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Verbal aggression in sibling relationships

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Verbal Aggression in Sibling Relationships

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Thesis submitted to the
Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Masters of Arts
in
Communication Studies

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ABSTRACT

Verbal Aggression in Sibling Relationships

Shannon M. Brogan

The major focus of this study was to further investigate the area of sibling verbal aggression. In order to research this area, students at West Virginia University and their siblings were asked to complete a questionnaire about verbal aggression. The results showed that self-reports of verbal aggression were consistent with other reports. Results also showed that male same sexed siblings were more likely to display more verbal aggression than all other combinations. Results revealed that males self-reports of verbal aggression were higher than females. Results also indicated that males are reported by their siblings to be more verbally aggressive than females. These results lead to the conclusion that the sibling relationship is important and that the communication aspect in this area is one that communication scholars should further research.

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you could also find the other. Thank you for helping me

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The following manuscript is a Master's thesis submitted in partial fulfillment for a Communication Studies Master's degree. The major focus of this document is on sibling verbal aggression. First, a review of relevant sibling literature is given with a rationale for this study. Next, conflict and verbal aggression are examined. The methods used in this study are given as will as the results of the study are reported. A discussion of the study and its results as well as future directions and limitations are given. Following the discussion are a list of references used for this thesis as well as appendices. The abstract gives an overview of the entire study including a statement about the investigation, the methods used to conduct the study, and the outcomes and conclusions of the study.

Verbal Aggression in Sibling Relationships

The sibling relationship often lasts throughout most people's lives. According to Goode (1994), eighty percent of Americans have a sibling relationship. A considerable amount of research has been gathered on parent-child communication (see for example: Beatty, Burant, Dobos, & Rudd, 1996; Beatty & Dobos, 1992; Beatty, Zelley, Dobos, & Rudd, 1994; Martin & Anderson, 1995; Stafford & Bayer, 1993); however, siblings also have a relationship worthy of investigating.

Communication scholars have identified fathers' trait verbal aggressiveness (Beatty et al. 1996; Beatty et al. 1994) and communication motives (Martin & Anderson, 1995) as important influences on the father-adult child communicative relationship. However, the relationship between trait verbal aggressiveness and communication motives has not yet been established. This study addresses several questions concerning the similarities and differences in trait verbal aggressiveness and the communication motives for older and younger male/female siblings.

The definition of a sibling relationship has varied from biological to the social-psychological perspective.

Cicirelli and Nussbaum (1989) define sibling relationships as:

> The total of interactions (actions, verbal, and
> nonverbal communication) of two or more individuals
> who share common biological parents, as well as their
> knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and
> feelings regarding each other, from the time when one
> sibling first became aware of the other (p. 283-284).

This definition assumes that both parties are exchanging information and mutual influence. Siblings are thought by some to influence each other earlier than the Cicirelli and Nussbaum (1989) conceptualization of sibling relationships states. Some researchers argue that the sibling relationship is often influenced before the second child is born (Parke, 1992). The relationship with the older child is being altered as parents adjust to the coming of their second child (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982).

Noller and Fitzpatrick (1993) called the sibling relationship the "forgotten relationship" in communication research. And although it often contains a great deal of conflict, it is a relationship that is maintained over time by the participants. As such, it is basically a life-long relationship (Cicirelli, 1995; Fitzpatrick & Badzinski, 1994; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993; Vangelisti, 1994).

Siblings take on various roles as brothers and sisters. For instance, they take on the roles of a friend, competitor, manager, and teacher (Buhrmester, 1992). People also look to their siblings to provide companionship, comfort, affect, and friendship (Goetting, 1986). Goetting stated that siblings often support and protect one another from their parents when parents are verbally and/or physically abusive towards their children. The more emotional closeness between siblings, the greater the contact and commitment in the sibling relationship (Lee, Mancini, & Maxwell, 1990).

Throughout siblings' lives, they can form several types of bonds with one another. Bank and Kahn (1955) stated "there is no simple, time-honored, socially approved, all-pervasive sibling relationship; rather, there are a multiplicity of bonds that arrange themselves into a finite number of predictable patterns" (p. 15). A sibling bond can consist of three things: a tie that unites, an obligation or an agreement, and a connection or a system of connections (Bank & Kahn, 1955).

Over half of the conflict in families involves siblings (Montemayor & Hanson, 1985). Jealousy and rivalry among siblings can be traced through mythology, literature, history, and religion (Dunn, 1988a). Siblings often deal

with conflict by screaming at one another (Goodwin & Roscoe, 1996). Stormshak, Bellanti, and Bierman (1996) found that most verbal aggression between siblings takes place outside of the sight of parents. Therefore, parents tend to underestimate the amount of conflict between their children. Parents also appear unable to stop or prevent destructive communication from taking place (Stormshak, et al., 1996). Dunn (1988a) noted that parents often feel responsible for the communication of hostility or aggression between children. The more quarreling and destructive communication in the sibling relationship, the less companionship, intimacy, affection, and interaction between siblings (Buhrmester, 1992; Montemayor & Hanson, 1985).

Rival comes from the Latin word *Rivalis* which means having rights. Siblings have the tendency to rival against one another. For example, one child can rival another for the love of a parent, for a prized family role and so on. However, many forms of sibling aggression are not rivalrous. This has to do with a forbidden satisfaction or the fulfillment of a deeper emotional need. For instance, some sibling aggression and rivalry is an attempt to humiliate; or one may live a part or all of one's life

knowing that the presence of a brother or a sister makes one physically or emotionally unsafe.

Frequently, the birth of a second child has been portrayed as traumatic to a first-born child. Gudykunst, Yoon, and Nishida (1986) found that when only two children are present there is an intensive rivalry between siblings. Research indicates that "most first-born children showed signs of disturbance following the sibling's birth" (Dunn, 1988b, p. 170). The first-born child usually experiences emotions of displacement. Dunn and Stocker (1989) speculated that the sibling-sibling relationship is mediated by the first-born child's emotional well being. Insecure first-borns have a more difficult time accepting and incorporating the new child into the family system.

Conflict

There is a significant amount of conflict for most children and adolescents (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Buhrmester & Furman, 1990; Dunn, 1985; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Lamb & Sutton-Smith, 1982; Montemayor & Hanson, 1985). Siblings provide companionship like friends; however, unlike friends, siblings usually differ in age, are bound by involuntary ties, and may or may not like each other as individuals. When focusing on research, sibling conflict

is typically discussed as the outward manifestation of unconscious processes of rivalry (e.g., Faber & Mazlish, 1987; Freud, 1955; for an important exception, see Dunn, 1988).

The structure of conflict episodes has been described by a number of theorists and researchers (e.g., Berscheid, 1986; Hay, 1984; Shantz, 1987; Shantz & Hobart, 1989). A conflict event can be analyzed in the following three stages: what is happening when conflict erupts ("onset"), what happens during the episode ("process"), and what happens afterwards ("aftermath").

Among siblings, two studies revealed that verbal exchanges and property disputes were common precipitants. Quarrels over duties, chores, privileges or special treatment by parents were less frequent (Goodwin & Roscoe, 1990; Roscoe et al., 1987). Montemayor and Hanson (1985) found that most sibling quarrels were due to "interpersonal concerns" (teasing, extending courtesies, turn taking). It appears that friends quarrel over relationship concerns and issues arising from shared interactions; whereas, siblings enter into conflict over issues of shared life and personality differences. After reviewing this literature, it is believed that it is important to identify the influence of verbal aggression in the sibling relationship.

Verbal Aggression

Verbal aggression is defined as a predisposition to attack another's self-concept rather than, or in addition to, their positions on issues (Infante & Wigley, 1986). Cahn (1996) stated that verbally aggressive messages are a prevalent type of family violence. These are messages sent with the intent of hurting receivers (Infante, 1995; Infante & Rancer, 1996). Verbal aggression may cause people to feel embarrassed, inadequate, humiliated, hopeless, desperate, or depressed (Infante, 1987). Communicating aggressively in families can be viewed as ineffective and inappropriate (Beatty, Burant, Dobos, & Rudd, 1996). Additionally, verbal aggression between siblings can lead to social difficulties with peers (Stormshak et al., 1996). Researchers have also found that people use more verbal aggression when involved in a family dispute than when involved in organizational disagreements (Infante, Myers, & Buerkel, 1994).

The subject may report being verbally aggressive, but they may argue that the sibling was verbally aggressive first. Hence, siblings may be similar in verbal aggression due to their genetics or environment (Beatty & McCroskey, 1997; Infante, 1995; Martin & Anderson, 1995a). There are questions about whether self-report or other report would

be more appropriate. Some people have questioned the issue

of self-report because of the self-serving nature of self-

report data.

Accordingly, this study is designed to test the

following:

RQ1: Are self-reports of verbal aggression consistent

with sibling reports?

Kinney (1994) stated that verbally aggressive messages

produce various negative emotional responses, including

anger, annoyance, and sadness. People who report being

verbally aggressive with their siblings would be expected

to be less satisfied with the relationship. People would

also be expected to have less trust in their siblings when

they perceive their siblings as being verbally aggressive.

Trust reflects caring and being responsive to each other's

needs (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). Trust in a relationship is

also positively related to the quality of communication in

the relationship (Collins & Repinski, 1994).

Beatty and his colleagues researched verbal aggression

within the father-son relationship. They investigated the

impact of verbal aggression on the adult sons' perceptions

of their fathers use of sarcasm and criticism (Beatty et

al., 1996; Beatty et al, 1994). Verbal aggression was

found to be a predictor of sons' perceptions of fathers'
sarcasm and criticism behavior.

Verbal aggression was found to occur more inside the
family than outside the family. A father's verbal
aggressiveness also helps understand the father-son
communication relationship. The older brother may be
higher in verbal aggressiveness since the older male
sibling often takes on the parent-like role instead of the
younger male sibling (Dunn, 1993).

In the sibling relationship, it is possible that the
sex of the siblings could influence the communication
between the dyads. The sex of the individuals in the
sibling dyad is related to the type of communication in the
relationship (Floyd, 1995, 1996, 1997). For example,
Buhrmester (1992) found that women have a higher need to
self-disclose to their sisters than to their brothers. The
sex of the sibling is also related to the amount of
conflict. Montemayor and Hanson (1985) found more conflict
between same-sex siblings than opposite-sex siblings. For
verbal aggression, research has consistently shown that men
are more verbally aggressive than women, and that both men
and women expect men to be more verbally aggressive (Martin
& Anderson, 1996a; Nicotera & Rancer, 1994). Sibling dyads
where both individuals are female may be less verbally

aggressive than male and mixed sex dyads. However, it is possible that women are more verbally aggressive than men in some relationships.

Accordingly, this study is designed to test the following:

H1: Same sex sibling pairs will display more verbal aggression than mixed sex sibling pairs.

Infante, Bruning, and Martin (1994) found that people believe using verbally aggressive messages is justified when teasing someone. Infante (1995) argues that teasing is verbally aggressive. Others claim that teasing can be constructive, not destructive, to a relationship. One study found that teasing messages were rated as causing "little hurt" (Martin, Anderson, & Horvath, 1996). Goodwin and Roscoe (1996) also identified teasing as a common form of destructive communication between siblings, noting that women reported being teased more than men. Teasing can "threaten face needs, create negative identities, and embarrass recipients" (Alberts, Kellar-Guenther, & Corman, 1996, p. 338).

Richardson et al. (1986) gathered data from young adolescents from intact families with at least two children to explore the link between family structure, family functioning, and time spent with parents. Adolescents who

were further in age from their siblings spent more time with their fathers than those who were closely spaced. Kidwell (1981) found that adolescents with a mean sibling spacing of less than five years indicated that fathers were more strict than those with wider spacing. When sibling spacing was wider, adolescents perceived their parents' disciplinary behavior as more fair. Sibling spacing did not influence perceptions of mother strictness, but males rated their mothers as more strict than did females.

Buhrmester (1992) provided evidence that older and younger siblings' perceptions of the level of conflict in their relationships differed, with increased divergence in adolescence. Older siblings viewed their younger siblings as an annoyance, while younger siblings reported greater intimacy and more admiration for their older siblings.

The relationship with an older sibling may have important consequences for the younger sibling. Studies have shown that older siblings often serve as guides or teachers for younger siblings (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982; Klagsbrun, 1992; Vandell et al., 1987). Research also indicates that older siblings are more likely to influence younger siblings than to be influenced by them (e.g., Bryant, 1982; Newman, 1991; Rogers & Rowe, 1988). The hierarchical quality (Dunn, 1983) of sibling relationships

may be salient in terms of development since older siblings generally experience developmental tasks before younger siblings do.

Male and female sibling interactions can depend upon masculine and feminine gender socialization (Floyd, 1996). Buhrmester (1992) found a trend suggesting that adolescent girls reported greater intimacy with siblings than did boys. Findings from another study suggest that girls viewed their sibling relationships as more supportive than boys (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). Martin et al. (1997) stated that female siblings are more satisfied and reported using less verbal aggression than male dyads or mixed sex dyads.

Accordingly, this study was designed to test the following:

H2: Male siblings will score higher in verbal aggressiveness than female siblings.

Since there may be some differences between one's own perception of aggressive behavior and that reported by a sibling, it was appropriate to test this through both self-report and other-report techniques. Hence,

H2a: Males' self-reports of verbal aggression will be higher than females' self-reports.

H2b: Siblings will report that their male siblings are more verbally aggressive than their female siblings.

Chapter 2

METHODS

Participants

This study consisted of 338 participants. There were
169 undergraduate students enrolled in mass lecture
communication courses at West Virginia University. 151 of
the participants were males (45.8%) and 179 were females
(54.2%). The students were given two options for the
study. First, students who had a sibling could themselves
participate in the study. Second, those people without
siblings were asked to find a pair of siblings and
administer the questionnaire to them. Each participant was
required to turn in two completed questionnaires (older and
younger brother and/or sister responses). After the
students returned the questionnaires they were given extra
credit in the course.

Instrument

To measure verbal aggression participants were asked
to complete the sibling verbal aggressiveness scale (Teven,
Martin, & Neupauer, 1998). The participants were given two
identical surveys. The first survey asked them to focus on
one sibling relationship and complete the sibling verbal
aggressiveness scale. They needed to report their verbal

aggressiveness and perceived verbal aggression of their sibling. The second survey was given to their sibling to complete and they were asked to do the same thing.

Procedures

This investigation used a fourteen-item behavioral report of sibling verbal aggressiveness created by Teven, Martin, and Neupauer (1998). The scale consisted of responses from 1 = "never true" to 7 = "always true". There were four of the same surveys distributed in this investigation. The first survey looked at the subject's own verbal aggression, survey two looked at the subjects perceived verbal aggression of their sibling, three was the sibling's own verbal aggression, and survey four looked at the siblings perceived verbal aggression of their sibling. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. In this investigation a coefficient alpha of .90 ($\underline{M}$ = 41.30, $\underline{SD}$ = 14.49) was reported for the first instrument as completed by the participants. Survey two returned a coefficient alpha of .91 ($\underline{M}$ = 40.25, $\underline{SD}$ = 14.80). For the sibling, a coefficient alpha of .90 ($\underline{M}$ = 38.27, $\underline{SD}$ = 13.93) was obtained in survey three. Survey four had an coefficient alpha of .91 ($\underline{M}$ = 37.98, $\underline{SD}$ = 14.49).

Chapter 3

RESULTS

Research Question One asked whether self-reports of verbal aggression were consistent with sibling reports. This was best answered using simple correlational analysis. The correlational coefficients were .62 and .58, considered moderately high.

Hypothesis One stated that same sex sibling pairs will display more verbal aggression than mixed sex siblings pairs. This first hypothesis was tested using a two-way ANOVA. This hypothesis was partially supported [$F(1,328)$, 2.99, $p < .03$, $R2 = .03$]. Male sibling pairs were found to be more verbally aggressive than all other combinations. See Table 1.

Table 1

_____

Gender	SGender	N	Mean	SD
Male	Male	78	43.68abc	14.94
Male	Female	73	38.51a	15.39
Female	Male	77	38.29b	12.99
Female	Female	102	38.25c	12.11

_____

* Means with the same subscript are significantly different (p < .05).

Hypothesis Two stated that male siblings will score higher in verbal aggressiveness than female siblings. This hypothesis was tested using t-tests. This hypothesis was partially supported. H2a stated that males self-reports of verbal aggression will be higher than females (Males M = 41.18, SD = 15.33; Females M = 38.27, SD = 12.46). This hypothesis was not supported [$F(1, 328)$, 3.62, $p > .05$, $R2 = .01$]. On H2b, subjects reported that their male siblings were more verbally aggressive towards them than their female siblings were [$F(1, 328)$, 4.58, $p < .03$, $R2 = .013$]. The results indicated that males (M = 40.75, SD = 15.22) are reported by their siblings to be more verbally aggressive than females (M = 37.34, SD = 13.73).

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to investigate whether the sex of the sibling influences verbal aggression. The results from this study provide little support in regards to siblings and verbal aggression.

Research Question One examined whether or not self-reports of verbal aggression were consistent when compared to sibling reports. Subjects reported the same as their siblings reported in regards to verbal aggression. Self reports and other reports are at least moderately correlated; therefore, the choice of method may not be critical. The correlation between self verbal aggression and sibling verbal aggression suggests that there may be some reciprocity taking place.

Hypothesis One examined whether same sex sibling pairs would display more verbal aggression than mixed sex siblings. One might expect that same sex siblings would be more verbally aggressive than opposite sex siblings; however, this was only proven to be partially supported. Male same sex sibling dyads reported being the most verbally aggressive; whereas, female same sex dyads were not as verbally aggressive.

Hypothesis Two examined the relationship between sibling gender and verbal aggression. H2a found that males self reports of verbal aggression tended not to be higher than females. When males were filling out the questionnaire, they did not report being more verbally aggressive. H2b claimed that siblings would report that their male siblings are more verbally aggressive than their female siblings. This was supported, indicating that brothers are more verbally aggressive than their sisters.

Future Directions

This study allows for several implications for future research in the area of sibling verbal aggression and communication. One of the areas that needs to be further examined is birth order. Limited research has been done in this area and its impact on the sibling relationship and verbal aggression. Research has found that family communication patterns are systematically and dynamically interwoven (Stafford & Dainton, 1994). Collins (1990) stated that as children grow older and societal pressures increase, parents must set up new rules, and the communication patterns are renegotiated between the parents, the parents and children, and between the children themselves. Therefore, it has been found that verbally

aggressive messages are still present within the entire family system.

Another area that could be examined in this study is age. It would be interesting to look at the number of years between the siblings, but also the age of the two people filling out the survey. It would be interesting to see if older siblings are less verbally aggressive than younger siblings. It would also be interesting to look at age differences and if people become less verbally aggressive as they get older. Sibling relationships often become more important later in life; therefore, they often spend time talking about their past family experiences (Bedford, 1989b; Bedford & Gold, 1989; Cicirelli, 1985; Goetting, 1986; Ross & Milgram, 1982). As siblings get older they often need each other during family crises, such as divorce or death (Ambrose, Harper, & Pemberton, 1983).

Another area for future research is comparing gender issues in several different relationships. For instance, friendships, relationships, and sibling relationships. Could verbal aggression be a sibling issue or could it be a gender issue? This study does not address this issue.

Another future direction, is looking at what causes siblings to be verbally aggressive. Do siblings do this intentionally and what long term affects does this causes?

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, siblings may have been influenced due to social desirability bias. The participant was able to call their sibling on the telephone and record their answers. However, some may have felt that they needed to lie in order to prevent any problems between them and their sibling. The participants may also felt that they needed to make it sound as though they have a good relationship with their sibling. No one wants people to think that the have an unstable relationship or family problems. Participants may have also not have gone with their first instinct and put too much thought in to the question. Therefore, it is possible that they made their relationship seem more stable than it actually was and affected the results of the study.

This study had to be conducted by participants using self-reports of verbal aggression. Therefore, the results of this study may not be completely accurate. In order to be more accurate, I could have asked the participants to focus on a certain time period when filling out the surveys.

Age of the siblings may also be another limitation. This study consisted only of college students. However,

over time the sibling relationship is likely to change. Depending on the age of the sibling, the sibling relationship is likely to change. Age will affect the amount of contact between siblings and their living arrangements (Cicirelli, 1995; Goetting, 1986). For instance, many freshmen still may view their siblings in a high school manner. They may have fought a lot when they were younger and have not developed a mature relationship with their sibling. Siblings may have responded differently if they were seniors or they had siblings that were significantly older. The would also responded differently if they shared a room together their whole life verses those who were 10 years apart and may not have spend a lot of time together growing up.

Another limitation may be geographic location. Many people value sibling relationships based on where they are from. Some families are closer than others are and this would affect sibling relationships. People from certain places may spend more time with their siblings and family. It would be interesting to conduct this study in different geographic locations and compare the results.

Summary

This study provided further research in the sibling

relationship in regards to verbal aggression. This study provides insight; however, it also shows the future direction needed in sibling relationships. Although this study had several limitations, there was also significant findings as well. The findings of this study suggests that males and more verbally aggressive than females.

The area of sibling relationships and verbal aggression can be beneficial to communication scholars as well as family scholars.

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Appendix A

*Instructions: Please indicate how frequently you do the following things **to your sibling***.

Never True	Rarely True	Seldom True	Sometimes True	Often True	Mostly True	Always True
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

_____1.   Attack their intelligence.

_____2.   Make fun of their dating or lack of relationships.

_____3.   Make fun of their friendships.

_____4.   Call them uncomplimentary nicknames.

_____5.   Make fun of their physical appearance.

_____6.   Threaten to get them in trouble.

_____7.   Threaten to hurt them physically.

_____8.   Make fun of their friends in front of them.

_____9.   Complain about something they've done.

_____10.   Attack their self-esteem.

_____11.   Threaten to abuse or destroy a possession of theirs.

_____12.   Make fun of them in front of their friends.

_____13.   Tease them.

_____14.   Swear at them.

*Instructions: Please indicate how frequently your sibling does the following **to you***.

Never True 1	Rarely True 2	Seldom True 3	Sometimes True 4	Often True 5	Mostly True 6	Always True 7

_____1.   Attack your intelligence.

_____2.   Make fun of your dating or lack of relationships.

_____3.   Make fun of your friendships.

_____4.   Call you uncomplimentary nicknames.

_____5.   Make fun of your physical appearance.

_____6.   Threaten to get you in trouble.

_____7.   Threaten to hurt you physically.

_____8.   Make fun of your friends in front of you.

_____9.   Complain about something you've done.

_____10.   Attack your self-esteem.

_____11.   Threaten to abuse or destroy a possession of yours.

_____12.   Make fun of you in front of your friends.

_____13.   Tease you.

_____14.   Swear at you.

Your Gender: Male   Female

Your Siblings Gender: Male   Female

How many years are there between you and the sibling you are filling the survey out on? _____