ADOLESCENTS’ TEXT MESSAGING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR

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OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION

- Talk about the role of peer influence in youths’ involvement in antisocial behavior
- Discuss some specific features of text messaging that may make it ideal for antisocial communication
  - Present findings from an observational study of the content of adolescents’ text messages.
- Discuss steps parents and school administrators can take to reduce the possible negative influence of texting
**Peer Influence on Antisocial Behavior**

- Frequency of interaction affects the strength of peer influence (Agnew, 1991; Barry & Wentzel, 2006)

- Peer Contagion Hypothesis (Dishion & Dodge, 2005)
  - Establish deviant group norms
  - Restrict interaction opportunities with normative peers
  - Provide instrumental support for antisocial behavior
Peer Influence on Antisocial Behavior

Deviancy Training – when antisocial youth encourage and reinforce their peers’ discussion of delinquency.

- Antisocial dyads discuss more negative topics than normative youth (Dishion et al., 1995)
- They are also more likely to reinforce their peers discussing delinquent topics (Piehler & Dishion, 2007)
Peer Influence on Antisocial Behavior

- Interpersonal communication about delinquent topics is a mechanism through antisocial behavior develops.

- Text Message communication may be an ideal forum for youth to discuss antisocial activities.
Adolescents use text messaging (SMS) heavily:

- Over 77% of adolescents own cell phones.
- 63% of teens report sending at least 1 text everyday.
- Median rate of 60 messages sent per day (Lenhart et al., 2012).

SMS may be an ideal forum for discussing antisocial topics because:

- Discrete
- Constant access to peers
- Largely unsupervised (Ling, 2004b).
TEXTING AND ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR

- Few studies have examined the role of text message communication and involvement in antisocial behaviors.
  - Ling, 2005a
    - Texting frequency predicted self-reported problems at school, truancy, and alcohol use
  - Underwood, Rosen, Beron & Ehrenreich, submitted for review
    - Youth following high social aggression, high physical aggression and high joint social and physical aggression trajectories sent and received more text messages.

- Studies have focused on frequency and relied on self-reports of electronic communication
THE BLACKBERRY PROJECT: AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY

- No previous research had examined how the actual content of adolescents’ text messaging relates to antisocial behavior

- 178 adolescents (89 girls) provided with BlackBerry devices
  - 66% Caucasian, 17.5% Hispanic, 8.5% African American, and 14% did not report/of mixed race.
  - Median income between $26,000 – 75,000

- Also collected information participants’ parents (152 mothers) and participants’ language arts teachers
METHOD – MICRO CODING

- Four days of SMS communication (in 2-day transcripts) were assigned to a team of 24 coders
- Coding system designed primarily to capture social aggression and prosocial communication.
  - Property Crimes - $\kappa = 1.0$
  - Physical Aggression - $\kappa = .72$
  - Rule-Breaking - $\kappa = .94$
  - Substance Use Codes - $\kappa = .90$
**Discussion of Antisocial Topics via Texting**

Descriptive Statistics of Antisocial and Non-Antisocial Utterances via SMS Over a 4 Day Period: Entire Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Utterance</th>
<th>Number of participants&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Antisocial Utterances</td>
<td>172 (100%)</td>
<td>426 (98.38%)</td>
<td>401.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2136</td>
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<tr>
<td>Antisocial Utterances (Collapsed)</td>
<td>102 (59.3%)</td>
<td>7 (1.62%)</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule-Breaking</td>
<td>53 (30.81%)</td>
<td>1.8 (.42%)</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illicit Substances</td>
<td>48 (27.91%)</td>
<td>3.2 (.74%)</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>217</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Aggression</td>
<td>57 (33.14%)</td>
<td>1.7 (.39%)</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Crimes</td>
<td>11 (6.4%)</td>
<td>0.2 (.05%)</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Utterances</td>
<td>172 (100%)</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>409.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2201</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Numbers outside parentheses indicate raw frequency of utterances, numbers inside parentheses indicate percentage of utterances.

<sup>a</sup>Number of participants who engaged in each type of utterance
**Rule-Breaking Behavior**

**Friday:**
(08:21:43 AM) Katherine says to Juan (P):
  I gotta math test today. Can we skip at ur crib?
(08:21:45 AM) Juan (P) says to Katherine:
  no my big bros home today and he awake already. y cant we stay at ur house
(08:34:11 AM) Katherine says to Juan (P):
  My moms not workin today. Could we stay at Louis’s house?
**Rule-Breaking Behavior**

**Thursday:**
(11:44:48 AM) Stephanie says to Roselyn (P):
what up
(11:44:50 AM) Roselyn (P) says to Stephanie:
Nthin {just} drivin ma lil sis to da store
(12:56:33 PM) Stephanie says to Roselyn (P):
girl when you get your license?
(12:56:36 PM) Roselyn (P) says to Stephanie:
I don't got ma license yet
(12:56:38 PM) Stephanie says to Roselyn (P):
Oh so you givin a ride with a bike?
(12:56:40 PM) Roselyn (P) says to Stephanie:
No ma mom car
(01:07:11 PM) Stephanie says to Roselyn (P):
Ok lol
PHYSICAL AGGRESSION

Tuesday:
(07:50:30 PM) Dave (P) says to Rachel:
Yeaa i saw u like {2} times today:) :) & haha sammy {got} beat
upp by like 6 pakistan kids lol He like punched 1 of them cause
they were talkin trash in their
(07:50:33 PM) Dave (P) says to Rachel:
language but then they all jumped himmm. That suckkss

Friday:
(11:12:18 PM) Raul (P) says to Sandy:
Mark {and} his lil bro jason haha fought roger n his cuzin. Haha u
should uf seen Jason. dat nigga got crazy as hell
(11:12:56 PM) Sandy says to Raul (P):
For real. Who whooped lil roger? Ha i bet jason lol
(11:13:40 PM) Raul (P) says to Sandy:
Na Mark did. roger 2 big 4 jason
(11:17:34 PM) Sandy says to Raul (P):
Haha man lil roger funny. But i wanna see you n george box
SUBSTANCE USE

Tuesday:
(03:27:55 PM) Alicia (P) says to Charlie:
   Gud imma need it {$20 worth or marijuana}. I wanna smoke so badly
   I've neva been dis sober at school befo

Friday:
(11:32:03 AM) Mindy (P) says to   Daisy:
   Hey daisy {let’s} skip 4th so we can {smoke marijuana}
(11:53:41 AM) Daisy says to Mindy (P):
   That’s a great idea!!! but I’m already in class
(11:53:44 PM) Mindy (P) says to   Daisy:
   ok letz skip 5th. were do we meet so I can give u sum?
(11:54:27 AM) Daisy says to Mindy (P):
   I can’t skip 5th period. I have a test
(11:54:30 AM) Mindy (P) says to   (SMS):
   ok go to da restroomz were we met last time. well just {smoke} quick
**SUBSTANCE USE**

Saturday:

(11:23:27 AM) Griffin (P) says to Michelle:
   Lol i have bought 85 dollars worth in all my weed life. It lasted for a long
time. Still lasting.
(11:23:29 AM) Michelle says to Griffin (P):
   Dang son.
(11:23:31 AM) Griffin (P) says to Michelle:
   I didnt buy it all at once! And i use a pipe which conserves weed. Its amazing
shit what pipes can do.
(11:34:11 AM) Michelle says to Griffin (P):
   Yeah dude I see that now
(11:34:14 AM) Griffin (P) says to Michelle:
   Lol hey i always get my shit from my guy in {town}. He gets me lots for
cheap, like $20 for 5 grams.
(11:34:17 AM) Michelle says to Griffin (P):
   Haha you've gotten the connections
(11:34:20 AM) Griffin (P) says to Michelle:
   Yeah i only buy from Nick if i want that A-1 shit. That is the best shit ever.
(11:34:22 AM) Michelle says to Griffin (P):
   Haha. Alright. I don't wanna get hooked.
(11:34:26 AM) Griffin (P) says to Michelle:
   Lol dont! Its expensive. But yeah dont buy from Nick its too expensive and it
would ruin other types of weed cause they wont get you as high as A-1.
**SUBSTANCE USE**

- **Saturday:**
  (03:32:45 PM) Lee (P) says to Trish:
  Its cool. Man I really want a joint right now
  (03:32:47 PM) Trish says to Lee (P):
  haha.
  (03:32:51 PM) Lee (P) says to Trish:
  I think I should b the 1st person u get hi with
  (03:32:52 PM) Trish says to Lee (P):
  haha. Me too.
  (03:32:55 PM) Lee (P) says to Trish:
  Really?!? WHEN!!!!?????
  (03:32:57 PM) Trish says to Lee (P):
  I dont know.
  (03:33:00 PM) Lee (P) says to Trish:
  Next time I see u??? I won't fuck u up to bad. DUDE!!! We can watch
  Friday {the movie}!!!!
  (03:47:07 PM) Trish says to Lee (P):
  Haha. Yes we should.
Sunday:
(07:20:47 PM) Nora (P) says to Josh:
 So wut happenin
(08:46:12 PM EST) Josh says to Nora (P):
 {Nothing,} jus fuckin {stole} a shit load of condoms from wal mart. and u?

Friday:
(11:30:52 PM) Roger (P) says to Nina:
 Yeah and during advisory ms smith gave me and Lee her car keys to go get something and we got in her car and put it in drive and hit a car and it left a Huge {dent} but she never noticed
(11:41:43 PM) Roger (P) says to Nina:
 those were good times
(11:55:57 PM) Nina says to Roger (P):
 Haha
RESULTS - DESCRIPTION

- Adolescents engage in antisocial and deviant conversations via SMS.

- Much of the antisocial communication displays the features of Deviancy Training:
  - Encourages involvement and reinforces this behavior as appropriate
  - Conveys instrumental knowledge on how one engages in these behaviors
**METHOD - MEASURES**

- Does this antisocial text messaging relate to subsequent involvement in antisocial behavior?
- Baseline Antisocial Behavior – Parent, Teacher, and Self-reports were collected in the spring/summer before 9th grade
  - Rule-breaking behavior subscale
    - “breaks rules”, “lies”, “cheats”, “sets fires”
  - Aggressive behavior subscale
    - “argues a lot”, “gets in fights”, “attacks people”
- Outcome ratings – Parent, Teacher, and Self-reports were collected again in the spring/summer before 10th grade
## Results – Rule-Breaking Behavior

Regression Analyses Predicting Parent, Teacher, and Self-Reports of 9th Grade Rule Breaking from Gender and Delinquent SMS Utterances

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<td>$\beta$</td>
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$^a$ Baseline Rule Breaking collected in 8th grade. Baseline and outcome ratings have corresponding reporters

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$
### RESULTS – AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

Regression Analyses Predicting Parent, Teacher, and Self-Reports of 9th Grade Aggressive Behavior from Gender and Delinquent SMS Utterances

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$^a$ Baseline Aggressive Behavior collected in 8th grade. Baseline and outcome ratings have corresponding reporters

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$


**DISCUSSION**

- Adolescents use SMS communication as a forum for antisocial conversation.

- Antisocial talk via SMS significantly predicts later involvement in rule-breaking and aggressive behavior
  - With the exception of parent reports of Aggressive Behavior
**So what can be done about it?**

- *Parental Monitoring* is one of the strongest protective factors against involvement with deviant peers and engaging in antisocial behavior.
  - **Monitor** (mon-i-tor), verb: “to observe and check the progress or quality of something over a period of time; to keep under systematic review”
**So what can be done about it?**

- *Parental Monitoring* is one of the strongest protective factors against involvement with deviant peers and engaging in antisocial behavior.
  - Monitor (mon-i-tor), verb: “to observe and check the progress or quality of something over a period of time; to keep under systematic review”

- Evidence suggests parents have very little knowledge of their children’s texting behavior (as well as other digital communication forums)
  - Parents are the first (and arguable most important) line of defense against children’s problem behavior
So what can be done about it?

The first step in parental monitoring is *having the ability* to monitor.

- Knowing passwords
- Having access to phones
- Limiting access to phones/internet during the night
10 PM
DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR CHILDREN ARE?
It’s 10pm, do you know where your children are?

I told you last night, ‘NO’!!
SO WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?

- The first step in parental monitoring is *having the ability* to monitor.
  - Knowing passwords
  - Having access to phones
  - Limiting access to phones/internet during the night

- It’s important to start this process early, and make necessary adjustments as children grow older.
  - Think of it as similar to “you have to leave the door open when your boy/girlfriend comes over”.
  - That rule works best if it begins when boy/girlfriends first *start* coming over, not when somebody’s pregnant.
SO WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?

- Parental monitoring is best when integrated into a larger conversation about digital safety and citizenship.
  - (These are lessons our kids need regardless of monitoring)
  - Lay out your expectations for what is appropriate digital communication

- Perhaps most importantly, monitoring requires finesse and *restraint*
  - Don’t comment on their Facebook page
  - Don’t weigh in on any little issue that comes up
  - “I was reading your texts last night, and you told Susie that you were late to third period!! How many times have I told you that you need to get to class on time...blah blah blah”
  - “You said ‘crappy’ in your Facebook status yesterday...we don’t swear in this house!”

- What are **YOUR** goals for this monitoring?
SO WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?

- These findings also suggest that giving students free access to their smartphones throughout the school day may have unintended consequences
  - Teachers’ hands are often tied
  - Many schools have recently engaged in an “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em” approach.
  - Furthermore, parents’ insistence on being able to communicate with their children throughout the school day has been some of the largest hurdles to administrators.
**Do’s and Don’ts for Monitoring Electronic Communication**

- **Do…**
  - …broach the subject early, openly, broadly, and incrementally
  - …take your child’s age, maturity, etc. into account
  - …let your individual child guide your monitoring efforts, but be very wary about giving up the *ability* to monitor
  - …use this as an opportunity to improve your relationship with your child

- **Don’t…**
  - …go home and make far-reaching and instant changes
  - …use you’re monitoring abilities as a way to micro-manage your child
  - …confuse your efforts to monitor as an attempt to participate in your child’s social interactions
SOME RESOURCES

- www.CommonSenseMedia.org
- *Talking Back to Facebook* by James P. Steyer
- *Raising Digital Families for Dummies* by Amy L. Bair
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- All of our BB Project participants, parents, and teachers
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