THE INFLUENCE OF INTER-PARENTAL CONFLICT, PARENTING STYLES, AND ATTACHMENT ON REACTIVE AND PROACTIVE AGGRESSION IN ADOLESCENCE

ZHOU GUANGDONG

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

SEPTEMBER 2014
CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
香港城市大學

The Influence of Inter-Parental Conflict, Parenting Styles, and Attachment on Reactive and Proactive Aggression in Adolescence
夫妻矛盾、教養方式及依懸對青少年反應型和操縱型攻擊的影響

Submitted to
Department of Applied Social Sciences
應用社會科學系
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
哲學博士學位

by

Zhou Guangdong
周廣東

September 2014
二零一四年九月
Abstract

This study investigated the family-related origins of reactive and proactive aggression in adolescents. No study thus far has examined 1) whether parenting and attachment have a joint effect on reactive and proactive aggression; 2) how marital relationships may be related to these aggression subtypes; 3) how different family subsystems, such as the parent-child and marital subsystems, affect one another in their relationships with adolescents’ reactive and proactive aggression; 4) whether family variables relate equally to reactive and proactive aggression; and 5) whether the relationships between these family variables and aggression subtypes vary between boys and girls. This study used a joint residual regression method to address these research gaps and examine how family variables, including parenting styles, attachment, inter-parental conflict and appraisals to inter-parental conflict such as self-blame and perceived threat, influence reactive and proactive aggression in adolescence. Participants were 1,865 adolescents (aged 10-16 years) and their fathers and mothers recruited from three junior middle schools in Guangzhou, China. Adolescents reported their own reactive and proactive aggression, inter-parental conflict, their appraisals to parental conflict (e.g., self-blame and perceived threat), perceived parenting styles, and attachment with fathers and mothers. Fathers and mothers reported reactive and proactive aggression of adolescents and the parenting styles of themselves and their spouses.

Existing findings suggested that parenting styles and attachment may influence children’s outcomes independently, and that parenting styles are moderated or mediated by attachment. These three possible models were examined in terms of their relationships with reactive and proactive aggression after taking inter-parental conflict and appraisals
into account. Support was found for the independent predictor and moderation models, and the results varied on genders of the adolescent, parenting styles and aggression subtypes. Further, attachment was found to have a moderation effect on the relationships between authoritarian parenting style and reactive aggression in girls, between authoritative parenting style and reactive aggression in boys, and between permissive parenting style and proactive aggression in boys. Secure attachment’s buffering effect on reactive aggression was only evident when authoritarian parenting was low for girls and when authoritative parenting style was high for boys. Insecure attachment was only positively related to boys’ proactive aggression when permissive parenting style was high rather than low. In the independent models, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles were positively related to both reactive and proactive aggression. Authoritative parenting style was not significantly related to either reactive or proactive aggression after other family variables were considered. Attachment was mainly negatively related to self-reported reactive aggression but not proactive aggression, except in models with permissive parenting styles.

Based on the relationships between attachment and parenting styles, a mediation model of inter-parental conflict through parenting styles, attachment and appraisals such as self-blame and perceived threat was developed separately for girls and boys. Parenting styles, attachment and appraisals completely mediated the positive effects of inter-parental conflict on reactive and proactive aggression. Moreover, self-blame had only a positive effect and mediated the effect of inter-parental conflict on self-reported reactive and proactive aggression in girls but not in boys. Perceived threat had a positive effect and mediated the effect of inter-parental conflict on reactive but not proactive aggression.
In addition, the family variables tended to relate more strongly to reactive than proactive aggression, especially when adolescents reported the aggression subtypes.

These results suggest that the patterns of how family variables mutually influence their effects on aggressive behaviors in adolescents vary according to the aggression subtypes and gender of the adolescent. Only when both marital and parent-child relationships are considered can the family-related influences on reactive and proactive aggression in adolescents be fully captured.
Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................i
Acknowledgement ............................................................................................................... iv
List of Tables ..................................................................................................................... xiii
List of Figures .................................................................................................................. xvii
Chapter 1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
Chapter 2 Literature Review ............................................................................................... 6
  2.1 Reactive and Proactive Aggression.............................................................................. 6
    2.1.1 Definition of Reactive and Proactive Aggression ................................................. 6
    2.1.2 Theories of Reactive and Proactive Aggression .................................................. 6
    2.1.3 Reactive and Proactive Aggression in Adolescence ........................................... 9
    2.1.4 Distinction between Reactive and Proactive Aggression ................................. 10
    2.1.5 Gender Differences in Reactive and Proactive Aggression .............................. 12
    2.1.6 Family Origins of Reactive and Proactive Aggression ...................................... 13
  2.2 Parenting Styles ......................................................................................................... 15
    2.2.1 Definition of the Different Types of Parenting Styles ......................................... 15
    2.2.2 Authoritarian Parenting Style and Aggression .................................................. 17
    2.2.3 Authoritative Parenting Style and Aggression ................................................... 21
    2.2.4 Permissive Parenting Style and Aggression ....................................................... 23
    2.2.5 Gender Differences in Parenting Styles .............................................................. 25
  2.3 Parent-Child Attachment ............................................................................................ 27
    2.3.1 Definition of Attachment ................................................................................... 27
2.3.2 Attachment and Aggression .................................................................29
2.3.3 Gender Difference in Attachment ..........................................................31
2.4 Parenting Styles and Attachment ...............................................................32
2.5 Inter-Parental Conflict ..............................................................................36
  2.5.1 Inter-Parental Conflict and Modeling ......................................................37
  2.5.2 Inter-Parental Conflict and Appraisals ....................................................38
  2.5.3 Inter-Parental Conflict and Attachment ..................................................41
  2.5.4 Inter-Parental Conflict and Parenting Styles ..........................................42
  2.5.5 Gender Differences in Inter-Parental Conflict, Self-Blame, and Perceived
       Threat ........................................................................................................46
2.6 Research Gap ..............................................................................................48

Chapter 3 Conceptual Framework ........................................................................51
  3.1 Summary of Distinction between Reactive and Proactive Aggression and Their
       Correlates ......................................................................................................52
  3.2 Summary of the Possible Linkage between Family Variables and Reactive and
       Proactive Aggression ......................................................................................52
  3.3 Summary of the Effect of Inter-Parental Conflict Reactive and Proactive
       Aggression through Appraisals, Parenting Styles, and Attachment ..............55
  3.4 Summary of the Inter-Relationships between Attachment and Parenting Styles ....57
  3.5 Summary of Gender Differences in the Relationship between Family-Related
       Variables and Aggression Subtypes ..............................................................60
  3.6 Theoretical Model .........................................................................................60
3.7 Hypotheses ...........................................................................................................................63

Chapter 4 Methodology ............................................................................................................. 66
  4.1 Participants ..........................................................................................................................66
  4.2 Procedure ...........................................................................................................................67
  4.3 Measurement .......................................................................................................................68
    4.3.1 Reactive and Proactive Aggression ...........................................................................68
    4.3.2 Parenting Styles ........................................................................................................69
    4.3.3 Attachment ................................................................................................................71
    4.3.4 Inter-Parental Conflict ............................................................................................72
    4.3.5 Appraisals of Inter-Parental Conflict .....................................................................73
  4.4 Analysis Strategies ............................................................................................................75

Chapter 5 Results ..................................................................................................................... 78
  5.1 Primary Analysis ...............................................................................................................78
  5.2 Measurement Model .........................................................................................................81
    5.2.1 Self-Reported Reactive and Proactive Aggression ...............................................81
    5.2.2 Parent-Reported Reactive and Proactive Aggression .............................................83
    5.2.3 Parenting Styles ......................................................................................................84
    5.2.4 Attachment ..............................................................................................................89
    5.2.5 Inter-Parental Conflict and Appraisals ..................................................................89
  5.3 Structural Models .............................................................................................................89
    5.3.1 Attachment and Reactive and Proactive Aggression .............................................90
    5.3.2 Authoritarian Parenting Styles and Reactive and Proactive Aggression ..........94
6.3.3 Gender Difference in the Effect of Attachment on Reactive and Proactive Aggression ................................................................. 178

6.4 Relationship between Attachment and Parenting Styles in Their Joint Effect on Reactive and Proactive Aggression ......................................................... 179

6.4.1 Gender Difference in the Joint Effect of Attachment and Authoritarian Parenting on Reactive Aggression ................................................................. 181

6.4.2 Gender Difference in the Joint Effect of Attachment and Authoritative Parenting on Reactive Aggression ................................................................. 183

6.4.3 Gender Difference in the Joint Effect of Attachment and Permissive Parenting on Proactive Aggression ................................................................. 185

6.5 Inter-Parental Conflict and Reactive and Proactive Aggression ................................................................. 188

6.5.1 The Effect of Inter-Parental Conflict on Reactive Aggression ................................................................. 188

6.5.2 The Effect of Inter-Parental Conflict on Proactive Aggression ................................................................. 189

6.5.3 Gender Difference in the Effect of Inter-Parental Conflict on Reactive and Proactive Aggression ................................................................. 190

6.6 Self-Blame and Reactive and Proactive Aggression ................................................................. 190

6.6.1 The Effect of Self-Blame on Reactive Aggression ................................................................. 190

6.6.2 The Effect of Self-Blame on Proactive Aggression ................................................................. 191

6.6.3 Gender Difference in the Effect of Self-Blame on Reactive and Proactive Aggression ................................................................. 192

6.7 Perceived Threat and Reactive and Proactive Aggression ................................................................. 193

6.7.1 The Effect of Perceived Threat on Reactive Aggression ................................................................. 193

6.7.2 The Effect of Perceived Threat on Proactive Aggression ................................................................. 194
6.7.3 Gender Difference in the Effect of Perceived Threat on Reactive Aggression .................................................................195

6.8 Mediation of the Associations between Inter-Parental Conflict and Reactive and Proactive Aggression .................................................................197

6.8.1 Mediation of Appraisals on the Effect of Inter-Parental Conflict on Reactive and Proactive Aggression .................................................................198

6.8.2 Mediation of Attachment on the Effect of Inter-Parental Conflict on Reactive and Proactive Aggression .................................................................199

6.8.3 Mediation of Parenting Styles on the Effect of Inter-Parental Conflict on Reactive and Proactive Aggression .................................................................201

6.9 Distinction between Reactive and Proactive Aggression .................................................................203

6.9.1 Mean Differences for Reactive and Proactive Aggression .................................................................203

6.9.2 Gender Differences in Reactive and Proactive Aggression .................................................................204

6.9.3 Different Mechanisms Underlying the Effects of Family-Related Variables on Reactive and Proactive Aggression .................................................................206

6.9.4 The Different Relationships between Family-Related Variables and Reactive and Proactive Aggression .................................................................208

6.10 Culture Difference in Family Variable and Its Effect on Aggression .................................................................210

6.11 Implications .......................................................................................................................................................213

6.11.1 Theoretical Implications ........................................................................................................................................213

6.11.2 Practical Implications ........................................................................................................................................220

6.12 Limitations .......................................................................................................................................................223

6.13 Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................................226