Children’s Experiences of Peer-Peer Aggression: Capturing the Story through Narratives
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Background and Purpose
- Bullying is a major, world-wide concern (Nansen et al., 2004).
- While cyber-bullying has escalated with increased access to Information and Communication Technology, most previous studies are limited to the experiences of individuals 11-years and older.
- Debate: Why do children bully?
  - Due to chronic social cue misinterpretations (Crick & Dodge, 1994)
  - Due to advanced Theory of Mind abilities enabling better manipulation of others (Sutton et al., 1999a)
- Current Goal: Examine how social cognition influences children’s bully/victim status and their ability to talk about peer-peer aggression.

Methods

School-Age “Younger” Children
- 7y: 2m to 10;6 (M = 8.10, SD = 1.0)
- 49% girls

Early Adolescents “Older” Children
- 10y: 7m to 13;11 (M = 12.2, SD = 1.0)
- 50% girls

Measures:
- Bully/Victim Questionnaire
- Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test
- Strange Stories (5 mental)
- PPVT

4 Narrative Accounts
- 2 perpetrator experiences (face-to-face, cyber)
- 2 victim experiences (face-to-face, cyber)
- Transcribed using CHAT
- Coded for:
  - Perspective-Taking (Self, Other)
  - Aggressive Acts (Physical, Virtual, Relational, Verbal, Other)

Children’s Role in Peer-Peer Aggression

Children’s Narrative Accounts

Older children emphasized their own perspective and others’ (emotions, intellect, perceptions) when others had hurt them in the cyber realm more frequently than younger children:
- “It made me really mad.”
- “She saw that I was a bit chubby and then she called me fat.”

Older children tended to discuss instances of hurting others in the cyber realm through relational aggression more frequently than younger children:
- “I have spread rumors about other people.”

Older children discussed instances of hurting others through verbal aggression more frequently than younger children:
- “I told her that I didn’t like her anymore.”
- “I called him names.”

Conclusions
- Older children were more likely to act aggressively towards peers (both face-to-face and through the use of technology) than were younger children.
- Older children were more likely to experience cyber aggression than were their younger counterparts.
- Children’s social cue interpretation and theory-of-mind abilities were NOT related to their bully/victim status as assessed through a self-report questionnaire.
- However, children’s social cognition was related to details provided during narrative accounts of these experiences that varied by age group, role, and context.
- Our results emphasize the importance of narrative accounts and their ability to capture unique aspects of children’s experiences of peer-peer aggression.

Suggested Readings