



# Conflict, Averted Conflict, and Aggression in 17-year-olds' Sibling and Friend Interactions



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## Abstract

As part of a longitudinal study, we examined aggression during 17-year-olds' conflicts with siblings and friends. Our results indicate that connections between conflict and aggression are not straightforward. Relations between conflict and various forms of aggression were different for siblings and friends, and for boys and girls.

## Introduction

Conflict and aggression are often assumed to be closely related. However they are actually separate phenomena. Not all conflicts involve aggression, and not every aggressive behavior results in conflict. Previous research has examined aggression and conflict in adolescents. However, little research has been done on the relationship between conflict and aggression in adolescents.

We conducted a preliminary exploration of the relationships between conflict and verbal, physical, and relational aggression. We anticipated that siblings and friends would differ in amount and type of aggression during conflicts. Past research also suggested that gender would play a role in connections between conflict and aggression, with boys perhaps more likely to resort to physical aggression and girls more likely to rely on verbal and relational aggression.

## Method

### Participants

- Fifty-seven white, middle-class American adolescents were videotaped at home in cooking sessions with a sibling and with a friend.
- 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. Half of the target adolescents were female, half male.
- Half of the sibling pairs were same-sex, half mixed-sex

### Procedure

- Participants were videotaped at home in cooking sessions with a sibling and a friend, with materials provided by the experimenters.
- The videotapes of the cooking sessions were transcribed and coded for conflicts, and instances of physical, verbal, and relational aggression within each conflict were tallied.
- We defined conflicts as exchanges containing mutual opposition.

### Analyses

- Relationships between conflict and aggression for sibling and peer dyads were analyzed using Pearson bivariate correlation coefficients.

Figure 1. Rate of Aggression per Sibling Conflict

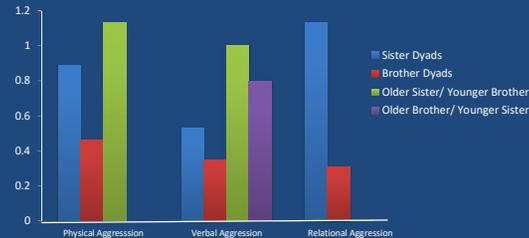


Figure 2. Rate of Aggression per Friend Conflict

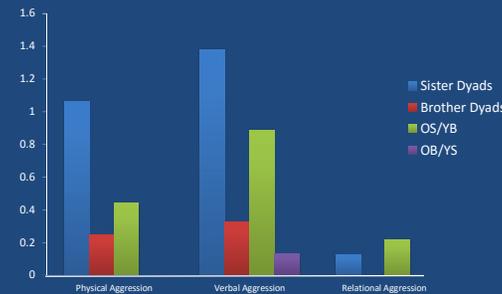


Table 1.

Significant Correlations for Sibling Conflict and Aggression during Conflicts	
Dyad Type	Significant Correlations
Overall n = 54	Conflict Frequency and Physical Aggression :.391, $p < .01$ Conflict Frequency and Verbal Aggression: .534, $p < .01$
Sister Dyads n = 19	Conflict Frequency and Physical Aggression: .674, $p < .01$ Conflict Frequency and Relational Aggression: .389, $p < .01$
Brother Dyads n = 13	Conflict Frequency and Physical Aggression: .570, $p < .05$
Older sister /Younger Brother n = 12	Conflict Frequency and Physical Aggression: .943, $p < .01$ Conflict Frequency and Verbal Aggression: .780, $p < .01$
Older brother/Younger Sister n = 10	Conflict Frequency and Verbal Aggression: .907, $p < .01$

Table 2.

Significant Correlations for Friend Conflict and Aggression during Conflicts	
Sibling Dyad of Target Child	Significant Correlations
Overall n=60	Conflict Frequency and Physical Aggression :.325, $p < .01$ Conflict Frequency and Verbal Aggression: .658, $p < .01$
Sisters n=19	Conflict Frequency and Verbal Aggression: .879, $p < .01$

## Results

### Correlations between sibling conflict and aggression during conflicts (Table 1)

- Overall, sibling conflict frequency was significantly correlated with physical and verbal aggression, but not with relational aggression.
- In sister dyads, conflict frequency was significantly correlated with physical and relational aggression, but not with verbal aggression.
- In brother dyads, conflict frequency was significantly correlated with physical aggression, but not with verbal or relational aggression.
- In older sister/younger brother dyads, conflict frequency was significantly correlated with physical and verbal aggression, but not with relational aggression.
- In older brother/younger sister dyads, conflict frequency was significantly correlated with verbal aggression, but not with physical or relational aggression.

### Correlations between friend conflict and aggression during conflicts (Table 2)

- Overall, friend conflict frequency was correlated with physical and verbal aggression, but not with relational aggression.
- For girls with sisters, friend conflict frequency was significantly correlated with verbal aggression, but not with physical or relational aggression.
- For boys with brothers, friend conflict frequency was not significantly correlated with verbal, physical or relational aggression.
- For children from older sister/younger brother dyads, friend conflict was not significantly correlated with verbal, physical or relational aggression.
- For children from older brother/younger sister dyads, friend conflict was not significantly correlated with verbal, physical or relational aggression.

## Discussion

Our results indicated that the relationship between conflict and aggression is more complicated than we initially anticipated. Overall, both sibling and friend conflict frequency was positively correlated with frequency of physical and verbal aggression in conflicts, but not with frequency of relational aggression in conflicts. Relations between conflict and the various forms of aggression were different for siblings and friends, and varied across gender composition categories.

Our findings suggest that both gender and partner influence the ways adolescents use aggression during conflicts. Sequential analysis would be useful to determine exactly how the various forms of aggression are used.

## Acknowledgements

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