



**DIFFERENCES IN PERSPECTIVE-TAKING BETWEEN MOTHER AND PEER LISTENERS: LITERATURE REVIEW**

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Throughout their development, children will experience a great deal of conflict with other people. Although conflict is often viewed as a negative occurrence, experiences of conflict can nonetheless assist children in learning about differences between their perspective and the perspectives of others (Recchia, Wainryb, & Pasupathi, 2013, p. 1469). Furthermore, conflict has been implicated in the development of social reasoning (Lollis, van Engen, Burns, Nowack, & Ross, 1999). Still, it is understandable and important for children and their caregivers to seek resolutions to conflicts that children engage in.

To discuss conflict resolution, we must first clarify what we mean by conflict. We use Laursen and Hafen's definition: something that "entails disagreement, which is manifest in incompatible or opposing behaviors or views," (2010, p. 859). Their definition further describes conflict as separate from emotions that often occur alongside conflict, such as aggression and anger, and from situations that may share some facets, such as competition.

Conflict resolution is, logically, the process by which parties conclude a conflict that they are engaged in. Prior research provides mixed results on the strategies children and adolescents prefer to resolve conflict, although that difference may be in part due to differences in culture and social context. Maruyama and colleagues, for example, found in 2015 that young children in three East Asian countries expand their repertoire of conflict resolution strategies as they age, while Adams and Laursen found in 2001 that children in Western nations tend to vary their conflict resolution strategies by the type of conflict. Regardless of possible cultural differences, though, some of those conflict resolution strategies implicate perspective-taking, the process by which an individual comes to understand the viewpoint of another. Negotiation-based strategies in particular may require that the parties in conflict come to a shared understanding, even if that understanding does not entail agreement. It is the potential value of perspective-taking in amicable conflict resolution that leads to our present interest in the topic.

***Perspective-taking, sympathy, and empathy***

Berk's definition of affective perspective-taking provides a useful starting point for exploring the mechanism in more detail: "inferring how another feels by imagining [oneself] in that person's place," (2013, p. 417). It is not sufficient, however, to confine the process to only affective, emotional occurrences. Perspective-taking also encompasses cognitive processes, such as an individual's theory of mind. By middle childhood, children will develop the capacity for recursive thought—the process by which individuals can consider many different perspectives simultaneously—suggesting that the cognitive component of perspective-taking is intimately related to the emotional component (Berk, 2013, p. 453).

As such, our research considers both the cognitive and emotional components of perspective-taking, yet still attempts to disentangle them: as we discuss further alongside our methodology, we label the cognitive side of the coin "perspective-taking" and the

emotional side "sympathy," drawing on Nancy Eisenberg's explorations of the latter (2000). Importantly, we reject the notion that empathy is a requisite process for perspective-taking to occur. We instead prefer to distinguish empathy as "an involuntary, vicarious response to affective... cues from another person" (Gerdes, 2011, p. 235; see also Eisenberg et al., 1994 and Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983), while perspective-taking is a motivated process that can involve cognitive understanding of another person, affective understanding of another person, or both.

### ***Methods of conflict resolution***

Accurate perspective-taking is necessary to make effective use of negotiation and compromise resolution strategies, because doing so necessitates that the people engaged in conflict consider one another's viewpoints (Joshi, 2008, p. 134). Additionally, perspective-taking may mediate the effect of avoidant attachment styles on individuals' refusal to engage in productive conflict resolution (Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2000, p. 481), and may even reduce anger in mother-adolescent relationships (Lundell, Grusec, McShane, & Davidov, 2008, p. 569).

Conflict resolution does not take place solely between parties in conflict, though, as talking about conflict with other people is a common experience. Sometimes an individual may seek out advice about a conflict, while other times, the individual may be seeking validation (Hart et al., 2009). Furthermore, the idea that those conversations may be very important is neither novel nor exclusively limited to psychological inquiries: linguist Robin Hobbess wrote in 2015 that "this talk must reveal the values—that is, what matters—to the actors in the conflict," (p. 268).

Crucially, the experience of the speaker—defined in our study as the storyteller, advice-seeker, or similar person-in-conflict—may depend heavily on how their listener or listeners react to what they have to say (Weeks & Pasupathi, 2011; Diazgranados, Selman, & Dionne, 2016). Indeed, what the speaker is able to gain from the experience may be dependent on whether their listener encourages them to engage in perspective-taking or engages in perspective-taking themselves: in six separate experiments, Goldstein, Vezich, and Shapiro found substantial positive benefits for speakers whose listeners engaged in perspective-taking. Among those outcomes were increased levels of prosocial behavior and a more positive view toward the listener, among other things (2014, p. 956).

### ***Parental scaffolding and the role of the listener***

How, then, do listeners foster perspective-taking? While there is some evidence that listeners may play a variety of roles in conversations (see Thomas, 2004), one key aspect of listener behavior within certain relationship contexts is parental scaffolding. Scaffolding, which is "the process by which an 'expert' partner provides help to a 'novice' partner, increasing or reducing the level of assistance according to the 'novice' partner's performance," (Mermelshtine, 2017, p. 241), is frequently used by parents to teach their child—the "novice partner," in this case—how to do some action or think about some situation. It can be a very effective tool for guiding children towards productive ways of thinking about difficult situations (Pratt, Kerig, Cowan, & Cowan, 1988, p. 835), especially when deployed to help children understand situations that would be outside their grasp without help but are manageable with adult support, an ideal range known as Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Vygotskiĭ & Cole, 1978; Wass & Golding, 2014, p. 671).

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