

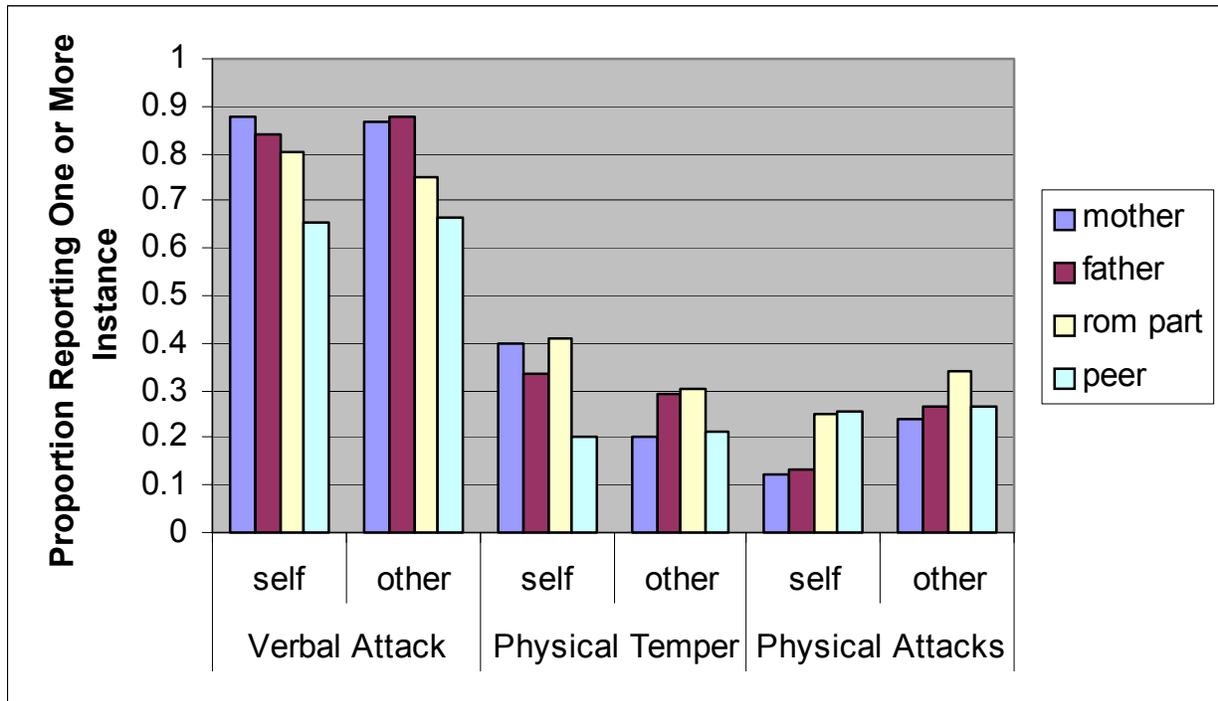
Aggression during Conflict with Parents, Romantic Partners, and Close Friends: Verbal, Physical, and Expressions of Temper

The changing nature of adolescents' social relationships make conflict resolution skills especially important. Relations with parents undergo marked changes (Smetana, 1999) and the increasingly psychological nature of adolescent peer relations make new demands on adolescent skills (Collins & Laursen, 1992). Romantic relationships place special demands on conflict resolution skills. Romantic relationships require youth socialized in two different interactional styles to negotiate successfully (Maccoby, 1995), are highly emotionally charged (Larson, Clore, & Wood, 1999), and involve complex issues such as time use, emotional commitment, and sexuality. These challenges may help to explain the rapid turn-over of romantic relationships (Brown, Feiring, & Furman, 1999) as well as the high rate of violence in adolescent dating relationships (Downey, Feldman, & Ayduk, 2000). This paper describes adolescents' aggressive conflict resolution strategies in relations with mothers, fathers, same-sex best friends, and romantic partners.

Method. Preliminary results reported in this proposal are from 76 currently dating high school juniors and seniors (36 males, 40 females). Final analyses will include an additional 100 dyads and will be analyzed using HLM to examine concordance of boyfriend and girlfriend reports. These final data will also include reciprocal reports of 100 youth and each of their parents and best friends. Adolescents completed the Conflict in Relationships scale (Wolfe, Reitzel-Jaffe, & Lefebvre, 1998), reporting whether they or mothers, fathers, romantic partners, or best friends had used 36 different tactics in conflict situations during the last year. Three types of aggression were coded: verbal (e.g. threats, hostile tone), physical (e.g., slapping, hitting), and physical expression of temper (e.g. breaking things). Scales were recoded Yes if the adolescent reported any act in that category, No if they did not. Dating couples were also videotaped in four social interaction tasks, which are currently being coded for use of conflict resolution strategies, including aggression.

Results. Verbal attacks were reported most frequently, followed by physical expression of temper, and physical aggression (Table 1). Over 25% of youth reported physical aggression in relations with both romantic partners and friends. Although girls reported using more physical aggression with romantic partners than did boys (35% v. 14%), there were no differences in reported use of aggression by self or partner in other roles. Interestingly, romantic relationships were the only relationship where significant number of girls used physical aggression, although they reported being the recipient of it in relations with mothers, fathers, and romantic partners (>25%). This reported use of physical aggression by girls (slaps, shoving, hair pulling) and threats of physical aggression is consistent with our observations of these youth and will be explored more fully in the final analyses. HLM analyses examining the extent to which adolescents use aggression across roles suggest similarity of aggression with parents and romantic partners, but markedly less similarity to relations with peers. Interestingly, boys report more aggression in relations with peers (>40%), girls markedly less (10%). Additional analyses will focus on concordance between observational and self-report data and agreement between boyfriends and girlfriends, parents and children, and friends on reports of conflict resolution strategies.

Figure 1: Proportion of Adolescents Reporting at Least One Instance of Each Type of Aggression by Partner Role.



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