

Aggression During Conflict with Parents, Romantic Partners, and Close Friends

Preliminary Findings from the
Continuity of Close Relationship Project

Nancy Darling & Andrew Burns

Bard College

Catherine Cohan

The Pennsylvania State University

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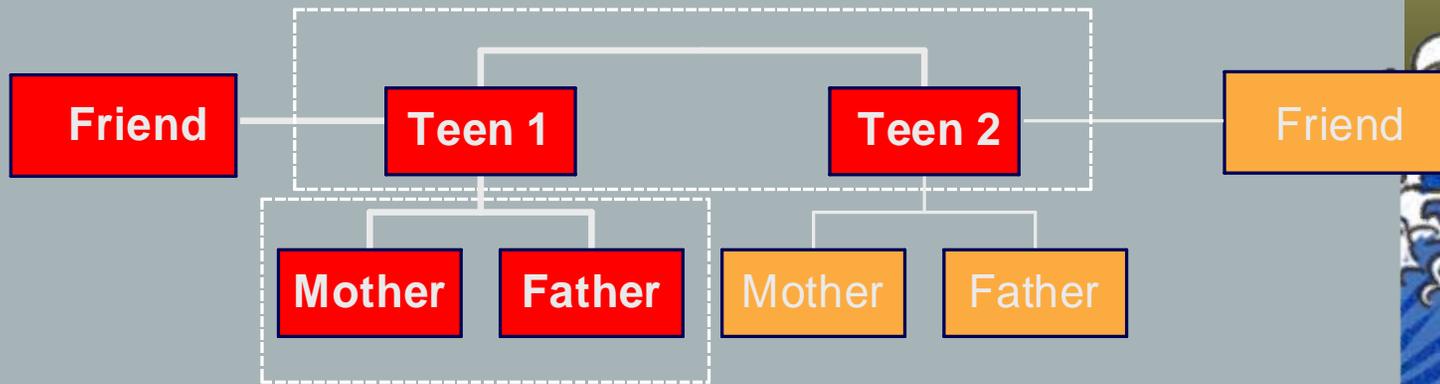


The Continuity of Close Relationships Project

- ▶ *How similar are adolescents' relationships with romantic partners to other relationships in their lives?*
- ▶ *How similar are adolescents' romantic relationships to their parents' marriages?*
- ▶ *How do relationships with romantic partners affect emotional regulatory processes?*



Data Collection Strategy:



Data Source:

Self Report

Self & Other Report

Observations



Questions:

- ▶ *How commonly is aggression used as a conflict resolution strategy in adolescents' romantic relationships?*
- ▶ *To what extent are these strategies similar to those used in relationships with parents and same-sex friends?*
- ▶ *To what extent do self-reports, partner-reports, and observed interactions lead to similar conclusions about the use of aggression?*



Method: Sample

- ▶ *31 currently dating couples*
 - ▶ *Dating at least 4 weeks*
 - ▶ *At least one adolescent currently a high school junior or senior*
 - ▶ *At least one adolescent's parents currently married to each other*
- ▶ *Recruited via advertisement and direct phone recruitment*



Sample Characteristics:

- ▶ *Dating 1-30 months, median=7 months*
- ▶ *Known each other 1-120 months, median=18 months*
- ▶ *Boys slightly older than girls:*
 - ▶ *Boys 17.6 Girls: 16.9*
- ▶ *Ethnicity reflects area*
 - ▶ *81% European-American, 7% Asian-American, 3% Latino, 8% Ethnically mixed*
- ▶ *79% from intact families living with both parents*



Protocol

▶ *Questionnaires:*

▶ *Conflict in Relationships Scale¹*

- ▶ *Adolescents reported on Self and Partner use of 36 different tactics*
- ▶ *Target: Relationships with Mother, Father, Romantic Partner, Same-sex peer*

▶ *Videotaped Social Interactions*

- ▶ *Two Social Support (10 minutes each)*
- ▶ *Two Conflict Resolution (7 minutes each)*

Wolfe, D. A., Wekerle, C., Reitzel-Jaffe, D., & Lefebvre, L. (1998). Factors associated with abusive relationships among maltreated and nonmaltreated youth. *Development and Psychopathology*, 10(61-85).



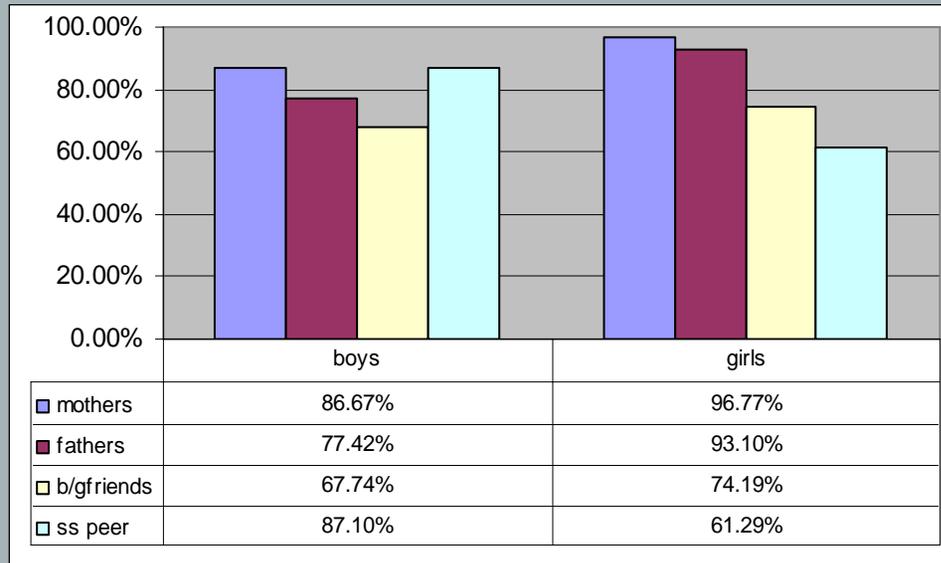
Measures of Aggression

- ▶ *Verbal aggression:*
 - ▶ *Spoke in a mean or hostile tone of voice*
 - ▶ *Insulted this person with put downs*
 - ▶ *I ridiculed or made fun of this person*
- ▶ *Direct or implied physical threats:*
 - ▶ *I threatened to hurt this person*
 - ▶ *I threatened to hit this person or throw something at him/her*
 - ▶ *I hit, kicked, or punched something, like a wall*
 - ▶ *I destroyed or threatened to destroy something this person valued*
 - ▶ *I deliberately tried to frighten this person*
- ▶ *Physical aggression*
 - ▶ *I kicked, hit, or punched this person*
 - ▶ *I slapped this person or pulled his/her hair*
 - ▶ *I threw something at this person*
 - ▶ *I pushed, shoved, or shook this person*



Verbal aggression used in 80% of relationships

self report



Boys:

- *No significant difference across roles*
- *less likely to report in relations with girlfriends than friends*

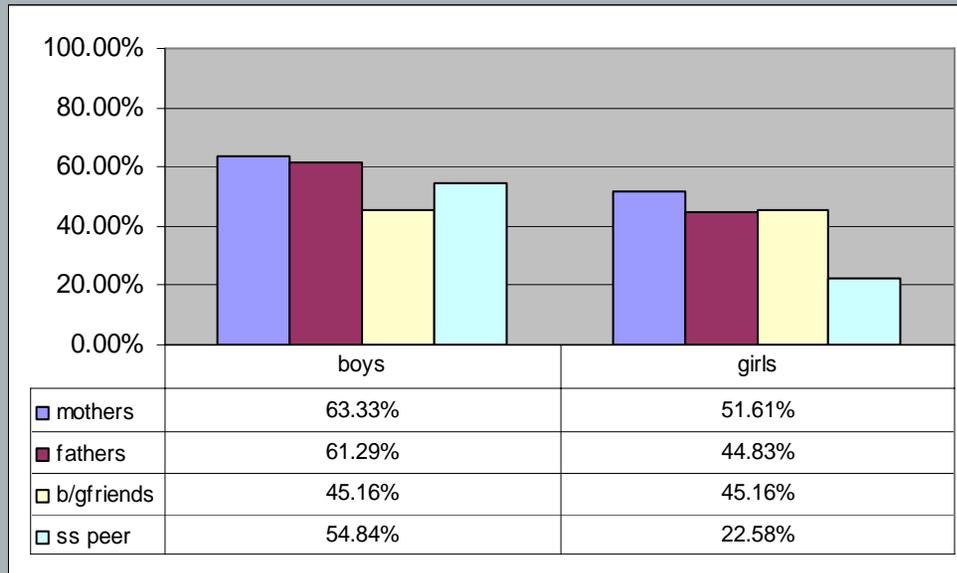
Girls:

- *Differential use of aggression across roles*
- *least likely with same-sex best friends ($p < .01$)*



Physical threats used in 49% of relationships

self report



Boys:

- ▶ *Less likely to use in relations with girlfriends than with peers*

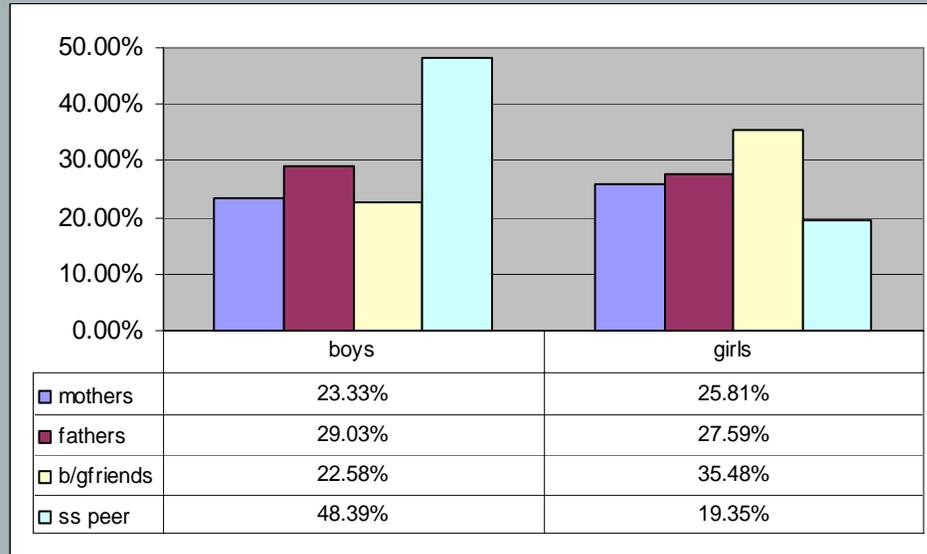
Girls:

- ▶ *Less likely to use with friends than others*
- ▶ *Twice as likely to use with boyfriend than with friend*



Physical aggression used in 29% of relationships

self report



Boys

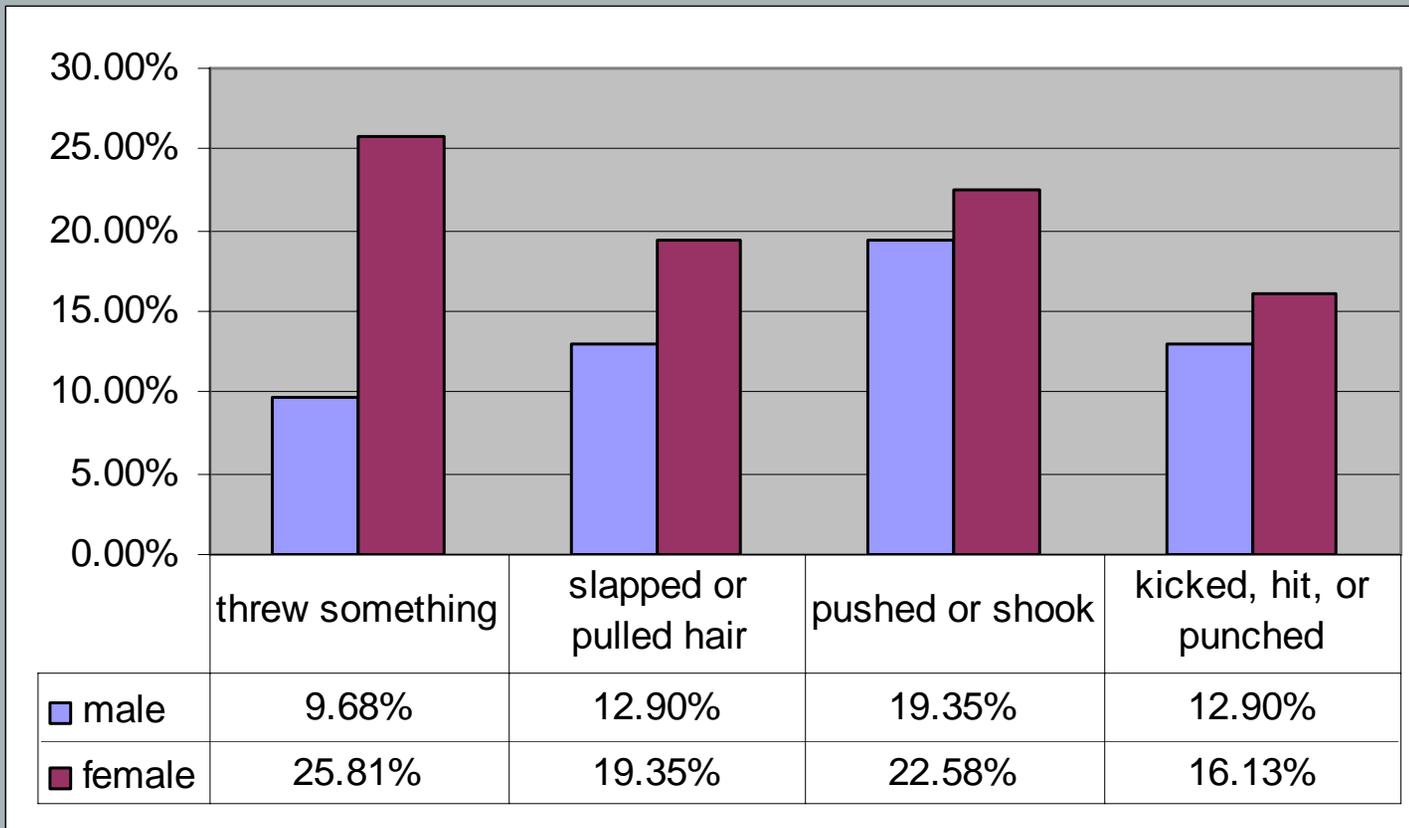
- ▶ *more likely to use than girls overall*
- ▶ *least likely to use with girlfriends - 23% v. 48% with friends*

Girls

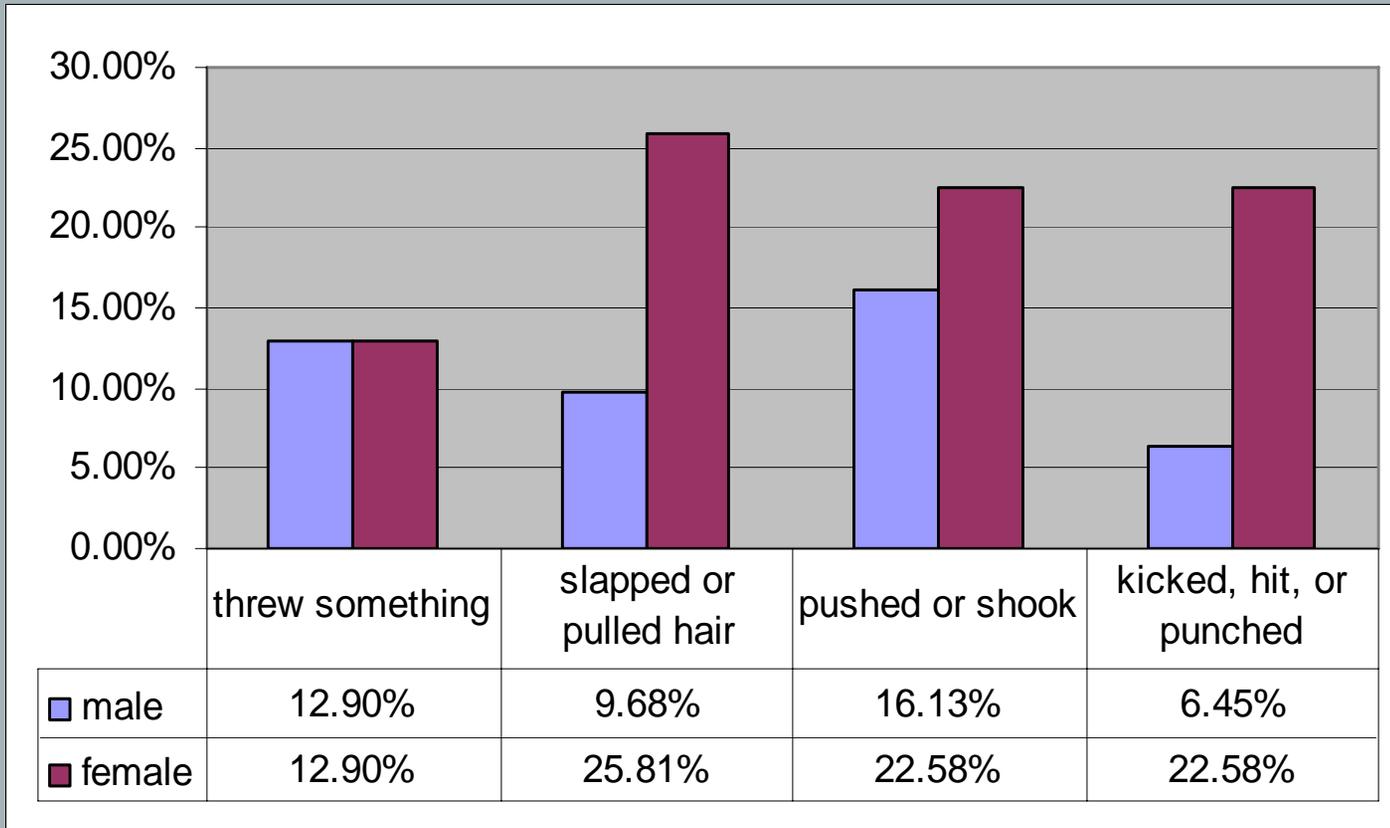
- ▶ *most likely to use with boyfriends - 35% v. 19% with friends*



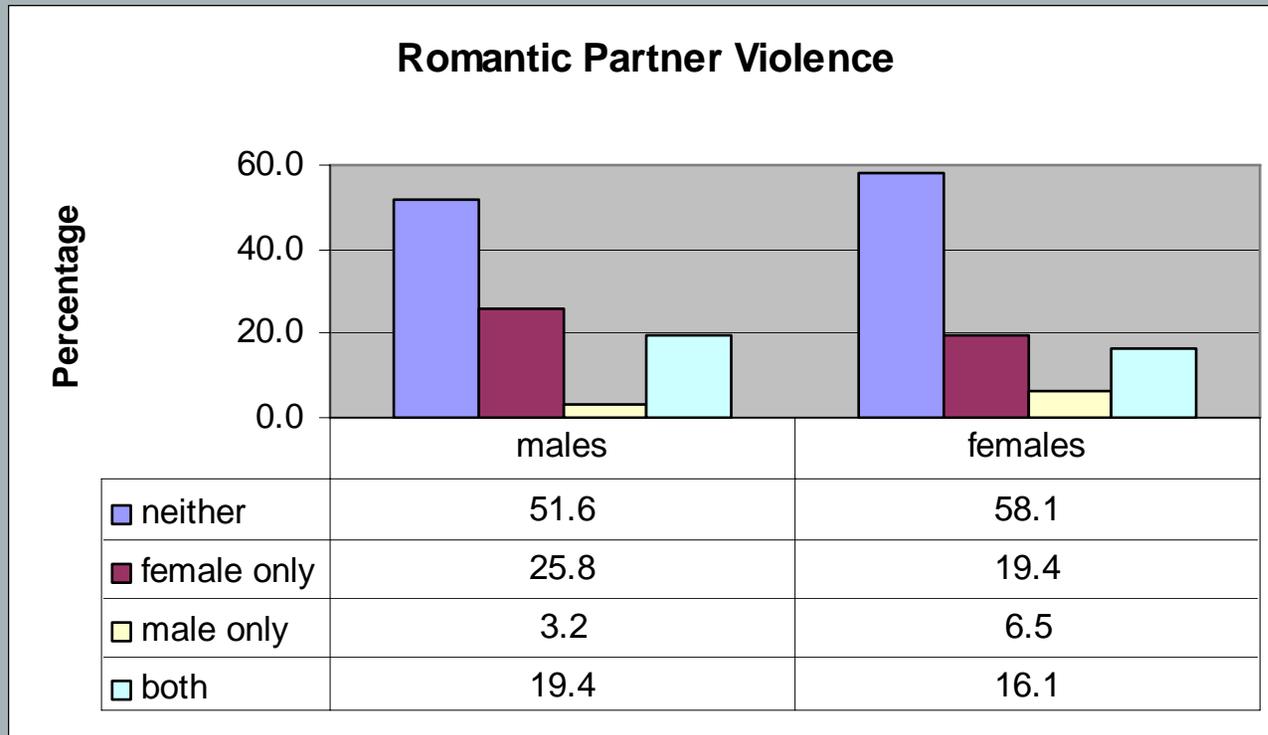
Type of Physical Aggression: Self-Report in Romantic Relationship



Type of Physical Aggression: Partner-Report in Romantic Relationship



Dyad Level



- *Most individuals report that couple violence is symmetrical*
- *When asymmetrical, it is most often female only*

Conclusions

- ▶ *All forms of aggression are fairly common in adolescent relationships*
 - ▶ *Threatened or actual use of physical aggression is present in a sizeable minority of relationships*
- ▶ *Distinctive patterns of aggression are reported by males and females:*
 - ▶ *Males:*
 - ▶ *Conflict highest in relationships with same-sex friends*
 - ▶ *Least likely to be expressed in relationships with girlfriends*
 - ▶ *Females:*
 - ▶ *Conflict lowest in relationships with same-sex best friend*
 - ▶ *Most likely to be expressed in threatened or actual violence in relationships with boyfriends*



Why do boys behave better than expected?

Why do girls behave worse?

- ▶ *Girls bring strong conflict resolution skills from same-sex friendships to romantic relationships*
- ▶ *Boys bring relatively weak conflict resolution skills from same-sex friendships to romantic relationships*
- ▶ *From this, we might have predicted that boys would be more physical in romantic relationships and girls less so*
- ▶ *Data from multiple sources in this data, consistent with prior work (see Archer, 2002 for a meta-analysis), suggests that this is not true.*
- ▶ *We're left with a puzzle. Why?*

