Introduction

- Respect is a universally researched, valued, and sought after quality, even to children. Although children often define respect as reciprocity (Huwh et al., 2005), research in adolescents and adults suggests that respect can be more complex (e.g., Langdon, 2007). This discrepancy may occur for two reasons. First, there may be developmental differences in how children and adolescents think about respect. Second, current literature lacks child-specific respect rather than ask children to describe their respect experience. This is important because definitions and experience often do not align (McLanahan et al., 2007).

- Fuqua (1952) and Sullivan (1953) suggest that the context of friendship fosters reciprocal respect, but they do not discuss the experience of respect between non-friends. Children’s experiences of respect may be dependent on peer interactions, which differs between friends and non-friends (Berndt, 1982).

- Children’s positive and negative interactions with their peers may influence their experience of respect (e.g., Rubin et al., 2006).

- This study examined children’s lived experiences of respect by collecting narratives and examining the relations among respect narrative experiences and peer interactions including aggression, victimization, and social preference.

Research Questions

1. How do children experience respect?
2. How does the narrative context reflect children’s descriptions of respect?
3. How are respect experiences influenced by peer interactions?

Methods

Participants and Procedures

- 106 children (52.8% female; 61.3% European American) in grades 3-5
- University-affiliated elementary school in Southern United States
- Survey data collected in fall, narrative data collected in spring
- IRB Approval (Southern University)

Measures

- Peer reports were used to evaluate children’s respect, social preference, and negative peer behaviors, including victimization and aggression, in order to investigate the relationship between earning respect and friendship in middle childhood. All peer reports were standardized by classroom to control for class size.

- Respect Nominations
  - Children were asked to circle (unlimited) names on a classroom roster of classmates they “respect” (Cohen et al., 2006).

- Social Conventions
  - Following Coie et al. (1982), children were asked to circle (unlimited) names of classmates they “like the most” and the names of classmates they “like the least” on a classroom roster. The subsetted (ELM - JLL) was used to create social preference scores.

Negative Peer Behavior Evaluations

- Using the Class Play Measure (Masten et al., 1985), children evaluated peers:
  - Victimization behaviors
  - Relational and overt aggressive behaviors

Earning Respect Narrative

- Open-ended narrative prompt (McClanahan et al., 2007)
  - “Tell us about a time that a classmate earned your respect” (See Figure 1).

Coding

- Created codebook of inductive and deductive codes (Saldaña, 2005)
- Respect experiences
- Narrative Context of Respect

- Narratives were coded by two trained undergrads (n = 108)
- All codes whose reliabilities were under .75 were discussed and coding consensus was reached (see Figures 3 & 4).

Results

Discussion

- Children experience respect in their everyday lives. The purpose of this study was to examine how children describe respect experiences with their peers.

Question 1. How do children experience respect?

- Previous assumptions held that children associate respect with reciprocity (Huwh et al., 2005). However, this study found that children’s narratives most commonly expressed respect as ‘moral help,’ followed by ‘admirable qualities,’ and ‘social conventional’ behaviors.

Question 2. How does the narrative context reflect children’s descriptions of respect?

- Children whose narratives focused on the context of ‘frienship’ described respect as ‘friendship qualities.’ This is not surprising, as ‘trust and confidentiality,’ which are subcategories of ‘friendship qualities,’ are associated with developing friendships in the literature (e.g., Berndt, 1982).

Question 3. How are respect experiences influenced by peer interactions?

- ‘Social conventional’ experiences of respect were common in narratives written by children who were low in relational aggression. This finding is supported by research that suggests that children who behave in prosocial ways are non-aggressive and well-liked by their peers (Rubin et al., 2006).

- ‘Reciprocity’ was most common in narratives written by children who were high in overt aggression. This is surprising, and suggests that future research consider children’s experiences with respect rather than their definitions.

- Limitations of this study include the size and cultural homogeneity of the sample. In order to expand this study, it is necessary to collect more data to increase sample size and change the cultural dynamic of the research. This will allow for an investigation of possible cultural differences in children’s first-person accounts of respect in future research.

‘Then we became friends and respected each other’

The relationship between earning respect and friendship in middle childhood


Department of Education and Child Study, Smith College

Figure 1. Narrative and Coding Examples

1. Telephone conversation with a friend
   - “One person who I trusted was...” One time I was running really fast when my shoe came lose. I tried to stop, but it was too late. When I fell, ___ was right behind me. Then I looked at my knees. One knee was red and the other was bleeding... I picked him up, and took me to a water fountain. Thats when waves of TRUST come out of me. The End!”

2. Third Grade’s Respect Experience (social conventional):
   - “The time when I got respect was when somebody was humming. I asked them to stop. He said why so I said because I am trying to do work. So he stopped humming so I did my work. I respect others by listen to that person when they are talking.”

Figure 2. Percentages of Respect Categories

Table 1. Kappas and Descriptions of Respect Codes and Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Descriptions</th>
<th>Category Description</th>
<th>Example Descriptions</th>
<th>Kappa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global Fameness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Global Respect (10.3%)</td>
<td>“Shelly was awesome-oos-oos nice to me.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Social Interactions | 1.0 | Reciprocity | “I can trust them.” | 0.48 |

| Admiration Qualities | 1.0 | Admiration Qualities (17.5%) | “I admire people who are fast, so Eve earned my respect.” | 0.75 |

| Moral Aggression | 1.0 | Moral (20.8%) | “One day I threw up and the person in my class gave me his whole piece of pizza because he is nice.” | 0.85 |

| Social Conventions | 1.0 | Social Conventions (15.4%) | “I respect others by listen to that person when they are talking.” | 0.50 |

| Reciprocity | 1.0 | Reciprocity | “She always respects me and I respect her!” | 1.0 |

| Narrative Contexts | 1.0 | Ambiguous (11.2%) | “Once upon a time: the end.” | 0.10 |

| Not Friends (20.3%) | Peers | Peers (7.8%) | Behaviors or experiences are related that involve interactions with peers, but not with “friends.” | 0.73 |

| Reciprocity (16.9%) | Friendship Maintenance: Children who were not friends, in some activities, became friends. | 0.805 |

| Already Friends (39.2%) | Friendship Maintenance: Children who were already friends, best friends, or strengthened their relationship in some way. | 0.752 |

| Ambiguous (13.5%) | Narrative either does not fit above categories, or the coder can not tell. | 0.191 |