Peers play an extremely crucial role in the development of children. Children who lack peers are therefore at risk for a variety of difficulties later in life. Parents are known to influence their children's social development and to play a major role in helping children enter the world of social interactions. When children enter toddlerhood, between one and one-half and two years of age, they begin to interact with other children and discover that there is a world outside of their own parents. To understand how children negotiate this transition and how parents influence them, we videotaped pairs of toddlers playing together.

I worked on a project that sought to understand the links between early parent-child and early peer relationships. At the Barnard Center for Toddler Development, pairs of children were put in a playroom that is unfamiliar to them. The playroom had two telephones, two sets of keys, two hoses, two mirrors, and two wheels. Children were videotaped as they played, and my job as Research Intern was to code the type of play that I observed as either parallel play, solitary play, or onlooker behavior. I coded the behavior of one child at a time. Children exhibited 8 or 9 types of play that had to be coded. In addition to coding the play, I had to indicate the presence of either positive or negative effects, interactions with the teacher, initiation of play with the other child, and physical or verbal conflict with the other child. For this part of the project, another Research Intern and I were trained for two weeks using videotaped data that had already been coded. Once we were coding behaviors reliably, we started coding new videotaped data.

Another part of my job was the transcription of audiotapes of parents talking about their children's social interactions. The coding and transcribing were my primary duties. In addition, I also coded parents' memories of their own childhood experiences with peers. They were not asked to write about either positive or negative experiences; we asked them to simply write about any experiences that stood out as memorable. I then coded their memories as either positive, negative, or that of a lonely outsider. For this part of the project I was also trained for a couple of weeks using previously coded data.