

Annual Newsletter

Issue 08 • January 2018



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OUR RESEARCH

In our laboratory, we examine the development of emotions in children and adolescents such as sympathy, guilt, and respect. We are especially interested in how these emotions relate to young people's understanding of everyday situations involving social conflict. In a related line of research, we investigate how emotions promote **kindness** and prosocial behavior and impede **aggression** and mental health problems. More recently, we have been interested in how children's experiences of **adversity** affect their social-emotional development.

We use this knowledge to design, implement, and evaluate prevention and intervention programs for children and adolescents. We aim to work with educators to set up these programs, which would help promote achievement, well-being, and positive relationships among children.

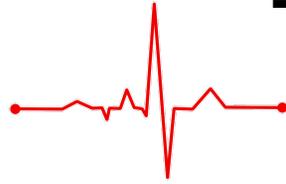


Dear Parents, Children, and Practitioners:

Thank you for participating in a research study at our developmental psychology lab and for supporting our research throughout the years. We hope that you and your child enjoyed your experience at the laboratory, school, or community setting, and that you will find this newsletter interesting and informative. We could not do this work without your valuable contribution and are excited to share our interesting findings with you.



Sincerely,
Dr. Tina Malti



Children with low resting heart rates tend to engage in more aggression because they lack the arousal to fear its negative consequences. We found that such children were actually less aggressive if they had a strong sense of guilt after harming others. Thus, when children’s physiological arousal is lacking, having a strong understanding of why harming others is wrong may help them avoid aggressive outcomes.

(Colasante & Malti, 2017)

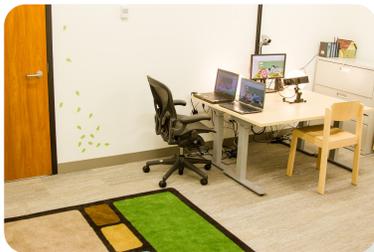
When asked to include an in-group or out-group peer, children overwhelmingly choose the in-group peer (e.g., a peer of the same gender). Nevertheless, children are more inclined to include an opposite gender peer compared to a peer who displayed different behavioural characteristics (e.g., aggression or ADHD). In-group homogeneity may lead to prejudice and discrimination; thus, it is important to enhance opportunities that foster voluntary and positive interactions between students who are different from one another.



(Peplak, Song, Colasante, & Malti, 2017)



ON-GOING STUDIES



How are Children’s Emotions Formed? In this project, we examine how children ages 4 to 12 years attend to different cues in hypothetical social conflicts. By studying children’s eye movements, we can examine how the cues to which they attend impact their self-reported emotions, facial expressions, and physiology. With this, we hope to better understand how children move from being self-centered and selfish to other-oriented and kind.

Emotions in Intergroup Contexts. Emotions such as guilt, sympathy, pride and schadenfreude may play an important role in the development of children’s prosocial orientations. In this study, we examine how children’s emotional responding differs toward peers who are similar vs. different from them. We aim to garner insight into how moral emotions may contribute to the development of kindness in diverse settings.

Prosocial Development and Resilience in Syrian Newcomers. With many Syrian refugees arriving in Canada, it is important to understand how to best help these children and families successfully integrate and resettle into society. In this study, we aim to understand how refugee children and families deal with their transition to Canada and the factors that contribute to their resilience, helping them to adjust and thrive.

Understanding the Development of Aggression. Do children bully others because they lack sympathy or because they have trouble expressing their concern for others in positive ways? In this study, we investigate children’s physiological (i.e., bodily) responses to situations that involve bullying others. This knowledge will help treatment efforts determine when and how to target aggression and reduce the risk of bullying as children develop.



Child Development in Marginalized Communities. Growing up in marginalized communities expose children to not only poverty, but also violence, inadequate care, limited access to services, and so on. This project focuses on children from birth to 24 months in marginalized urban informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya. We aim to design, implement, and evaluate an intervention to support children’s early development in physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional domains.



In collaboration with the Hamilton Mountain Mosque, Hamilton Downtown Mosque, and the YMCA of Hamilton, Burlington, and Brantford, we aim to understand how Syrian newcomers are dealing with their transition to Canada in order to help them successfully integrate and resettle into society.

Our community continues to grow!

In partnership with community organizations from child welfare and child mental health, the SEDI lab is developing ways to make what we learn from our research more accessible to clinicians, practitioners, and educators. The shared vision of the SEDI lab and our partners is to promote the use of social-emotional research research into practice and service delivery.



The New York Times

A recent New York Times article, featuring research from our lab, discusses how children's experiences of guilt promote their healthy development:

“There's lots of evidence that healthy guilt promotes children's prosocial behavior.” – Dr. Tina Malti

For the full story, see: nytimes.com

For updates on our research and community involvement, please visit our media outlets below!



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RESEARCH FACTS

Children's ability to regulate their emotions influences their development of sympathy and trust, which in turn affects how often they engage in prosocial behaviours such as helping and sharing.

(Song, Colasante, & Malti, 2017)

Children's sympathy and aggression co-develop. That is, children who experience higher degrees of sympathy from age 6 to 12 are more likely to have lower levels of aggression across the same period.

(Zuffianò et al., 2017)

Children's prosocial behaviors develop from simple, “nice” forms of behaviors to varied, complex, and sometimes truly “kind” (i.e., selfless) prosocial acts.

(Malti & Dys, 2017)

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- Colasante, T., & Malti, T. (2017). Resting heart rate, guilt, and sympathy: A developmental psychophysiological study of physical aggression. *Psychophysiology*. Early online publication, July 1, 2017. doi: 10.1111/psyp.12915.
- Peplak, J., Song, J.-H., Colasante, T., & Malti, T. (2017). “Only you can play with me!” Children's inclusive decision-making, reasoning, and emotions based on peers' gender and behavior problems. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 162, 134-148.
- Malti, T., & Dys, S. P. (2017). From being nice to being kind: Development of prosocial behaviors. *Current Opinion in Psychology*. Early online publication, August 5, 2017. doi:10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.07.036
- Malti, T., Zuffianò, A., & Noam, G.G. (2017). Knowing every child: Validation of the Holistic Student Assessment (HSA) as a measure of social-emotional development. *Prevention Science*. Early online publication, May 8, 2017. doi: 10.1007/s11121-017-0794-
- Song, J.-H., Colasante, T., & Malti, T. (2017). Helping yourself help others: Linking children's emotion regulation to prosocial behavior through sympathy and trust. *Emotion*. Early online publication, June 5, 2017. doi: 10.1037/emo0000332.

In 2017, we welcomed three post-doctoral fellows to the SEDI lab:



Connie Cheung received her Ph.D. from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Prior to joining the SEDI lab, she has been involved with policy development, program evaluation and research in Ontario’s child-welfare sector. Connie is dedicated to promoting the best outcomes for children and families through intervention research and encouraging the integration of child development concepts and specialized assessment information into practice across multiple service sectors.



Marc Jambon received his Ph.D. in developmental psychology from the University of Rochester in 2016. He joined the SEDI lab as a post-doctoral fellow in September 2017. Marc’s research focuses on moral development in early to middle childhood. He is particularly interested in processes that contribute to individual differences in children’s understanding of right and wrong, and how these differences may help us understand the development of aggressive and antisocial tendencies.



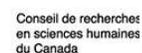
Linlin Zhang received her Ph.D. from Arizona State University in 2017. Driven by the interest in how sociocultural contexts shape child development, she has studied shyness and social withdrawal across diverse cultural contexts (US, China, Uganda). Turning to applied research, she is working on the design and evaluation of a parenting intervention program to promote holistic child development in the very early years of life in a highly marginalized community in Kenya.



AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

- ✚ Graduate student, Tyler Colasante, successfully defended his Ph.D. dissertation – Congratulations, Dr. Colasante!
- ✚ Graduate student, Joanna Peplak, was awarded the June and David Scott Fellowship.
- ✚ Dr. Marc Jambon was awarded the University of Rochester’s 2017 Outstanding Dissertation Award (Commendation).

Thank you to all the families, educators, and practitioners for participating in our research, and to our sponsors:



And a special thanks to our wonderful students and research assistants:

Justine Ziolkowski, Danah Elsayed, Tehreem Mehmood, Alexandra Rondinone, Amanda Marcinowska, Stefania Mariani, Samantha Martina-Sitarz, Veronika Orsanska, Akpene Kutauadu, Mishika Mehrotra, Parnika Celly, Anjali Suri, Victoria Troisi, Hazel Ngo, Elizabeth Drysdale, Samantha Pena, Sihan Zheng, Ganeesha Sivakumaran, Nirma Jbara, Hannah Bride, Maaryya Abdulkarim, Durga Ramesh