The Effect of Exuberance on Social Behavior in Middle Childhood

Michela A. Caffrey B.A., Rachel Carafello B.A., Sarah B. R. Kravitz M.A.
Department of Psychology, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

Positive Development Lab

Introduction

- The current research examines exuberance in 7-year old children while playing an approach/avoidance eliciting game with an unfamiliar peer, and the effect of exuberance on the peers' social behaviors.
- Goal: to examine whether one child's Exuberance may impact the interactions between the peers in terms of their social behaviors
- Hypothesis: Children with higher Exuberance will influence the unfamiliar peer to display more Exuberant behaviors. Children with lower Exuberance will not affect the unfamiliar peer's behavior.

Participants

- 164 peer dyads (74 male)
- Exuberance was observed as part of earlier longitudinal assessments for Peer 1
- Peers 1 & 2 engaged in social interaction with an unfamiliar, same-sex peer at 7 years

Procedure

- Videos of two 7-year old peers playing Crocodile Dentist were observed and coded for positive and negative social behaviors:
  - *Positive Social Behaviors:* smiling, making eye contact, excited/amused tone of voice, encouraging or giving advice to the peer.
  - *Negative Social Behaviors:* avoiding eye contact, pushing/hitting, mocking/making mean comments, blocking the peer from taking a turn, frustrated/ annoyed tone of voice.
- Exuberance for Peer 1 was observed in early childhood during a series of laboratory visits at 4, 9, 24, & 36 months of age (see Degnan et al., 2011)
  - a temperamental dimension including positivity, sociability, and high approach behavior to novelty.

Analyses

Initial Correlations:
- Peer 1's Positive social behavior was related to Peer 2's Positive social behavior, $r = .43$, $p < .001$.
- Peer 1's Negative social behavior was not related to Peer 2's Negative social behavior, $r = .12$, $p = .140$.
- Peers 1's Exuberance was related to their own Positive social behavior, $r = .16$, $p = .035$, but not their Negative social behavior.

Linear Regressions:
- Peer 1's Positive Social behavior significantly predicted Peer 2's Positive Social Behavior, $\beta = .43$, $t(164) = 6.07$, $p < .001$.
- Peer 1's Exuberance interacted with their Positive social behavior in relation to Peer 2's Negative social behavior, $\beta = .24$, $t(162) = 3.00$, $p = .003$.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.061[a]	.004	-.002	33.52867	.004	.610	1	164	.436
2	.062[b]	.004	-.008	33.62973	.000	.016	1	163	.900
3	.238[c]	.056	.039	32.82917	.053	9.047	1	162	.003

a. Predictors: (Constant), ZScore Target Positive Social Behavior

b. Predictors: (Constant), ZScore Target Positive Social Behavior, Mean Centered High Exuberance Profile
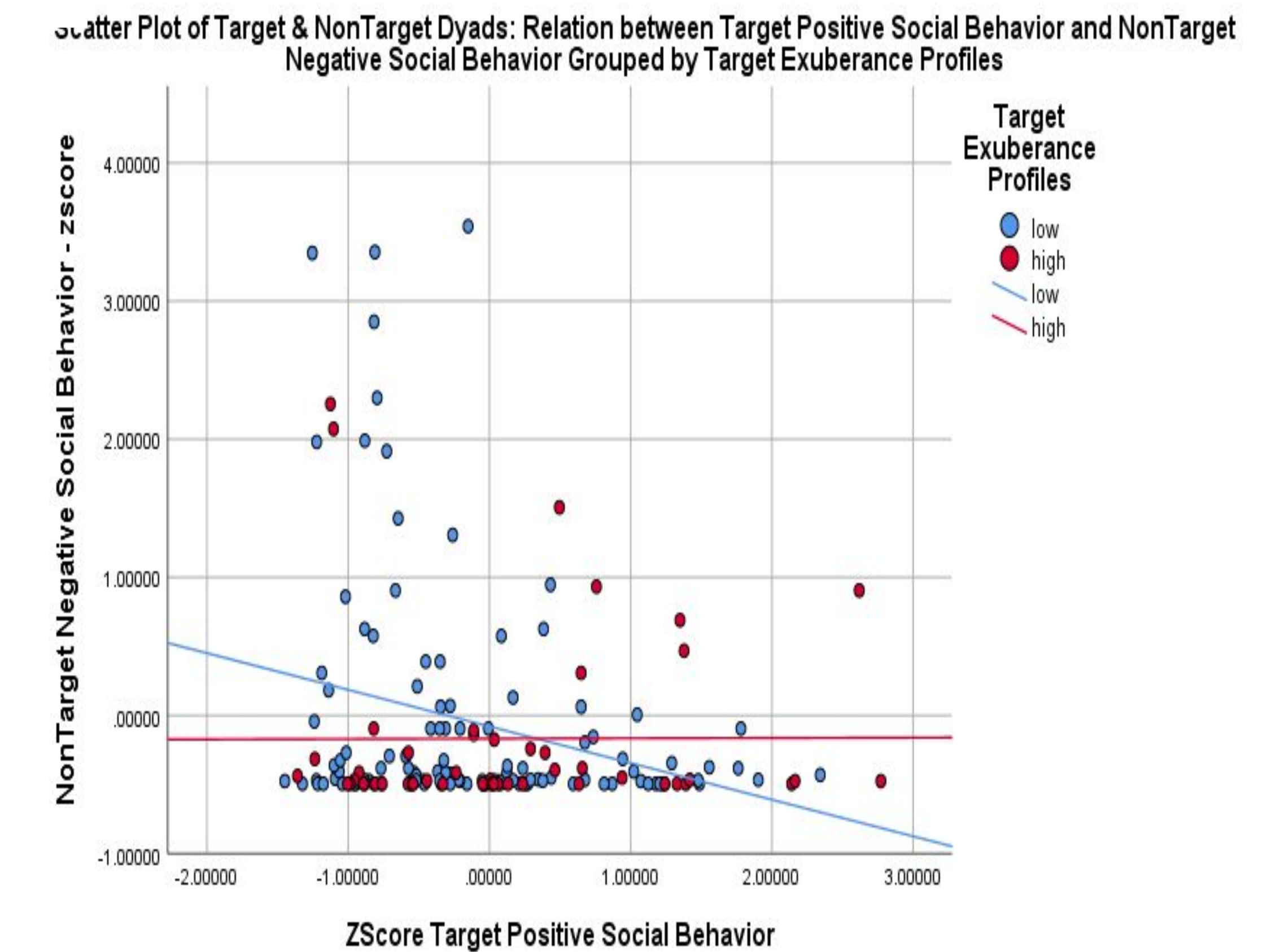
c. Predictors: (Constant), ZScore Target Positive Social Behavior, Mean Centered High Exuberance Profile, Interaction ZScore T Pos X Exub

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	16.618	2.602		6.386	.000
	ZScore Target Positive Social Behavior	-2.035	2.604	-.061	-.781	.436
2	(Constant)	16.625	2.611		6.368	.000
	ZScore Target Positive Social Behavior	-2.089	2.648	-.063	-.789	.431
	Mean Centered High Exuberance Profile	.928	7.376	.010	.126	.900
3	(Constant)	15.421	2.580		5.977	.000
	ZScore Target Positive Social Behavior	-4.143	2.674	-.124	-1.550	.123
	Mean Centered High Exuberance Profile	-1.215	7.236	-.013	-.168	.867
	Interaction ZScore T Pos X Exub	20.321	6.756	.240	3.008	.003

a. Dependent Variable: NonTarget Negative Social Behavior

Results

Scatter Plot of Target & NonTarget Dyads: Relation between Target Positive Social Behavior and NonTarget Negative Social Behavior Grouped by Target Exuberance Profiles

- When Peer 1 had **lower Exuberance**, their Positive social behaviors were **related to fewer** Peer 2 Negative social behaviors.

- When Peer 1 had **higher Exuberance**, their Positive social behavior was **unrelated** to Peer 2's Negative social behavior.

Conclusions

- Results show that Exuberance and Positive social behavior of children in middle childhood predicted Negative social behaviors in unfamiliar peers.

- Future research should observe what other factors may be predictive of Positive or Negative social behaviors between unfamiliar peers during an intense approach/avoidance eliciting game.

- Additionally, future work should examine what particular social behaviors are most helpful and how to teach shy kids about them.