

Siblings’ Perceptions of Their Relationship in Adolescence and Early Adulthood

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Abstract

As part of a longitudinal study of sibling and friend relationships, we examined siblings’ perceptions of their relationship in adolescence and early adulthood. To date, 26 participants from the longitudinal study have completed questionnaires about their sibling relationship during late adolescence and early adulthood. In preliminary analyses, we found coherence at both points in time and continuity across the two time points, especially for positive relationship qualities.

Introduction

For most people, sibling relationships endure longer than parent-child relationships, friendships, or romantic relationships, and there is evidence that they continue to be important throughout the lifespan. However, research on sibling relationships has been concentrated in childhood and adolescence; we know relatively little about sibling relationships in early adulthood or about the extent to which they show continuity from earlier phases of development. As part of a longitudinal study of sibling and friend relationships, we are examining siblings’ perceptions of their relationship in adolescence and early adulthood. This poster presents preliminary findings; data collection is ongoing.

Method

- Twenty-six participants in a longitudinal study of sibling and friend relationships (13 male, 13 female) completed questionnaires about a relationship with a sibling during late adolescence (mean age 16.8 years) and early adulthood (mean age 27.5 years). Fifteen were the older sibling in their relationship, 11 the younger sibling; the age gap between siblings was 15-30 months. Ten of the sibling pairs were mixed-gender, the rest same-gender.
- The adolescent questionnaire was an age-adjusted questionnaire developed for use in the longitudinal study; it included five scales (Asymmetry, Intimacy, Prosocial/Harmony, Relational Aggression, and Conflict).
- The questionnaire used during the early adulthood phase of the study was the Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (Stocker et al., 1997); it included 12 scales (Similarity, Intimacy, Quarreling, Affection, Antagonism, Admiration, Emotional Support, Competition, Instrumental Support, Domination, Acceptance, and Knowledge).
- The adolescent questionnaire was administered during a home visit; the adulthood questionnaire was administered online.
- Participants received movie tickets as compensation during the adolescent phase of the study and 10-dollar Amazon gift cards during the adulthood phase.

Results

Pearson bivariate correlations among the scales on the adolescent and adulthood questionnaires reveal considerable coherence in the sibling relationships at both ages and some continuity between adolescence and early adulthood

Correlations within Adolescent Questionnaire (Table 1)

- The more positive scales on the adolescent questionnaire (Intimacy and Prosocial/Harmony) were positively correlated with each other and negatively correlated with the more negative scales (Relational Aggression and Conflict).
- Likewise, the more negative scales (Relational Aggression and Conflict) were positively correlated with each other and negatively correlated with the more positive scales (Prosocial/Harmony and Intimacy).
- Interestingly, Symmetry (a measure of how evenly power is distributed in the relationship) was not significantly correlated with any other scale; this result may reflect relatively low variability in sibling relationship symmetry.

Correlations within Early Adulthood Questionnaire (Table 2)

- Similarity was positively correlated with the more positive scales on the adulthood questionnaire (Intimacy, Affection, Admiration, Emotional Support, Instrumental Support, and Acceptance, and Knowledge) and negatively correlated with Quarreling and Antagonism.
- The more positive scales (Intimacy, Affection, Admiration, Emotional Support, Instrumental Support, Acceptance, and Knowledge) were positively correlated with each other and negatively correlated with the more negative scales, with a few exceptions.
- Quarreling, Antagonism, and Domination were positively intercorrelated.
- Competition is positively correlated with Quarreling and Domination, but not with Antagonism.
- Interestingly, Knowledge is positive correlated with all of the positive scales, but also with Domination.

Correlations between Adolescent and Early Adulthood Questionnaires

- Adolescent Intimacy is positively correlated with adult Intimacy ($r = .647$, $p < .01$), Similarity ($r = .486$, $p = .014$), Affection ($r = .658$, $p < .01$), Admiration ($r = .582$, $p = .002$), Emotional Support ($r = .643$, $p < .01$), Instrumental Support ($r = .486$, $p = .012$), Acceptance ($r = .443$, $p = .023$), and Knowledge ($r = .576$, $p = .002$).
- Adolescent Prosocial/Harmony is positively correlated with adult Intimacy ($r = .416$, $p = .035$), Affection ($r = .484$, $p = .012$), Emotional Support ($r = .448$, $p = .022$), Admiration ($r = .515$, $p = .007$), and Acceptance ($r = .539$, $p = .004$).
- Adolescent Prosocial/Harmony is negatively correlated with adult Quarreling ($r = -.437$, $p = .026$) and Antagonism ($r = -.468$, $p = .016$).
- Adolescent Relational Aggression is positively correlated with adult Domination ($r = .520$, $p = .006$).
- Interestingly, adolescent symmetry and conflict were not significantly correlated with any scales on the adulthood questionnaire.

Table 1. Correlations within Target Adolescent Sibling Questionnaire

Subscale	1	2	3	4	5
1. Symmetry	--				
2. Intimacy	-.183	--			
3. RelAgg	.045	-.310*	--		
4. Pro/Har	-.093	.618**	-.583**	--	
5. Conflict	.033	-.258*	.586**	-.470**	--

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 2. Correlations within Target Adulthood Sibling Questionnaire

Subscale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Similarity	--											
2. Intimacy	.558**	--										
3. Quarreling	-.404*	-.286	--									
4. Affection	.582**	.854**	-.407*	--								
5. Antagonism	-.447**	-.313	.871**	-.324	--							
6. Admiration	.502**	.718**	-.392*	.777**	-.306	--						
7. EmoSupp	.611**	.906**	-.315	.863**	-.297	.818**	--					
8. Competition	.208	-.076	.420*	-.018	.291	.101	.090	--				
9. InsSupp	.344*	.759**	-.133	.640**	-.121	.479**	.744**	-.157	--			
10. Domination	-.318	-.122	.829**	-.185	.792**	-.149	-.123	.433**	.024	--		
11. Acceptance	.576**	.612**	-.622**	.672**	-.574**	.766**	.745**	.043	.396*	-.501**	--	
12. Knowledge	.664**	.899**	0.293	.833**	-.283	.694**	.857**	-.033	.679**	.622**	.622**	--

*Correlations significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

**Correlations significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

Our study found that both the adolescent and the early adulthood questionnaires were internally consistent. There was also considerable continuity in the positive dimensions (similarity, intimacy, affection, emotional/ instrumental support, etc.), but less continuity in the negative dimensions (antagonism, domination, conflict, relational aggression).

Interestingly, competition and knowledge did not fit neatly into the positive/negative categories. Competition was not correlated with antagonism, suggesting that it may not be entirely negative in some adult sibling relationships. Adult knowledge was correlated with all of the positive scales, but also with domination, suggesting that knowledge may be a two-edged sword in some sibling relationships. We suspect that there may be gender differences in how various aspects of adolescent and adult sibling relationships are connected; we intend to pursue these analyses once we have gathered more data.