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SELECTED CORRELATES OF PEER RELATIONS
IN NURSERY SCHOOL CHILDREN

by

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Marcella Dean	

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IN

NURSERY SCHOOL CHILDREN

by Gwen Andrew

AN ABSTRACT

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

FOR

MASTERS OF SOCIAL WORK DEGREE

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

SOCIAL WORK 895

Dr. Gwen Andrew

June, 1968

Group Members:

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THESIS



ABSTRACT

The objective of this project was to study three variables affecting peer relations of nursery school children.

Since early socialization patterns are related to subsequent interaction and social adjustment, it may be assumed that understanding of interaction patterns among nursery children will be instrumental in developing positive programs that may prevent later maladaptive behavior.

The sample for this study consisted of thirteen 3-year old and seventeen 4-year old children currently enrolled in the Michigan State University laboratory nursery school. All students had been attending school since October, 1967 and there was extensive family and personal data on each child in the files which were available to this group.

The present study attempted to provide some clarification in the above mentioned area by examining the assumption that there is a significant association between: 1) number of siblings and number of friendship choices among nursery school children; 2) self concept and number of friendship choices; and 3) chronological age and duration of friendship choices. The following hypotheses were tested:

H₁: The number of friendship choices varies directly with the number of siblings.

H₂: The number of friendship choices varies directly with positiveness of self concept.

H_3 : The duration of friendship choices varies directly
with chronological age.

The results of the study failed to support H_1 . H_2 was not supported, perhaps because the instrument used lacked sensitivity and appropriateness. H_3 was supported.

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A RESEARCH REPORT

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SELECTED CORRELATES OF PEER RELATIONS IN NURSERY SCHOOL CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

Both experience and research support the theory that much of a child's early physical, intellectual, emotional and social progress is maturational. Since the 1930's, the main current in progressive kindergartens and nursery schools has been to study the child's natural development and to follow along with ancillary measures. However, there are many aspects of growth, especially in social interaction, which do not emerge concomitantly with maturation. From age 3 on, playmates become increasingly important to children but there are wide differences in patterns of interaction with playmates. Lambert (1960) notes that the area of interpersonal behavior in children has hardly been tapped. It seems appropriate, therefore, to explore various aspects of social interaction among young children. The objective of this study is to test relationships between three maturational and environmental variables (chronological age, number of siblings, and self concept) and peer relations of 3 and 4 year olds currently attending a university nursery school, as indicated by duration and number of friendship choices.

Variations in social participation of young children have been studied by recording the frequencies of behavior which represent different degrees of social involvement. These have been classified as: unoccupied, solitary and onlooker behavior and parallel, associative and cooperative play. It has been noted that in interaction

1. The first part of the document is a letter from the author to the reader, explaining the purpose of the study and the methods used. The letter is dated 1950 and is addressed to the reader.

2. The second part of the document is a list of references, which includes books, articles, and other sources used in the study. The references are listed in alphabetical order.

3. The third part of the document is a list of figures, which includes tables, graphs, and other visual aids. The figures are listed in alphabetical order.

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with their age peers, children progress from onlooker behavior to parallel play where they play alongside but not with other children, using the same playthings. Later, they proceed to associative play where they play with and share materials. Cooperative and organized play, then, seem to develop with maturity. One study by Green (1933) revealed that the number of children with whom a child interacts in group play increases with age, apparently because maintaining an associative relationship with more than one person requires effective use of language. Further investigation is required to determine whether duration of friendship also increases with chronological age.

Children differ not only in degree of involvement, but also in their patterns of interaction with others. Bossard (1956), who is especially interested in the relationship between family size and the ways in which children are reared, found that the size of a group markedly influences the patterning of interactions and relationships among its members. In a large family there tends to be less intense interaction between parents and children; they have a more satisfying and relaxed way of looking at the world and getting along with people. Some studies have indicated that children from smaller families are more likely to have feelings of inferiority and problems of social adjustment.

This is particularly pertinent to the "only" child who has a vastly different social environment from the child with several brothers and sisters. McCandless, Bilous and Bennett (1961) found

that children who are most dependent on adults are least popular among their peers at pre-school age. This may explain why "only" children, who typically seek out adults for comfort and attention, have more difficulty establishing friendships with peers than do children who are relatively independent of adults. Also, when a child has found social interaction with adults associated with punishment and frustration, he may experience difficulty interacting with his peers. However, under some circumstances, youngsters who have not enjoyed gratification in their social contacts with adults may still learn that friendships with other children are rewarding. In this study, sociometric instruments will be used to determine whether there is a significant relationship between the number of siblings which a child has in his home and the number of friends he has in nursery school.

It is important to recognize that differences in family size may reflect, to a substantial degree, differences in values and aspirations of parents which are, in turn, incorporated by their children at an early age. Someone has suggested that in the genesis of the adult from the child the creative factor is the child's attachment to his parents. Certainly by the time a child enrolls in nursery school, his perception of himself and others has been colored by the attitudes, values and experiences in human relationship which he has encountered within the context of his family. Some researchers have reported that a negative self concept and expectations of failure appear in a child as early as four years of age or younger.

We know that at this age children already tend to assign roles and pass judgements on each other. Between the ages of 3 and 5 a child develops a definite personality of his own. The kind of person he will eventually become is beginning to show, not only in his appearance, but also in the way he meets new situations. Whatever patterns of behavior have been rewarded frequently by his parents, gain ascendancy in the child's hierarchy of responses and are likely to be used in other social situations. According to G. H. Mead's (1956) theory, which anchors the development of self-awareness in social interaction, a child's "awareness" becomes translated into self concepts. It seems reasonable then to postulate that there will be a positive association between self concept and number of friendship choices among nursery school children.

Research techniques, which would include all the variables relating to children's acceptance of and by others, have not yet been devised. However, several early studies of friendship contacts of preschool children included variables which continue to be of interest, such as: chronological age, developmental level, popularity and physical attractiveness. Relatively new and improved sociometric instruments and measures of self concept make it possible to assess more accurately young children's perceptions of themselves, as well as of other members in their social group.

Northway and Weld (1956), reporting on sociometric studies, write, "With children there is considerable variation, but even at

nursery school level, there is some tendency for a child to maintain his sociometric level." Since early socialization patterns are related to subsequent interaction and social adjustment, it may be assumed that understanding of interaction patterns among nursery school children will be instrumental in developing positive programs that may prevent later maladaptive behavior.

The present study hopes to provide at least some clarification in this area by examining the assumption that there is a significant association between: (1) number of siblings and number of friendship choices among nursery school children; (2) self concept and number of friendship choices; and (3) chronological age and duration of friendship choices. This assumption may be more formally specified in the following hypotheses:

- H_1 : The number of friendship choices varies directly with number of siblings.
- H_2 : The number of friendship choices varies directly with positiveness of self concept.
- H_3 : The duration of friendship choices varies directly with chronological age.

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METHOD

The sample for this study consisted of thirteen three year old and seventeen four year old children currently enrolled in the Michigan State University laboratory nursery school. All the S's had been attending the school since October, 1967, and there was extensive family and personal data on each child in files which were available to the E's.

Operational Definitions

"Number of siblings" and "chronological age" in months was recorded from the files, and no operationalizing as such was required.

"Self concept" was defined in accordance with the theory of G. H. Mead (1956) as the feelings of intrinsic self worth held by an individual. It was determined by taking a polaroid picture of each child and using this to administer the first part of the Brown IDS Self Concept Reference Test. All fourteen descriptive items on the test were presented in an "either - or" format, the more socially desirable choice being scored "1", while the less socially desirable choice was scored "0". The closer a child's "self score" approached the maximum of 14, the more positive his self concept was considered to be.

"Number of friendship choices" was arrived at by administering The Play Situation-Picture Board Sociometric Technique, which was adapted from sociometric techniques initially developed by McCandless and Marshall (1957). Presenting the same photographs used in the

Brown Test, along with ten stimulus pictures portraying play situations and activities, each S was asked to select the five play situations he preferred. He then chose the child he would most like to play with in each of the activities selected. After making these five choices, the S was asked whom he would like to play with most of all, whom else, and a third choice. (This resulted in three selections). The E then put all the pictures back and asked the S whom he did not want to play with, whom else, and a third choice. (E tried to get all three responses, if possible.) The "number of friendship choices" includes the number of children chosen for the play activities and the number of different responses to the positive question, "Whom would you like to play with most of all?" Thus, each S was assigned a score between 3 and 8; this score will be correlated with number of siblings and with self concept in checking H_1 and H_2 .

"Duration of friendship" was also derived from sociometric data. In the Play Situation set and Positive Choices, scores of 3, 2, or 1 were assigned according to the frequency with which choices made in October, 1967 reappeared on the May retest. The positive and negative choice sets were then combined and scores of 3, 2, or 1 given, depending upon consistency both of choice and position of preference in October and May tests. The details of the procedure are given in the next section. The "duration of friendship" score for each S may range between 0 and 21, the higher score representing more consistency in friendship patterns. This score will be correlated with the

8.

chronological age of Ss to check H_3 .

For further clarification on this matter reference may be made to the sample data collection form in the appendix.

PROCEDURESData Collection:

When the E had established some rapport with the children in their classroom situation, she took the Ss, one at a time, to an interviewing room where she took a full-front color picture of each S with a polaroid camera. Standardized, but ambiguous instructions for posing were used in order to obtain a spontaneous facial expression. After the exposure was made, E waited fifteen seconds for the print to develop, during which time she talked with S to establish better rapport. When the developed print was pulled from the camera, E pointed to the print and obtained a statement from S indicating that he recognized himself in the picture. E then sat opposite S at a table, placing the photograph on the table top directly in front of S and beneath his head. Pointing to the picture, E said, "Now can you tell me, is Johnny Gallagher happy or is he sad?" She proceeded through all fourteen of the bipolar adjectival items on the test, being careful to point directly to the picture before asking each question, and always prefacing the question with the phrase, "Is Johnny Gallagher?" This procedure establishes a set in which the child is induced to "stand back from himself" and to gain a perspective of himself as an object in the photograph. As noted above, the more socially desirable choice received a score of "1", while the less socially acceptable choice was scored "0". The "self score" could range from 0 - 14 and, in this

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study, was assumed to represent the "self concept" which was correlated with the number of friendship choices to determine whether there is a relationship between positive self concept and ability to establish friendships in nursery school.

After all thirty Ss had completed the Brown test, the same E administered the Play Situation-Picture Board Sociometric Technique to the same group of children, but on a different day. The pictures which were used when assessing self concept by the Brown (1966) procedure were placed in a group on a piece of white fiberboard and positioned directly in front of each S. The E then showed ten pictures of play situations to the S who was instructed to select the five activities he preferred. These were subsequently presented to S, in order of his preference, with his own picture attached to the play situation picture. S was then asked to select from the photographs of his peers, the picture of the child whom he would most like to play with in the play situation portrayed. His actual behavioral response in selecting a picture from the group constituted his sociometric choice response. This procedure was repeated for each of the five play activities selected. The E then said, "Now tell me--whom do you like to play with most of all?" Show me the picture." Then, "Whom else do you like to play with most of all?" E repeated this question until she got three selections. She put all the pictures back then said, "Tell me now, whom do you not want to play with? Show me the picture." Also, "Whom else do you not want to play with?" Again this is repeated until three selections are made.

The E computed the score for "number of friendship choices" by adding the number of different children chosen for the five play situations and the number of different responses to the positive question, "Whom would you like to play with most of all?" Scores would range between 1 and 8, the larger number representing a wider friendship circle among nursery school peers. This was then correlated with the number of siblings each child had in his home.

"Duration of friendship choices" was scored according to the following criteria:

Play Situation Set and Positive Choices:

- 0 - For any response made in set T_1 or T_2 , but not made in T_1 and T_2 (T_1 = October testing; T_2 = May testing.)
- 1 - For any response made in both sets T_1 and T_2 , and no more than once in either T_1 or T_2 .
- 2 - For any response made in both sets T_1 and T_2 , and more than once in either T_1 or T_2 , but not both.
- 3 - For any response made in sets T_1 and T_2 and more than once in both T_1 and T_2 .

Positive and Negative Choice Sets:

- 3 - For any response made in the same set in the same position in T_1 and T_2 .
- 2 - For any response made in the same set in adjacent positions in T_1 and T_2 .
- 1 - For any response made in the same set T_1 and T_2 .

The scores which each S obtained on the Play Situation Set and on the Positive and Negative Choice Sets were combined to yield a score which was assumed to be an indication of the S's duration of friendship choices. This was correlated with the child's chronological age which had previously been computed in months.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Hypothesis 1:

Examination of the number of siblings in the home and the number of friendship choices in nursery school revealed no significant association. The numbers of friendship choices were distributed as follows:

<u>No. of Siblings</u>	<u>Mean No. of Friendship Choices</u>
0	4.83
1	6.14
2	5.18
3-6	5.13

As the mean number of friendship choices by "only" children was 4.83 compared to a mean of 5.46 by children with any number of siblings, and as this was in the predicted direction, the Chi-square statistic was used to test the null hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the two groups. The results, which appear in Table 1, were not significant and failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 1. Comparison of Number of Siblings in the Home and Number of Friendship Choices in Nursery School.

No. of Siblings	No. of High Choices	No. of Low Choices	Total
0	2 (33%)	4 (67%)	6
1 - 6	11 (45%)	13 (55%)	24
Total	13	17	30

$$\chi^2 = .31, \quad df = 1, \quad P \text{ about } .50 \text{ (not significant)}$$

According to this study, the number of peer choices among nursery school children did not seem to be associated with the number of siblings in the home.

Hypothesis 2:

The prediction that children with the highest self concept would have the largest number of friends was likewise not supported by the results of this study. The mean number of friendship choices for Ss who had high, medium or low "self scores" on the Brown IDS Self Concept Reference Test was essentially identical, as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of Self Score on Brown IDS Test and Number of Friendship Choices in Nursery School Children

Brown IDS Self Score	f	Mean No. of Friendship Choices
High (14)	8	5.25
Medium (12-13)	19	5.26
Low (6-7)	3	6.00
N= 30		M= 5.33

If there was a trend, it was in the direction opposite to that hypothesized in H_{2a} , but because of the small sample and because the test itself appeared to be inappropriate for this study, no confidence can be placed in these results.

Hypothesis 3:

The statistic used to test the third hypothesis was the t-test for the difference between the means of two independent samples. As predicted, the duration of friendship choices of 4-year olds was

significantly greater than that of 3-year olds. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparison of Chronological Age and Mean Scores of Duration of Friendship Choices by 3-year and 4-year Old Nursery School Children

	3-Yr. Olds (N=13)	4-Yr. Olds (N=17)
Mean Duration of Friendship Choices	6.61	10.23
SD	3.71	3.59

$t = 2.53$, $df = 28$, significant $< .02$ level.

The difference between the mean duration scores of the 3-year and 4-year olds was significant beyond the .02 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and it may be assumed from the results of this study that the ability to play cooperatively with the same peers over a period of time is a function of maturity which usually develops simultaneously with chronological age.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The failure to reveal significant association between self concept and peer participation does not necessarily negate the assumption that a child who thinks well of himself is inspired to be friendly toward his peers. Failure to reject the null hypothesis in the present instance may be due to the fact that "self as subject" was used as a measure of "self concept". Perhaps "self as object", or the perception which one has of the way in which he is seen by significant others in his life, is a more accurate estimate of "self concept." However, it was the opinion of the Es who administered the Brown IDS Self Concept Reference Test that the instrument as a whole is not sufficiently sensitive to differentiate between children in a comparatively homogeneous school population. The format is such that a child--especially one who is already "test-wise"--almost invariably responds positively to the first question regardless of its appropriateness. The preponderance of high scores appears, then, to be an artifact and cannot be regarded as a true indication of the children's self concepts. The only three low scores seemed to be either the result of emotional immaturity or precocious mental development, rather than a measure of self concept. Moreover, the vocabulary of the test is appropriate for only a very narrow age range--immature children being unaware of the meaning of some of the adjectives while advanced children respond on a cognitive level. Different results would be expected if a more sensitive

and appropriate instrument were used to measure self concept or if the Brown Test in its entirety were administered to less sophisticated children who have not been so frequently exposed to empirical studies in a laboratory atmosphere.

The greater ability which 4-year olds exhibit in establishing continuing friendships with members of their nursery school group may, in reality, be a function of increased perception of the concept of duration. For instance, 4-year olds are more likely to look ahead for a week or a month as they anticipate doing something with a "buddy", whereas 3-year olds live primarily in the present. The concept of time seems to correlate with play activity; that is, increased perception of time and duration, develop along with the ability to participate in co-operative play. This is important for programming and instruction at all levels. Teachers should be aware that chronological age, more than physical size or appearance, determines a child's pattern of social interaction. It is also important to identify excessive differentials between chronological age and emotional maturity so that help may be given to the older child who cannot interact with his peers at a level consonant with his age. Likewise, the younger child who is exceptionally mature emotionally should be encouraged to develop maximally in the area of social interaction.

A teacher's philosophy will determine how much emphasis she puts upon peer relations within her classroom. If she considers this to be a critical part of the curriculum, she will provide both play

and work experiences within a context of reasonable social freedom. In this way, she may observe each child's behavior and develop strategy to reinforce adaptive behavior while attempting to modify ineffective or maladaptive behavior. The more teachers and researchers can identify the pertinent variables affecting the child's peer status, the more specific help can be given to children who, as early as nursery school, have difficulty relating to their peers.

IMPLICATIONS

As studies in which predictions have been made from early behavioral records suggest a positive relation between the quality of early social behavior in the peer group and adult social adjustment, it seems important to further refine hypotheses about peer relations among nursery school children. The present study indicates that continued efforts should be made to develop a sensitive instrument which adequately measures the self concept of young children. Also, it would seem pertinent to follow "only" children throughout their school experience in an attempt to determine whether their initial handicap in establishing meaningful peer relationships is eventually overcome, and at what grade level. The association between chronological age and emotional maturity should be examined and utilized at all levels to develop more effective classroom programs.

It is hoped that this research study has contributed in a small way toward the identification and understanding of a few of the innumerable variables which contribute toward successful peer relations among nursery school children. The more hypotheses can be refined and tested, the greater is the possibility of zeroing in with the specific help early in a child's school career which he needs in order to establish successful patterns of friendship and social interaction.

APPENDIX

Scoring Sheet for Brown -- IDS Self Concept Reference Test

13

Example of question format: 1. Now tell me, is Johnny Gallagher happy or is he sad?

2. Does Johnny Gallagher's mother think Johnny Gallagher is happy or sad?

Item	<u>Self Score*</u>	<u>Mother Score</u>	<u>Teacher Score</u>	<u>Peer Score</u>
1. Happy-sad	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0
2. Clean-dirty	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0
3. Good looking-ugly	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0
4. Likes to play with other kids-doesn't like to play with other kids	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0
5. Likes to have own things-likes to have other kids things	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0
6. Good-bad	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0
7. Likes to talk a lot-doesn't like to talk a lot	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0
8. Smart-stupid	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0
9. Scared of a lot of things-not scared of a lot of things	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0
10. Scared of a lot of people-not scared of a lot of people	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0
11. Likes the way clothes look-doesn't like the way clothes look	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0
12. Strong-weak	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0
13. Healthy-sick	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0
14. Likes the way (my) face looks-doesn't like the way (my) face looks	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0	1, 0

*Note: Score values parallel order in which adjectives are presented.

APPENDIX

PLAY SITUATION -- PICTURE BOARD

SOCIOMETRIC

Record Form

Child's Name John Brown

Child's Code No. 12

Head Start Center Lake School

Date 5-6-68

Play Situation

Voluntary or "Urged"
Response Response
(Check one)

1st card selected <u>Penis</u>	1st response <u>Richard</u>	<u>Sanct</u>	_____
2nd card selected <u>Swings</u>	1st response <u>Gayle</u>	<u>Gayle</u>	_____
3rd card selected <u>Paints</u>	1st response <u>Richard</u>	<u>David H.</u>	_____
4th card selected <u>Lumber</u>	1st response <u>Richard</u>	<u>Elizabeth</u>	_____
5th card selected <u>Dolls</u>	1st response <u>Richard</u>	<u>Richard</u>	_____

S's responses to "Who would you like to play with most of all?"

1st response <u>Richard</u>	<u>Richard</u>	_____
2nd response <u>Gayle</u>	<u>David</u>	_____
3rd response <u>Laden</u>	<u>Gayle</u>	_____

S's responses to "Who would you not want to play with?"

1st response <u>Billy</u>	<u>Sanct</u>	_____
2nd response <u>Laden</u>	<u>David</u>	_____
3rd response <u>Steven</u>	<u>Steven</u>	_____

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