Social Competence and Parental Differential Treatment Across Sibling Dyads
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Introduction
- Parental differential treatment (PDT) is defined as unequal treatment of siblings that can take place across an array of domains.
- PDT has been linked to siblings' tasking and internalizing symptoms, sibling relationship quality, and self-worth (Shelnotski, Conger, & Widaman, 2005).
- However, this relationship may be moderated by siblings' perceptions of the fairness of their differential treatment (Kowal et al., 2002).
- Children often justify parents' preferential treatment by noting differences between themselves and their sibling, such as age and personality (Kowal & Kramer, 1977).

Research Questions
Do siblings' reports of social competence differ by Parental Differential Treatment in time spent with parents?

Do siblings' reports of social competence differ by dyad type, suggesting possible genetic and age correlates?

Participants
Participants 252 dyads:
- 54 MZ twin pairs
- 86 DT twin pairs (52 same-sex; 34 opposite-sex)
- 43 VT twin pairs (16 same-sex; 27 opposite-sex)
- 69 Full sibling pairs (36 same-sex; 33 opposite-sex)
- Aged 8-12: M = 9.6, SD = 1.4.
- The families were predominantly middle class, with 63% of European ancestry.
- The children were interviewed about their family relationships by trained testers as part of a three-hour home interview.
- Pairs with children who experienced birth difficulties that may affect behavioral development were excluded.

Criteria for Virtual Twins:
- Both unrelated siblings must be reared together before 1 year of age.
- Must be enrolled in the same grade at the time of testing.
- May attend separate classrooms or separate schools.

Measures
Parental Differential Treatment in Play
Parents completed a 3 item subscale assessing three different dimensions of parental differential treatment of the two siblings. The item correlations between the 3 dimensions range from .25 to .45.

For this study, we focused on PDT in the area of play, which was the following:
- In general do you treat sibling 1 and sibling 2 equally with respect to time and activities for play? I treat them:
  1. Very Equally
  2. Somewhat the same
  3. Somewhat differently
  4. Very Unequally

Social Competence
Siblings completed the Social Competence subscale of the Perceived Peer Competence measure (Harter, 1982). Internal reliabilities for the Social Competence subscale were .69 and .67 for sibling 1 and 2, respectively.

Instructions were as follows:
For each question below, first pick the sentence that best describes you. For example, are you more like kids who would like to play outdoors, or are you more like kids who like to watch T.V.? Then, decide if the sentence is really true for you or only sort of true for you.

Results
- A mixed 2 reporter (sibling 1 vs. 2) x 2 PDT (same treatment vs. different treatment) x 4 dyad type ANOVA was conducted to test the research questions.
- The results showed a significant trend for the relationship between PDT and siblings' social competence, F(1, 234) = 2.93, p = .088.
- Results were not significant for the PDT x Dyad Interaction, however siblings' social competence means were in the expected direction, suggesting genetic and age effects.

Design

Funding

References