Conflict, Averted Conflict, and Verbal Irony in 17-year-olds' Sibling and Friend Interactions Brianna Heuser, Nicholas Palumbo, Molly Vierhile, Madeleine ReisGerzog, Courtney Woolever, Austin Simon, Rose Zinkowski, and Ganie B. DeHart, Ph.D State University of New York at Geneseo

Abstract

We examined connections between conflict, averted conflict, and various forms of verbal irony in adolescents' interactions with siblings and friends. Sarcasm appears to be associated with both conflicts and averted conflicts, but the role of jocularity in conflict and averted conflict seems to be relationship-specific.

Introduction

Adolescents make frequent use of verbal irony, but there has been little research on exactly how they use various forms of irony in specific social contexts. One setting in which adolescents seem likely to use verbal irony is conflict with siblings and friends. Previous research in our lab has found differences in adolescents' use of sarcasm and jocularity with siblings and friends, as well as in their sibling and friend conflicts.

We hypothesized that: (1) conflicts and averted conflicts would involve different forms of verbal irony, with sarcasm more useful during actual conflicts and jocularity more useful as a way of averting conflict; and (2) this tendency would be stronger in interactions with friends than in interactions with siblings.

Method

Participants

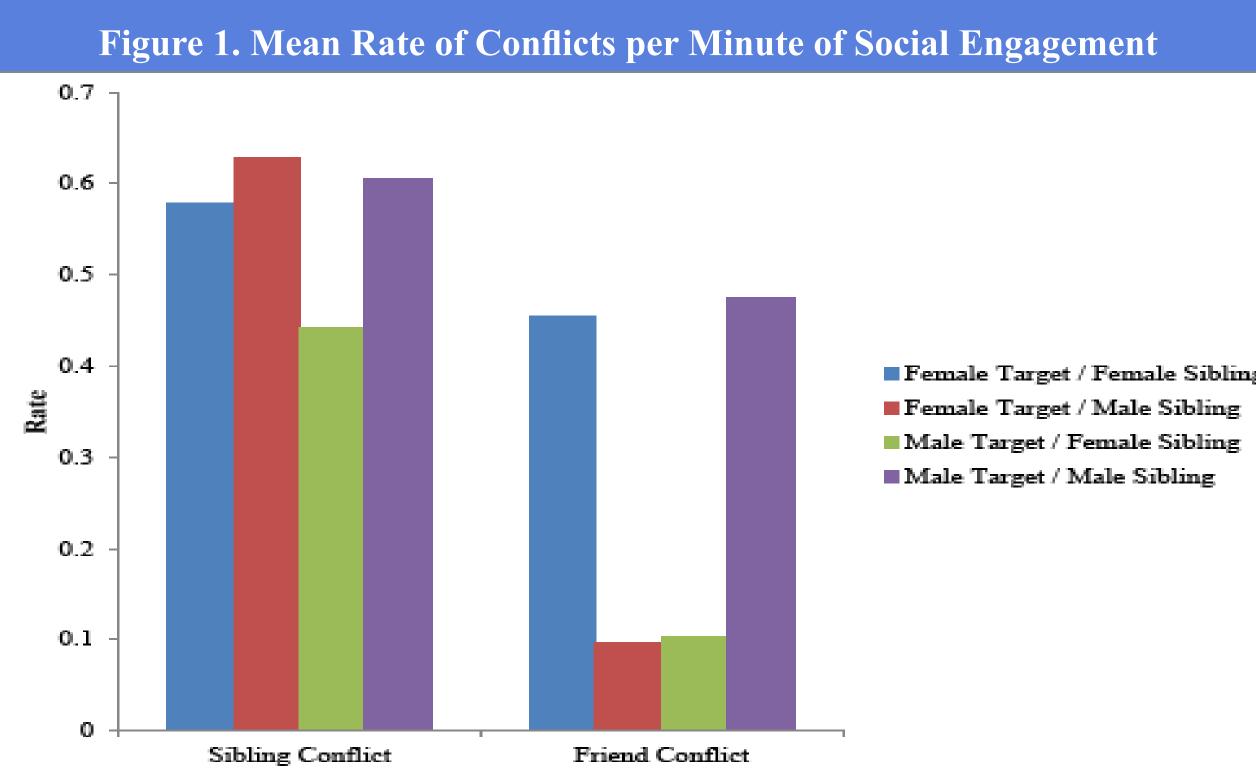
- 57 Caucasian, middle-class American target adolescents
- Approximately half of the target adolescents were observed with a sibling who was 15 to 30 months younger, half with a sibling who was 15 to 30 months older.
- Approximately half of the target children were female, half male.
- Approximately half of the sibling pairs were same-sex, half mixed-sex

Procedure

- Participants were videotaped at home in cooking sessions with a sibling and friend, using materials provided by the experimenters.
- The videotapes were transcribed and coded for conflicts, averted conflicts, and verbal irony. We defined *conflicts* as exchanges containing mutual opposition, either verbal or behavioral. Averted conflicts
- were defined as oppositional behaviors, physical or verbal, that were not reciprocated by the partner. Verbal irony was defined as non-literal language in which a speaker intentionally says one thing but means another; instances of verbal irony were further classified as sarcasm or jocularity.
- Sarcasm was defined as a form of irony that involves ridicule aimed at a specific target and that appears to be hurtful/caustic/biting. *Jocularity* was defined as a form of irony in which speakers appear to be teasing one another in humorous ways without being overtly hurtful/caustic/biting.
- Once identified, conflicts and averted conflicts were further coded for frequency, number of turns, instigator, issue, aggression, and termination strategy.
- Once identified, verbal irony utterances were further coded for type, impact, intent, and communicative function.
- Social engagement was coded at 10-second intervals. For the purposes of the present analysis, social engagement was collapsed into three categories: *engaged* (partners mutually participating in the activity or engaged with each other), semi-engaged (one partner watching or trying to engage the other), and unengaged (partners not socially engaged with each other).

Analyses

- Incidence of conflict and averted conflict was analyzed using separate 2 (partner) x 2 (target child gender) x 2 (sibling gender) repeated-measures ANOVAs.
- Relationships between conflict, averted conflict, and verbal irony were analyzed using Pearson bivariate correlation coefficients.





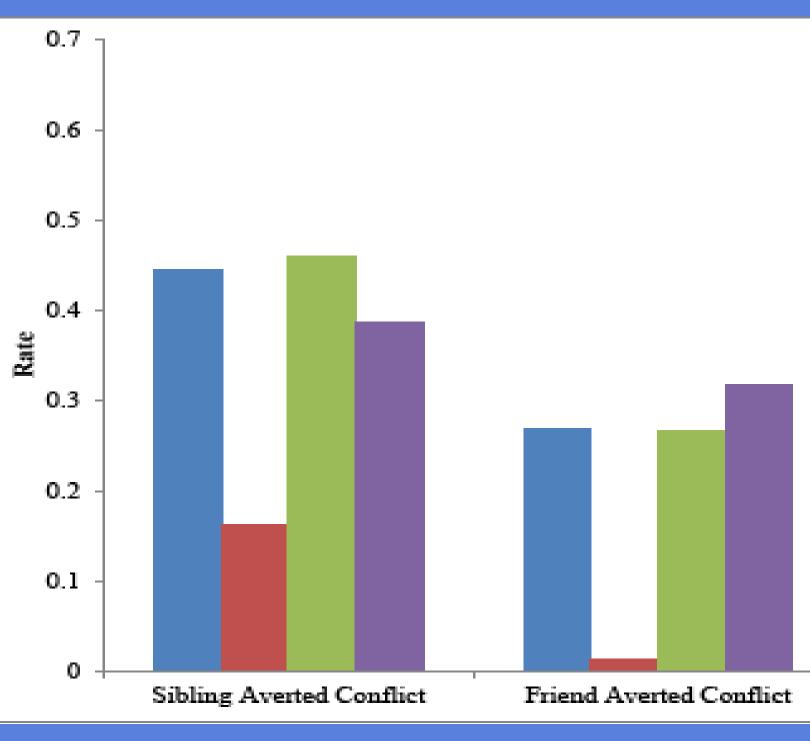


Table 1. Conflict and Verbal Irony Correlations

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Sibling Conflict Frequency	1.000	0.525**	0.164	0.436**	0.305*	0.083
2. Sibling Total Sarcastic Utterances		1.000	0.393**	0.049	0.157	0.001
3. Sibling Total Jocular Utterances			1.000	0.177	0.185	0.163
4. Friend Conflict Frequency				1.000	0.596++	0.398++
5. Friend Total Sarcastic Utterances					1.000	0.738++
6. Friend Total Jocular Utterances						1.000

Table 2. Averted Conflict and Verbal Irony Correlations

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Sibling Averted Conflict Frequency	1.000	0.359*	0.262	0.454**	0.277	0_380**
2. Sibling Total Sarcastic Utterances		1.000	0.393**	0.115	0.157	0.001
3. Sibling Total Jocular Utterances			1.000	0.172	0.185	0.163
4. Friend Averted Conflict Frequency				1.000	0.575**	0.431**
5. Friend Total Sarcastic Utterances					1.000	0.738**
6. Friend Total Jocular Utterances						1.000

Table 3. Conflict and Aggressive Intent Correlations

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Sibling Total Aggressive Intent	1.000	0.428**	0.220	0.310*
2. Sibling Conflict Frequency		1.000	0.355++	0.436++
3. Friend Total Aggressive Intent			1.000	0.569++
4. Friend Conflict Frequency				1.000

Table 4. Averted Conflict and

- 1. Sibling Total Aggressive Intent
- 2. Sibling Total Averted Conflict Frequency
- 3. Friend Total Aggressive Intent
- 4. Friend Total Averted Conflict Frequency

Male Target / Female Sibling Male Target / Male Sibling

Female Target / Male Sibling

⁷emale Target / Female Sibling

Aggressive Intent Correlations					
1.	2.	3.	4.		
00	0.125	0.310+	0.275		
	1.000	0.275	0.454**		
		1.000	0.485**		

1.000

Conflict and Averted Conflict (Figure 1 and 2)

- averted conflict (p = .010).
- conflict (p = .066).
- averted conflict (p < .001).
- averted conflict (p = .003).

Correlations between Conflict, Averted Conflict, and Aggressive Intent (Table 3 and 4)

- frequency (p = .001).
- (p = .001).
- (p = .003).

intent

Our results suggest that the connections between verbal irony and conflict are more complex than we suspected. Sarcasm appears to be associated with both conflicts and averted conflicts, but the role of jocularity in conflict and averted conflict seems to be relationship-specific. Sarcasm may serve an oppositional function in averted conflicts with both siblings and friends, even though the opposition is not reciprocated. On the other hand, adolescents may use jocularity as a way of averting conflicts with siblings, but as a way of softening conflicts with friends. Moreover, aggressive intent was more strongly associated with conflict than verbal irony in general, and these associations cut across relationships. Additional examination of exactly how sarcasm and jocularity are used in conflict and averted conflict will be needed to explain this pattern of associations.

Results

There was a significant partner effect for both conflict (p = .002) and averted conflict (p = .044); overall, siblings had a higher rate of conflict and averted conflict than friends did.

There was also a significant partner x target gender x sibling gender interaction in conflict (p = .036); the partner effect only held true for dyads in which the target child had an opposite-sex sibling.

Correlations between Conflict, Averted Conflict, and Verbal Irony (Table 1 and 2)

Siblings' use of sarcasm was positively correlated with their frequency of conflict (p < .001) and

Siblings' use of jocularity was marginally correlated with their frequency of averted conflict, but not

Friends' use of sarcasm was positively correlated with their frequency of both conflict (p < .001) and

Friends' use of jocularity was positively correlated with their frequency of conflict (p = .004) and

Siblings' and friends' overall aggressive intent during verbal irony was positively correlated (p = .024), the same was true for their aggressive intent during sarcasm in particular (p = .013). Siblings' sarcastic aggressive intent in particular was positively correlated with their conflict

Friends' overall aggressive intent during verbal irony was positively correlated with sibling conflict frequency (p = .010), friend conflict frequency (p < .001), and friend averted conflict frequency

Friends' sarcastic aggressive intent in particular was positively correlated with their conflict frequency (p < .001) and averted conflict frequency (p < .001).

• Friends' jocular aggressive intent was positively correlated with sibling conflict frequency

Discussion

Our hypotheses were only partly supported. During sibling interactions, sarcasm was positively correlated with both conflicts and averted conflicts; in contrast, jocularity was positively correlated with averted conflicts but not conflicts. During friend interactions, sarcasm and jocularity were positively correlated with both conflicts and averted conflicts. Furthermore, total aggressive intent in verbal irony was associated with conflict frequency in both sibling and friend interactions. However, there was a difference in correlation patterns for sarcastic aggressive intent and jocular aggressive