culturally-sensitive context...

- Promote bonding to school
  - Learning-based - not exclusionary - discipline
- Promote parent involvement
- Assess and monitor academic progress
  - Early literacy screenings, e.g., DIBELS or AIMSweb
  - RTI approaches for academics and behavior
What Can Be Done for Boys?

In a culturally-sensitive context...

- Early screening for high risk boys
- Behavioral skills training with evidence-supported interventions
  - ICPS (I Can Problem-Solve)
  - Anger Coping Program
  - Positive Alternative Choices Training (PACT)
  - Think First Anger and Aggression Management
A Final Story
Resources

  [http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/model/programs/IYS.html](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/model/programs/IYS.html)

  [http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/model/programs/BBBS.html](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/model/programs/BBBS.html)

  [http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/model/programs/PATHS.html](http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/model/programs/PATHS.html)
Resources

- Dynamic Indicators of Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) [http://dibels.uoregon.edu/](http://dibels.uoregon.edu/)
- ICPS – I Can Problem Solve available through Research Press
- PACT – Positive Adolescent Choices Training available through Research Press