



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Experimental Child Psychology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jecp



CrossMark

The effects of affective and cognitive empathy on adolescents' behavior and outcomes in conflicts with mothers

Caspar J. Van Lissa^{a,*}, Skyler T. Hawk^b, Wim H.J. Meeus^{c,d}

^a Faculty of Social Sciences, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 3062 PA Rotterdam, The Netherlands

^b The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, NT, Hong Kong

^c Adolescent Development, Utrecht University, 3584 CS Utrecht, The Netherlands

^d Developmental Psychology, Tilburg University, 5037 AB Tilburg, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 10 November 2016

Revised 27 December 2016

Available online 10 February 2017

Keywords:

Empathy

Perspective taking

Conflict resolution

Adolescence

Experiment

Adolescent–parent relationships

ABSTRACT

The current study investigated whether manipulations of affective and cognitive empathy have differential effects on observed behavior and self-reported outcomes in adolescent–mother conflict discussions. We further examined how these situational empathy inductions interact with preexisting empathic dispositions. To promote ecological validity, we conducted home visits to study conflict discussions about real disagreements in adolescent–mother relationships. We explored the roles of sex, age, and maternal support and power as covariates and moderators. Results indicated that the affective empathy manipulation had no significant effects on behavior, although a trend in the hypothesized direction suggested that affective empathy might promote active problem solving. The cognitive empathy manipulation led to lower conflict escalation and promoted other-oriented listening for adolescents low in dispositional cognitive empathy. State–trait interactions indicated that the empathy manipulations had significant effects on self-reported outcomes for adolescents lower in dispositional empathic concern. For these adolescents, both manipulations promoted outcome satisfaction, but only the cognitive manipulation promoted perceived fairness. This suggests that cognitive empathy, in particular, allows adolescents to distance themselves from the emotional heat of a conflict and listen to mothers' point of view, leading to outcomes perceived as both satisfying and fair. These findings are relevant for interventions and clinicians because they

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: vanlissa@fsw.eur.nl (C.J. Van Lissa).

demonstrate unique effects of promoting affective versus cognitive empathy. Because even these minimal manipulations promoted significant effects on observed behavior and self-reported outcomes, particularly for low-empathy adolescents, stronger structural interventions are likely to have marked benefits.

© 2017 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Increased conflict with parents is normal during adolescence as youths strive for greater autonomy (Laursen & Collins, 2004). If such conflicts are not resolved constructively, however, they can lead to maladjustment (Branje, Van Doorn, Van der Valk, & Meeus, 2009). Therefore, it is important to study factors that may promote prosocial conflict resolution. A promising candidate is adolescents' empathy. Across different relationship contexts, empathy is associated with conflict-related constructs such as lower aggression and greater prosocial behavior (for reviews, see Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). Moreover, recent research suggests that adolescents' *dispositional* empathy development is accompanied by a shift toward more prosocial conflict resolution behaviors with parents (Van Lissa, Hawk, Branje, Koot, & Meeus, 2016). The current study set out to investigate whether experimentally induced *situational* empathy similarly promotes prosocial conflict behaviors and mutually beneficial outcomes in adolescent–mother conflict discussions. In doing so, we paid special attention to the distinction between affective empathy and cognitive empathy (Davis, 1983): Affective empathy refers to other-oriented emotional responses, and cognitive empathy refers to the process of considering others' points of view. Although the distinction between these empathy dimensions is widely acknowledged in the literature (e.g., Davis, 1983; Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Sadovsky, 2006), relatively little is known about potentially different effects of these empathy dimensions on behaviors and outcomes in conflicts. The current study sought to contribute to this literature by examining differential effects of experimentally induced situational affective versus cognitive empathy on observed behavior and self-reported outcomes in adolescent–mother conflicts. We also examined the role of dispositional empathy and potential state–trait interactions between the empathy manipulations and preexisting empathic dispositions.

Empathy and adolescent–parent conflict resolution

Studying adolescent–parent conflict resolution is important because the way in which these conflicts are resolved has implications for adolescents' adjustment (Branje et al., 2009). Moreover, the obligatory and permanent nature of adolescent–parent relationships allows adolescents to practice effective conflict resolutions behaviors for future peer and romantic relationships (Adams & Laursen, 2001; Van Doorn, Branje, Van der Valk, De Goede, & Meeus, 2011). Observational methods have long been used to investigate conflict behavior because they offer high ecological validity despite being costly and time-consuming (Kurdek, 1994). Although self-report questionnaires can be readily administered to larger samples, they may introduce bias because relationship members are not trained observers and have a stake in the discussion (Hahlweg, Kaiser, Christensen, Fehm-Wolfsdorf, & Groth, 2000). These concerns may be especially pertinent when studying adolescents because adolescents' reports of conflict behavior toward parents are affected by their attachment relationship even when questionnaires are administered immediately post-conflict (Feeney & Cassidy, 2003). Moreover, children's and parents' perceptions of conflict diverge temporarily during adolescence (Van Lissa et al., 2015), which suggests that observers' reports may be more objective than self-reports. With regard to the specific behaviors that have been examined, self-report research has focused primarily on two negative behaviors, conflict escalation and withdrawal, and two prosocial behaviors, problem solving and compliance, without asserting one's own standpoint (Kurdek,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5040018>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5040018>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)