Conflict in Latino Immigrant and Anglo Children's Sibling Interactions

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Abstract

As part of an ongoing study of Latino immigrant children's sibling relationships, we examined conflicts during interactions of 38 Latino sibling dyads and a comparison group of 38 Anglo sibling dyads in semi-structured play situations. Latino sibling pairs had fewer conflicts than Anglo pairs, and the conflicts they did have were shorter. There were also ethnic differences in conflict issues and termination strategies, although the gender composition of sibling dyads also made a difference in some cases. The pattern of ethnic differences and similarities in conflict behaviors highlights differences and similarities between Latino and Anglo sibling relationships.

Introduction

Although the Latino population is the fastest growing minority group in the United States, there has not been sufficient research conducted about Latino family relationships, especially those involving siblings. Previous research has revealed some cultural themes evident within many Latino families that differentiate them from other families, including the importance of family, religion, and gender roles, specifically within the family. These prescribed roles include concepts of sibling relationships that include greater responsibility for brothers and sisters—particularly younger brothers and sisters--than is commonly found in Anglo-American families.

As part of an ongoing study of Latino immigrant children's sibling relationships, we examined conflicts during sibling interactions in semi-structured play situations. Based on previous research and experience with Latino families, we hypothesized that Latino siblings would show lower rates of conflict, and a less confrontational style of conflict resolution than Anglo siblings of similar ages. We also expected differences based on sibling dyad age and gender composition, with dyads that included older sisters showing particularly low rates of conflict, due to the expectation that older sisters would take on maternal characteristics.

Method

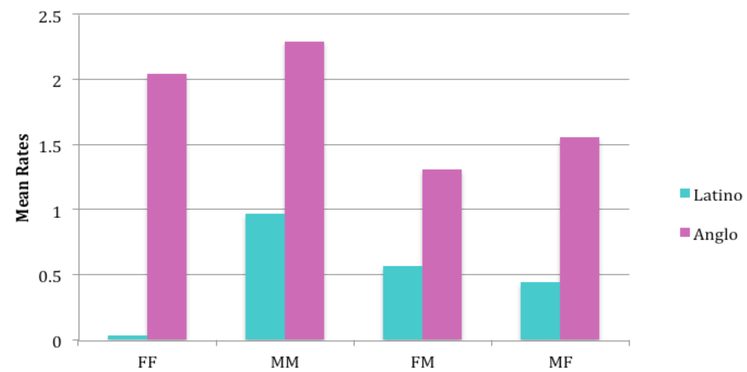
Participants:

- 38 Latino sibling pairs from the Rochester, NY, and New York City areas participated in the study, recruited through social networks such as Latino community groups and churches.
- 21 of the Latino sibling pairs were same-sex, 17 mixed-sex. The sample varied with regard to age (younger siblings M = 70.0 months, range 24-120 months; older siblings M = 96.5 months, range 48-136 months), ethnicity (Dominican and Puerto Rican), and acculturation status (from recent immigrants to third generation in the United States).
- 38 Anglo sibling pairs were chosen from a larger study to resemble the Latino pairs in regards to age (younger siblings M = 74.2 months, range 26-107 months; older siblings M = 97.6, range 49-131 months) and gender composition (same sex = 22, mixed sex = 16).
- All families were offered a gift card as a token of gratitude for their participation.

Materials and Procedures:

- Each pair was taped at home in a 30-minute session that included a 10-minute construction task, a 10-minute board game session, and a 10-minute free play session with a wooden train set. Only the free-play data are used in the current study.
- Each session was transcribed and coded for instances of conflict (mutually oppositional behavior).
- Once identified, conflicts were further coded for duration (in seconds), number of turns, affective intensity (on a scale from 1 to 3), issue, and termination strategy.
- To adjust for variability in the extent to which sibling pairs were mutually engaged with each other, videotapes were coded for social engagement at 10-second intervals.

Figure 1 Mean Rate of Conflict Per Engaged Minutes



FF = Sister Dyads, MM = Brother Dyads
FM = Older Sister/Younger Brother Dyads
MF = Older Brother/Younger Sister Dyads

Table 1. Basic Conflict Characteristics

Latino	Turns/Conflict	Duration (sec)	Affective Intensity
FF	0.63	1.25	1.00
MM	2.17	4.41	2.14
FM	2.67	9.86	1.58
MF	2.69	8.75	1.89
Anglo			
FF	6.15	21.60	1.76
MM	7.41	22.90	1.90
FM	5.38	12.50	1.68
MF	5.63	18.20	1.74

Table 2. Conflict Issues

Latino	Object	Behavior	Plans for Play	Ideas or Facts
FF	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
MM	0.61	0.22	0.17	0.00
FM	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
MF	0.39	0.36	0.25	0.00
Anglo				
FF	0.10	0.58	0.08	0.16
MM	0.21	0.61	0.02	0.16
FM	0.18	0.57	0.04	0.21
MF	0.34	0.44	0.11	0.12

Table 3. Termination Strategies

Latino	Standing Firm	Distraction	Surrender	Disengaged	3rd Party Intervention
FF	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00
MM	0.64	0.00	0.11	0.14	0.00
FM	0.25	0.08	0.42	0.17	0.00
MF	0.78	0.06	0.25	0.20	0.00
Anglo					
FF	0.47	0.03	0.18	0.27	0.00
MM	0.36	0.65	0.31	0.21	0.08
FM	0.46	0.00	0.46	0.00	0.02
MF	0.56	0.012	0.56	0.08	0.01

Method (cont.)

Analyses:

- Rates of conflict, conflict duration, number of turns, and affective intensity were analyzed using 2 (ethnicity: Latino vs. Anglo) x 4 (sibling pair gender composition: sisters, brothers, older sister/younger brother, older brother/younger sister) ANOVAs.
- Conflict issues and termination strategies were analyzed using 2 (ethnicity: Latino vs. Anglo) x 4 (sibling pair gender composition: sisters, brothers, older sister/younger brother, older brother/younger sister) MANOVAs with the specific conflict issues or termination strategies as the dependent variables.

Results

Basic conflict characteristics:

As shown in Fig. 1 and Table 1, there were significant ethnicity effects for several conflict characteristics:

- Anglo sibling pairs had more conflicts per minute of social engagement than Latino sibling pairs ($p < .001$).
- Anglo siblings' conflicts were longer than those of Latino siblings, both in duration and in number of turns ($p < .001$).
- No significant differences were found for affective intensity of the conflicts.

Conflict issues (Table 2):

- Anglo siblings had more conflicts involving behavior issues ($p = .002$) and ideas or facts ($p = .009$) than Latino siblings did.
- Latino siblings had more conflicts involving plans for play ($p < .001$) than Anglo siblings did. There was also a significant gender x ethnicity interaction involving conflicts about plans for play ($p < .001$):
  - Latino sibling pairs that included older sisters argued more about plans for play than Latino sibling pairs that included older brothers.
  - Among Anglo sibling pairs, however, older brother/younger sister pairs argues more about plans for play than any other pairs.

Conflict Termination Strategies (Table 3):

There were significant effects of ethnicity and gender for termination strategies:

- Latino sibling pairs were more likely to use disengagement as a strategy for ending conflicts than Anglo sibling pairs were ($p = .028$).
- Older brother/younger sister pairs were more likely to use standing firm as a way to end conflicts than other gender compositions were ($p = .033$).
- Overall, same-sex pairs were more likely to use disengagement to end conflicts than mixed-sex pairs were ($p = .022$).

Discussion

Overall, Latino sibling pairs had fewer conflicts than Anglo pairs, and the conflicts they did have were shorter, both in duration and number of turns. Latino and Anglo sibling pairs were equally likely to argue about objects, but Latino siblings' conflicts were more likely to center around plans for play (what to do next) than Anglo siblings', and less likely to involve objecting to sibling behavior or arguing about ideas or facts. Latino siblings were more likely than Anglo siblings to use indirect strategies, such as disengagement, for ending conflicts. Gender composition of sibling dyads mattered more than ethnicity for some conflict characteristics, especially conflict termination strategies.

The pattern of ethnic differences and similarities in conflict behaviors highlights differences and similarities between Latino and Anglo sibling relationships. The lower Latino conflict rates, as well as the emphasis on issues involving joint activity and on relatively soft termination strategies, reflect the priority placed on family well-being and on caring for siblings in Latino cultures.