

## Difficult subjects: Time and Number

Child Interviewing Seminar  
Tom Lyon  
Spring, 2013  
With the assistance of Brittany  
Younger

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## Different aspects of time

- Time *within* event and time *between* events
- Sequence (when, before/after, next/after that)
- Location (when):
  - Clock time, days, months, years
  - Landmarks: School years, teachers, holidays
- Distance (how long ago);
  - Clock time, days, months, years
    - Compare "it was January" to "it was one month ago"
  - Yesterday, today, tomorrow
  - Little while/long time
- Duration (how long)
  - Seconds, minutes, hours...

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## Time: Sequence

- Easiest—children best at narrating a single event in the order in which it occurred.
- Problems:
  - Cause easier than arbitrary order
    - Causal sequences easier to remember ("we cooked food and then we ate it")
    - Arbitrary sequences difficult to remember (e.g. order in which you saw 60 minutes stories)
    - Sex may seem arbitrary to children (e.g. when in sequence does ejaculation occur?)
  - Before/after is complicated
    - Forward order-bias—children will tell you what happened next
    - Before now vs. Before then
      - "have you seen this before?"

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## Temporal Location

- Children can tell time before they can tell what time something occurred
- Timing events requires:
  - Making inferences
  - Knowledge about conventional time concepts

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## Asking children about dates

Psychology, Public Policy, and Law

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### MALTREATED CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO ESTIMATE TEMPORAL LOCATION AND NUMEROSITY OF PLACEMENT CHANGES AND COURT VISITS

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Thomas D. Lyon  
University of Southern California

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William J. Friedman  
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## Method

- 167 6- to 10-year-old children in dependency court
- ½ asked about prior placements, ½ about court visits
- Asked about current age, birthday, current month
- Asked about age/month at first/last placement or court visit
- Asked about number of placements or court visits

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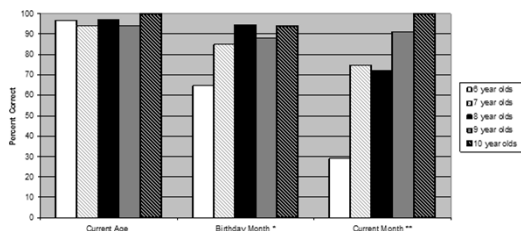
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### Current age, birthday month, current month




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### Time of Placement?

- Age at first placement ( $M = 2.3$  years ago)?
- 42% correct
- Month at first placement?
- No better than chance
- Age at last placement ( $M = 1.5$  years ago)?
- 54% correct
- Month at last placement?
- No better than chance

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### Time of court visit?

- Age at first court visit ( $M = 1.7$  years ago)
- 52% correct
- Month at first court visit?
- No better than chance
- Age at last court visit ( $M = 6$  months ago)
- 59% correct
- Month at last court visit?
- Older children better than chance (20% correct)
- No other age differences in accuracy

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## Conclusions

- Children's knowledge of current time (age, birthday, month) doesn't predict ability to estimate when something occurred.
- Children are unlikely to remember their age when describing remote events.

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## Estimating time (Friedman & Lyon, 2005)

- 86 4- to 13-year-olds
- Children experienced staged event just before or just after Halloween.
- Questioned about event three months later, including questions about timing.
- Fewer than 20% recalled proximity to Halloween, at chance in determining whether before or after Halloween.

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## Don't give up on "when"

- When do you get up in the morning?
  - "9 o'clock"
    - Location
  - "When my brother gets up"
    - Same time (Simultaneity)
  - "When my mom wakes me up"
    - Cause (Sequence)
  - "After I sleep all night"
    - Order (Sequence)

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### Case Study: Leslie H. (6-year-old)

Mother woke up to find Leslie's uncle in the Kitchen with Leslie, wiping off Leslie's genitalia with a towel. Child interviewed several weeks later

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### Consider child's ability to report actions/reactions

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### Compare child's difficulty in estimating the time

Q: Do you remember when it was?  
A: [shakes head]  
Q: Was it a day ago? Or a lot?  
A: A day ago.  
Q: It was one day ago that this happened? Okay.

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Q: What time in the day was it?  
A: Like... I think it's six o'clock.  
Q: Six o'clock? So it was in the...  
A: Afternoon.

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Q: Afternoon? Where was your dad?  
A: At work. He comes at four.  
Q: He comes home at four? He hadn't come home from work yet?

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A: I think he comes at... I mean he comes home at nine at night.  
Q: He gets home late? Is it dark when your dad comes home?  
A: I don't know. He doesn't tell me.

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Q: Are you awake when he comes home?  
A: No. I'm asleep.  
Q: Okay.

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### Time recommendations

- Do ask “what happened next/first”
  - Be careful with “what happened before”
- Do ask “when” questions, including what was happening when abuse occurred
- Do ask “where” questions, which often allow you to date abuse
  - Residences, Vacations

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Number

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## Number

- Children can count objects before they can enumerate events.
- Enumerating events requires
  - Making inferences about frequency
  - Knowledge about conventional time concepts
- E.g., "how many times did you go to the bathroom last week?"
  - Estimate frequency (e.g. "every four hours")
  - Multiply frequency by duration (hours in day/days per week)
- Compare "How many times did he touch you?"

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## Catherine: Number

THE COURT: How many times did that happen?  
THE WITNESS: I don't know. Same--fifty times out of the whole entire year. I don't really do numbers--around --  
THE COURT: About how many times did it happen all together? How many times did he touch his private part to your private part?  
THE WITNESS: I don't know how many.  
THE COURT: Okay. More than once?  
THE WITNESS: More than once, yes.  
THE COURT: More than five times?  
THE WITNESS: Yes.

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## Juror No. 9

They weren't consistent on their story. We know that they were young and we understand they are children but the story was like did he touch you three times, yes, did he touch you five times, yes, did he touch you 50 times, yes. Everything was yes, yes, yes.

Riverside Press Enterprise 8-15-02 (2002 WL 21279565)

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## Number of placements?

- How many placements? ( $M = 3$ )
- 23% correct
- One or more than one?
- 67% correct
- No age improvement

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## Number of court visits?

- How many visits? ( $M = 3.2$ )
- 14% correct
- One or more than one?
- 62% correct
- No age improvement

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## Brandon (11-year-old)

- Originally reported that man with gun and mask had raped him.
- Changed story to accuse a 16-year-old gang member

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## Interview #1 (number and duration)

Q: What did he do?  
A: Rape me.  
Q: **How many times did he rape you?**  
A: About ten times.  
Q: Multiple times?  
A: Yes.  
Q: **How long do you think you were there with him when he was raping you?**  
A: I don't know.  
Q: Can you guess?  
A: About [pause], about a minute or two. [inaudible]  
Q: A minute or two?  
A: Yes.  
Q: Could you tell his penis moving in and out of your butt?  
A: Yes.  
Q: How many times?  
A: It's probably more than ten times.  
Q: More than ten times?  
A: It's probably more, but I'm just guessing.  
Q: Guessing? But it seemed like a lot of times?  
A: Yes.  
Q: When he was doing that, did you say anything to him?  
A: No.  
Q: Did he say anything to you?  
A: No.  
Q: He didn't say anything?  
A: No.

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## Interview #1 (number and duration)

A: Rape me.  
A: About ten times.  
A: Yes.  
A: I don't know.  
A: About [pause], about a minute or two. [inaudible]  
A: Yes.  
A: Yes.  
A: It's probably more than ten times.  
A: It's probably more, but I'm just guessing.  
A: Yes.  
A: No.  
A: No.  
A: No.

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## Interview #2 (actions and feelings)

Q: Yeah. And then you said he spit on it and you could feel it and then what happened right after that?  
A: He stucked his thing inside of me.  
Q: Okay. And, what sounds did you hear when he did that?  
A: He was like 'oh yeah' and stuff.  
Q: Uh huh. And where were his hands when he did that?  
A: On the side of my waist right here.  
Q: Okay and how did it feel when he did that?  
A: Ill.  
Q: What?  
A: It don't feel good.  
Q: Yeah. Okay you said eww it don't feel good. Tell me more about that.  
A: About his hand on my waist?  
Q: No, I'm saying when he put his penis inside you. How did that feel.  
A: Hard.  
Q: Yeah. Hard? Tell me about that.  
A: Nasty.  
Q: Yeah. Why nasty?  
A: Cause it's sick.  
Q: Yeah. And how did, what did you think when he put his penis inside you?  
A: That he was going to kill me.  
Q: Uh huh. And what made you think that?  
A: Because he had the knife and he was threatening me.  
Q: Yeah, yeah. And what did you feel right after, when he was putting his penis in you how did he do it? How was he moving?  
A: I was down and he was over me like this.  
Q: Yeah. Was he still or was he moving, what was he doing?  
A: He was telling me to move back, right there and stuff.

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## Interview #2 (actions and feelings)

A: He stucked his thing inside of me.  
A: He was like 'oh yeah' and stuff.  
A: On the side of my waist right here.  
A: Ill.  
A: It don't feel good.  
  
A: Hard.  
A: Nasty.  
A: Cause it's sick.  
A: That he was going to kill me.  
A: Because he had the knife and he was threatening me.  
  
A: I was down and he was over me like this.  
A: He was telling me to move back, right there and stuff.

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## Interview #2 (actions and feelings)

Q: He was telling you move back? [A: Yeah] Right there? I see, I see and what was his body doing?  
A: Um, just still, just--  
Q: Do you understand? So tell me was he, and what did you feel after like right at the end when he was putting his penis into you  
A: When he was done it feel watery.  
Q: Yeah, why did it feel watery? What made it feel watery?  
A: I think he eject his stuff inside me.  
Q: Oh. How do you know he ejected his stuff inside you?  
A: Because it feel like baby oil, real, real watery.

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## Interview #2 (actions and feelings)

A: Um, just still, just--

A: When he was done it feel watery.

A: I think he eject his stuff inside me.

A: Because it feel like baby oil, real, real watery.

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## Number recommendations

- Asking "how many times..." is a bad idea.
- Even "once or more than once" is risky.
- Better to ask child to narrate individual episodes and to rely on contextual clues to timing.
  - Tell me everything that happened the time you remember the most
  - The first time
  - The last time
  - Tell me about something different he did
  - Tell me about the worst thing he did

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## Chronic abuse

- If a child clearly indicates the abuse occurred more than one time, it might not be necessary to ask "did this happen one time or more than one time?"
- E.g.,
  - Child uses present tense (e.g. "he touches me here")
  - Child uses frequency terms (e.g. always, sometimes, usually)
  - Child uses "would" (e.g. "he would stick it in")

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### For more information

- Google “bepress lyon” for reprints of the Ten-step interview, other practitioner guides, and articles.
- Google “MRCAC Tom Lyon Spring 2013” to sign up for online viewing of lectures.
- You can reach me at [tlyon@law.usc.edu](mailto:tlyon@law.usc.edu)

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