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Examining the Relationship between Emotion Perception and Bullying: A Proposal

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ABSTRACT

Bullying and aggressive behaviors have adverse effects on many children. Violent behavior among children occurs most commonly in the school setting and may lead to negative emotional outcomes later in life (Kub & Feldman, 2015). According to a study conducted by Baroncelli et al. (2014), boys who have been found to be high in aggression have a difficult time perceiving relevant social cues such as fear and anger. However, boys were prone to frequently identify happiness and fear in faces when a different emotion was expressed. For girls, Baroncelli and colleagues did not find any significant relationships. The purpose of this paper was to conceptually replicate the research of Baroncelli et al. (2014), which was originally done in Italy. For my study, I plan on using children in the United States to determine if the ability to perceive emotion predicts aggression. Participants will be recruited from Hyde Park Middle School in Las Vegas, Nevada and will consist of approximately 1,100 male and female students. The Aggression Scale (Orpinas & Frankowski, 2001) and the Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy –2 (DANVA2; Nowicki, 2013; Nowicki & Duke, 1994) will be completed online and will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. In order to determine if there is a relationship between aggression and emotion perception, I will calculate the correlation between the DANVA and the Aggression Scale.

INTRODUCTION

Aggression can be defined but is not limited to the following aspects, which may or not occur together: aggressive behavior, subjective feelings like rage or hostility, biological and physiological reactivity, aggressive motives and desires, and environmental factors (Bolman, 1974). Aggression and aggressive behavior in children seem to vary in how they are defined. Aggressive behavior in children is often related to violent and delinquent behavior, which includes many intense overt hostile and aggressive feelings and anger (Simeon & Links, 1978). Violence can be defined as a multitude of aggressive behaviors that are intended to cause harm resulting in injury or death to individuals or destruction of things (Bolman, 1974).

Although the majority of children experience aggression, either physical or relational, it is essential for them to manage their emotions. Emotional intelligence is the ability to be aware of, manage, and clearly express one's emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). It is important for children to develop emotional intelligence early in development and continue to improve it throughout life in order to have successful social interactions with their peers. Children equipped with skills such as recognizing emotions in others, understanding the causes and consequences of emotions, and labeling emotions accurately are able to improve their social information processing skills (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001). With a solid understanding of emotions, children would have the ability to engage in healthy social interactions (Baroncelli, Ciucci, & Nowicki, 2014).

One of the key studies on bullying and emotion perception was conducted by Baroncelli et al. (2014). In that study, participants were recruited from a middle school in Tuscany, Central Italy. Participants ranged in age from 11 to 15 years old and attended grades 6, 7, and 8. This sample was primarily made up of Italian school children, with the remaining comprising of East European, Balkan, African, South American, and Asian children. Data were collected during regular school hours by trained assistants. To start, trained assistants facilitated a comprehensive discussion in the classroom to ensure all students fully understood bullying. Following the discussion, an 11-item self-report questionnaire was distributed to measure involvement in traditional bullying. The Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy –2 (DANVA2; Nowicki, 2013; Nowicki & Duke, 1994) was individually administered to each student in a quiet room and took about 10 minutes to complete. Baroncelli et al. (2014) found that aggressive boys have a difficult time in perceiving relevant social cues, especially fear and anger. Specifically, boys with higher levels of traditional bullying did not show any deficit in their overall ability to perceive emotions, but they were prone to identify happiness and fear in faces when a different emotion was expressed. Baroncelli and colleagues did not find any significant relationships for girls.

Given that Baroncelli et al. (2014) research was conducted in Italy, we do not know if their findings would generalize to the United States. Therefore, I will replicate the work of Baroncelli et al. (2014) using children in the United States by assessing the accuracy of the perception of four basic emotions: happiness, sadness, anger and fear. The purpose of this study is to conduct a conceptual replication of Baroncelli et al. (2014) research to determine if emotion perception predicts aggression, using children in the United States.

METHOD

Participants

Participants will be recruited from Hyde Park Middle School in Las Vegas, Nevada. The sample will consist of approximately 1,100 students, from grades 6 and 7. They will include both males and females. I will work with the administration of the school to get permission to collect data in the school. I will ask that the school participate in return for workshops given to teachers and students. Prior to beginning the study, I will ask parents to complete a consent form and I will ask children to complete an assent form.

Procedures

Students will complete two measures on the computer during their regularly scheduled computer lab class. There will be roughly 40 computer lab classes. Afterwards, they will participate in a workshop on bullying for the remainder of class.

Measures

The Aggression Scale (Orpinas & Frankowski, 2001) is a self-report scale that measures aggressive behaviors in young adolescents. The scale consists of 11 items which measure behaviors that could be potentially harmful physically and psychologically to other students (Orpinas & Frankowski, 2001). The scale includes questions about overt aggressive behaviors (such as name-calling, teasing, encouraging to fight) and physical aggression (such as punching, pushing, and slapping) and also inquires about anger and the frequency of anger throughout the day. Responses for all items may vary from 0 times a day to 6 or more times a day. I estimate it will take 10 minutes to complete this measure.

The Aggression Scale

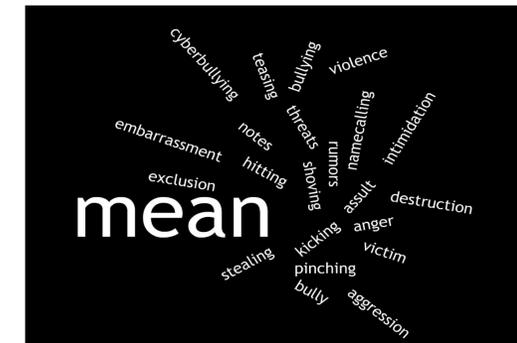
The Aggression Scale was developed using a list of common verbal and physical aggressive behaviors. All items were reviewed by a school counselor, 12 teachers, and 2 university professors with a background in school health promotion and violence prevention.

Content Areas:

- I. Encouraging fights
- II. Threatening, teasing, or hitting others
- III. Feelings of anger throughout the day
- IV. Talking badly about other kids
- V. Encouraging laughter at other kids



The Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy –2 (DANVA2; Nowicki, 2013; Nowicki & Duke, 1994) measures the ability to perceive happiness, sadness, anger and fear in facial expressions. There are two sections: the DANVA-AF and DANVA-CF. The DANVA2-CF consists of child facial expressions and DANVA2-AF consists of adult facial expressions totaling 24 photograph facial expressions for both. Each test uses 12 female and 12 male faces, displaying an equal number of high and low intensity emotions, portraying happiness, sadness, anger and fear. Each participant will be asked to identify if the person in the photograph felt happy, sad, angry or scared. The photographs will be shown for a total of two seconds and then the participant will be asked to select which of the four emotions they feel was being expressed. The total number of correct answer choices can vary from 0 to 48 on the DANVA 2 subtests, with higher scores indicating greater accuracy of facial expression recognition. I estimate it will take 20 minutes to complete this measure.



Data Analysis

To determine if there is a relationship between aggression and emotion perception, I will calculate the correlation between the DANVA and the Aggression Scale.

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