III. TEASING, BULLYING, AND EMOTION REGULATION IN CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED MOTHERS

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Jason teases his fellow camper, Dwayne, daring him into the deep end of the pool, knowing that Dwayne cannot swim. What was Jason's intention with this tease? Is Jason cementing their friendship with a friendly gibe, or is he trying to belittle with a deliberate insult? And how does Dwayne interpret the tease? Will he laugh it off ("Nah, I think I'll pass on drowning today"), or pummel Jason to the ground, believing he has been bullied? For the teaser and the teased, there is an intention and an interpretation to teasing.

For better or for worse, every child, adolescent, and adult is teased; it is a normative part of living (Warm, 1997). Teasing can be playful or hurtful, but the line between the two is not always clear (Keltner, Capps, Kring, Young, & Heerey, 2001). The ambiguity between hostile and friendly teasing is part of the very nature of teasing, and teasing can cross into bullying (Mills & Carwile, 2009). Whereas teasing may be positive, bullying is always negative, as it intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort upon another (Olweus, 2006). Teasing is universal, but there is tremendous variability in how well children cope with teasing and the extent to which their own gibes are designed to hurt others. Although some topics allow for lighthearted joking, having a parent in prison is a tender subject for children and is an easy target for cruel teasing. Furthermore, we know that children who report feeling high levels of stigma around their mothers' incarceration tend to act out aggressively (Hagen & Myers, 2003). Their aggressive behavior can include bullying their peers.

In contrast, many children of incarcerated parents exhibit positive behavior and adjustment (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008), and we need to know more about the processes that facilitate such resilience. We propose that children's prosocial teasing, prosocial behavior with peers, and avoidance of

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bullying result, in part, from children's ability to regulate their emotions. Thus, a child's emotion regulation may serve as a protective factor against engaging in bullying behavior. In this study, we sought to find how bullying behavior in children of incarcerated mothers was predicted by dual aspects (i. e., both the positive and the negative sides) of teasing, peer interaction, and emotion regulation. Exhibiting resilience is both difficult and critical for children whose families are affected by incarceration (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). A child's capacity to regulate emotions—and to manage bullying and teasing—may relate to their overall competence, potentially facilitating resilience (Shields & Cicchetti, 2001).

Teasing Can Be Hostile or Friendly

Three components of teasing—aggression, humor, and ambiguity—are at the heart of what makes teasing both dangerous and attractive (Shapiro, Baumeister, & Kessler, 1991). As Warm (1997) explained, "[Teasing] is a source of universal suffering as well as a means of expressing power, sadism and friendly humor" (p. 97). When asked, children more often see teasing as aggressive rather than fun. When third, fifth, and eighth grade children wrote compositions about teasing, they talked about name calling and making fun of the attributes of others, and they said the usual targets of teasing were smaller children, "losers," and "stupid" children (Shapiro et al., 1991). Similarly, Warm (1997) analyzed written responses to questions about teasing from 250 children in the 1st grade through 11th grade. An average of 80% of students' reasons for teasing involved aggressive intent that included pleasure in the misery of the victim, revenge, and drive for power. Warm observed that the dominant motivation for children's teasing seemed at every age to be "sadistic pleasure in the discomfort of the child being teased" (p. 97), and Scambler, Harris, & Milich (1998) observe that the message to the recipient is most often hostile and is likely to consist of taunting, verbal abuse, and insults.

Barnett, Burns, Sanborn, Bartel, and Wilds (2004) found a more positive view of childhood teasing, however, in their study with fifth and sixth grade children. They offer an example of a prosocial tease: Two friends are in gym class, and one boy teases the other that his feet are growing so big that, "you'll have to borrow shoes from some giant NBA superstar like Shaquille O'Neal" (p. 295). In this type of teasing, the "target" child is actually pleased, as the teaser is joking and having a good time with the one being kidded. Both teachers and peers rated children as showing a greater tendency to be prosocial teasers than antisocial teasers. Voss (1997) similarly demonstrated that in the early school years, children use teasing to express liking for each other, while Eder (1991) found that adolescent group members tease each other to increase cohesion and solidify group membership.

Children need both emotional and cognitive skills to understand the subtleties of teasing. As a recipient of teases, the child needs to interpret

whether the instigator had a friendly or a hostile intention, an ability that relies on understanding that an act can have multiple, contradictory intentions. A child then needs to have the emotional ability to react appropriately. Children who report negative experiences and attitudes about being teased interpret ambiguous teases as if they were meant to be hostile and antisocial. These same children tend to use ineffective coping mechanisms in response to ambiguous teasing. They reported that they would retaliate, physically and verbally, or tell the teacher (Barnett, Barlett, Livengood, Murphy, & Brewton, 2010). This hostile attribution bias, along with an immature response, could set them up for further alienation and rejection from their peers (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge et al., 2003).

Bullying

Like teasing, childhood bullying occurs frequently. In a nationwide study of 15,686 students in grades 6 through 10, 29% of the students reported having been involved in some aspect of bullying, either as a bully, a victim, or both (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2001). Unlike teasing, which may be playful, bullying always has a hostile intent. As defined by Olweus (1993, p. 10), a child "is being bullied or victimized when he/she is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative action on the part of one or more other students." "Negative action" can be anything that provides discomfort and upsets the targeted child, from verbal put-downs to physical attacks to exclusion from a group. Bullying is intentional, not an accident, and it happens in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power (Olweus, 2006).

To an observer, the distinction between teasing and bullying is not always clear, however, particularly during middle childhood. Verbal aggression during this stage replaces the more physical aggression seen in preschoolers, so there are more snide remarks than punches (Warm, 1997). Since the intent behind teasing is often subtle, an outside observer, unable to know the motivations behind a remark, can only assess the distinction between teasing and bullying by seeing "how participants are presenting, and responding to, the teasing comments" (Mills & Carwile, 2009, p. 282). Still, a child's status as a bully is clear to both adults and children (Shields & Cicchetti, 2001). School systems show their disapproval of teasing by incorporating interventions programs designed to stop both teasing and bullying (Mills & Carwile, 2009).

Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation is the "ability to manage one's subjective experience of emotion, especially its intensity and duration, and to manage strategically one's expression of emotion in communicative contexts" (Saarni, 1999, p. 220). It requires emotional competence to interpret the level of hostility— or playful fun—inherent in a tease and to choose to respond appropriately.

While children may know intellectually that humor is the most effective reaction to teasing (Scambler et al., 1998), they may not have the ability to refrain from an emotionally dysregulated reaction such as anger or tears.

Children of incarcerated mothers are at especially high risk for emotion dysregulation. In earlier work with children of incarcerated mothers, a worrisome number of children showed problems in both the positive and the negative aspects of emotion regulation, and poor emotion regulation was related to heightened externalizing, internalizing, and callous-unemotional traits (Lotze et al., 2010). The development of emotion regulation is not simply a matter of maturation but is learned through interaction with others, especially within the family (Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998; Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007; Saarni, Mumme, & Campos, 1998). Negative parenting (e.g., hostility, negative control, lack of sensitivity) is associated with poor emotion regulation in children (Calkins, Smith, Gill, & Johnson, 1998; Morris et al., 2007). While the quality of parenting and home life for children of incarcerated parents varies tremendously (Dallaire, 2007a; Mackintosh et al., 2006), for some it may threaten their emotion regulation. Chaotic households can make it difficult for children to anticipate events and be planful, thus ending up emotionally labile (Evans, Gonnella, Marcynyszyn, Gentile, & Salpekar, 2005).

Along with family influences, children have their own temperamental qualities that influence their emotion regulation. Children predisposed toward high negative reactivity experience higher levels of anger, frustration, and irritability, and these children are at risk for behavioral and emotional problems (Morris et al., 2007), especially when parental guidance is poor or lacking. The relationship between emotional negativity/lability and quality of parenting is dynamic, in that difficult children are more likely to evoke negative responses from their caregivers (Bell, 1968; Sameroff, 2000). Children who are maltreated show dysregulated emotions (either over-controlled or undercontrolled) in the face of simulated anger (Maughan & Cicchetti, 2002). The quality of caregiving is thus critical in assisting children who are already at risk for problems managing their emotions.

Peer relationships also shape, and are shaped by, emotion regulation. As children move into middle childhood, more and more of the feedback regarding the display of emotions comes from peers (Kopp, 1989). Social competence requires the increasing internalization and use of these messages as to norms of behavior that are appropriate to the context (Denham, 1998). Peers provide constant feedback as to what behaviors are acceptable or not, and children who are unable to manage their emotions within the established boundaries are often rejected (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). Therefore, poor regulation of emotions is linked to problems with peer acceptance (Shields & Cicchetti, 2001). This relationship is dynamic, as those children who are not accepted make attractive targets for hostile teasing, and

those who respond inappropriately to teasing risk further rejection by their peers.

Both bullies and victims show deficits in emotion regulation. Shields and Cicchetti (2001) investigated emotion dysregulation as a predictor of bullying and victimization in maltreated and nonmaltreated children age 8–12 years at a summer camp. Emotion dysregulation was correlated with both disruptive and withdrawn behaviors. More specifically, disruptive behaviors were associated with bullying, whereas withdrawal-submissiveness was associated with victimization. Both bullies and victims were more emotionally dysregulated than other children. Moreover, there are long-term consequences to poor emotion regulation. Problems with modulation and expression of emotions are linked to both externalizing and internalizing behaviors, difficulties in relationships with caregivers, and poor peer relationships (Denham, 1998; Eisenberg et al., 2001).

Purpose and Hypotheses

This study was designed to explore potential mechanisms to explain bullying in children of incarcerated mothers. In line with resilience research, we asserted that there are desirable factors that help attenuate bullying as well as negative factors related to more bullying. We proposed that bullying would be predicted by the dual aspects of teasing, peer interaction, and emotion regulation. More specifically, we hypothesized that membership in a high bully group would be related to more hostile teasing (and less playful teasing), more aggressive behavior with peers (and less prosocial behavior with peers), and more negative emotion regulation (and less positive emotion regulation). We used independent measures to assess the two aspects of each of these predictors.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 61 children (55.7% girls), 7–13 years ($M = 9.7$, $SD = 1.6$), attending a 6-day, sleepover summer camp for children of incarcerated mothers. Children self-identified as African American (67.2%), mixed race (16.4%), European American (13.1%), and Hispanic (3.3%). All were children of currently or formerly incarcerated mothers; by camp policy, children whose mothers were now released from jail or prison were welcome to attend camp and take part in research. Children were currently living with grandparents (39.3%; including grandmother alone, 16.4%, or both grandparents, 23%), mother (29.5%; including mother alone, 18%; mother and

father, 8.2%; or mother and other, 3.3%), father (13.1%), aunt (8.2%), or other (relative, friend; 9.8%). Additional background data about mothers and families were not available. While at camp, children were assigned a same-sex mentor, with whom they spent the entire 6 days. Each mentor was assigned a maximum of two campers, with most mentor/camper matches being one-on-one.

Measures

Adult Rating of Antisocial and Prosocial Teasing (Barnett et al., 2004)

Adopted from Barnett, this is a rating (1–5, *never* to *all the time*) of an adult's rating of the child as an antisocial teaser and prosocial teaser. The measure provided the following definitions:

Type 1 Teases are mean teasing. They purposely hurt another person's feelings; the person who is teased ends up feeling sad or hurt.

Type 2 Teases are playful and fun teasing. The person who is teased thinks it is funny and feels happy about being kidded. Nobody feels hurt or mad afterward.

Mentors rated children in three contexts at camp: during daytime camp activities and moving between activities; while in the cabin with the other kids; and during evening camp activities. A sample question is, *How often does this child do Type 1 (hurtful) teasing while in the cabin with the other kids?* Internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for antisocial teasing was .95 and for prosocial teasing was .91. Higher mean scores indicate higher levels of each kind of teasing.

Child Behavior Scale (CBS; Ladd & Proffitt, 1996)

The CBS is an adult-report measure of children's aggressive, prosocial, and withdrawn behaviors in interaction with peers. The full scale has six subscales, of which two were employed here: Aggressive with Peers (sample, "kicks, bites, hits") and Prosocial with Peers (sample, "kind toward peers"). Items are rated on a three-point response scale, 1 = *doesn't apply*, 2 = *applies sometimes*, and 3 = *certainly applies*. Internal reliabilities were $\alpha = .92$ for Aggressive with Peers and $\alpha = .92$ for Prosocial with Peers. Higher mean scores indicate higher levels of each subscale.

Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC; Shields & Cicchetti, 1997)

The ERC is an adult-report measure of a child's emotion regulation. Its authors used the measure with low-income, primarily minority status children ages 6–12, in a summer camp. The 24 items make up two subscales. The Lability/Negativity subscale is a measure of poor emotion regulation that

assesses arousal, reactivity, anger dysregulation, and mood lability. A sample item is *Responds angrily to limit-setting by adults.* The Emotion Regulation subscale evaluates empathy, appropriate emotional expression, and emotional selfawareness; a sample item is *Responds positively to neutral or friendly overtures from peers.* Internal consistency reliability with this sample was .92 for Lability/Negativity and .71 for Emotion Regulation. High scores on Lability/Negativity indicate poor emotion regulation; high scores on the Emotion Regulation subscale indicate better emotion regulation.

Mount Hope Bully-Victim Questionnaire (Shields & Cicchetti, 2001)

This eight-item adult-report questionnaire measures children's bullying behavior and vulnerability to victimization. Only the five-item bullying subscale was used here, and Cronbach's α was .93. It was first developed for use by counselors in a summer camp setting for inner-city low-income children and so is particularly appropriate for the present study. Using a four-point Likert-type scale (never, seldom, sometimes, often), camp counselors/mentors rate how frequently children display bullying behavior. The measure permits researchers to classify children as high/low bullies. Shields & Cicchetti (2001) classified children as bullies who scored at least one standard deviation above the mean on the bully subscale and below one standard deviation above the mean on the victim subscale. The sample size in the current study was too small to form a meaningful bully group in this way (i.e., the bully group would have had just 10 children). Thus, High and Low bully groups were formed by splitting the variable at its mean (1.87, *seldom*), so that High bullies scored above and Low bullies below a score of 1.87.

Procedure

Children were attending a summer camp conducted by a faith-based organization for children of incarcerated mothers. This 6-day sleepover camp included typical camp activities (e.g., swimming, arts and crafts, nature hikes) and was provided at no cost to families. Our research group has been part of the camp since its inception. Information about the study was mailed to registering families as part of the precamp information packet. Consent forms were included in the packet and were signed by the primary caregivers and brought to camp by the children. Only the children with signed consents were evaluated by their mentors.

The measures were completed by camp mentors, who were adult volunteers (college students and members of the faith group) who supervised and camped with the children all week. Mentors participated in a training period prior to camp during which the researchers explained the study, including the behaviors that were to be measured. Mentors signed consents. Mentors came to know their children well in both structured and

unstructured contexts, as they were with the children 24 hr a day for 6 days (see Pellegrini & Bartini, 2000; Shields & Cicchetti, 2001, for discussion of adults' ability to rate aggression and bullying in children with whom they work). At the end of the week, mentors completed questionnaires for their assigned children. No compensation was provided for taking part in the study. The study was approved by the University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

RESULTS

Table 6 shows adults' ratings of antisocial and prosocial teasing and subscales of the CBS, the ERC, and the Mount Hope Bully-Victim Questionnaire. We hypothesized that membership in the high bullying group would be predicted by higher antisocial teasing, lower prosocial teasing, higher Aggression with Peers of the CBS, lower Prosocial with Peers of the CBS, higher Lability/Negativity of the ERC, and lower Emotion Regulation of the ERC. Sample size was not sufficient to include all the predictors in one model.

Logistic regression allows one to predict a discrete outcome such as group membership (here, High/Low bully groups) from a set of variables that may be continuous, discrete, dichotomous, or a mix (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). Logistic regression also lends itself to a clear interpretation of the probability of bullying as a function of the predictors. A hierarchical logistic regression model was built using antisocial teasing as a predictor of membership in High/Low bullying group and adjusting for age and gender (see Model 1 in

TABLE 6

ADULT MENTORS' REPORTS OF CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORS

Measure	Boys ($n = 26$)		Girls ($n = 35$)		All ($N = 61$)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Adult rating of antisocial and prosocial teasing						
Antisocial teasing	2.56	1.20	1.75	.78	2.10	1.05
Prosocial teasing	2.29	0.77	2.49	.89	2.40	0.84
Child behavior scale						
Aggressive with peers	1.90	0.67	1.43	.43	1.63	0.59
Prosocial with peers	1.89	0.51	2.36	.55	2.16	0.58
Emotion regulation checklist						
Lability/negativity subscale	2.39	0.77	1.98	.57	2.16	0.69
Emotion regulation subscale	2.94	0.55	3.16	.48	3.06	0.52
Mount hope bully-victim questionnaire						
Bullying	2.28	1.02	1.57	.71	1.87	0.92

Table 7). A test of the full model, including antisocial teasing, was statistically significant [$X^2(3) = 27.21$, $p < .001$]. With all three variables included in the model, 84% of cases were correctly predicted; 92% of Low bullies and 72% of High bullies were correctly predicted. Gender of the child was a significant predictor of bullying group [$X^2(1) = 4.26$, $p = .04$], with boys higher, but age not significant [$X^2(1) = .002$, $p = .97$]. Age was not a significant predictor in any of the models shown in Table 2. Antisocial teasing was a significant predictor of bullying group [$X^2(1) = 10.51$, $p = .001$] when adjusted for age and gender. The change in odds associated with a one-unit change in antisocial teasing was 4.3, indicating that a one-unit change in antisocial teasing behavior resulted in a child being more than four times more likely to be a High bully. A test of a similar model using prosocial teasing was not significant. Prosocial teasing was not a predictor of bully group.

A similar model with the Aggressive with Peers subscale of the CBS was also tested (see Model 2 in Table 7). A test of the full model was found

TABLE 7

HIERARCHICAL LOGISTIC REGRESSION MODELS PREDICTING CHILDREN'S HIGH/LOW BULLYING GROUPS FROM ADULT MENTORS' PREDICTORS

Prediction of High/Low Bullying	Chi-Square	Percent Predicted Correctly (%)	95% CI for Odds Ratio (OR)	Adjusted OR
Model 1	27.21**	83.6		
Gender			1.07–15.02	4.01*
Age			0.67–1.46	0.99
Antisocial teasing			1.78–10.32	4.28**
Model 2	37.84**	80.3		
Gender			.89–19.15	4.14
Age			0.75–1.82	1.17
Aggressive with peers (CBS)			5.89–282	40.77**
Model 3	21.27**	78.7		
Gender			1.08–13.52	3.83*
Age			0.74–1.53	1.06
Prosocial with peers (CBS)			0.05–0.57	0.17*
Model 4	33.96**	83.3		
Gender			1.45–30.75	6.68*
Age			0.65–1.52	0.99
Lability/Negativity (ERC)			3.7–100	19.27**
Model 5	18.53**	71.7		
Gender			1.6–18.52	5.44*
Age			0.67–1.41	0.97
Emotion Regulation (ERC)			0.43–0.7	0.17*

Note. CBS = Child Behavior Scale; ERC = Emotion Regulation Checklist.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .001$.

statistically significant [$X^2(3) = 37.84$, $p < .001$], and with all three variables included in the model, 80% of cases were correctly predicted; 89% of Low bullies; and 68% of High bullies were correctly predicted. The Aggressive with Peers subscale of the CBS was a significant predictor of bullying group [$X^2(1) = 14.12$, $p < .001$] when adjusted for age and gender. The change in odds associated with a one-unit change in aggression with peers was 40.8, indicating that a one-unit change in aggressive behavior with peers resulted in a participant being 41 times more likely to be a High bully, when adjusting for age and gender.

An additional model was tested with the Prosocial with Peers subscale of the CBS entered in the model (see Model 3 in Table 7). The full model was found to be statistically significant [$X^2(3) = 21.27$, $p < .001$]. With all three variables included in the model, 79% of cases were correctly predicted; 83% of Low bullies; and 72% of High bullies were correctly predicted. Prosocial behavior with peers as measured by the CBS was a significant predictor of high bullying behavior [$X^2(1) = 8.11$, $p = .004$] when adjusted for age and gender. The change in odds associated with a one-unit change in Emotion Regulation was .17, indicating that a one-unit change in prosocial behavior score resulted in a participant being 5.9 times *less* likely to be a High bully.

A similar model with the Lability/Negativity score of the ERC was also tested (Model 4, Table 7). The full model was found to be statistically significant [$X^2(3) = 33.96$, $p < .001$], and 83% of cases were correctly predicted; 89% of Low bullies; and 76% of High bullies were correctly predicted. Lability/Negativity was a significant predictor of bullying group [$X^2(1) = 12.35$, $p < .001$] when adjusted for age and gender. A one-unit change in Lability/Negativity resulted in a participant being 19 times more likely to be a High bully.

The emotional regulation score of the ERC was tested in a similar model (see Model 5, Table 7). A test of the full model was found to be statistically significant [$X^2(3) = 18.53$, $p < .001$]. With all three variables included in the model, 72% of cases were correctly predicted; 80% of Low bullies; and 60% of High bullies were correctly predicted. Emotional regulation as reported by adults was a significant predictor of bullying group [$X^2(1) = 6.06$, $p = .01$] when adjusted for age and gender. A one-unit change in emotional regulation resulted in a participant being 5.8 times *less* likely to be a High bully.

DISCUSSION

Bullying and Teasing

Teasing is not always bullying, but it can easily become so. Holding back on teasing is hard to do, especially where there is an appreciative audience

who may laugh at the child being teased. Sometimes when the target laughs along and takes the humor in stride, the edge goes out of the tease; but even when children know this in their heads, they are unlikely to practice it (Scambler et al., 1998). Adult mentors rated antisocial teasing and bullying as going hand in hand, such that a one-unit change in antisocial teasing resulted in a child being more than four times more likely to be a High bully. There is indeed a slippery slope of antisocial teasing into bullying. Contrary to our hypothesis, however, prosocial teasing was unrelated to bullying (i.e., correlation of −.004) and did not act as a protective factor against being a bully. Thus, if we saw a child at camp engage in fun, silly teasing with other children, we could not know one way or the other whether this child would engage in bullying when adults were not watching.

The CBS provided another way of measuring how children interacted with their peers. It was no surprise that scores on the Aggression with Peers subscale predicted bullying, as the behaviors described physical bullying: fights, kicks, bites, hits, etc. (Ladd & Proffitt, 1996). Scoring one point higher on the Aggression with Peers subscale raised a child's probability of being in the High bully group by 41 times. These behaviors are what people mean when they say someone is a bully. Importantly, though, bullying groups were also predicted—negatively—by positive aspects of children's behavior with their peers. Children who were high on the Prosocial with Peers subscale had a smaller change of being in the High bully group by about six times (per one unit change, Ladd & Proffitt, 1996). Here, we saw kind behaviors—helping, recognizing feelings, cooperating with peers—acting as protective factors against the potential meanness of bullying.

Emotion Regulation as a Mechanism Behind Bullying

A child's ability to regulate emotions was a strong predictor of whether a mentor viewed a child as a Low or High bully, suggesting a possible protective factor for children of incarcerated mothers who were successful in managing their emotions. Like Shields and Cicchetti (2001), the bullies had difficulties with emotion regulation. It was both the negative and the positive aspects of emotion regulation that told the story. The children whose moods flew up and down, showing more lability or negativity, had a higher chance of being classified as a High bully. Each point increase on the scale raised the odds almost 20 times. This held real and concrete meaning in our camp context. Children who are labile and negative are difficult to supervise and cause trouble with the other children waiting in line at the pool or getting to bed in a crowded cabin; it is likely that they are just as hard to live with at home and in the classroom. They show wide mood swings, frustration, and impulsivity, and they are prone to disruptive outbursts and tantrums (Shields & Cicchetti, 1997). The more positive subscale, which was appropriately named Emotion

Regulation, marked behaviors that included being a cheerful child who responds positively to overtures from peers and adults. These children laugh with their friends and quiet down when it is time for singing or announcements. This matched our previous findings with children at camp, in which positive and negative aspects of emotion regulation contributed in expected ways to externalizing behavior, internalizing behavior, and callous-unemotional traits (Lotze et al., 2010). These findings point to emotion regulation as a potential mechanism in the management of bullying and other problematic behavior in children who are already vulnerable because of family incarceration and life stressors.

Resilience and Children of Incarcerated Parents

Resilience is a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Children of incarcerated parents certainly qualify as living with adversity. They most often experience living conditions that put them at risk (e.g., poverty, unstable home life), but parental incarceration adds strains to their well-being (Dallaire, 2007; Miller, 2006; Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen, & Kennon, 1999). Rutter (2006) has suggested that the research focus needs to be on individual differences and the causal processes they reflect, rather than on resilience as a general issue. Masten and Obradovic (2006) observed that recurring attributes of person, relationships, and context consistently emerge as predictors of individuals' resilience across diverse situations, and they name emotion regulation as a personal process that predicts resilience. Our findings lend support to this idea. Here, we have shown that poor emotion regulation is related to a child's hostile teasing and bullying, while positive emotion regulation is related to the capacity to refrain from these antisocial behaviors. Bullies are not resilient. Conversely, those children of incarcerated parents who maintain a calm and cheerful demeanor when playing with their peers, who restrict their teasing to kidding around, who laugh at others' gibes, and who refrain from bullying, are showing resilience.

Cause for Concern in Children of Incarcerated Parents

Our hope is that the children of incarcerated parents will be resilient and grow up strong, even when life is difficult. We know that resilience is characterized by an increased likelihood of positive outcomes in spite of risks to adaptation or development, and that resilience comes about through dynamic processes rather than static characteristics (Luthar et al., 2000). One of these processes involves accumulated risk (Garbarino, 1990). Garbarino suggested that vulnerability to risk increases as the number of stressful life events accumulate. He noted that when children are faced with four or five

stressors, the likelihood of developing behavioral problems increases considerably. In prior studies with children of incarcerated mothers from the same summer camp, we counted the number of life stressors the children experienced in the past year (Hagen & Myers, 2003; Hagen et al., 2005; Mackintosh et al., 2006). Each year, at least half the children had experienced four or more risks, while some had up to 13 out of the 16 possible on the measure—and this did not count mothers' incarceration. Resilience is hard to achieve and maintain under the weight of such pressures.

The longer term outlook for children with incarcerated parents is troubling. Multiple studies find that as children of incarcerated parents become older, they are at heightened risk for antisocial behavior and arrest. Murray and Farrington (2005) examined adult children of parents who were incarcerated in the United Kingdom. These offspring were at increased odds for both juvenile conviction and adult incarceration. Parental incarceration had a stronger impact than other types of parent–child separation. Huebner and Gustafson (2007), using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, found that adult offspring of incarcerated mothers were more likely than peers to be involved in the criminal justice system. Finally, in a meta-analysis of 16 studies of parental incarceration, the authors concluded that children of incarcerated parents experienced about twice the risk for antisocial behavior and poor mental health as children of nonincarcerated parents (Murray et al., 2009). Although resilience breaks down for many of these children as they become adults, it is important to examine factors that may promote resilience.

In the present study, we examined emotion regulation as a possible protective factor. In her seminal work on resilience, Werner found that children who show resilience in the face of multiple risks have the ability to evoke positive attention from the people around them (Werner, 1993). Clearly those children who can manage their emotions effectively are more appealing. They are more likely to have real friends and develop close relationships with the surrogate caregivers who step in when the mother is imprisoned. On the other hand, the absence of emotion regulation skills is closely tied to problems in social competence (Calkins & Hill, 2007). Children who lack the ability to manage emotions effectively, whether they act out or withdraw, are harder to incorporate into a new home. When caregivers of children of incarcerated mothers see behavior as problematic, the caregivers also feel less warmth and acceptance for those children (Mackintosh et al., 2006).

Limitations

Our study was limited as a result of sampling and measurement issues. Only families who sent their children to camp were eligible to participate, and

thus we know this was not a random sample of children of incarcerated mothers; we suspect that these children were in "better than average" situations, but do not have data from noncamping children to test that idea. We do not have data on mothers' incarceration history or her offenses, nor do we know whether fathers or other family members experienced incarceration. The sample was relatively small, limiting the power needed to conduct some analyses. Specifically, because of an insufficient sample size, we were not able to enter all the variables into a single analysis to test a full model. The measure of teasing was straightforward but not in-depth; we had no observational measures of children's teasing, nor were there measures from family members, teachers, or peers. Camp mentors rated the children on multiple measures, thus introducing a mono-informant and mono-method bias. And of course, as in any correlational study, it is not possible to assume causal direction.

Reflections

As researchers, our team gets to know these children in a summer camp setting, where they run, play, and sing, not unlike other children in our communities. We have an unusual relationship with our participants. Besides gathering data about them and from them, we eat, swim, and make bead necklaces with them. In our own experience, these children are more often cheerful than angry, more often kind than mean. But there are children every summer whose behavior is so aggressive, so out of bounds, that we are astounded. Some of the children are "almost impervious to camp rules and adult guidance" (Lotze et al., 2010, p. 713). Fighting, rock throwing, and vandalism happen before any adult can intervene. We work with children whose status as a bully is clear to both the adults and the other children (Shields & Cicchetti, 2001). As Olweus (1993) notes, unless it is modified early in life, bullying—and we would add, antisocial teasing—may be the beginning of a generally antisocial and rule-breaking behavior style that can extend into adulthood (i.e., Murray & Farrington, 2005; Murray et al., 2009). It is a favor to these children, and to our communities, to carefully monitor their teasing and prohibit their bullying.

Emotion regulation has potential importance as a mechanism for understanding resilience and long-term outcomes for children of incarcerated parents. Much of emotion regulation is shaped through socialization processes within the family: the emotional climate of the family, parent–child conversations (including discussions about the causes and consequences of feelings), the modeling of coping by the caregiver, and the overall quality of the caregiver–child relationship (Thompson & Meyer, 2007). Thus, effective interventions for emotion regulation optimally include the entire family. Supporting the emotion regulation of children affected by

parental incarceration is a worthy goal, though providing such support and impacting emotion regulation will not be easy to achieve given the difficult life histories and family situations of children whose parents are in prison or jail.