

A bias among aggressive children towards attributing hostile intentions to others has been well documented among second- through eighth-grade children, although findings have been somewhat mixed among preschool samples. The current study examines the hypothesis that difficult temperament moderates the association between young children's hostile attributions and aggressive behavior in two samples.

Study 1 included 61 preschoolers (32 girls, 62.3% European-American, 9% African-American; age 36 - 73 months, $M = 57.4$; $SD = 8.3$). Hostile Attributions was the number of negative attributions in response to 10 videotaped hypothetical peer dilemmas ($\alpha = .82$). Difficultness was assessed through maternal ratings on the Preschool Characteristics Questionnaire ($\alpha = .88$). Aggression was assessed via caregiver ratings on the Teacher's Checklist of Peer Relations (TCPR; $\alpha = .90$), and the Preschool Socio-Affective Profile (PSAP; $\alpha = .89$). Regression equations predicting teacher-rated aggressive behavior from hostile attributions, difficultness, and the multiplicative interaction terms were computed for each of the aggression ratings. In both equations, the difficultness main effect and the interaction term were significant, but the hostile attributions main effect was not (Table 1). The slopes predicting PSAP aggression from hostile attributions was significant for high difficult children, 1.93 ($t = 2.82$, $p < .05$), but not for children of average, 0.55 ($t = 1.38$, ns), and low, 0.53 ($t = -.75$, ns), difficultness. The slopes predicting TCPR-rated aggression followed the same pattern (Figure 1).

Study 2 included 585 5-year-old children (281 girls; 81% European-American, 19% African-American) from the longitudinal Child Development Project. Hostile Attributions was the number of negative attributions children made in response to eight hypothetical peer dilemmas. Difficultness was assessed through maternal ratings on 9-items from the Retrospective Infant Characteristics Questionnaire ($\alpha = .86$). Aggression was assessed via teacher ratings on Achenbach's TRF. A regression equation predicting aggression from sex, hostile attributions, difficultness, the multiplicative interaction terms of sex X hostile attributions, sex X difficultness, attributions X difficultness, and sex X hostile attributions X difficultness was computed (Table 1). All of the entered variables contributed significantly to the prediction of aggression, with the exception of the sex X hostile attributions interaction term. The slopes of the association between hostile attributions and aggression at multiple levels of difficultness were computed separately for boys and girls (Figure 1). For boys, the slope predicting aggression from hostile attributions was significant for high (+1 *sd*), 7.21 ($t = 3.22, p < .05$), and mean difficultness, 4.46 ($t = 2.62, p < .05$), but not for low (-1 *sd*), difficultness, 1.72 ($t = 0.75, ns$). For girls, hostile attributions did not predict aggression at any level of difficultness (Figure 1).

Findings suggest the association between hostile attributions and aggression is significant for boys with more difficult temperament, but is not significant, though still positive, for boys with less difficult temperament. Discussion will focus on the interplay of biological and cognitive processes in the prediction of problem aggression.

Table 1

Predicting aggressive behavior from hostile attributions, difficult temperament and the interaction between hostile attributions and difficult temperament

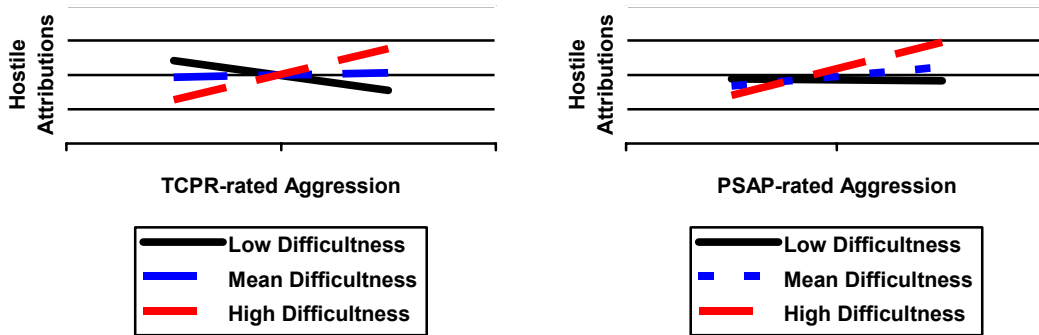
DV	Variables entered on step	R^2	β^a	p
<u>Study 1</u>				
PSAP Aggression	Hostile attributions		.20	.10
	Difficult Temperament		.26	.03
	Interaction term	.19**	.25	.04
TCPR Aggression	Hostile Attributions		.07	.58
	Difficult Temperament		.27	.03
	Interaction term	.16**	.26	.04
<u>Study 2</u>				
TRF Aggression	Hostile Attributions		.93	.05
	Difficultness		.70	.03
	Attributions X Difficultness		-1.32	.02
	Sex X Difficultness		-1.09	.03
	Sex X Attributions		-1.15	.06
	Sex X Attributions X Difficultness	.05**	1.7	.01

Note: ** $p < .01$

Figure 1

Association between hostile attributions and aggression at high (+1 sd), medium (0 sd), and low (-1 sd) values of difficult temperament

Study 1



Study 2

