Study Summary for HUM00095249

Study Title and Target Age Range
Children's Thinking about Revenge (ages 3-12)

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Brief Overview of Research Goals/Research Questions:
While there is a great deal of research on how children make sense of interpersonal conflict, we know surprisingly little about how children view one dimension that is a factor in some conflicts: revenge. This study is designed to explore this question with children. The key questions we ask are:
- When do children view revenge as acceptable, and when do they not?
- Are people who engage in revenge viewed as deserving of punishment?
- Do judgments about the acceptability of revenge differ as a function of the amount of initial victimization, and the subsequent amount of revenge?
- Do children's views on revenge correlate with age and with their actual behavior?
We hope that this research gives us more insight into how children think about an important aspect of human conflict.

Brief Summary of Research Procedure
There are two main parts to the procedure. In the first part, children are shown brief illustrated vignettes and are asked to provide their judgments about the actions taken by the main characters. For example, in one story protagonist is pushed by another person and decides to push back (a revenge scenario). In another story, the protagonist takes a different course of action, by telling the teacher for example. The children are asked to rate the acceptability of each type of response. (Sample images are provided on the next page.) In the second part of the procedure, children take part in a sticker-sharing game. Each participant learns that a 'child from another city' has put some stickers in an envelope, and that he/she will be the recipient of the stickers. Some participants actually receive stickers from the 'other child' (the envelopes are actually packed by the experimenter). Other participants get a note in the envelope saying the stickers were used by the sender. The participant then gets a chance to share stickers back with the 'other child.' We are interested in whether children who don't get stickers tend to hoard more for themselves in the sharing portion of the task, and whether this relates to their thinking about revenge expressed in the earlier part of the study. (Note: at the end of the procedure, all children are sent away with fun stickers. Parents will be asked to keep the stickers in a bag until the family leaves the museum.)
Brief Overview of Hypotheses
We hypothesize that as children get older, they will be less approving of revenge as a way to resolve interpersonal conflicts. We also hypothesize that children who view revenge as more acceptable in the first part of the study will be more likely to hoard stickers for themselves (instead of sharing) in the second part of the study.

Implications of Research
This research will shed light on how children think about revenge as an option for settling conflicts, and how this thinking changes with age. We hope it will provide parents and teachers with more insight into how children make sense of conflicts, and how children at different ages might receive adult guidance about conflict resolution.

Sample Images