



Does What Parents Say Matter? Developing a Measure of Parental Messages About Aggression and Nonviolence

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Background

Considerable research suggests that parents exert a powerful influence on the development of violent behavior in their children. Although parenting practices and family processes have received the most attention in the literature, there is also support for the influence of the messages parents give their children regarding the use of violence. Orpinas, Murray, and Kelder (1999) studied four parental influences on aggressive behavior and weapon carrying among urban middle school students: family structure, relationship with parents, parental monitoring, and perception of parental attitudes toward fighting, and found that parental support for fighting was the strongest predictor. One drawback to this study was that their 10-item scale combined parental messages about violence with those about nonviolent strategies. Subsequent analyses of the scale suggested that these represented distinct factors (Multisite Violence Prevention Project, 2004). Unfortunately, because the scale was not specifically developed to assess both factors, it does not appear to adequately sample each domain.

This poster describes the development and evaluation of a recently created self-report measure of parental messages that aims to address the limitations of existing measures. Items were designed to reflect parental messages supporting both the use of aggressive and effective nonviolent strategies.

Method

Items were developed to reflect relevant themes identified in a series of qualitative and quantitative studies designed to identify factors influencing the use of violent and nonviolent response strategies by urban, African American youth (e.g., Farrell et al., 2006). Statements about family influences on aggression and nonviolence from both adolescents and adults were used to inform the development of items representing both *parental messages supporting fighting* and *parental messages supporting alternatives to fighting*. Items were also written to assess the presence of *messages supporting the prevention of conflict*, such as encouragement to avoid people and places where a student is likely to get into a fight. Respondents are asked to rate how likely their parents would be to tell them each statement on a 4-point scale.

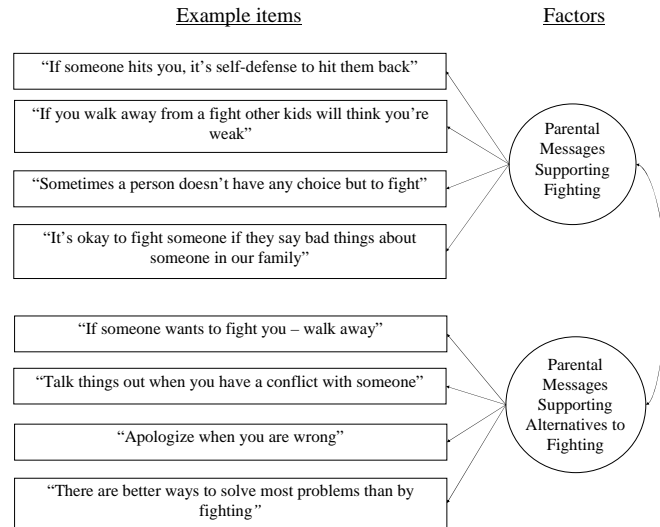
A 26-item measure was administered to 199 youth attending two urban middle schools who completed other measures of adjustment. Youth ranged in age from 11 to 14, with a mean age of just over 12 years old.

% Male	49	% African American	71
% Special Education	28	% Multi-ethnic	18
		% Other ethnicity	8.5

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Confirmatory Factor Analyses.

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to compare three competing models: (a) a one-factor model in which all items loaded on a single factor; (b) a two-factor model representing messages supporting fighting and messages supporting alternatives to fighting; and (c) a three-factor model representing the original proposed structure (messages supporting fighting, messages supporting alternatives to fighting, and messages supporting the prevention of conflict). Although the three-factor model provided the best overall fit, the high correlation ($r = .85$) between the factors representing messages about alternatives and the prevention of conflict suggested that they did not represent distinct constructs. The two-factor model that merged these two factors was therefore thought to best represent the scale structure, and provided an adequate fit to the data.



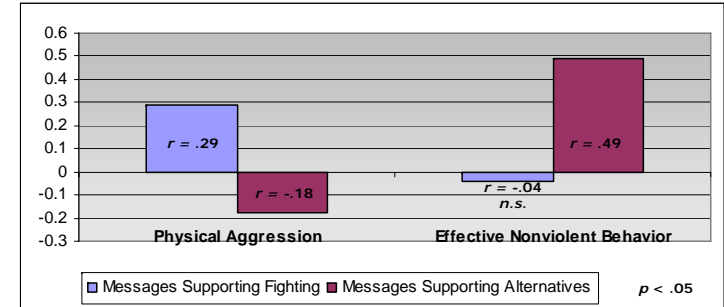
Reliability

Reliability estimates and a reassessment of the core content of each subscale resulted in the deletion of several items. This process yielded a final scale that includes 15 items representing two distinct subscales with acceptable internal consistency: Support for Fighting (8 items; $\alpha = .75$) and Support for Alternatives to Fighting (7 items; $\alpha = .83$).

Results

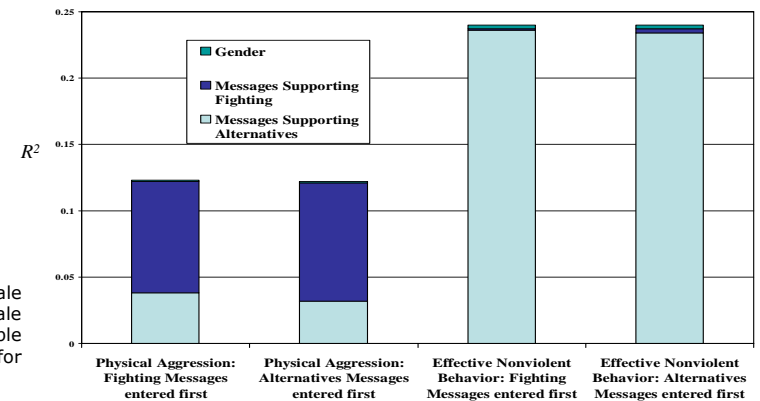
Correlational Analyses.

The two factors generally showed the expected pattern of relations with measures of physical aggression and effective nonviolent behavior



Regression Analyses

Regression analyses were used to examine the unique variance accounted for by each subscale in explaining physical aggression and effective nonviolent behavior. Analyses controlled for gender and counterbalanced the order in which the subscales were entered. Parental Messages Supporting Fighting and Supporting Alternatives to Fighting were both significant predictors of Physical Aggression; Messages Supporting Alternatives to Fighting was a significant predictor of Effective Nonviolent Behavior, but Messages Supporting Fighting was not.



Conclusions

>This measure development effort resulted in a 15-item scale measuring parental messages about fighting and alternatives to fighting, with items based on actual descriptions of parental messages from students and school personnel.

>Confirmatory factor analyses provided evidence for a 2-factor model, with correlations between latent factors indicating that messages supporting fighting and messages supporting nonviolence represent distinct constructs.

>Correlational and regression analyses resulted in a pattern of findings mainly consistent with the aims of measure development.

>Messages Supporting Fighting were positively associated with aggression but not significantly associated with effective nonviolent behavior.

>Messages Supporting Alternatives were negatively associated with aggression and positively associated with effective nonviolent behavior.